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## Charter School Governance: An Exploration of Autonomy and Board Effectiveness

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CHARTER SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: AN EXPLORATION OF AUTONOMY AND  
BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

by

JUNE ERSKINE

(Under the Direction of Dr. Devon Jensen)

ABSTRACT

Despite the increased numbers of charter schools each year, we understand very little about their governing boards. According to the Georgia Public Policy Foundation (2004) factors that correlate with charter school success such as accountability, public support, and institutional capacity to progress toward established goals are typically under the management of a charter school governing board. While there is no shortage of governance recommendations for charter schools, there are few empirically validated prescriptions. There are empirically validated characteristics of successful Non-Profit Organization (NPO) governing boards (Herman & Renz, 2008). The methodology for this research was designed to determine if governance practices of successful NPO governing boards impact charter school outcomes.

A charter school's governing board has tremendous power. A governing board can help optimize the educational outcomes of the school it serves. The theoretical framework that supports this research involves institutional theory; schools are open systems. Schools are impacted by external factors that may advance or challenge institutional goals.

The Board Effectiveness Quick Check is a valid and reliable governance survey that can provide a small non-profit governing board with information about their quality

of governance, areas of strength, and areas in need of improvement. This study analyzed the relationship between charter school governance and student progress on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check scores between two groups of schools: schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average. The results from this study provide evidence that there is a correlation and a moderate effect size between governance practices and student academic growth.

INDEX WORDS: Charter Schools, School leadership, effect size, Governance Effectiveness Quick Check, Matched pairs analysis

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DEDICATION

For Mummy and Daddy

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a majority of children in all racial and income groups in US public schools do not read or complete math operations at grade level. Nearly 80% of Black and Hispanic children are not performing at grade level in the US where a 20 plus percentage point gap exists in high school graduation rates between Black and White students (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). In one effort to remedy these challenging circumstances, educational leaders and policy makers have increased funding and support for charter schools. Recent presidential programs, such as the Charter School Program (CSP), assist in the planning and implementation of quality public charter schools and dissemination of their successful practices. In 2013, the CSP invested \$240 million dollars in effective charter school programs. Additionally, President Barack Obama's fiscal year 2014 budget requested \$294 million for the Expansion of proven Educational Options. This expansion included grants to expand the number of high-quality charter schools available to children across the US (US Department of Education, 2013). Current educational research from the Center in Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) supports this decision (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2007, 2010; Gross, 2011).

The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) has published numerous reports that detail the potential of charter schools to remedy customary failures of traditional public schools. In a 2011 CRPE report, Gross (2011) asserted that schools that are allowed to develop their own mission and determine their academic programs present enhanced opportunities for diverse student populations. Findings from research

published by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University revealed that traditionally underserved groups of children such as children in poverty or English language learners demonstrated greater learning gains in charter schools than in traditional public schools (CREDO, 2013). In spite of favorable reviews from various educational and political groups, disturbing trends are evident in related research.

For instance, Ni (2007) found in her research that there was a great deal of segregation in charter schools within the state of Michigan. This lack of diversity is a reflection of established trends in the state traditional public schools. Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, and Wang (2010) reminded readers that segregation for Blacks among all public schools has been increasing for nearly two decades. Unfortunately, in some Michigan districts, charter schools were less diverse than traditional public schools.

Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, and Wang (2010) expressed “fundamental civil rights concerns” about charter schools in their report for the Civil Rights Project out of University of California, Los Angeles (p. 84). According to their report, charter schools were more racially segregated than traditional public schools in most states. They also found that charter schools tended to be located in urban areas.

Consequently, they attracted a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged, minority children than traditional public schools. Additionally, these researchers’ review of assessment scores revealed no academic advantages for students who attended charter schools. Given this limited information about charter schools, critics are alarmed that the charter school movement is advancing at such a rapid rate.

Public charter schools are expanding faster than any other sector of the US public education system (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012). More than 2 million students in 41 states and the District of Columbia attend charter schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012). According to The Georgia Department of Education (2015), the 2015-16 school year saw an increase of 12 new start-up charter schools and the addition of 4 charter systems with 36 schools total. There are 153 charter campuses across the state, excluding charter system schools.

Nationally, charter school students make up 5.1% of all public school students in the 2013-14 school year. Charter school students in the state of Georgia make up 5.9% of all public school students in the state. This is higher than the national percent of charter school students (GADOE, 2015). Georgia's charter schools on average have consistently outperformed non-charter schools on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) during the past three years. In the state of Georgia, startup charter schools on average do not perform as well as peer institutions within the public school system. A potential reason for this is because charter schools tend to serve greater portions of children from economically challenged communities.

Fiest (2007) asserted the success of a charter school is directly dependent on the board's ability to govern effectively. She argued that the greatest factor that influences the health and sustainability of a charter school is its school board.

The National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance (2011) shares common roles and responsibilities of a charter school governing board. The following bulleted list represents common responsibilities of the board and board members.

- Articulate the school's mission and purpose.
- Maintain a productive relationship with the charter school administrator. The board is responsible for hiring and collaborating with the school's director and for reviewing the director's performance regularly.
- Lead organizational planning. The board plans strategically for its' charter school to create or adjust the school's vision/mission statement, develop institutional goals and priorities, and create a measurable action plan.
- Ensure financial sustainability. The board accounts for the financial well-being of the charter school by being actively involved in fundraising initiatives and by approving an operating budget.
- Create a comprehensive public relations strategy. The board enhances the image of the charter school and its mission through communication with the local community, broader public, and the media.
- Self-evaluate and improve performance. The board bases its yearly goals on self-assessment. Additionally, board members plan a new trustee orientation as well as ongoing education for returning members

Governance consultant and author Mel Gill addressed these responsibilities in his book "Governing for Results" (Gill, 2005). According to Gill (2005), governing board members should have positive relations with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), good board development practices, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, and effective management of board meetings and board work.

### **Positive Relations between the Board and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**

The term CEO designates executive director, management team leader, staff coordinator, and other similar designations within a charter school entity. Generally, governing boards have responsibilities that include hiring a capable CEO, evaluating the leader against established performance expectations, and supporting the CEO in achieving goals while respecting the distinct roles of governance and management (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009). It is critical that the board clearly communicates their collective expectations of the CEO during the hiring process. In fact, the annual performance expectation of the CEO happens in consultation with the CEO. Board members must be willing to ask and answer tough questions. This negotiation helps develop mutual trust and respect. The establishment of common expectations between the board and the CEO helps create and maintain a productive working relationship (Gill, 2005). The board also shares expectations of new governing board members.

### **Good Board Development Practices**

Ideally, the goal is to offer orientation to individuals within one month of joining the board as part of the recruitment process. Orientation to the organization's mission, vision, and values should help prospective board members decide if they want to serve on the board (Gill, 2005). A well-structured orientation should offer new board members a comprehensive understanding of key elements of the governance structure. This includes bylaws and governance policies (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, 2008). An effective orientation will have a corresponding manual that should include the history, mission, and purpose of the organization; procedural

guidelines for board meetings; the strategic plan; and annual reports (Gill, 2005). All board members should benefit from continuous board development practices (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, September 2008).

Organizational stability and flexibility is a natural consequence of an effective board orientation and ongoing development (Gill, 2005).

### **Good Balance between Organizational Flexibility and Stability**

The board is directly responsible for ensuring that there is enough revenue for the organization to function. Some organizations may be large enough to support a finance subcommittee or a Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Regardless of size, non-profit governing boards should reserve the authority to approve all funding initiatives, anticipate challenges, and manage risks (Gill, 2005).

It is, in fact, the board's responsibility to predict and manage any risks to organizational functioning. Even when an organization is flourishing, it is necessary that the board continuously monitor all institutional processes to ensure the school maintains adequate resources to function effectively (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, May 2009). Additionally, every non-profit governing board should have a contingency plan for possible crisis. A contingency plan could mean the difference between stability and an organizational catastrophe. In addition, there should be a risk assessment and management plan that identifies existing risks. This plan should include steps taken to address them. Risk management also involves taking calculated risks that promote innovation while ensuring stability (Gill, 2005).

Organizational stability does not necessarily stifle innovation. Progressive organizations have environments where staff feel safe to take calculated risks. Calculated

risks in an organization where staff feel safe to engage in thoughtfully planned experimentation encourages innovation. This level of thoughtful experimentation positions organizations to build on existing strengths while maintaining a secure future that school governance, staff, and stakeholders can count on (Gill, 2005).

### **Effective Management of Board Meetings and Board Work**

A non-profit governing board should be actively involved in planning the direction and priorities of the organization (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, September 2008). Successful organizational planning happens through well planned and well managed board meetings. The meeting agenda should remain focused on matters pertaining to governance. In addition, there should be opportunities for all board members to contribute in a meaningful way. Discussions and actions within a well-managed board meeting should occur within clear rules of conduct that guide sound decision making processes. Gill (2005) recommended a near-consensus approach to decision making. A monitored, estimated time allowance for related discussions can help support efficient productivity during meetings. Sometimes, in spite of well-managed meetings and clear rules of conduct, conflict occurs within boards. Often times, this conflict can happen because boards include people from a range of backgrounds, educational influences, and business experience.

Boards are often necessarily diverse. Diverse board members may hold diverse perspectives that require thoughtful management. An effective board has a variety of ways to address conflicts when needed. For instance, the resolution of interpersonal conflict, can happen through private conversations between the governing board chair and relevant board members. Conflicts that are more serious may be the responsibility of

the board chair and CEO to address (Gill, 2005). In other situations, the governing board may need to directly deal with conflicts between or among board members. Specifically, active listening to enhance meaningful communication is one strategy to move a board through constructive disagreements leading to resolution. Successful governing boards have members that communicate effectively with each other as well as stakeholders in the community (Gill, 2005).

Non-profit governing boards are often advocates for their organization in their local communities (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, September 2008). Effective governing boards inform the community about their organization in an effort to influence others to support mission-based initiatives. By identifying primary audiences to target for support and ensuring stakeholder input is integrated into strategic planning, boards can work toward accomplishing their goal of staying connected with the community. Governing boards also need to identify their target audience so that they can ensure that there are consistent communications that will improve the community's understanding of the organization. Well-organized efforts will result in an interdependent relationship where the organization and the community strengthen one another (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009).

What this overall research on governing board shows is that there are many vital and multifaceted responsibilities of charter school boards. Considering how important governing boards are to charter school success, there remains a lack of research investigating operational characteristics that directly influence charter school success

(National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, 2008). This supports a need for the research proposed in this dissertation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Achievement gaps, school choice, dropout rates, and the ongoing struggle for universal access to a high quality education create increasingly complex challenges for school leaders. In theory, the advantage of enhanced autonomy should create a context in which charter school leaders can design and support innovative educational programs uniquely suited to advance student achievement. The reality is, however, some charter schools are performing at the same standard as the traditional public schools in their communities while others are surpassing the performance of their non-chartered peers.

Charter school leaders who know how to harness the power of autonomy through school governance advance the potential of their school to manifest academic excellence (Feist, 2007). This feeds into the overall governance structure where state educational laws require every charter school to have a board of directors (Center for Education Reform, 2012). Current literature on charter school governance suggests charter school leaders need to optimize the potential of governance if they are to realize the true benefits of charter school autonomy. Existing literature also maintains autonomy is only beneficial if school based leaders are skilled in strategic planning, conduct periodic review of financial stewardship, and actively monitor institutional goals (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009). To this end, there is a need to continually validate the role of the governing boards in charter schools through empirical validated research.

## **Hypotheses**

This study had the following overarching hypotheses:

- Common governance practices among charter school boards in which students are surpassing the performance of their peers include positive relations between the board and the executive director; good board development practices; a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility; and effective management of board meetings and board work.
- Governance practices common among charter school boards in which students are not surpassing the performance of their peers in traditional public schools lack positive relations between the board and the executive director; good board development practices; a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility; and effective management of board meetings and board work.

Board members must have a positive, productive working relationship with their CEO. They must be willing to work with the CEO to ask tough questions and establish common expectations. Mutual trust and respect stem from these conversations (Gill, 2005). These are the positive relations that were explored in this study.

## **Significance of the Study**

In Georgia public schools, 325,806 students were enrolled in a start-up, conversion charter school, or a charter system school during the 2015-2016 academic year (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). This is 18.5% higher than in 2014-2015.

In 2015-2016, student enrollment in conversion and start-up charter schools was up 21% since 2014-2015 and up 32% since 2013-2014.

Charter systems and conversion charter schools generally outperformed non-charter schools on the 2014-15 Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones), a comprehensive summative assessment program spanning grades 3 through high school. However, start-up charter schools did not score as well as non-charter schools on average (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). While reports on charter school performance will note that start-up charter schools serve greater portions of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds than their peers, there are examples of start-up charter schools that are out performing their traditional public school peers. This study seeks to understand the influence that a start-up charter school governing board in the state of Georgia has on charter school performance.

While there is no shortage of governance recommendations for charter schools, there are few empirically validated prescriptions. Essential practices of charter school leaders remain elusive to administrators who are seeking research proven approaches to governance. Research based practices that support optimal functioning of charter schools are rare yet vital for these unique organizations. This study creates a framework for a scientific analysis of start-up charter school governing boards in the state of Georgia in an effort to fill this research gap on charter school governance.

Participating charter school governing boards completed a valid and reliable survey, the Board Effectiveness Quick Check. This governance assessment is appropriate for diagnostic and ongoing governance appraisals. Information provided to participating governing boards during this research study enable them to establish

informed goals and to reflect critically on strategic priorities. The illumination of common goals and needs among charter schools, from this study, will promote dialog and meaningful exchange of evidence based practices.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section of Chapter 1 provides definitions for terms used in the research that are unusual or not widely understood.

*Charter Schools:* Charter schools are innovative, autonomous public schools held accountable for improved student achievement (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools)

*College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI):* The CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement and accountability system that helps inform educational stakeholders how well schools are performing.

*Conversion Charter Schools:* Conversion Charter Schools are traditional public schools that apply to become charters and are authorized by the local educational agency (LEA).

*Start Up Charter Schools:* Start Up charter schools are locally approved schools. Local stakeholders such as parents, community members or non-profit organizations will submit a petition to the LEA to request permission to open an innovative independent school within the district. Once approved, this autonomous public school is accountable for the terms outlined in the petition or charter (Georgia Charter School Association).

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

Limitations for this study include the fact that the data from the completed surveys reflects the unique perspective of each individual governing board member.

Those who completed the survey presented information in a manner that is consistent with their individual involvement.

The small sample size along with using only willing participants (rather than randomly selected ones) will restrict generalization to larger populations.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter 2 contains the review of related literature pertaining to charter schools and their governing boards. The review of literature for this study finds the growing body of research about charter schools is increasingly differentiating among types of charter schools, controlling variables that impact student performance, and analyzing the impact of autonomy on charter school performance. Factors that have a significant impact on charter school performance are also examined in this review of literature. There are few studies, however, that analyze the influence of governance on charter school success. While there are publications that assert the importance of charter school governance there is little empirical evidence that validate this claim.

The methodology and procedures used to gather and analyze data for this study are presented in Chapter 3. This chapter will introduce an approach to analyzing charter school governing boards. This approach will help others investigate commonly utilized governance strategies that influence charter school outcomes. Additionally, it will describe the statistically sound survey that was disseminated among charter school governing board members.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

March 1988, during an address to the National Press Club in Washington D. C. Albert Shanker, the president for the American Federation of Teachers, proposed a new kind of school. Shanker envisioned a school freed from the bureaucracy that stifled innovation in public schools. This “new type of school” would stem from teachers and parents collaboratively determining instructional approaches that were uniquely engaging and beneficial to public school children (Kahlenberg & Halley, 2014). This innovative collaboration would generate evidence-based strategies that could subsequently be shared with other public schools. Shanker envisioned community representatives and school boards working together to review proposals and thoughtfully selecting educational programs that would serve diverse children. In July of 1988, in a New York Times article entitled ‘Where We Stand’ Shanker borrowed Ray Budde’s term ‘Charter School’ to name his idea for schools (Kahlenberg & Halley, 2014).

Ray Budde was an educational administration professor at the University of Massachusetts. Budde’s research interest was organizational theory. In 1974, he shared his unique ideas for the reorganization of school districts in a paper he titled "Education by Charter." Although Budde’s school district reorganizational philosophy was fundamentally different from Shanker’s “new type of school”, Shanker used the term “charter” to compare teachers to explorers who “got charters to seek new lands and resources” (Kolderie, 2005).

Critics of Shanker’s idea insisted that instead of investing in charter schools, we should be reinvesting into existing schools to help them realize their fullest potential.

Assistant secretary of Education Chester Finn expressed his concern about Shanker's charter school proposal stating, "it suggested that we did not already know what works in education" (Kahlenberg & Halley, 2014).

In November 1988, the Citizens League, a policy organization in Minnesota, published a report, 'Chartered Schools = Choices for Educators + Quality for all Students'. This report reinforced Shanker's proposal by advocating for a school that adapts to children's needs rather than expecting children to conform to a standard system. It also supported the concept of shared governance. The Citizens League described a place where "public school teachers, parents, administrators, and students working together in shared governance have a better chance of devising the right approach and seeing it implemented than they would have in the rigid top-down conventional school system" (The Citizens League, 1988, p. ii).

In 1990, Milwaukee Wisconsin passed a private school voucher law that allowed public school children access to private and parochial schools. Polly Williams, a Democratic lawmaker, worked with conservative politicians to pass an education law that provided educational options to low-income children so they could escape the fate of the "dysfunctional" schools. Critics of our nation's first private school voucher law expressed concern regarding the blurred lines between church and state. Opponents also warned of lack of accountability for the related expenditure of public funds. Opposition toward the private school voucher law strengthened support for the proposed charter school legislation in Wisconsin. Proponents for charter school legislation could maintain, unlike private school vouchers that took resources away from school districts, charter schools strengthened public schools (Kahlenberg & Halley, 2014).

In 1991, Minnesota became the first state to adopt charter school legislation. Today, Minnesota has over 50,800 students enrolled in more than 160 charter schools. Nationally, there are more than 6,800 charter schools enrolling nearly 3 million children (Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, September 2014).

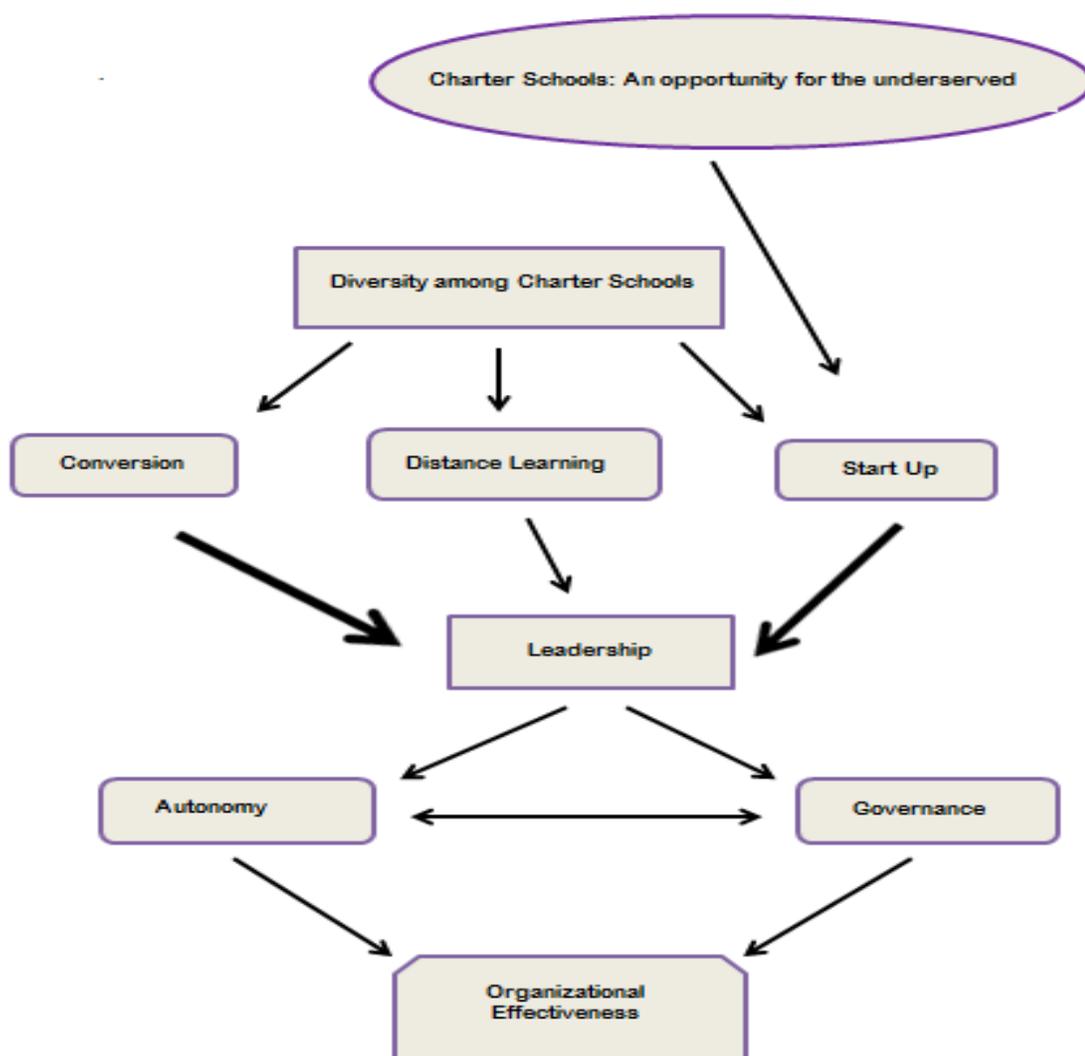
Charter schools are relatively new additions to the landscape of public education. Due to their recent incarnation, educational researchers are only beginning to compile statistics and various data sets on charter schools. Recent substantial increases in the numbers of charter schools have placed these independent schools at the center of educational policy debate and associated scrutiny. Several researchers have expressed concern regarding charter schools' contribution to the increased racial stratification of public schools (Ni, 2007; Orfield & Lee, 2007).

This review of literature begins with an empirically based critical examination of charter schools. Current research reveals that race and socioeconomic status are key variables of segregation in charter schools (Ni, 2007).

Research also documents overall substandard student achievement of charter school students when compared to their peers in traditional public schools (CREDO, 2013). A closer examination of achievement results, however, provides a better understanding of why charter schools have become so popular. While charter schools offer distinct educational advantages, especially for many economically disadvantaged minority children, the role that the legally mandated governing board plays remains unclear. This literature review closely examines the advantages of school autonomy and the related duties of charter school governing boards. These governing responsibilities are compared with empirically validated characteristics of successful governing boards of

non-profit organizations. Finally, this chapter proposes research to contribute to understanding charter school autonomy and school effectiveness.

Figure 2.1. *Mind map of Charter School Leadership, Autonomy, and School Effectiveness*



Charter schools are diverse. Their diversity is manifest in large part by their organizational structure. Startup charter schools provide a unique opportunity for children historically underserved by our public education system. A review of related

literature reveals children from economically disadvantaged homes, black students, and English language learners show greater gains in learning in the areas of reading and math than do their peers in traditional public schools at charter schools (CREDO, 2013). In addition, start-up charter schools provide the greatest promise of improving performance of the various types of charter schools (Buddin & Zimmer, 2004). All three types of charter schools represented in the graphic depend on leadership for organizational effectiveness. As well, the ultimate success of a charter school is dependent on the school's autonomy and governance.

### **Charter Schools: An Opportunity for the Underserved**

Frankenberg and Hawley (2010) examined national data from the National Center for Education Statistics and Common Core of Data (CCD) 2007-08 regarding enrollment trends of various subgroups including black, white, Latino, and impoverished children in charter schools. The researchers also reviewed existing legislative mandates and their potential to enhance diversity among charter schools. Frankenberg and Hawley determined that charter schools are generally segregated by race and socioeconomic status. Other research based publications from Ni (2007), and Orfield and Lee (2007) reported similar findings. Frankenberg and Hawley articulated the value of diversity in public schools. They also described the typical correlation between low educational attainment and minority-segregated schools. This report, however, failed to address why certain subgroups are disproportionately enrolled in charter schools

The Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO, 2013) conducted an analysis of student performance on state achievement tests as well as student characteristics that might affect performance. This research used growth data from the

2006-07 school year through the 2010-11 school year (CREDO, 2013). In this study, CREDO defined growth as the change in each student's score from one school year to the next school year. The methodological approach to this study included the use of data to create a "virtual twin" to match individual students.

Their matching criteria included:

- grade level,
- gender,
- ethnicity,
- reduced-price lunch eligibility,
- English language learner status,
- special education status, and
- prior scores on state achievement tests (CREDO, 2013).

Fifty-six percent of students at charter schools performed at approximately the same standard in reading achievement as traditional public schools while 19% of these students had weaker growth. In other words, 25% of students at charter schools had stronger growth in reading achievement. Twenty-nine percent of charter school students had stronger growth in Math than comparable traditional public schools. Forty percent of students at charter schools performed at approximately the same standard in Math achievement as traditional public schools and 31% had weaker growth (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes, 2013). Charter school critics note that charter schools are more racially isolated than traditional public schools. In addition, substandard student achievement is a reality in too many charter schools (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010).

Research reveals, however, the type of children that benefit most from charter schools are black children in poverty and English Language Learners (CREDO, 2013). This body of research showed that students from economically disadvantaged homes, black students, and English language learners at charter schools show greater gains in learning in the areas of reading and math than their peers in traditional public schools (CREDO, 2013). Researchers have surmised that one indicator is black students in poverty who attend charter schools experience 29 additional days engaged in reading instruction and 36 additional days in math instruction over their traditional public school peers (CREDO, 2013). Betts and Tang's (2014) meta-analysis of student achievement in charter schools revealed significant and positive achievement gains for children in charter schools in urban areas. According to Betts and Tang's meta-analysis, reasons for the positive impact may include the "No Excuses" approach to education, which emphasizes discipline and comportment, instructional time, and selective teacher hiring. This research will investigate the relationship between governance practices among charter schools and student achievement.

While some of the schools examined in this study serve largely minority, economically disadvantaged students, others serve mostly white affluent students. This research examined if schools that participate in this study reflect national trends. This study also explored possible explanations for charter school success beyond existing correlations of economic advantage and academic achievement.

### **Diversity Among Charter Schools**

Luekens (2004) compared characteristics of charter school principals to their traditional public school counterparts. His paper highlighted the multifaceted

responsibilities of charter school leaders and emphasized the need for informed, strong, highly skilled school based leaders whose broad responsibilities require long hours and advanced problem-solving abilities. Data in Luekens' study included responses from 891 principals and 2,847 teachers in all public charter schools open in the US in 1999-2000. There were 12,260 principals and 52,404 teachers from traditional public schools included in this study. The data were disaggregated around the variables of school level, school size, minority student enrollment, and the type of community in which the school was located. Findings included the fact that charter school principals earn less, have less experience, and are more diverse than their traditional public school counterparts.

Fifty-four percent of charter school principals surveyed in this study were women while approximately 46% percent of principals in traditional public schools were women. Seventy-one percent of charter school principals in this study were white, non-Hispanic during the 1999-2000 school year while 80% of public school principals were white, non-Hispanic. In addition, approximately 18% of charter school principals in this study were African American while only 11.6% were African American in traditional public schools. The percentage of principals that were Hispanic was approximately similar among charter and public schools. Finally, charter schools were 1.4% more likely compared with their public school counterparts to have a non-white background other than Black or Hispanic as the principal.

A notable conclusion of the study by Luekens revealed charter school teachers strongly agreed more often than public school teachers that their principal's behavior toward staff was supportive and encouraging. This may be reflective of the fact that charter schools are usually much smaller than traditional public schools. As a result,

teachers in these smaller, charter schools have contact that is more frequent with the principal. While the results of this study is instructive, a flaw in the presented research includes a failure to explore the shared responsibility of governance and the role the governing board has in establishing a relationship with key stakeholders including school staff.

Buddin and Zimmer (2005) published research designed to examine the differences in performance among four types of charter schools: conversion, start up, classroom based, and instruction outside of the classroom such as independent study or distance learning. Their research examined notable differences in performance among the types of charter schools. For instance, Buddin and Zimmer (2005) examined individual records for California students who took the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition from 1998 through 2002. The researchers used a statistical model to control for factors other than charter status that are likely to affect student achievement such as disproportionate number of low achieving students or high concentrations of at risk students. Their research design acknowledged the diversity of charter schools and openly sought to explore advantages and weaknesses within the types of charter schools. They concluded there should be a disproportionate allocation of resources to charter schools that consistently provide the greatest return on investment. According to their study, start-up classroom-based charter schools provided the greatest promise of improving performance. A significant limitation of the research conducted by Buddin and Zimmer (2004), however, is that they examined achievement without regard to student growth. An analysis of student progress over time could provide a more accurate representation of the effectiveness of different types of schools.

Laciereno-Paquet (2006) examined data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey Public Charter School questionnaire data. Her analysis of the enrollment of low-income and minority students in charter schools revealed that schools supported by large Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) are more likely than small EMOs to operate in urban areas with high numbers of minority and low income students filling a need for educational choices. Laciereno-Paquet also revealed disturbing institutional practices utilized by charter school leaders at some schools such as failing to provide transportation and misuse of admissions criteria. Critics asserted that these school-based policies limit the provision of services to certain subgroups of students. For instance, charter school boards are less likely to adopt restrictive practices when they have invested in relationships with their surrounding communities. This leads to a need to study the countless examples of effective practices of charter school leaders.

McDonald, Ross, Bol, and McSparrin-Gallagher (2007) examined the impact of three charter schools on student achievement, school climate, and pedagogy. The researchers analyzed various data including the results of the School Observation Measure, The School Climate Inventory, and the Charter School Teacher Questionnaire. The researchers analyzed the data separately and as a group to reveal how charter schools affected the data variables. Each analysis used a matched program-control design at the student level (431 students), whereby charter school students were individually matched with non-charter school students on criteria including race, gender, prior achievement, grade level, and socio economic status. A major finding of this study was that the charter schools included had a positive impact on student achievement. All three schools in this study demonstrated significant gains in student achievement when compared to matched

pairs of students. Another major finding was that teachers and parents' response to surveys reflected a positive school climate at all three charter schools. Teachers were generally supportive of their school missions, satisfied with provided resources, and pleased with parental involvement. Parents consistently expressed satisfaction with the educational programs and their children's teachers.

A relative strength of the McDonald (2007) study was the matched program control design. This approach presented a more accurate comparison among the schools. An obvious limitation was the small sample size and a limited demographic. Presumption of generalizability of the findings to all charter schools would be misguided at best.

Henig, Holyoke, Brown, and Lacireno-Paquet (2005) examined institutional behaviors of various types of charter schools. They sent a survey to principals of charter schools in Arizona, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. The investigators were able to examine 270 surveys. Results from a multivariate analysis revealed evidence of vast differences as well as marked similarities among various types of charter schools. Types of charter schools included those that are more mission-oriented such as start-up, conversion charter schools, and schools associated with certain businesses. In addition, there are those that are more market oriented. For-profit educational management organizations (EMOs) are examples of market oriented charter schools.

Significant distinctions characterized these categories of charter schools. EMO initiated charters are more likely to be considerably larger than other charter schools. Mission based charter schools such as those founded by social service organizations are

more likely to target particular subpopulations. Henig, Holyoke, Brown, and Lacireno-Paquet (2005) ultimately concluded, however, that macro influences such as testing requirements and uniform expectations of an acceptable learning community promotes such convergence that institutional constraints, more than anything else, encourages uniformity among all charter schools regarding standards and curricula. In other words, while there are significant differences (e.g. type, size, student demographics) among charter schools, there are significant similarities (e.g. accountability, expectations) as well.

Research included in this review of literature offers models of effective and imperfect research methods. Effective methods of research on charter schools tend to address characteristics that distinguish charters from traditional public schools such as school based shared governance. The strongest research designs differentiate among types of charter schools instead of treating all charter schools as a homogeneous entity. Finally, the most effective researchers use measures of school performance that extend beyond achievement scores and control the myriad of factors that may influence school outcomes

A consistent theme throughout the current research about charter schools is the potential that start up charter schools hold for historically underserved student populations. Existing research on charter schools also informs educators that school success is evident through numerous variables. This research study explores the unique nature of startup charter school governance while controlling extraneous variables that may affect school success. In addition, this study used a measure of school effectiveness

around a multifaceted score that incorporated student progress, attendance, and graduation rates.

### **Charter School Leadership**

Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, and Giles (2009) highlighted core practices and principles of a charter school leader who not only turned around a failing school but also maintained a highly effective school. The researchers used report card data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as well as annual reports generated by Frazier Community Charter School's (FCCS) governing board. The researchers also analyzed field notes from school visits and interviews of school leaders, teachers, parents, and governing board members. This data showed that the participating school leader not only turned around a failing school, but was also able to maintain a safe, nurturing learning community over time by developing shared goals and redesigning the organization to match its' objectives. The effective school leader in this study used direction setting, teacher professional development, and accountability measures to turn around a failing, high poverty urban school.

Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and Pedro (2011) examined charter school leader strategies to secure and maintain parent involvement in urban charter schools. In the final sample, the researchers utilized 12 urban charter schools in six states. The researchers interviewed charter school principals using 11 semi-structured questions. All interviews were taped, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Analysis of the interview data revealed that charter school leaders used extensive and innovative strategies to secure parental support and participation. They reported wrap around services, incentives, home visits, contracts, and including parents in school governance as strategies charter schools

typically employed to secure parental involvement. The significance of parental involvement (key stakeholders) is a reoccurring theme across the literature that examines the success of charter schools.

Zimmer and Buddin's (2007) research examined school attributes that lead to high and low achieving charter schools. In their research, Zimmer and Buddin surveyed principals in all of California's charter schools and a matched set of traditional public schools (TPS). The survey questions analyzed the school characteristics that affect the learning environment of a school. Questions came from the public and charter school questionnaires from the School and Staffing Survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics and reflected the unique context of California schools. The researchers revealed that parental involvement most consistently predicted student performance. Parental involvement was significant for charter and TPS (elementary schools and charter middle schools); however, parental involvement did not impact high school reading and math.

Griffin and Wohlstetter (2001) conducted a study to investigate the challenges start up charter school leaders' faced during the start-up process. The researchers conducted interviews in 17 start-up charter schools across three cities (six schools in Boston, six schools in Los Angeles, and five schools in Minneapolis). Participants in each focus group interview session included a combination of teachers, directors/founders, and other administrators. There was one representative from each school in each focus group. The researchers then looked for commonalities across schools in their start up processes. Common challenges faced by start-up charter school

leaders included developing a curricular program, an accountability system, and effective school management policies.

In summary, factors central to charter school success include shared goals, organizational capacity to meet established goals, public support, an accountability system, and effective institutional policies. The issue of parental involvement is particularly relevant to this study because a common responsibility of charter school governing boards is to develop and maintain a relationship with the public to promote the work of the school (Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2004). Additional responsibilities of charter school governing boards including goal setting and curricular development mirror those identified as vital for student progress and charter school success (Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2004). This research used a survey that examined these and other factors for each participating school board.

### **Charter School Autonomy**

Research and literature about charter schools is increasingly addressing the theme of autonomy. In 2007, the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) sent surveys to charter school principals as part of a comprehensive research project, funded by the US Department of Education. The researchers designed this project to examine variation within charter schools and to develop related recommendations for legislative policy. One of the surveys explored challenges of charter school principals. This survey included a random sample of 715 charter school principals in six states. The investigators received a response from 401 charter school leaders (a 56% response rate). Almost 40% of the responding school leaders reported that finances and attracting quality teachers were serious problems. Further, principals consistently recognized a need to

spend more time on strategic planning. However daily operational demands often amounting to 60-hour weeks left little time to address this critical responsibility.

Institutional theory addresses this challenge.

Huerta and Zuckerman (2009) explored organizational structure through the lens of institutional theory. Their article “An Institutional Theory Analysis of Charter Schools: Addressing Institutional Challenges to Scale” presented an analysis of bureaucratic and decentralized organizational models. Decentralized models fostered progressive teaching and learning strategies while bureaucratic organizational structures impeded innovation due to the limiting demands of institutional conformity.

Local profit and nonprofit corporations sometimes open charter schools aligned with a specific vision. The focused, mission based venture attract motivated principals and teachers with similar pedagogical philosophies. The focus on the technical core fosters a culture of progress where clearly articulated organizational goals drive decision-making. Similarly, market-based charter schools encourage innovation through autonomous governance.

The driving philosophy behind market-based charter schools is that consumers (parents) will gravitate toward the highest quality product available. Incentive driven decision making encourages educational excellence as schools compete for the loyalties of parents and their children. Educational excellence, competition, and consumer satisfaction are primary considerations of educators and their leaders in market-based charter schools. Conversely, when charter schools are subject to institutional rules and norms of a larger bureaucracy, innovation is often stifled and the focus of decision making moves from advancing the technical core to conformity to institutional

definitions and expectations of schooling. A supporting theoretical framework for this research is schools are open systems. This means that the external community impacts the design and practice of a school. Charter schools that exercise their autonomy to control relationships with external influences can minimize the impact of bureaucracies such as LEAs that do not support their institutional goals.

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute (Brinson & Rosch, 2010) released a report citing the results of a study that examined the areas in which charter school level autonomy was most important. Researchers developed an advisory panel of charter school experts who developed a metric that spanned 14 types of charter autonomy. For each of the 14 areas, the panel defined what constituted low, moderate, and high levels of autonomy. Then, they examined charter school laws in the 26 states included in their research. The advisory panel concluded that two areas of autonomy that mattered most to building leaders were control over staff and instruction.

Silver (2010) examined the operations of a conversion charter school board of directors. He analyzed governance documents from a charter school as part of a case study. These official papers included meeting minutes, agendas, and other historical documents that reflected the functioning of a conversion charter school board over a 16-month period (February 2008 - June 2009). Silver concluded that charter school governing boards needed consistent training to establish and support long-term sustainability with an emphasis on long-term fiscal viability, strategic planning, and policymaking.

In summary, a supporting theoretical framework for this research is the idea that social systems such as schools are open systems. According to this perspective,

organizations are largely influenced by and dependent on external forces such as state mandates, politics, history, and a host of other environmental forces (Hoy & Miskel, 2007). In many ways, the success of an organization is dependent on the effectiveness of other organizations and the people with which it is associated (Herman & Renz, 2008). External forces can have a positive or negative impact on an institution. It is the researcher's hypothesis that bureaucratic structures such as a Local Educational Agency (LEA) school board may impair a charter school's effectiveness due to external rules and regulations that fail to support school goals. The effectiveness of a charter school board may limit the negative impact of a LEA school board. A charter school board's capacity to productively manage finances, hire desirable personnel, and attract people and organizations that support institutional goals may help provide a charter school the necessary autonomy to optimize performance.

Figure 2.2 *Autonomy, Governance, and School Effectiveness*

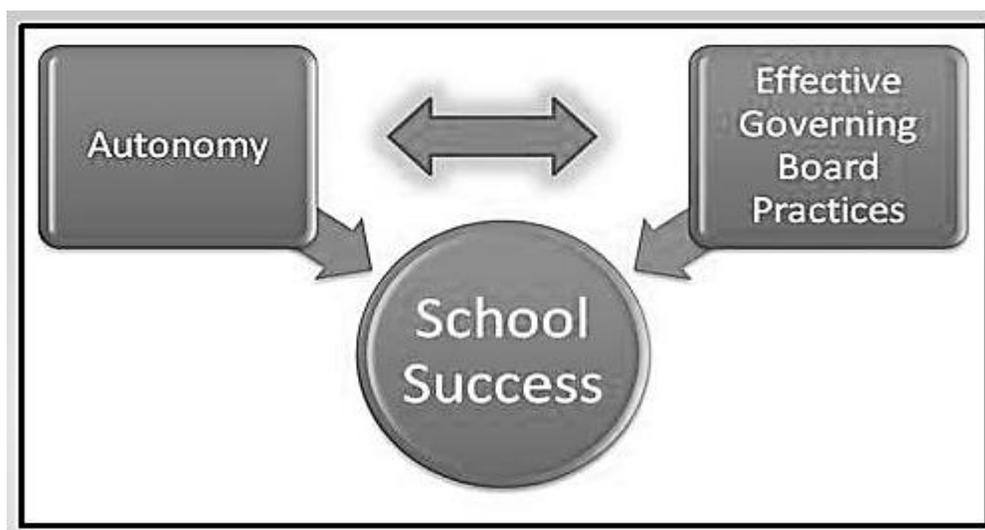


Figure 2.2 illustrates the shared impact that charter school autonomy and effective governing board practices have on school success. An effective governing board impacts

the level of autonomy a school enjoys. A governing board is a critical component of a charter school's capacity to function as a successful, independent school (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, 2008). Concurrently, enhanced autonomy can have a significant effect on a charter school governing board (Gross, 2011). Greater freedom from Local Educational Agency governance utilized productively by charter school leaders can encourage innovative programs and higher expectations for students (Gross, 2011).

### **Charter School Governance**

The Charter School Quality Consortium (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009) is a partnership that includes four organizations invested in supporting increased numbers of quality charter schools: Colorado League of Charter Schools, CREDO at Stanford University, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). The Consortium published a report in 2009 that outlined basic operational standards, systems, and practices that may serve as operational guidelines for establishing and sustaining charter school success (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009). The Consortium encourages charter school leaders to use this reference as a tool for school planning, monitoring, self-evaluation, and improvement. This reference elaborates on three primary indicators of charter school operational quality: Financial Performance and Sustainability, Board Performance and Stewardship, and Parent and Community Engagement. The fact that primary responsibilities of charter school governing boards include fiscal oversight and communications with the public highlights the overarching operational impact of charter school governing boards. The Consortium

recommended that every charter school board assume at least four primary guidelines that could support effective governance (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009).

- 1) Adopt members that reflect diverse expertise and skills necessary to perform the board's multifaceted responsibilities.
- 2) Hire and evaluate strong principals while respecting the necessary boundaries between governance and management.
- 3) Ensure proper oversight over all contracts including the school charter.
- 4) Serve the public's interests as an integral part of the community.

These guidelines were developed through ongoing collaborative meetings and dialogue among geographically diverse individuals with extensive experience with charter school governance, finance, and parent and community engagement. Randy DeHoff (2011), the Executive Director of the Colorado Charter School Institute, published similar guidelines. National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance (2011) also published recommendations for effective charter school governance in an issue brief, *Maximizing Effectiveness: Focusing the Microscope on Charter School Governing Boards*. National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance (2011) noted some significant flaws with these and similar publications.

Despite the availability of recommendations for creating effective governing boards, little empirical data exist on the characteristics of charter school governing boards, further complicating the task for charter operators of unpacking the sometimes conflicting advice. (p. 8)

### **Board Effectiveness and Organizational Effectiveness: Correlation vs. Causation**

There are empirical studies of factors that influence organizational effectiveness for Nonprofit Organizations (NPO). This is relevant to a discussion about charter school governance because start-up charter school boards are typically required by state law to be tax-exempt 501(c)3 organizations (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, 2011). Most successful charter schools are also nonprofit corporations. It is important to understand that charter schools are multi-million-dollar startup enterprises whose stakeholders are taxpayers including parents, community leaders, and other corporations (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009).

Herman and Renz (2008) reviewed empirical studies and related literature on nonprofit organizational effectiveness. Their analysis revealed salient conclusions about factors that impact NPO effectiveness. One conclusion noted that effectiveness is always comparative in nature. Organizations may be compared against themselves at a different time or with similar organizations. Some studies compare organizations against an ideal. Organizations that are deemed effective are often closely examined for best practices.

Significant differences among organizations should be considered when researching effective practices (Herman & Renz, 2008). Herman and Renz (2008) advised that the term “best practices” be avoided. Organizational diversity can limit the potential of an institutional practice that has proven successful at one site to be generalizable. It is necessary to differentiate among types of organizations when determining causes for organizational effectiveness. Organizations can vary by activities, size, and other characteristics. Strategies that are successful over time and show

measurable gains can be replicated as “promising practices”. Herman and Renz cautioned against the assertion that specific board and management practices are ideal. Instead, “promising practices” describe approaches that warrant consideration. Any recommended management practice must be considered within the unique context of the specific organization. Promising practices hold potential value. Research has proven that boards of directors do make a difference in the effectiveness of a non-profit organization. While several studies have found a correlation between board effectiveness and NPO effectiveness it remains unclear how governing boards impact organizational success (Herman & Renz, 2008).

Questions remain whether this correlation is reflective of causation. Statistics can provide evidence of interrelationships between governing board characteristics and student achievement, however, careful analysis and rational deductions can help determine if there is a causal relationship. According to Marzano (2005), there are many variables that collectively have a significant causal effect on student achievement. School and district based leadership practices weigh heavily among factors that impact student achievement. There are, in fact, a variety of measures of organizational effectiveness.

Organizational effectiveness is comparative in nature. This research used district and school level data as a standard for school effectiveness. Identified trends in governance that correlate with school success will serve as a starting point for future research. The analysis of data derived from this research will contribute to logical arguments to lend support for the cause and effect explanation related to board governance.

### **Effective Governing Boards: Characteristics**

Many empirical studies use varied criteria to assess organizational effectiveness. Herman and Renz (2008) asserted that organizational effectiveness is multidimensional and cannot be assessed with a single indicator. Criteria may include finances, quality, or public image. According to Mel Gill (2005), effective organizations have governing boards that uphold a productive direction of the organization, maintain stewardship over finances and personnel, and preserve a positive public image. Systemic evaluation of these empirically validated standards of board performance is needed to optimize NPO functioning. These standards are beneficial to this study because they mirror common roles of charter school governing boards (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, 2011) as well as statements on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check. A closer examination of these standards help reveal how vital they are to an NPO's survival.

A governing board, according to Gill (2005), should establish and safeguard the organizational mission. This responsibility constitutes developing foundational principles and goals of the organization. Organizational priorities drive the establishment and monitoring of goals, inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

Governing board members, according to Gill (2005), are the financial stewards of an NPO. Ongoing funding, maintaining productive communications with funders, understanding funder priorities, and knowing future funding prospects are all vital roles of a board of directors. Additionally, the establishment and monitoring of an annual operating budget, initiating and reviewing audits, and maintaining transparency through quarterly reports to the board and chief executive officer (CEO) are necessary to ensure

organizational stability. In fact, according to Gill (2005), selecting, supporting, and regularly evaluating the performance of a CEO is a board's most important responsibility.

A governing board will, albeit infrequently, have to hire a CEO. Ideally this CEO will be an effective manager who has a personal leadership style that works well with the board. Effective management involves the organization of people and resources to meet organizational goals (Gill, 2005). Trust will be maintained through open and ongoing communications and a clear delineation of responsibilities. Similarly, public opinion and confidence in an NPO is strategically earned and needs to be sustained.

According to Gill (2005) board members must promote the organization to the community. A primary benefit for charter schools is that this practice can enhance parental involvement that has a proven correlation to charter school success (Smith et al. 2011). Organizational promotion can persuade stakeholders to invest in the NPO. The public's overall impression of an organization can impact its access to revenue and resources. An NPO's capacity to meet the community's interests may impact its potential for prosperity or failure.

### **Summary**

Charter school critics express a valid concern that these public schools are generally segregated by race and socioeconomic status (Ni, 2007; Orfield & Lee, 2007). Additionally, overall substandard student achievement of charter school students reignites former charges of a separate and inferior educational system for many of the most vulnerable children. A disaggregated analysis of student outcomes, however, revealed that minority children from economically impoverished backgrounds demonstrated significantly greater learning gains in charter schools when that same learning is

compared to peers in their traditional public schools. Conversely, white children and Hispanic children not in poverty had greater achievement gains in traditional public schools. Not all charter schools are equally effective. This review of literature explored similarities and differences among different types of charter schools. Start-up charter schools seemed to hold the greatest potential. When compared to conversion or distance learning charter schools, start up charter schools have the greatest documented student growth (Buddin & Zimmer, 2005).

Identification of an educational model that is effective for traditionally underserved students offers inspiration for those who value equitable access to quality educational services for all children. Factors that correlate with charter school success include accountability, public support, and institutional capacity to progress toward established goals (Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2004). While these factors are directly tied to common duties of the legally mandated charter school governing board, the influence that a charter school governing board has on its' charter school remains unclear. There are empirically validated characteristics of successful NPO governing boards (Herman & Renz, 2008). This suggests that it is likely that charter school governing boards do hold value that can be measured.

This research utilized an empirically validated governance survey developed by Mel Gill, the Board Effectiveness Quick Check. Statements found on this survey are aligned with common functions of charter school governing boards.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **The Research Context**

A charter school's board of directors has a variety of responsibilities that should help benefit the school (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009). This research examined charter schools as open systems and explored governance practices that involve the management of external as well as internal resources to learn if they correlate with performance by participating start-up charter schools.

Community based stakeholders that support the mission of a school may help foster innovative educational approaches and related enthusiasm. Alternatively, Local Educational Agency (LEA) regulatory constraints can impair a charter school's capacity to perform better than their non-chartered peers (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). An effective charter school board may optimize the positive impact of community based organizations that support the school's mission while concurrently limiting the negative impact of LEA regulatory constraints. The methodology for this research is designed to determine if positive relations between the board and the executive director; good board development practices; a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility; and effective management of board meetings and board work help provide a charter school the necessary autonomy to optimize performance.

#### **Population and Sample**

According to the 2014-2015 Georgia Charter Schools and Charter Systems Annual Report, there are a total of 71 start-up charter schools in the state of Georgia. The

researcher invited 37 start-up charter school boards within five diverse school districts to participate in this study. Six start up charter school boards within three school districts agreed to participate in this study. The 31 individual board members who completed a survey for this study serve a variety of schools including elementary, middle, and high. Charter school board members from three elementary, one Kindergarten through 8th grade, one middle, and one high school completed the Board Effectiveness Quick Check to evaluate their quality of governance. Children in the participating school districts have diverse economic advantage and school success. The six schools were divided into two groups according to the percentage of students that met typical and high academic growth as evidenced by their Student Growth percentiles.

CCRPI reports for three of the six schools in this study reveal that the percentage of their students demonstrating typical or high growth exceeded their school district's average. These three elementary schools are diverse in economic advantage, ethnicity, and size. They also share important similarities. Proportions of students receiving Free or Reduced lunch range from 9.95% to 79%. Two schools in this group have majority white populations. One has a majority black population. Of the three schools whose student growth percentiles exceed the district average, student populations range from 374 to 605 students. Two of the three schools are adding middle grades. All three schools opened between 2010 and 2011, have Special Education populations between .08 and .09, and have Board Effectiveness Quick Check Scores between 3.7 and 4.7.

Three schools that participated in this study have student growth percentiles that fell below their district's average. These three schools are diverse in economic advantage, ethnicity, and size. In addition, they serve older children than their

comparative group. Proportions of students receiving Free or Reduced lunch range from less than 5% to 51.1%. Two schools in this group have majority black populations; one has a majority white population with a Hispanic minority and no black students. Student populations for these three schools range from 179 to 829 students. Two schools serve children from Kindergarten to 8th grade; one of these school's elementary students exceed the SGP district average while the middle school students fall below the SGP district average. One is a high school. All three schools opened between 2010 and 2014, have Special Education Populations between "fewer than 15 students" to .07, and have Board Effectiveness Quick Check Scores between 3.7 and 4.1.

### **Instrumentation**

The Governance Self-Assessment Checklist (GSAC) informs leaders of nonprofit organizations institutional governance strengths and needed areas of improvement. This instrument can be used to inform and improve governance practices. The GSAC consists of 144 items that have been identified as closely related to successful governance. These items are organized into 12 subscales. Research conducted on this instrument indicated that this assessment has strong internal reliability and good criterion-related validity.

Statistical tests were used to review the reliability and validity of the GSAC and its success in discriminating between stronger and weaker facets of board functioning (Gill, 2005). Internal consistency coefficients for each of the GSAC subscales are at or above .76, and most are in the .80s and .90s. Results revealed the subscales were significantly inter-correlated with all but three of the correlations significant at the .001 level (the three exceptions were significant at the .01 or .05 levels). The assessment of the criterion-related validity of the GSAC occurred by examining correlations of ratings

of organizational effectiveness by board members with ratings by outside observers. Ratings of organizational effectiveness made by external observers correlated significantly and moderately highly with those made by the board members ( $r = .63$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The less comprehensive Board Effectiveness Quick Check is designed for small nonprofits that may prefer a simpler form of self-evaluation. This instrument, created by the same researchers, mirrors the more comprehensive GSAC. There is a high correlation between the Quick Check and the GSAC. The Quick Check has a strong correlation ( $r = 0.79$ ) with the Governance Quotient and, with other subscales, from a high of .80 with Mission and Planning to a high of .53 with Risk Management. According to Mel Gill (2005), the Quick check can provide a feasible way of efficiently evaluating the quality of governance. Mel Gill shared with this researcher in a phone conference that the Quick Check has been embedded in the web-based tool Survey Monkey in the past and used effectively that way (personal communication, September 9, 2013). The researcher used Qualtrics to build and disseminate the Board Effectiveness Quick Check.

Qualtrics is a survey and data collection tool used for creating, sharing, and analyzing surveys. The researcher used Qualtrics to build the Quick Check survey and generate related reports. Responses from each of the 31 completed surveys were housed within Qualtrics secure servers and were available for analysis online by the researcher. Completed surveys were printed and hard copies were examined for trends and outliers. The survey was activated April 12, 2016 and deactivated July 6, 2016.

The Board Effectiveness Quick Check (Table 2) has 15 statements about governance and a corresponding 5-point Likert scale response format that ranges from “Agree Strongly” to “Disagree Strongly”. Numerical values used for quantitative analysis were as follows: Agree Strongly (5), Agree (4), Agree somewhat (3), Disagree somewhat (2), Disagree (1), Disagree strongly (0), and Don’t know (-1). In this study, the 15 statements are categorized into 4 constructs aligned with characteristics of effective governing boards. According to Mel Gill (2005), characteristics of effective governing boards include positive relations between the board and the executive director, good board development practices, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, and effective management of board meetings and board work. Statements for each of these four constructs and their related items on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check are shown in Table 2.1

Table 2. *The Board Effectiveness Quick Check survey statements*

This organization’s orientation for board members adequately prepares them to fulfill their governance responsibilities.
This board is actively involved in planning the direction and priorities of the organization.
The board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO (measuring results against objectives).
This organization is financially sound (viable and stable).
Board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO.
The organization’s resources are used efficiently (good value for money spent).
The board has high credibility with key stakeholders (e. g. funders, donors, consumers, collateral organizations or professionals, community, and staff).
Board members demonstrate commitment to this organization’s mission and values.
Board members comply with requirements outlined in key elements of the governance structure (bylaws, policies, code of conduct, conflict of interest, traditional/cultural norms, etc.).
The board’s capacity to govern effectively is not impaired by conflicts between members.
There is a productive working relationship between the board and the CEO (characterized by good communication and mutual respect).
I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated.

Board meetings are well managed.
The board uses sound decision-making processes (focused on board responsibilities, factual information, efficient use of time, items not frequently revisited, effective implementation).
This organization has a good balance between organizational stability and innovation.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of effective governing boards & Statements of the Board Effectiveness Quick Check

Characteristics of effective governing boards	Statements on The Board Effectiveness Quick Check survey
positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO.</li> <li>• There is a productive working relationship between the board and the CEO.</li> <li>• Board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO.</li> </ul>
good board development practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board members demonstrate commitment to this organization's mission and values.</li> <li>• This organization's orientation for board members adequately prepares them to fulfill their governance responsibilities.</li> <li>• Board members comply with requirements outlined in key elements of the governance structure.</li> </ul>
a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated.</li> <li>• This organization is financially sound</li> <li>• The organization's resources are used efficiently</li> <li>• The board has a good balance between organizational stability and innovation.</li> </ul>
effective management of board meetings and board work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This board is actively involved in planning the direction and priorities of the organization.</li> <li>• The board's capacity to govern effectively is not impaired by conflicts between members.</li> <li>• Board meetings are well managed.</li> <li>• The board uses sound decision making processes.</li> <li>• The board has high credibility with key stakeholders.</li> </ul>

Governing board members from six schools completed this survey. The six schools were divided into two groups according to the percentage of students that met typical and high growth via their Student Growth percentiles as reported on their 2015

CCRPI reports. The researcher used descriptive statistics to analyze governance scores for each item on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check as well as for each construct: positive relations between the board and the executive director; good board development practices; a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility; and effective management of board meetings and board work. Additionally, governance scores were compared between the two groups: schools whose student growth exceeded their school district average and schools whose student growth fell below their school district average.

### **College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)**

In 2011, due to wide spread criticism of certain aspects of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, states were given the opportunity to seek a waiver from this law. Critics asserted that mandates central to NCLB had proven detrimental to our schools. Opponents claimed that NCLB failed to recognize and reward schools for growth in student achievement, did little to promote the teaching profession, and failed to recognize the most effective teachers ([www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us)). Georgia now uses the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for state accountability purposes. The CCRPI uses a variety of criterion to evaluate a school's successes or lack thereof. A possible numerical score out of 110 is given to every school in the state. Scores are based on achievement, achievement gap closure, progress, and challenge points. Table 2.2 shows the total points available for each component of the CCRPI Score.

Table 2.2. *Scoring Rubric for CCRPI*

CCRPI Component	Points Available 2015
Achievement	50
Progress	40
Achievement Gap Closure	10
Challenge	Additional 10 points

(Beaudette, 2016)

The achievement component is 50% of the final CCRPI score. It includes student achievement on standardized tests, measures of post high school readiness, and graduation rates. Standardized tests include analysis of Georgia Milestones End of Grade and End of Course tests.

The progress score is 40% of the final CCRPI score. It is calculated based on the percentage of a school's students demonstrating typical or high growth via their Student Growth Percentiles (SGP). A SGP (Appendix A) describes a student's growth on state tests relative to other students statewide with similar prior achievement. A student's growth percentile can range from 1 to 99. Every student's SGPs may earn points towards the Progress Score.

Table 2.3. *Individual Student Growth Percentiles*

SGP Ranges	Type of Growth
1-34	Low Growth
35-65	Typical Growth
66-99	High Growth

(GADOE, 2013)

CCRPI reports share the percentage of students for each district and school growing at a typical or high rate ( $SGP \geq 35$ ) compared to academically-similar students from across the state of Georgia.

Achievement gap closure, which is worth 10% of the CCRPI score, is calculated through analysis of the schools' achievement gap size and ability to close it. For each subject assessment, the schools' lowest 25% of achievers and the state average are determined. To calculate the gap change, take the current year gap size and subtract it from the prior year gap size.

Schools are assigned performance targets for economically disadvantaged students (ED), students with disabilities (SWD), and English Language Learners (EL). Challenge points are awarded when subgroups meet state and subgroup performance targets. Schools may only earn points proportionally for the percentage of students in these subgroups in their school. For example, schools with 70% of students in one or more of these groups can receive a maximum of 7 points (70% of 10 points) if every subgroup meets all targets. Schools may earn an additional 10 challenge points.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher sent email requests, letters in the mail, and when possible phone messages to start-up charter school leaders for documentation of support for this research. After letters of support were secured, the researcher shared a web address to the Qualtrics Quick Check online survey with the school leader. Then, the school leader provided the electronic survey to all board members. The survey was activated April 12, 2016 and deactivated July 6, 2016.

The researcher used Qualtrics to share the survey and store the related data. Qualtrics is a survey and data collection tool used for creating, sharing, and analyzing surveys. The researcher used Qualtrics to build and share the Quick Check survey. Responses from each of the 31 completed surveys were housed within Qualtrics secure servers and were available for analysis online by the researcher. Completed surveys were printed and hard copies were examined for trends and outliers.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher for this study conducted the data analysis so as to learn the existence of common governance practices among charter schools in which students are surpassing the performance of their peers in participating schools. The researcher also examined data to learn common governance practices among charter schools in which students are performing below expected standards.

The researcher summarized and described the results from the Board Effectiveness Quick Check surveys using descriptive statistics in the form of averages. The Board Effectiveness Quick Check has 15 statements about governance. The design of this study had the researcher categorize the 15 statements into four constructs: positive relations between the board and the executive director, good board development practices, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, and effective management of board meetings and board work.

Data were submitted to an independent samples t-test to ascertain whether there were statistically significant differences in board member responses between schools in which student growth was above average and schools in which student growth was below average. In each of these analyses, board members' self-reported scores served as the

outcome measure. Data screening and assumption testing procedures indicated that the data approximated a normal distribution and that no outliers that would otherwise undermine the trustworthiness of the data were detected, and thus, data analysis proceeded without making any adjustments to the data. Cohen (1988) provided the following interpretive guidelines for Cohen's  $d$ : .01-.49 as small; .50-.79 as medium; and  $\geq .80$  as large. Also, the internal consistency reliability coefficient was high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$  demonstrating the scores on the surveys have relatively high internal consistency.

### **Summary**

The researcher designed the methodology for this research to determine if the actions and decisions of a charter school governing board can help provide a charter school the necessary autonomy to optimize performance. The researcher used the Board Effectiveness Quick check survey to evaluate the quality of charter school governance. The researcher examined CCRPI reports to learn the performance of students in each charter school when compared to academically-similar students from across the state of Georgia. The researcher compared Board Effectiveness Quick check scores between two groups of schools: schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average. Thirty-one individual board members from a variety of schools including elementary, middle, and high completed the Board Effectiveness Quick Check for this research. An analysis of the Board Effectiveness Quick check scores in this study reveal high internal consistency without any outliers to undermine the dependability of the results.

## **Chapter 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

There are a lot of publications about charter schools. It is easy to find reports on the increased numbers of charter schools, innovative instructional approaches used by some, and the academic achievement of children who attend them. Rarely, however, do reports about charter schools take into consideration the impact that the governing board has on its' success or lack thereof. The theoretical framework for this research assumed that charter school governing boards can limit the potential negative impact an LEA board may have while optimizing the potential positive influence of community resources. If this is true, any analysis of charter school performance should begin with an examination of its' governing board. In addition, any effort to improve charter school performance should include recommendations for governance.

Research based recommendations for charter school governance are rare. This study presents a scientific analysis of charter school governance in an effort to fill this gap in research. Empirically validated recommendations of charter school governance could support increased numbers of charter schools that perform as well or better than traditional public schools.

This study utilized the following overarching hypotheses.

- Common governance practices among charter schools in which students are surpassing the performance of their peers include positive relations between the board and the executive director, good board development

practices, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, and effective management of board meetings and board work.

- Governance practices common among charter schools in which students are not surpassing the performance of their peers in traditional public schools lack positive relations between the board and the executive director, good board development practices, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, and effective management of board meetings and board work.

### **Return on the Survey**

At the time of this study, there was a total of 71 start-up charter schools in the state of Georgia. The researcher invited 37 start-up charter school boards within five school districts to participate in this study. Six start up charter school boards within three school districts participated in this study. Thirty-one individual board members from three elementary, one Kindergarten through 8th grade, one middle, and one high school completed the online Board Effectiveness Quick Check for this research.

Charter school board members could access the survey on any Wi-Fi enabled device including smart phones, tablets or computers. The survey included a total of 25 statements. The first item on the survey introduced the researcher, explained the intent of the research, and shared the structures in place to ensure the confidentiality of survey responses (see Appendix A). The second item on the survey provided directions to complete the survey. The directions are the standard set of instructions for The Board Effectiveness Quick Check survey found in Mel Gill's book *Governing for Results* (See Appendix B). The third item asks the board member which school district they serve.

The fourth item on the survey asks the board member which specific school they serve. Question 5 through 19 are the 15 questions from The Board Effectiveness Quick Check survey. The final item on the survey informs the board members how to contact the researcher if there are any questions about the survey or the procedure. The analysis of results rejected the null hypothesis.

### Study Variables

The researcher compared Board Effectiveness Quick check scores between two groups of schools: schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average.

Table 4. *Research Variables*

Variables	
Independent	Dependent
Student Growth percentiles: exceeds the district average and below the district average.	Board Effectiveness Quick Check Scores

Board Effectiveness Quick Check scores for the 31 individual participating board members revealed varied scores for each survey item. Overall, scores by individual board members ranged from -1 to 5. The lowest overall average score was 3.6 for item number 12, board members demonstrated clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO. The highest overall average score was 4.829 for item number 11, this organization is financially sound (viable and stable). Table 4.1 shows the average score for each of the items on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check.

Table 4.1. *Average Score for each Item on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check*

8. This organization's orientation for board members adequately prepares them to fulfill their governance responsibilities.	3.71
9. This board is actively involved in planning the direction and priorities of the organization.	4.11
10. The board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO (measuring results against objectives).	3.43
11. This organization is financially sound (viable and stable).	4.83
12. Board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO.	3.60
13. The organization's resources are used efficiently (good value for the money spent).	4.40
14. The board has high credibility with key stakeholders (e.g., funders, donors, consumers, collateral organizations or professional, community, staff).	3.71
15. Board members demonstrate commitment to this organization's mission and values.	4.49
16. Board members comply with requirements outlined in key elements of the governance structure (bylaws, policies, code of conduct, conflict of interest, traditional/cultural norms, etc.)	4.09
17. The board's capacity to govern effectively is not impaired by conflicts between members.	4.09
18. There is a productive working relationship between the board and the CEO (characterized by good communication and mutual respect).	4.49
19. I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated.	4.09
20. Board meetings are well managed.	3.91
21. The board uses sound decision-making processes (focused on board responsibilities, factual information, efficient use of time, items not frequently revisited, effective implementation).	4.09
22. This organization has good balance between organizational stability and innovation.	3.97

The average score for each construct reveal that governing boards experience the greatest challenge with positive relations with the Chief Executive Officer. This construct had the lowest overall average score of 3.85. There were three items in this construct: the board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO (measuring results against objectives), board members demonstrated clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO, and there is a productive working

relationship between the board and the CEO (characterized by good communication and mutual respect).

The highest score of all constructs was 4.32 for a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility. There were four survey items in this construct:

- 1) this organization is financially sound (viable and stable);
- 2) the organization's resources are used efficiently (good value for the money spent);
- 3) I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated; and
- 4) this organization has good balance between organizational stability and innovation.

Table 4.2. *Average score for Positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check*

<b>Positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer</b>			
Survey number	Average Score	Minimum individual board member score	Maximum individual board member score
10	3.43	-1	5
12	3.6	0	5
18	4.49	1	5
Average score for all participating schools	3.85		

An analysis of data from this research suggest governing boards experience difficulties with their Chief Executive Officers. Charter school governing boards should

hire a capable CEO as well as evaluate and support the CEO. It is critical governing boards respect the distinct roles of governance and management (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009).

Table 4.3. *Average score Good board development practices on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check*

<b>Good board development practices</b>			
Survey number	Average Score	Minimum Individual board member score	Maximum Individual board member score
8	3.71	2	5
15	4.49	3	5
16	4.09	3	5
Average score all participating schools	4.13		

Charter school governing boards should provide new members with an orientation of the recruitment process. All veteran board members should benefit from board development practices designed to improve school governance (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, September 2008).

Table 4.4. *Average score a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check*

<b>A good balance between organizational stability and flexibility</b>			
Survey number	Average Score	Minimum Individual board member score	Maximum Individual board member scores
11	4.83	4	5
13	4.40	1	5
19	4.09	1	5
22	3.97	2	5
Average score all participating schools	4.32		

The highest score of all constructs was a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility. Charter school governing boards are fiscal stewards. It is necessary that governing boards continuously monitor all institutional processes so the school maintains adequate resources (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, May 2009). Also, charter school governing board should develop and maintain a contingency plan for possible crises. This plan should help ensure organizational stability.

Table 4.5. *Average score effective management of board meetings and board work on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check*

<b>Effective management of board meetings and board work</b>			
Survey number	Average Score	Minimum Individual board member score	Maximum Individual board member scores
9	4.11	-1	5
14	3.71	-1	5
17	4.09	2	5
20	3.91	0	5
21	4.09	2	5
Average score all participating schools	4.03		

A charter school board should be actively involved in planning the direction and priorities of the organization (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, September 2008). Discussions and actions within a well-managed board meeting should occur within clear rules of conduct that guide sound decision making processes.

The six start-up charter schools that participated in this study were divided into two groups: schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools

whose student growth falls below the district average. The schools whose student growth exceeds the district average consistently had higher average governance scores across all four constructs. Table 4.3 shows average governance scores for schools whose student growth exceeds the district average. Table 4.4 shows average governance scores for schools whose student growth falls below the district average Table 4.5 shows average construct scores for the two groups.

The highest average construct governance score for both groups is a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility. Schools whose student growth exceeds the district average have an average governance score on this construct of 4.39. Schools whose student growth falls below the district average have an average governance score on this construct of 4.32.

The lowest average construct governance score for both groups is positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer. Schools whose student growth exceeds the district average have an average governance score on this construct of 4.11. Schools whose student growth falls below the district average have an average governance score on this construct of 3.49.

Table 4.3. *Average Board Effectiveness Quick Check Governance Scores for Schools where Student Growth Exceeds the District Average*

<b>Average Governance Scores: Student growth exceeds the district average</b>				
Board Effectiveness Quick Check statements	D1S1EM Sum of Scores	D2S1M Sum of Scores	D3S1H Sum of Scores	Average Score
8. This organization's orientation for board members adequately prepares them to fulfill their governance responsibilities.	16	27	24	3.72
9. This board is actively involved in planning the direction and priorities of the organization.	18	31	30	4.39
10. The board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO (measuring results against objectives).	19	23	30	4.00
11. This organization is financially sound (viable and stable).	19	38	29	4.78
12. Board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO.	18	24	25	3.72
13. The organization's resources are used efficiently (good value for the money spent).	18	33	28	4.39

14. The board has high credibility with key stakeholders (e.g., funders, donors, consumers, collateral organizations or professional, community, staff).	16	26	28	3.89
15. Board members demonstrate commitment to this organization's mission and values.	19	38	28	4.72
16. Board members comply with requirements outlined in key elements of the governance structure (bylaws, policies, code of conduct, conflict of interest, traditional/ cultural norms, etc.)	19	30	29	4.33
17. The board's capacity to govern effectively is not impaired by conflicts between members.	18	26	29	4.06
18. There is a productive working relationship between the board and the CEO (characterized by good communication and mutual respect).	19	34	30	4.61
19. I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated.	17	30	29	4.22

20. Board meetings are well managed.	18	27	29	4.11
21. The board uses sound decision-making processes (focused on board responsibilities, factual information, efficient use of time, items not frequently revisited, effective implementation).	19	28	28	4.17
22. This organization has good balance between organizational stability and innovation.	18	29	28	4.17

Table 4.4. *Average Board Effectiveness Quick Check Governance Scores for Schools where Student Growth Falls Below the District Average*

<b>Average Governance Scores: Student growth falls below the district average</b>				
Board Effectiveness Quick Check statements	D1S1EM Sum of Scores	D2S1M Sum of Scores	D3S1H Sum of Scores	Average Score
8. This organization's orientation for board members adequately prepares them to fulfill their governance responsibilities.	10	23	15	3.69
9. This board is actively involved in planning the direction and priorities of the organization.	11	26	14	3.92
10. The board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO (measuring results against objectives).	2	20	13	2.69

11. This organization is financially sound (viable and stable).	15	28	20	4.85
12. Board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO.	11	24	12	3.62
13. The organization's resources are used efficiently (good value for the money spent).	14	25	18	4.38
14. The board has high credibility with key stakeholders (e.g., funders, donors, consumers, collateral organizations or professional, community, staff).	13	23	12	3.69
15. Board members demonstrate commitment to this organization's mission and values.	14	24	17	4.23
16. Board members comply with requirements outlined in key elements of the governance structure (bylaws, policies, code of conduct, conflict of interest, traditional/cultural norms, etc.)	12	25	14	3.92
17. The board's capacity to govern effectively is not impaired by conflicts between members.	13	25	16	4.15

18. There is a productive working relationship between the board and the CEO (characterized by good communication and mutual respect).	7	27	20	4.15
19. I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated.	9	26	16	3.92
20. Board meetings are well managed.	12	23	14	3.77
21. The board uses sound decision-making processes (focused on board responsibilities, factual information, efficient use of time, items not frequently revisited, effective implementation).	11	25	16	4.00
22. This organization has good balance between organizational stability and innovation.	10	24	15	3.77

Table 4.5. *Average Board Effectiveness Quick Check Construct Scores: Schools whose Student Growth Exceeds the District Average and Schools whose Student Growth Falls Below the District Average*

<b>Positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer</b>			
Construct	Average Construct Scores: schools whose student growth exceeds the district average	Average Construct Scores: schools whose student growth falls below the district average	Average score: All schools
Positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer	4.11	3.49	3.85
Good board development practices	4.26	3.95	4.13
A good balance between organizational stability and flexibility	4.39	4.23	4.32
Effective management of board meetings and board work	4.12	3.91	4.03

The researcher was unable to calculate statistical significance, P value, due to the small sample size. So, analysis of effect size helped determine if governance practices found on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check survey contributes to school success. Effect size is especially beneficial for this study because it allows the researcher to quantify the size of the difference between the two groups (Coe, 2002). Another advantage of using effect size is that if this research study is replicated, the different effect size estimates from each study can be combined to give an overall best estimate of the size of the effect. This meta-analysis could advance our understanding of the relationship between charter school board governance practices and school performance.

There is a meaningful difference between mean Quick Check scores of schools that perform better and not as well as their public school peers. Board members in

schools whose student growth exceeds the district average had a higher mean Board Effectiveness Quick check score than schools whose student growth falls below the district average. Mean differences suggest that board members in schools whose student growth exceeds the district average use more effective governance practices ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) than board members in schools whose student growth falls below the district average ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ). Results also indicated the effect size of the difference was moderate,  $t(29) = -1.30$ ,  $p = .20$ , Cohen's  $d = -.48$ . Table 4.6 shows the results for the independent samples t-test.

Table 4.6

*Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples t-test Results*

Outcome	Growth < District Average ( $n = 13$ )		Growth > District Average ( $n = 18$ )		$t$	$p$	Cohen's $d$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			
Board Member Readiness Score	3.94	0.49	4.21	0.64	-1.30	.20	-0.48

$N = 31$

The effect size reveals that board members in schools whose student growth exceeds the district average reported being .5 a standard deviation more effective than those board members in schools whose student growth falls below the district average. This effect size suggests common governance practices among charter schools in which student growth exceeds the district average include characteristics of effective governing boards as identified by Mel Gill in his book “Governing for Results”. Characteristics of effective governing boards include positive relations between the board and the executive

director; good board development practices; a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility; and effective management of board meetings and board work.

### **Summary**

Charter school governing boards have vital and multifaceted responsibilities. This research presents a framework for future researchers who want to empirically validate operational characteristics that directly impact charter school success. Board Effectiveness Quick Check results reveal clear trends. Schools whose student growth exceeds the district average have consistently higher scores than schools whose student growth falls below the district average. In this study, the 15 statements on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check were categorized into four constructs according to characteristics of effective governing boards. Also, schools are divided into two groups according to whether or not their student growth percentiles, as reported on the 2015 CCRPI report, exceeded the district average.

An analysis of Board Effectiveness Quick Check scores revealed that all schools report their lowest scores for the construct, positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer. Also all schools report their highest scores for the construct, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility. Analysis of descriptive statistics of the survey results for all participants in this study revealed that schools whose student growth exceeded the district average had consistently higher governance scores.

The researcher used effect size in this study to quantify the size of the difference between schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average (Coe, 2002). It is informative to review the results of this study in terms of measures of magnitude to learn not only if governance

matters, but how much. The moderate,  $t(29) = -1.30$ ,  $p = .20$  effect size for this study suggests common governance practices among charter schools in which student growth exceeds the district average include characteristics of effective governing boards. Also, governance practices common among charter schools in which students are not surpassing the performance of their peers in traditional public schools lack characteristics of effective governing boards.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary of Study**

Charter schools are innovative public schools designed by educators, parents or civic leaders that are open by choice, accountable for results, and free from many rules and regulations governing conventional public schools. Despite the vital and multifaceted responsibilities of charter school governing boards, there are few empirically validated recommendations for charter school governing practices. Research informs readers that the strongest characteristics of effective governing boards include positive relations between the board and the executive director, good board development practices, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, and effective management of board meetings and board work (Gill, 2005). While these factors are directly tied to common duties of a charter school governing board, the influence that a charter school governing board has on charter school performance is unclear. Empirically validated characteristics of successful NPO governing boards (Herman & Renz, 2008) provide hope that charter school governing boards also have specific, effective, governance practices.

The methodology for this research was designed to determine if governance practices of successful NPO governing boards impact charter school performance. Board Effectiveness Quick Check scores between two groups: schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average were analyzed to learn if there is a relationship between charter school governance and student progress. The results from this study provide evidence, there is a

correlation and a moderate effect size between governance practices and student academic growth.

### **Discussion**

A supporting theoretical framework for this research is schools are open systems. Schools are largely influenced by external factors including community organizations, local educational agencies, and families. The capacity of a charter school to harness the full potential of its autonomy is largely dependent on state law and the effectiveness of the governing board. There are necessary restrictions on operational freedom of charter schools manifest in state law. Policies including school performance accountability, safety regulations, civil rights protections, and financial stewardship protect the community as well as the charter school (Brinson & Rosch, 2010). Additionally, the success of any organization is directly dependent on the failures and successes of other organizations with which it is associated (Renz, 2008). Bureaucratic structures such as an LEA school board may impair a charter school's effectiveness due to policies and regulations that fail to support institutional goals. A charter school board's capacity to evaluate the school leader, engage the community, and support innovation while maintaining organizational stability may help provide the necessary autonomy to optimize performance.

Public charter schools are expanding faster than any other sector of the US public education system (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012). The type of children that benefit most from charter schools are black children in poverty and English Language Learners (CREDO, 2013). Students from economically disadvantaged homes, black students, and English language learners at charter schools show greater gains in

learning in the areas of reading and math than do their peers in traditional public schools (CREDO, 2013). Empirically validated understanding and publication of specific governance practices that support the academic growth of the aforementioned groups of children may help expand educational benefits to more children. This dissemination of research based supports for school success is consistent with the original intent of charter schools. Charter schools were originally intended to generate evidence based strategies that could subsequently be shared with other public schools (Kahlenberg & Halley, 2014).

### **Board Effectiveness Quick Check Scores: All Schools**

Thirty-one individual board members from six schools completed the Board Effectiveness Quick Check in this study. According to 2015 CCRPI reports, three of the schools that participated in this study had student academic growth that exceeded their district average. Additionally, three of the schools that participated in this study had student academic growth that fell below their district average. These schools met the delimitations for the participant schools to be involved in this study. An analysis of Board Effectiveness Quick Check scores for all schools that participated in this study revealed that the statement that received the lowest average score is, board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and the CEO. The statement that received the highest average score is, this organization is financially sound (viable and stable).

Charter school participants in this study, seemed to struggle with understanding the roles between the board and the CEO. The related statement on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check received the lowest average score of 3.6 on the likert scale for

this study. The lowest score this statement received by an individual board member was Disagree Strongly with a numerical assignment of 0. The highest rating it received by an individual board member was Agree Strongly with a numerical assignment of 5. Board members from schools whose student growth exceeded the district average scored higher on this construct (4.11) than board members from schools whose student growth fell below the district average (3.49). Results suggest the relationship and roles between the CEO and board present a challenge for schools whose student growth fell below the district average and not for the other comparison group.

The review of literature for this research included details about charter school principals who reportedly struggled with responsibilities such as stakeholder engagement, accountability measures, and organizational goals that could reasonably belong to the charter school board. This research provided evidence that credibility with stakeholders, school leader evaluations, and strategic planning are characteristics of effective start up charter schools. A clear delineation of roles, however, remains a common challenge identified not only in this research's review of literature but also in the Board Effectiveness quick check survey results.

The statement this organization is financially sound (viable and stable) received an average score of 4.83. This was the highest average score of all statements. The lowest score this statement received by an individual board member was Agree with a numerical assignment of 4. The highest rating it received by an individual board member was Agree Strongly with a numerical assignment of 5. The Charter School Quality Consortium includes financial performance and sustainability as a primary responsibility of charter school governing boards (National Consensus Panel on Charter School

Operational Quality, 2009). This is because successful financial stewardship helps promote a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility in a charter school.

### **Construct Results: All Schools**

The Board Effectiveness Quick Check can be used to inform and improve governance practices (Gill, 2005). This survey has 15 statements about governance. In this study, the 15 statements were categorized into four constructs: (1) positive relations between the board and the executive director; (2) good board development practices; (3) a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility; and (4) effective management of board meetings and board work. Average construct scores for all schools revealed common trends between both groups: schools whose student growth exceeded the district average and schools whose student growth fell below the district average. The construct, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, had the highest average scores for both groups.

The construct, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility included four statements: (1) this organization is financially sound (viable and stable); (2) the organization's resources are used efficiently (good value for the money spent); (3) I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated; and (4) this organization has good balance between organizational stability and innovation. The lowest score by an individual board member for this construct was Disagree with a numerical assignment of one. The highest score by an individual board member for this construct was Agree Strongly with a numerical

assignment of five. This construct addresses circumstances that allow a school to, not only remain viable, but also to thrive.

Financial stewardship is a primary function of a charter school governing board yet, many charter schools fail due to financial mismanagement (Feist, 2007). Successful charter schools have procedures in place to safeguard assets and manage resources. A positive evaluation of a charter school's financial status by board members indicates the school has access to resources that can help benefit the academic progress of their students.

Governing board members in this study generally reported, their organization's resources were used efficiently (good value for the money). The average score for this statement on the survey was 4.4. The lowest score by an individual board member for this construct was Disagree with a numerical assignment of one. The highest score by an individual board member for this construct was Agree Strongly with a numerical assignment of five. This relatively high score reflects positively on the participants in this study. This high rating suggests the charter schools that participated in this study understand what resources are needed to effectively implement their school's educational program. Additionally, survey results indicate the charter school governing board members in this study are good stewards over the resources needed for instruction, building maintenance, and program management.

Another positive result from the surveys in this study was the generally high score board members gave to the statement, "I am confident that this board would effectively manage any organizational crisis that could be reasonably anticipated". The average score for this statement on the survey was 4.09. The lowest score by an individual board

member for this construct was Disagree with a numerical assignment of one. The highest score by an individual board member for this construct was Agree Strongly with a numerical assignment of five. The average score for this statement suggests, generally, the charter school boards that participated in this study are proactive in an effort to minimize the likelihood of potential catastrophes. Successful school boards consistently monitor safety and emergency procedures. Additionally, proactive school boards keep accurate records that document conformity to bylaws and legal mandates. School boards that clearly demonstrate their actions and decisions are for the benefit of the school and not for her personal advantage are reasonably prepared for potential organizational crises.

Governing board members in this study generally reported, this organization has good balance between organizational stability and innovation. The average score for this statement on the survey was 3.97. The lowest score by an individual board member for this statement was Disagree-Somewhat with a numerical assignment of two. The highest score by an individual board member for this statement was Agree Strongly with a numerical assignment of five. According to Mel Gill in his book *Governing for Results* (2005), in order to establish and maintain a degree of stability and innovation, organizations need to respect and celebrate past accomplishments while encouraging advancement. In addition, it is critical organizations that learn from prior challenges. Organizational progress is likely to occur consistently in a non-judgmental climate. If governing boards want to encourage innovation, it is necessary that they establish and maintain a “no fault” culture where members are free to conduct goals based plans in a safe environment. Moreover, innovation occurs in organizations where board members understand how to monitor outcomes without controlling the means.

### **Comparison of two Groups**

An interesting result of this study was that average governance scores were consistently higher for schools whose student progress exceeded the district average for all four constructs. While the differences are not statistically significant, the trend is noteworthy. The greatest numerical difference between construct scores was for the construct Positive relations between the board and the Chief Executive Officer. This construct includes three statements: (1) the board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO (measuring results against objectives); (2) board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO; and (3) there is a productive working relationship between the board and the CEO (characterized by good communication and mutual respect). The average score for this construct for schools whose student growth exceeded the district average was 4.11. The average score for this construct for schools who student growth falls below the district average was 3.48.

An important responsibility of a non-profit governing board is to evaluate the CEO. A related statement on the Board Effectiveness Quick check survey is, the board does a good job of evaluating the performance of the CEO (measuring results against objectives). Relatively high scores for this statement suggested governing boards in this study whose student growth exceeded the district average were able to engage in productive interactions with the CEO that support institutional goals. One can reasonably expect that these schools have established performance standards that are periodically reviewed with the CEO. Results from the survey indicated there exists mutual trust and respect between governing boards of the most successful schools and their CEO. Charter

school boards, in this study, whose student growth fell below the district average may experience challenges with building trust and communicating in candor with their CEO. Lower scores on this statement may reflect conflicts between the board and CEO that may inhibit progress toward institutional goals. Additionally, low scores on this statement may indicate lack of clarity regarding the quality of the CEOs performance. Effective charter school boards understand how to evaluate their school leader on collaboratively established criteria (Gill, 2005). This evaluation can include rewards for exceptional performance and should include candid conversations for areas of improvement. Successful charter school governing boards invest in professional development for their school leaders. This professional development should support proficiency on the standards charter school leaders are evaluated on as well as structured learning opportunities intended to remediate identified deficits (Gill, 2005).

It is critical that charter school board members have a clear understanding of the expectations of the board and the responsibilities of CEO. A related statement on the Board Effectiveness Quick check survey is, “board members demonstrate clear understanding of the respective roles of the board and CEO”. Relatively high scores for this statement suggested governing boards in this study whose student growth exceeded the district average have clarity in the respective roles between the CEO and the governing board. Results indicate, these governing boards understand the governance function, which is the role of the governing board involves strategic plans, policy development, and the legal and financial health of the school, not managing day-to-day operations. Charter school boards, in this study, whose student growth fell below the district average may experience challenges when dealing with areas of governance /

management overlap. Relatively low scores on this statement may reflect a temptation to micromanage. Governance and management, ideally, support one another with effective strategic planning and an institutional culture of respect for institutional policies (National Consensus Panel on Charter School Operational Quality, 2009). Good governance involves clarity of objectives, monitoring performance, and accountability. Effective management of a charter school involves working directly with teachers and staff and regular reports to the governing board (Gill, 2005).

It is critical that charter school board members have a respectful relationship with the CEO. A related statement on the Board Effectiveness Quick check survey is, “there is a productive working relationship between the board and the CEO (characterized by good communication and mutual respect)”. Relatively high scores for this statement suggested governing boards in this study whose student growth exceeded the district average have a constructive process for dealing with areas of governance/management overlap. Charter school boards, in this study, whose student growth fell below the district average may experience challenges with constructive confrontation and resolution of conflicts between the board and the CEO.

Identified differences in survey results between groups in this study are not statistically significant, however effect size was used to quantify the size of the differences between groups.

### **Research Highlights**

There is a meaningful difference in governance scores between the two groups of schools in this study. This difference suggests that board members in schools whose student growth exceeds the district average use more effective governance practices than

schools whose student growth falls below the district average. Key findings of this study have logical “promising practices” that warrant consideration. Startup charter school governing boards in the state of Georgia who are exploring options to improve their school performance may consider the following promising practices.

**Finding 1:** Common governance practices among charter school boards in which students are surpassing the performance of their peers have positive relations between the board and the executive director.

*Promising practice 1:* Startup charter school governing boards should develop annual performance expectations of their CEO in consultation with the CEO. Additionally, startup charter school boards should authentically evaluate their school leader against established performance expectations. It is critical that school boards support their CEO while respecting the distinct roles of governance and management. The support coupled with authentic evaluations will foster mutual trust and respect.

**Finding 2:** Common governance practices among charter school boards in which students are surpassing the performance of their peers have good board development practices.

*Promising practice 2:* The recruitment process for new board members should include an orientation. A thoughtfully developed orientation should offer new board members an accurate understanding of bylaws, governance policies, procedural guidelines for board meetings, the strategic plan, and annual reports. In addition, all board members should benefit from continuous board development opportunities.

**Finding 3:** Common governance practices among charter school boards in which students are surpassing the performance of their peers have a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility.

*Promising practice 3:* Startup charter school governing boards should develop a risk assessment and management plan that identifies existing risks and includes steps to address them. In addition, charter school boards should continuously monitor all income and expenses to ensure the school maintains adequate resources to function effectively. It is also critical for charter school boards to have environments where board members feel safe to initiate thoughtfully planned projects.

**Finding 4:** Common governance practices among charter school boards in which students are surpassing the performance of their peers have effective management of board meetings and board work.

*Promising practice 4:* Charter school governing boards should have well planned and well managed board meetings. The meeting agenda should always include items pertaining to governance as well as opportunities for all board members to contribute in a meaningful way.

### **Moderate Effect Size**

The researcher used effect size in this study to quantify the size of the difference between schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average (Coe, 2002). The effect size for this study provides evidence that common governance practices among charter schools in which student growth exceeds the district average include positive relations between the board and the executive director; good board development practices; a good balance between

organizational stability and flexibility; and effective management of board meetings and board work. In addition, governance practices common among charter schools in which students are not surpassing the performance of their peers in traditional public schools lack positive relations between the board and the executive director; good board development practices; a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility; and effective management of board meetings and board work.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

Thirty-seven start-up charter school boards within five diverse school districts were invited to participate in this study. The researcher sent email requests, letters in the mail, and when possible phone messages to start-up charter school leaders for support for this research. Several charter schools responded that they would not participate in this research. Many others did not respond at all. Six start up charter school boards within three school districts agreed to participate in this study. After letters of support were secured the researcher shared a web address to the Qualtrics Quick Check online survey with the school leader. Then, the school leader provided the electronic survey url to all board members. The survey was activated April 12, 2016 and deactivated July 6, 2016. The 31 individual board members who completed a survey for this study serve a variety of schools including elementary, middle, and high.

Limitations for this study included the fact that the responses to the survey were filtered through the lens of the participants. Those who are experiencing either a frustrating or a positive experience may present information in a manner that would support their individual involvement. The small sample size prohibits generalization to

larger populations. Also, the small sample size limits the researcher's ability to control variables that impact student performance.

### **Conclusion**

Board Effectiveness Quick Check Score mean differences between schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average provide evidence that charter school governance can support educational success. Also, the effect size revealed that board members in schools whose student growth exceeds the district average are more effective than those board members in schools whose student growth falls below the district average. This effect size also suggests common governance practices among charter schools in which student growth falls below the district average lack characteristics of effective governing boards as identified by Mel Gill in his book *Governing for Results*. Characteristics of effective governing boards include positive relations between the board and the executive director, good board development practices, a good balance between organizational stability and flexibility, and effective management of board meetings and board work.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

If this experiment is replicated, the different effect size estimates from each study can be combined in a meta-analysis to better understand the impact of governing board practices and school outcomes. Researchers who are well positioned to effectively solicit charter school governing boards to complete surveys will expand the sample size and the related capacity to generalize findings.

With enough responses to the survey, a researcher could then use a matching procedure for the research analysis. Criterion for matching mirrored after the virtual

control record (VCR) method of analysis developed by the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) in their national charter school study (2013) could generate results that would then be generalizable for charter schools in the state of Georgia. This matching procedure could ensure variables such as grade level, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, or students with disabilities do not erroneously impact findings (Gall, 2007). The match design could manifest at the school level whereby charter schools could be matched on grade levels served, Race/Ethnicity, Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility, percentage of students who are English Language Learners, percentage of students receiving special education services, prior test score on state achievement tests, size of school, and organizational life stage. Schools with relatively (compared to district average) positive outcomes should be paired with schools with outcomes that reveal room for improvement. After controlling for variables (grade levels served, Race/Ethnicity, Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility, percentage of students who are English Language Learners, percentage of students receiving special education services, prior test score on state achievement tests, size of school, and organizational life stage) and categorizing schools according to student growth the researcher could conduct a one-way ANOVA with blocking test to ascertain whether charter school governance impacts school outcomes. The analysis could determine if there is a significant difference between schools whose student growth exceeds the district average and schools whose student growth falls below the district average. If appropriate, a Tukey's honestly significant difference test could be conducted as well. Additionally, determining the effect size could quantify the effectiveness of the specific governance characteristics included on the Board Effectiveness Quick Check.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This research provides a framework that can be used to continue to learn more about charter school governance and the governing boards potential impact on school outcomes. Charter schools were originally intended to be creative spaces where educators had the autonomy to explore innovative approaches to teaching and learning. This original intent of charter schools is possible when they are optimizing their capacity for autonomy. Board Effectiveness Check results from this study will be shared with appropriate participating schools. This information can be used to consider board strengths and potential areas for improvement. Results from this study may also serve as a starting point for future research.

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## APPENDIX A

### The first item on the Qualtrics online Quick Check Survey

School Leader,

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Georgia Southern University. The purpose of my research is to determine the existence of common leadership practices among start up charter schools. The title of my dissertation is SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: AN EXPLORATION OF AUTONOMY AND CHARTER SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS.

You are invited to complete a survey that is designed to inform leaders of nonprofit organizations institutional governance strengths and needed areas of improvement. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and confidential.

You do not have to participate in this research. You may end your participation at any time by simply not submitting the survey. Please understand, you are not required to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study.

Your school will not be identified in my dissertation or any related documentation, names will not be used, and individual survey responses will be kept strictly confidential. All related data will be kept in a secure, password protected file manager. Deidentified or coded data from this study may be placed in a publically available repository for study validation and further research. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

Each participating school board will receive a detailed report. This report can help governing boards reflect on their duties, the effectiveness of their collaboration, and their contribution to the performance of the charter school.

There is no risk associated with this research beyond risks associated with normal daily activities. Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. Please let me know if you have any related questions. My committee chair, Dr. Devon Jensen (devonjensen@georgiasouthern.edu; 912.478.1710) is available to answer questions as well.

For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912.478.5465.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H16385.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. By completing the survey, participants are consenting to inclusion of their answers in the research.

Title of Project: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: AN EXPLORATION OF AUTONOMY AND CHARTER SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS  
 Principal Investigator: (June Erskine, 404.422.0670, jc03066@georgiasouthern.edu)  
 Faculty Advisor: (Dr. Devon Jensen, 912.478.1710, devonjensen@georgiasouthern.edu)

Continue  
 I do not want to take this survey

>>

## Appendix B

### The first item on the Qualtrics online Quick Check Survey

**Instructions:**

The Quick Check is intended to be completed by board members and the CEO. Please rate each statement according to your perception of how well your organization/board attends to each of these factors. Ratings are on a seven-point scale Please select the description that most closely corresponds to your perception of how well your board attends to each of the items. We are seeking an 'off the top of your head' or spontaneous response based on your immediate perceptions.

**Note:** The term CEO is used to refer to chief executive officer, executive director, senior manager, management team leader, staff coordinator, and other similar designations.

**Rating Scale:**

- Agree Strongly
- Agree
- Agree Somewhat
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree
- Disagree Strongly
- Don't Know

Continue

I do not want to take this survey