NORTH CAROLINA TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

NORTH CAROLINA TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

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The purpose of this research was to analyze North Carolina traditional public school principals' perspectives about and experiences with charter schools. A history of school choice in America was explored, as well as the changing role of public school principals. This dissertation presented a thorough review of the literature on school choice and charter schools in this country, specifically focusing on North Carolina. Principals across the state were interviewed about their concerns with charter schools, the strengths of charter schools, and how charter schools have influenced their decisions as school leaders. Interviews were transcribed and then coded for themes that would address the research questions. The majority of participants spoke of hostile parent and government attitudes toward traditional public schools. Principals found themselves competing with charter schools for students and marketing their schools and their offerings. Participants believed that charter schools created segregation and inequitable funding, as well as a playing field that was not level when it came to testing and teacher qualifications. Principals also acknowledged the lack of collaboration between their

schools and charter schools in their districts. This research revealed that traditional public school principals were more concerned about funding and competing for students than they were about learning from charter schools for the purpose of school improvement. They were blind to innovative practices occurring in charter schools in their districts. On the other hand, data showed that charter schools in participants' districts were enrolling fewer economically disadvantaged students, a sub-group which typically does not perform well on tests. Research also revealed that charter schools in North Carolina have a history of financial mismanagement. This research could serve as vital information for policy makers when discussing future legislation and policies for charter schools in the state, and for district and school leaders determining whether or not competition or collaboration with charter schools is the right move.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2011, North Carolina's lawmakers passed two significant bills supporting school vouchers in the state. House Bill 344, allowed parents of disabled K-12 students to apply for tax credits worth up to $6,000. Parents can use this money to send their children to private schools or they may choose to spend it on supplemental educational services (NCHB344, 2011). The second, Senate Bill 8, removed the cap on charter schools throughout the state and increased the number of students charter schools can enroll each year (NCSB8, 2011). School choice advocates celebrated these victories (Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2014; John Locke Foundation, 2014; Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina, 2014), while opponents criticized legislators for weakening traditional public schools and for trying to push through vouchers (Wagner, 2013; Ravitch, 2013). The controversy continued as Representatives Stam, Hager, Collins and Brawley introduced House Bill 41, which would allow parents a tax credit for children they send to any non-public school (NCHB41, 2011). In the summer of 2013, two additional pieces of legislation were passed. Senate Bill 337 (SB337, 2013) allowed charter schools more flexibility in hiring, reducing the minimum percentage of certified teachers to 50%. The law also created a North Carolina Charter Schools Advisory Board, reducing the State Board of Education's involvement in overseeing charters. North Carolina House Bill 250 cleared the way for charters to increase enrollment each year by up to 20% and add grade levels without State Board approval (NCHB250, 2013).

To date, much has been written about school choice in this country. Advocates claim that choice allows parents freedom to choose the best possible schools for their

children, and that competition improves all schools (Friedman, 1962; Gottlob, 2007; Moe, 2008). In addition, they point to the freedom that private and charter school leaders have that allows them to escape bureaucracy and focus on student achievement (Pignatelli, 2002; Triant, 2001). Advocates claim that given more financial support from the government, schools of choice – charter and private – could succeed (Friedman, 1962; Moe, 2008; Tavernise, 2012; Triant, 2001). Opponents of school choice cite the lack of evidence for the claims that charter schools have improved student achievement (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Center for Research on Educational Outcomes, 2009; Gabriel, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). They also claim that parents use the guise of "school choice" to undermine integration and privatize education (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Erickson, 2011; Glass, 2008; Godwin, Leland, Baxter & Southworth, 2006; Ravitch, 2010; Ravitch, 2013; Scott, 2012). Researchers point to White, middle-class parents choosing schools of choice as a way to avoid minority students and families living in poverty. Critics also believe that school choice has opened up school systems to the highest bidder, with private companies running schools and making a profit.

The most recent school choice option is the charter school. Charter schools are considered public schools, because they receive public tax dollars; however, they are bridled with less bureaucracy and are given more freedom in the areas of teacher certification, school governance, and budgeting than traditional public schools. In 1996, North Carolina's General Assembly adopted legislation that allowed for charter schools to be formed across the state with a 100 school maximum. Legislators included several purposes for the creation of charter schools:

(1) To improve student learning;

> (2) To increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as at risk of academic failure or academically gifted;
>
> (3) To encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
>
> (4) To create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunities to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;
>
> (5) To provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system. (North Carolina General Statute 115C-238.29A)

Since the passage of Senate Bill 8, more charter schools have been opened. During the 2012-13 school year, North Carolina had 107 charter schools, serving a total of 48,795 students (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c). Admittedly, this is only about three percent of the state's school aged children (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c); however, with legislation, one would expect those enrollment figures to change. In fact, North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction has received 70 additional charter school applications for the 2014-15 school year (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013d). In addition, a national poll showed that charter schools have an approval rating of 66% among the public (Bushaw & Lopez, 2012). With charter school enrollment on the rise, researchers need to study the impact of this increase in terms of student achievement and funding. Those who have great interest in these two areas are traditional public school principals. Few studies to date have looked into their perspectives about and experiences with charter schools.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine traditional public school principals' perspectives and experiences concerning charter schools in North Carolina. Research in this area could inform legislators and other policy-makers about the perspectives of school leaders on the effects of charter schools and school choice in North Carolina. Principals are largely responsible for the academic achievement and welfare of their students, giving their perspectives weight when it comes to considering what is best for the state's students. Principals are in a unique position of leading their schools, yet they still must follow district demands and guidelines. Finally, if charter schools were created as laboratories for pedagogical change, forcing traditional public schools to improve, this study could reveal whether or not principals are seeking assistance from charter school leaders to make changes in their school programs and curriculum.

As school leaders, principals must guide teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders in the process of school improvement. They are tasked with the implementation of new instructional programs and they are responsible for hiring quality staff. Often, they are also the ones responsible for informing staff of changes in legislation and local, state and federal policies. Principals must balance the ever-increasing needs of their student population with decreasing funds from the state. Charter schools could greatly impact traditional public school principals in terms of their decision-making and success at their schools.

Due to their evaluation tool and the influence of the North Carolina Teachers Working Conditions Survey, principals in North Carolina's traditional public schools have a professional interest in the performance of their schools. Direct competition from

charter schools could impact a traditional public school's performance, depending on the ability levels and disciplinary histories of students who choose charter schools. With their job security in question, traditional public school principals may feel pressured to implement changes to their school programs and policies as a direct result of charter schools in their districts.

In North Carolina, traditional public school principals are evaluated by superintendents on eight standards, each one pertaining to a different aspect of the job. The North Carolina Standards for School Administrators (2006) call for principals to show leadership in the areas of strategic planning, instruction, culture, human resources, management, external resources and the micro-political arena. The eighth standard centers on the school's performance on end-of-year state tests. The rubric contains five ratings – not demonstrated, developing, proficient, accomplished and distinguished. A principal who receives a rating below proficient on any standard runs the risk of nonrenewal.

Another tool used to evaluate North Carolina Principals is the North Carolina Teachers Working Conditions Survey (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012b). Every two years, public school staff members are asked questions pertaining to their schools. Superintendents use this data to ascertain a school's culture and the overall level of support teachers feel they have from school leaders.

In addition to the pressure of test scores and teacher satisfaction, traditional public school principals must also deal with ever-decreasing funding brought on by legislative cuts. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, since 1970 the state's public schools' share of the state's General Fund has been reduced by 15.2%

(North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c). About 62% of public school funding in North Carolina comes from the state (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c), a fact not lost on principals. With each child that leaves a traditional public school to attend a charter school, funding goes, too. During the 2012-13 school year, North Carolina's charter schools were allocated over $255,000,000 in state funds (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c). Traditional public school principals whose students transfer to charter schools lose funding that pays for teacher salaries, textbooks, and instructional supplies.

Lawsuits brought on by charter schools against Asheville City Schools and other North Carolina school districts indicate the growing clamor for scarce public school funding from the state. Three charter schools sued Asheville City Schools for funds that the school system retroactively moved to a restricted fund. Even though the funding was for pre-K and other programs that the charters did not offer, the judge ruled in favor of the charter schools, forcing Asheville City Schools to pay over $700,000 to the charters (City board approves $735k settlement with charter schools, 2012, March 27). Likewise, traditional public school supporters have brought lawsuits against the state's proposed voucher system, which would grant tax payer funded "opportunity scholarships" for families to send their children to private schools (Stancil, 2013).

Principals, unlike central office administrators, school board members and teachers, may witness the impact of charter schools at a more intense level because they actually see students withdrawing and they experience first-hand the consequences for the school-level budget. Principals often stand in the middle of the district hierarchy – they lead their own schools, yet they must follow the lead of central office administrators

and school board members. They are in a prime position to experience the impact of charter school competition in terms of student enrollment, budgeting, and test scores.

With concerns over student performance on state testing and budget shortfalls, traditional public school principals may view competition with charter schools as threatening. It is important to study these principals' experiences and perspectives concerning charter schools due their unique position and due to the increasing demands placed upon these leaders to create schools where students are performing at a high level, in spite of funding deficits.

Previous Study

In 2009, Ami M. Parker published a dissertation exploring North Carolina traditional public school administrators' perceptions of competition created by charter school legislation. She surveyed and interviewed principals and central office administrators about their knowledge of the legislation and how they believed charter school competition had impacted their enrollment, funding, marketing, and curriculum offerings. Parker (2009) found that charter schools had no impact on traditional public schools in terms of competition. Administrators were not making changes to their schools and were not aware of innovative practices or curriculum in charter schools.

In Parker's (2009) study, principals and central office administrators identified magnet and private schools as sources of competition more often than charter schools. Magnet schools are often created by districts to serve certain populations or interest groups. Schools for the arts, sciences, math and technology have sprung up across the state. Even if magnet schools are part of traditional public school systems, they often are seen as competition for regular public schools. However, those interviewed perceived

increased competition when charter schools were in their districts. Those in rural districts perceived more competition and direct losses of funding when students transferred to charter schools.

Parker (2009) recommended that further studies seek to find out if perceptions of traditional public school leaders change upon charter school legislative changes or additions. “This study offers a standard of comparison for future research,” Parker (2009, p. 131) stated. After legislation in 2011 significantly raised the charter school cap in North Carolina and now that principals are largely accountable for the performance of their schools, traditional public school principals could have changed their perspectives concerning charter schools. This study sought to find out if that has been the case.

Questions

This study sought to answer one primary research question and three sub-questions:

1. What are North Carolina traditional public school principals’ perspectives about and experiences with charter schools?
    a. What concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?
    b. What do traditional public school principals consider strengths of charter schools?
    c. How have practices of traditional public school principals been influenced by charter schools?

Methodology

To explore the perspectives and experiences of traditional public school principals, I conducted interviews with traditional public school principals from different North Carolina school districts. The selected districts included at least one charter school which enrolled at least four percent of the district's potential students. This qualitative approach allowed me to gather credible data with explanation and elaboration of participants' answers. As Creswell (2008) explained, "We conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people" (p. 40). After conducting interviews with 13 participants from districts that house charter schools, I analyzed transcripts for recurring themes in order to address the research questions.

In order to help validate the interview questions, I piloted the questions with colleagues from across the state, asking for honest feedback concerning the construction of questions and clarity. These traditional public school principals were asked to provide other questions they felt were necessary to answer the research questions. I incorporated the feedback of these principals to improve my interview questions so that the data they produced would clearly address my research questions.

I sought permission to interview principals from superintendents in districts that met certain criteria. Districts had to house at least one charter school and at least four percent of the district's potential students must have been enrolled in a charter school. Because a little over three percent of North Carolina's students attend charter schools, this required percentage provided more credible perspectives (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), criterion

sampling can be useful for identifying and understanding cases that are information rich (p. 34). If working in a district with charter schools, principals would be better able to provide their perspectives about and experiences with charter schools.

I obtained e-mail addresses of superintendents through their district websites. If they agreed to allow their principals to participate, I contacted principals in that district by phone asking them to participate in face-to-face interviews. I sought participants who met my study's criteria. Students attending charter schools with grade spans of kindergarten through eighth grade account for 82% of North Carolina's charter school enrollment, so I focused my study on this grade span's traditional public school principals (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013b).

Principals were asked to engage in a conversation with me about their perspectives concerning the impact of charter schools on their traditional public schools. These open-ended interviews lasted about one hour and ensured principals had freedom to share personal examples that provided rich data. When referring to semi-structured interviews, Merriam (1998) wrote, "The largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording or the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (p. 74). I referred to a list of specific questions, but remained flexible during the interviews, which allowed the participant to travel down whatever path he or she chose regarding the topic. Depending on a participant's responses, I sometimes added clarifying questions and followed up.

Data obtained from the interviews were kept confidential, so that no principal's responses are identifiable. Participants' actual names were replaced with pseudonyms. When quotes were used, no identifiers were added. Interviews were digitally recorded

with the participants' consent and I transcribed the interviews in their entirety. I coded the interviews, allowing themes to emerge from the qualitative data.

Conceptual Framework: School Choice

With some limitations, parents in America have always been given choice concerning schooling, even with the addition of compulsory attendance laws. Private schools and home schools have been options, but only for those who could afford them. In 1962, economist Milton Friedman proposed a voucher system for schools, claiming that an unrestrained free market would produce positive effects (Friedman, 1962). Vouchers would allow parents to send their children to schools outside of their neighborhood, specifically to private schools at the government's cost. However, 50 years later, vouchers still do not have a high national approval rating (Bushaw & Lopez, 2012). Moe (2008) claimed that there are only 10 public voucher systems across the country and that "choice-based reforms" are still "a small drop in a very large bucket" (p. 562), mostly due to a lack of financial support from federal and state governments. Moe (2008) further stated that "public education remains a top-down system of governmental control" (p. 562), speaking to the bureaucracy that many school choice advocates claim disregards innovative practices that could improve student learning.

In spite historically minimal school choice in this country, in recent years, there has been a groundswell of support for charter schools. With the addition of the federal No Child Left Behind law (2001), parents were given the opportunity to choose schools for their children, but only in the event their neighborhood schools were deemed failures by the new accountability program. Local districts were charged with spending "up to 20 percent of their Title I allocations to provide school choice and supplemental educational

services to eligible students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This opened the way for school reform, labeled school choice, enabling parents to, in theory, choose better schools for their children. In fact, some opponents of school choice view NCLB's testing accountability as a way to discredit public schools. Kohn (2004) wrote, "The real point of this whole standards-and-testing business is to make the schools look bad, the better to justify a free-market alternative" (p. 83). The author further explained that the government should be helping teachers, parents and students improve public schools (Kohn, 2004, p. 97). Instead, Kohn (2004) wrote, "we have become a nation at risk of abandoning public education altogether" (p. 96).

However, even with the choice to leave schools that have not produced adequate test scores, large numbers of parents have not exercised this option, as evidenced in several studies. Research has shown that the number of students who have left their district schools due to NCLB legislation has been insignificant considering the number who could have left (Ferebee, 2010; Kim, J. & Sunderman, G., 2004; Zimmer, R., Gill, B., Razquin, P., Booker, K., & Lockwood, J. R., 2007). Kim and Sunderman (2004) found that "in each of the ten districts in our study, fewer than 3% of eligible students requested to transfer to a different school" (p. 6). In addition, parents who initially requested transfers for their children, often kept them at their home schools (Kim & Sunderman, 2004, p. 6).

In his often-quoted essay, *The Role of Government in Education,* Friedman (1962) suggested school choice should be one of the basic American freedoms that all citizens enjoy. Friedman (1962) wrote:

> Parents could express their views about schools directly, by withdrawing their children from one school and sending them to another, to a much greater extent

> than is now possible. In general, they can now take this step only by simultaneously changing their place of residence. (paragraph 14)

He explained that vouchers would create equity for students seeking better schools and that competition would force all schools to improve (Friedman, 1962). The economist complained that public schools would never improve without competition from private schools, because "we are threatened with an excess of conformity" (Friedman, 1962, paragraph 25). Moe (2008) elaborated on Friedman's premise that vouchers would equalize students' opportunities for educational success. He acknowledged that private schools "promote class bias" (Moe, 2008, p. 564), but only because the government does not always support poorer parents by providing large enough vouchers so they can send their children to private schools, farther away from the neighborhood housing they can afford. He claimed that the current structure of the educational system "does not grant parents a choice of schools and makes it costly for parents to exercise choice by going private" (Moe, 2008, p. 564). He added that public schools have no incentive to improve due to the lack of school choice initiatives.

Dees (1998) and Gottlob (2007) argued that competition from private schools can improve public school graduation rates. Gottlob (2007) explained that the cost per dropout in North Carolina is about the same amount as the state spends per pupil per year in public schools. The author questioned why the state would not use a voucher system to send potential dropouts to private schools. Dees (1998) claimed that findings from his study "suggest that introducing more choice into public education can improve student outcomes" (p. 424). Those who were not well-served by traditional schools, could have better experiences in private or alternative schools, whereas those who remained in the

public schools would not have to compete for attention from educators, thereby increasing graduation rates for students in both public and private schools (Dees, 1998).

One of the crucial points made by supporters of school choice is that non-traditional public schools and private schools typically enjoy more freedom in terms of budgeting, curriculum and personnel decisions, thus providing for more effective schools. Triant (2001) studied eight charter school principals in Massachusetts and found that principals relished the freedom they had. For the most part, the principals were positive about being able to hire and fire teachers at their discretion, without worrying about tenure or teachers' unions. Principals were also grateful to have primary control over their budgets, but often lamented that they had to seek outside sources to keep their schools running (Triant, 2001), a claim that many school choice advocates make (Friedman, 1962; Moe, 2008; Tavernise, 2012). The principals in Triant's (2001) study also were appreciative that they were able to direct their schools' curriculum and instructional strategies, but complained that state testing dictated what was taught too often in their schools. The author explained that it is too early to tell if the innovative practices and leadership styles of charter school principals are truly improving education for students; however, he predicted that with a steady supply of capable leaders and laws that grant broader freedom, charter schools will experience greater gains in student achievement than traditional public schools (Triant, 2001).

Although some researchers claim that charter school students outperform traditional public students (Betts & Tang, 2011; Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005), others have highlighted the lack of evidence that charter schools have improved student achievement (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; CREDO, 2009; Gabriel, 2010; Glass, 2008; Ravitch, 2010; Ravitch, 2013;

Weissberg, 2009). A massive study conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (2009) used data from 16 states to show that charter school students have not performed as well as many school choice advocates claim. "This study reveals in unmistakable terms that, in the aggregate, charter students are not faring as well as their traditional public school counterparts" (CREDO, 2009, p. 10). Researchers acknowledged that high-poverty students and English Language Learners (ELL) typically have a higher success rate in charter schools, but found that only 17% of charter school students performed better than their traditional public school counterparts, while 37% did worse (CREDO, 2009, p. 1). Citing the CREDO study in his article, Gabriel (2010) found it alarming that parents chose poorer performing charter schools over traditional public schools in their neighborhoods. "Some advocates concede that the intellectual premise behind school choice – that in a free market for education, parents will remove students from bad schools in favor of good ones – has not proved true" (Gabriel, 2010). Gabriel (2010) proposed that parents would continue to choose charter schools over traditional public schools due to perceptions of discipline, in spite of poorer academic performance. Likewise, in their study of North Carolina students, Bifulco and Ladd (2006) concluded that "students make considerably smaller achievement gains in charter schools than they would have in traditional public schools" (p. 3), yet parents are still attracted to charter schools and school choice, in general.

Proponents of charter schools and advocates for traditional public schools can easily find studies that support claims of academic dominance; however, many supporters of traditional public schools question research reports that seemingly point in favor of charter schools. Ravitch (2010) noted that although some charter schools, like the

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), seem to produce good results, it is difficult to compare traditional public schools with charter schools due to the many advantages that charter schools have in terms of funding and flexibility (chapter 7). Ravitch (2010) also questioned any evidence of charter school achievement success, noting that if students and their parents are motivated enough to enter lotteries for charter schools, they probably would fare well in regular public schools (chapter 7). Ravitch (2010) and others claim that some charter schools enjoy academic success because they deliberately enroll fewer students who need remediation and special education services (Niles, 2011; Tirozzi, 2010). Charter schools enroll significantly fewer special education students than traditional public schools (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Services, 2004, p. 2).

In addition to their claims that school choice does not improve student achievement, traditional public school proponents charge that school choice is a guise to reintroduce segregated schools. After the Supreme Court legally put an end to segregation in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), many government officials in the South openly defied the law by blocking Black students from attending all White schools, or by closing down public schools and funding White students' tuition at private schools (Gates, 1964; Smith, 1965). Many fear that school choice is a continuation of these attempts to avoid integrated schools and return to an era of "White Flight." Orfield and Eaton (1996) wrote, "More than forty years after *Brown*, racial separation both between and within school districts is an ordinary, unnoticed fixture in K-12 education" (p. xiv).

In their study, which reviewed data from 16 states, including North Carolina, Bulkley and Fisler (2003) found that "70% of all Black charter school students attend intensely segregated minority schools compared with 34% of Black public school students" (p. 7). They also found that there were "pockets of White segregation where White charter school students are as isolated as Black charter school students" (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003, p. 7). Bulkley and Fisler (2003) admitted their disappointment in charter schools, due to their potential to racially integrate, given that, unlike traditional public schools, they do not have to seek students only within district lines. Many authors view school choice as attempts by White parents to avoid traditional public schools, which typically house a diverse population (Erickson, 2011; Glass, 2008; Godwin et al., 2006; Niles, 2011; Ravitch, 2010). Scott (2012) opined that school choice advocates take an "elitist approach" (p. 72) and are "disconnected from local struggles" (p. 73). According to Scott (2012), school choice advocates claim that they are offering everyone of all ethnicities and socioeconomic status the freedom to choose schools; however, as Erickson (2011) explained, poor, minority parents and their children are not afforded "the policy supports – in housing, transportation, movement across jurisdictional lines – that middle class white families enjoyed earlier" (p. 46).

Godwin et al. (2006) studied the school choice plan of one North Carolina district, Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The authors found that White students typically were admitted into their schools of choice because they chose neighborhood schools, while Black students chose schools not in their neighborhoods. Because the school system added a stipulation to the plan that if students chose their own neighborhood schools, they would be admitted to them, Black students were left with their second or third choices, typically

less desirable schools. Godwin et al. (2006) acknowledged that Charlotte-Mecklenburg's plan was "designed to encourage desegregation," but it "led to substantially greater ethnic sorting" (p. 990).

In response to claims of segregation in charter schools and other schools of choice, Moe (2008) explained that it is the structure of the current educational system, led by top-down approaches, that prevents true integration. Moe (2008) complained that choice critics jump to the conclusion that current choices lead to segregation as it did in the South in the 1960s and 1970s; however, if designed appropriately, choice plans could promote equity. If the government provided large enough vouchers, it could "equalize the purchasing power of parents" (Moe, 2008, p. 573) and diminish segregation in private, charter and traditional public schools alike. If given large vouchers, according to Moe (2008), families living in poverty could afford to send their children to schools of choice because they would be able to pay for tuition for expensive private schools or for transportation across district lines to more desirable charter or traditional public schools.

The literature on school choice highlights the controversial nature of education in America. School choice advocates point to the inherent American value of freedom, claiming that parents should have the right to choose the best educational situation for their children, regardless of location. Advocates claim that school choice provides the opportunity for innovation in the nation's schools, and that with new methods of school governance and invigorated pedagogy come educational gains. On the other hand, opponents of school choice claim that the movement has done nothing to improve student achievement, and has, in fact, led to more segregated schools in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. It is unlikely that one side or the other will surrender their claims

any time soon, given that researchers and well-financed foundations seem ready and willing to support either cause. It is more likely that school choice will continue to drive legislative changes and increase intensity of ensuing debates, as is happening in North Carolina now.

Conceptual Framework: The Role of the Principal

In addition to the concept of school choice, one must understand the role of the principal in today's public schools. Principals are expected to be change agents, instructional leaders, recruiters, and disciplinarians. The state of North Carolina and many professional organizations have attempted to categorize what principals need to know and do to be successful and to continuously improve their schools.

North Carolina's State Board of Education adopted several job descriptions in the mid-1980s to guide the state's school systems in finding qualified candidates. One of those job descriptions applies to principals. A principal's purpose, according to the state board, is "to serve as the chief administrator of a school in developing and implementing policies, programs, curriculum activities, and budgets in a manner that promotes the educational development of each student and the professional development of each staff member" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1987). It is apparent from this job description that a principal is responsible for educating not only students, but also teachers. The job description also calls for principals to evaluate student data, to ensure that supplies and materials are available, and to cooperate with the community in terms of resources and communication (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1987). A principal must be skilled in many areas to ensure success.

The state has taken this job description a step further with the addition of standards that are used to evaluate principals. In 2006, the State Board of Education created standards for school leaders with the following philosophies in mind:

- Today's schools must have proactive school executives who possess a great sense of urgency.
- The goal of school leadership is to transform schools so that large-scale, sustainable, continuous improvement becomes built into their mode of operation.
- The moral purpose of school leadership is to create schools in which all students learn, the gap between high and low performance is greatly diminished and what students learn will prepare them for success in their futures, not ours.
- Leadership is not a position or a person. It is a practice that must be embedded in all job roles at all levels of the school district.
- The work of leadership is about working with, for and through people. It is a social act. Whether we are discussing instructional leadership, change leadership or leadership as learning, people are always the medium for the leader. (North Carolina Standards for School Administrators, 2006)

School principals are no longer merely managers of the building and of people; they are leaders in every sense of the word. Principals are called to develop other leaders within their staff and are called upon to fulfill a "moral purpose" of ensuring that all children benefit from education (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1987).

North Carolina's eight evaluation standards for principals encompass all areas of school leadership: strategic planning, instruction, culture, human resources, management, external resources, the micro-political arena and student achievement. The evaluation rubric contains five ratings – not demonstrated, developing, proficient, accomplished and distinguished. A principal who receives a rating below proficient on any standard runs the risk of nonrenewal. Because the state decided to accept Race to the Top funds, a massive federal grant, the State Board of Education must evaluate schools, teachers and principals on student achievement. The tool to accomplish this is the Education Value-Added Assessment System or EVAAS. EVAAS evaluates teachers and principals based upon student growth as compared to the average student growth in the state. If a school's overall growth is two standard deviations or more below the average state growth rate, the school – and the principal – fails to meet expected growth (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). This rating, in conjunction with other factors, will decide a school's letter grade, A through F, something that will likely be printed in local newspapers. The pressure to perform well on state tests has moved from the students to the teachers and principals.

Beyond North Carolina's expectations, national organizations have created standards for school leaders. The Council of Chief State School Officers originally adopted the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders in 1996 and updated them in 2008 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The council, in recognition of principals' changing job requirements, desired to create "clear and consistent standards" that would "help state policy-makers strengthen selection, preparation, licensure, and professional development for education

leaders – giving these leaders the tools they need to meet new demands" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 3).

The ISLLC standards call on principals to:

1. Set a widely shared vision for learning;
2. Develop a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensure effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborate with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and
6. Understand, respond to, and influence the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts. (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 6)

Several functions are listed within each standard, further clarifying and giving examples of what an instructional leader should do. The Council of Chief State School Officers (2008) claimed that "these standards represent the broad high-priority themes that education leaders must address in order to promote the success of every student" (p. 6).

Other organizations, such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), have all called attention to the changing and demanding job of the principal. These organizations have also created standards for school leaders. NAESP calls for principals to lead in six areas: student and adult learning; diverse communities; 21st

century learning, continuous improvement; using knowledge and data; and parent, family and community engagement (NAESP, 2008). The focus is not just on student scores, but upon community involvement, individualized instruction, and valuable professional development. Similarly, NASSP recommends that principals create professional learning communities that demand all instructional staff differentiates instruction for students (NASSP, 2007).

Organizations and state school boards have spent much time and energy developing principal standards, drawing from the research on the effect of principal leadership. As reported by The Center for Public Education (2012), effective principals can impact schools positively when they stay on the job, lead instructionally, and recruit and retain effective teachers. Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) reported, "Leadership is second to only classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 4). While teachers are limited to affecting students within their classrooms, research indicates that multiple factors are involved in improving student achievement. "Principals are in a unique position to bring those factors together," (The Center for Public Education, 2012). Research also shows that the longer principals remain in their role, the more effective they become (The Center for Public Education, 2012). As Leithwood et al. (2004) pointed out, "This evidence supports the present widespread interest in improving leadership as a key to the successful implementation of large-scale reform" (p. 4).

The concepts of school choice and principals' roles lend themselves to understanding the importance of principals' experiences with and perspectives about charter schools. It is important for the reader to understand the nature of school choice in

North Carolina and the sense of competition and pressure it potentially places upon traditional public school leaders. Likewise, the reader must acknowledge that today's school leaders have taken on very different roles than their predecessors. More emphasis on student achievement and teacher performance demands that principals lead in various arenas, not limited to management of facilities and personnel. In addition, principals are in a unique position in the traditional public school district hierarchy – they lead their schools, yet they must follow the lead of superintendents and school board members. These demands on principals may influence their experiences and perspectives concerning charter schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1988, Albert Shanker, then president of the American Federation of Teachers, first proposed the idea of charter schools (Ravitch, 2010). His idea concerned a school within a school, where teachers would be free to try new ideas to help students who were struggling in traditional classrooms. Those teachers could then share their successful ideas with their colleagues, thus improving education for all (Ravitch, 2010). Ironically, five years later, Shanker withdrew his support for charter schools. "He came to see charter schools as dangerous to public education, as the cutting edge of an effort to privatize the public schools" (Ravitch, 2010, ch. 7).

The first state to pass charter school legislation was Minnesota in 1991 (Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, 2010). The first charter school was City Academy High School in St. Paul, Minnesota, formed in 1992. It began as a school for dropouts, ages 15-21, where students received vocational training (Ravitch, 2010, chapter 7). Forty-two states and the District of Columbia have passed charter school legislation (The Center for Education Reform, 2012).

In 2011, nearly 1.8 million students were enrolled in 5,274 charter schools across the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). North Carolina passed charter school legislation in 1996 (North Carolina House Bill 955, 1996), with the first charter school, Healthy Start Academy, forming in 1997 (Healthy Start Academy Webpage, 2011). During the 2012-13 school year, there were 107 charter schools in North Carolina, serving over 48,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c). About half of those schools were located in the central or north central part of the state, including heavily populated

counties like Forsyth, Durham and Wake. Another 37 were located in the western regions of the state, including Mecklenburg County (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012a).

In a review of the literature concerning charter schools and their impact on traditional public schools, one finds four common themes. First, literature about student enrollment at charter schools is abundant. Studies and articles explore demographics of students, focusing on ethnicity and special education designation, in comparison to traditional public schools. Second, authors have written about the financial impact of charter schools on neighboring public schools, as the two opposing sides' battle for funding. Third, research explores the academic achievement of charter school students and their traditional public school counterparts, along with the impact of charter schools on the achievement of traditional public schools' students. Finally, authors have written about the impact of charter schools on school improvement initiatives in traditional public schools, focusing on the innovative instructional and personnel strategies in charter schools. Literature concerning charter schools will be explored here, while paying special attention to what has been written about North Carolina schools.

Charter School Demographics

One of the most discussed controversies surrounding charter schools and their impact on traditional public schools centers on issues of ethnicity and special education status. Throughout the country, readers can find numerous editorials that discuss these topics. Many complain that charter school leaders "cherry pick" their students (Niles, 2011; Tirozzi, 2010). Niles (2011) wrote that traditional public schools in general do a great job of educating even those students who are at a disadvantage before they begin

kindergarten. He stated, “Education ought to be about lifting up, not weeding out,” and that “in public school, you’re part of the, well, public.” Tirozzi (2010) echoed that sentiment in his editorial, writing that our nation seems to be intent on creating “a public education system devoid of the public” (p. 2).

Some studies have shown that charter schools are, in fact, segregated more so than traditional public schools in their districts. Bulkley and Fisler (2003) reviewed data from charter schools in 16 states, including North Carolina. They only studied states whose charter school population was at least 5,000 students. The authors found that “70% of all Black charter school students attend intensely segregated minority schools compared with 34% of Black public school students” (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003, p. 7). Bulkley and Fisler (2003) also discovered that there were “pockets of White segregation where White charter school students are as isolated as Black charter school students” (p. 7). What the authors found to be particularly troubling in their findings was the fact that charter schools have more freedom in terms of enrollment than do their traditional public school counterparts. In other words, charter school students can cross district lines, so, in theory, enrollment in charter schools should be more diverse than traditional public schools (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003, p. 7-8). With charter schools, students have the option to attend schools outside of their neighborhoods, areas which may not be racially integrated.

Other researchers have found similar results. Erickson (2011) explained that charters are more segregated than their nearby non-charter district schools and claimed that the White middle class “exempt themselves from the culpability for segregation and inequality” by “embracing the rhetoric of choice” (p. 43). He pointed to how White families responded to the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision that ordered

desegregation. Large numbers left public schools and fled to private ones. Many authors have claimed that the more recent idea of school choice, charters included, is merely a way for White parents to avoid sending their children to racially diverse public schools (Erickson, 2011; Glass, 2008; Godwin et al., 2006; Ravitch, 2010). In the limited research that has included the opinions of traditional public school principals, authors point to the growing concerns of that population over enrollment trends that seem to be racially motivated (Sullivan, Campbell, & Kisida, 2008; Teske, Schneider, Buckley, & Clark, 2000). During the association's annual convention in the summer of 2010, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) recognized that charter schools across the nation have further segregated the school population. Delegates adopted a resolution that charter schools create "separate and unequal conditions for success," further claiming that "quality charter schools serve only a small percentage of children of color" (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2010, p. 2).

Based on data from the 2012-13 school year, North Carolina charter schools as a whole had a consistent enrollment rate in their schools when it came to Black students as compared to enrollment in non-charter public schools. Black students made up 26.5% of the charter school population, while 26.1% of traditional public school students were Black (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013b). Although statistics across the state were almost identical in terms of Black student population in charter and traditional public schools, there were areas of highly segregated charter schools. For example, the population of Black students in Wake County Schools, the largest Local Education Agency (LEA) in the state, accounted for 24% of total school enrollment. By

contrast, 89% of students at PreEminent Charter in Raleigh, were Black. The opposite is also true. For example, Black students in New Hanover County made up 21% of the school population, whereas just 4% of students at Cape Fear Center for Inquiry in Wilmington were Black in 2012-13 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a).

The original charter school legislation in North Carolina, House Bill 955 (1996), stated that a charter school's enrollment must reflect the district in which it is located. However, the bill also contained a stipulation that depending on a charter school's stated mission, its student population only needs to reflect the targeted population in the district (North Carolina House Bill 955, 1996). In other words, if a charter's mission is to serve academically gifted (AIG) students, it need only reflect that district's AIG population in terms of ethnicity. If a charter's mission is to serve underperforming or at-risk students, it need only reflect that LEA's at-risk population.

Charter legislation, such as North Carolina's, provides loopholes for charters hoping to avoid traditionally at-risk ethnic groups and special education populations, according to some researchers. Ravitch (2010) claimed that "charters avoid students with high needs, either because they lack the staff to educate them appropriately or because they fear that such students will depress their test scores" (ch. 7). Several studies on the enrollment of special education students in charter schools have been completed. Two studies' authors, in particular, voiced concerns over legislation that allows charter schools to disengage from the special education population. Both studies found that charter schools are enrolling special education students, but that some are not meeting the students' needs due to either ignorance or lack of resources. Dearhammer (2002) wrote

that charter school legislation tends to be ambiguous when it comes to student enrollment and that the "quality of support for students with special needs" in charter schools "was determined to be mixed" (p. 133). Dearhammer (2002) and Rhim and McLaughlin (2007) found that charter school leaders often lack knowledge and resources in terms of serving the special education or Exceptional Children (EC) population. In her dissertation, Dearhammer (2002) discovered that almost half of charter school leaders believed that serving EC students interfered with their schools' missions (p. 117). Rhim and McLaughlin (2007) found that many EC parents do not enroll their students in charter schools due to the fear that the school's program may not fit their children's needs.

In Dearhammer's (2002) study, only 20.3% of charter school leaders answered that charter schools should serve all types of EC students (Dearhammer, 2002, p. 120). This resistance, according to Rhim and McLaughlin (2007), is due in large part to charter school operators' opposition to "regulation and bureaucracy" (p. 9). Typically, charter schools that do house EC students follow the inclusion model, meaning that EC students are mainstreamed into regular classrooms and given the same assignments and expectations as their non-disabled peers. Rhim and McLaughlin (2007) viewed this as a "serious problem" (p.9). "Whether because of a lack of resources, lack of experience, or philosophy, charter schools possibly are adopting a 'school-wide' model of special education that does not necessarily address the individual needs of specific students with disabilities" (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007, p. 10).

The national percentage of EC students stands at about 12.1% (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). In North Carolina, 13% of the traditional public school population is made up of students designated as needing special education. Charter schools in North

Carolina enroll 11% EC students (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2009).

Funding

A hotly contested topic related to charter schools centers on equity of funding and the money that traditional public schools lose when students enroll in charter schools. School choice advocates claim that competition over funding will breed better outcomes for all students (Friedman, 1962; Moe, 2008), although, as some research indicates, this may not be the case. Teske et al. (2000) found school districts in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Washington, D.C. have not been financially affected by charter schools because they simply have not lost much money to charter schools. Some states, like Massachusetts, use a sliding scale when moving money from traditional public schools to charter schools. The charter schools get full funding from the state during that first year that a traditional public school student attends a charter school. In the years following, state funding declines (Teske et al., 2000). In addition, many states, like Massachusetts, rely on local property taxes for most of their public school funding.

However, in other states there is no sliding scale, meaning that funding remains constant throughout the student's enrollment years at the charter school. In addition, in some states public schools rely on the state for a large portion of their funding. In Pennsylvania, Chester Upland School District is in debt and has been sued by a local charter school. Traditional public school leaders in the district feel as if the charter school is "sucking up more than its fair share of scarce resources" (Tavernise, 2012). On the flip side of the controversy, the charter school claims that the district owes it money because students have left the traditional public schools to enroll at the charter school. The

federal, state and local money appropriated for those students should have traveled with them, according to the charter school (Tavernise, 2012).

Charter school leaders also complain that they must constantly fight for funding. In his study of charter school principals, Triant (2001) wrote that respondents were usually grateful to have primary control over their budgets, but they often lamented that they had to seek outside sources to keep the school running. On the other hand, many groups see funding that leaves traditional public schools and goes to charter schools as further weakening traditional public schools, especially those that are struggling to improve student performance. In a resolution, the NAACP (2010) stated that charter school funding has hurt "low performing" and "already underfunded traditional public schools" (p. 2).

North Carolina public schools receive 62% of their funding from the state (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c), therefore, charter schools have a direct and large impact on traditional public schools in North Carolina in terms of funding. The state awards districts funding based upon their average daily membership. In other words, schools receive money from the state for each student who enrolls in their schools. Table 1 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c) reveals the number of charter schools in operation and how much state funding went to charters from school years ending in 1997 to 2013. During the 2012-2013 school year, charters received a total of $255,396,318, which was 3.3 percent of what the state funded all public schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c).

North Carolina courts have awarded charter schools funding that they say was owed to those charter schools. In Sugar Creek Charter School v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Table 1

State Funding for Charters 1997-2013

Year	Approved	Opened	Closed	Relin-quished without Opening	Total Charter Schools in Operation	Number of Students	Percent of Total NC Students	Total State Funds Allotted
96-97	34	0	0	0	0			
97-98	31	34	1	0	33	4,106	0.3%	$16,559,947
98-99	28	26	3	0	56	5,572	0.4%	$32,143,691
99-00	17	23	4	4	75	10,257	0.8%	$50,104,210
00-01	9	15	4	3	86	14,230	1.1%	$64,213,491
01-02	3	8	3	2	91	19,492	1.5%	$77,177,902
02-03	2	5	3	1	93	19,832	1.5%	$87,233,744
03-04	4	2	2	0	93	21,578	1.6%	$94,286,726
04-05	2	4	0	0	97	24,784	1.8%	$110,888,050
05-06	1	2	3	0	96	28,733	2.1%	$132,089,910
06-07	7	1	4	0	93	29,170	2.0%	$144,299,621
07-08	2	7	2	0	98	30,892	2.1%	$169,871,326
08-09	0	2	3	0	97	34,694	2.3%	$191,751,412
09-10	3	0	1	0	96	38,449	2.6%	$187,726,898
10-11	1	3	0	0	99	41,314	2.8%	$200,058,046
11-12	9	1	0	0	100	44,829	3.0%	$228,291,552
12-13	24	8	1	1	107	48,795	3.3%	$255,396,318

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2013c). *Highlights of the North Carolina public school budget*.

Board of Education (2009), judges ruled that the traditional public school district denied the charter school funding that should have been granted to them based on North Carolina General Statute 115C-238.29H(b) (2007) which states in part:

> if a student attends a charter school, the local school administrative unit in which the child resides shall transfer to the charter school an amount equal to the per pupil local current expense appropriation to the local school administrative unit for the fiscal year.

The court case created a flood of lawsuits by charter schools against local districts, as it became evident that the charter legislation and the courts supported equal funding for charter schools. What many districts question, however, is the stipulation in the Sugar Creek v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (2009) ruling that LEAs must also send to charter schools any funding slated for special programs like pre-K and Junior ROTC, even if the charter schools do not offer those programs. Any money that is in the local current expense fund must be shared. Those in favor of the court ruling, like the charter school's lawyer Richard Vinroot, claim that "the money that is going to be taken from them should have gone to the charter schools in the first place" (Hui & Latifi, 2009). Others, like Wake County's school board attorney Ann Majestic, state that the ruling "will take away money from the school system" (Hui & Latifi, 2009). In a follow-up case, Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy won more than $730,000 from the Rutherford County Board of Education. "Appellate judges agreed the school system had shorted the charter school funding for the 2007, 2008, and 2009 budget years" (Burrows, 2011).

Other North Carolina school districts have geared up for funding fights with charter schools. Durham Public Schools and Wake Public Schools could be the hardest hit because their districts host 10 and 15 charter schools, respectively (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013e). In 2011, Durham Public Schools Board of Education adopted a resolution, asking for revisions to the proposed North Carolina Senate Bill 8. Members asked that legislators "create a bill that is truly equitable for all public schools and all public school students in North Carolina and is not subject to ambiguities which will have to be resolved through years of litigation at the expense of students" (Durham Public Schools Board of Education, 2011, p. 2). Due to the relatively recent court rulings on charter school funding, it is likely that this battle will continue in the courts, in the legislature and in the media.

Academic Achievement

One of the most debated issues surrounding charter schools centers on student achievement, given that proponents of charters and school choice claim that competition will increase student performance. In their study of Washington, D.C. public schools, Sullivan et al. (2008) found that in some schools, achievement improved due to competition with charter schools, but the authors cautioned that "choice alone does not equate to competition" (p. 30).

Both supporters and opponents of charter schools point to studies to strengthen their claims of superiority. At the beginning of the controversy, many researchers were simply comparing scores and were not taking into account the many variables that could influence the outcomes. In their research, Betts and Tang (2011) urged charter school advocates and opponents to use growth-based student-level data when analyzing results.

Others, like Hoxby and Rockoff (2005), insisted on comparing similar groups of students, those who entered charter school lotteries and won entrance, and those who entered the lotteries, but lost and continued on at their traditional public schools. This comparative sample, they claimed, gave more validity to their study (Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005). Ravitch (2010) also explained that studies that compare achievement between charter school students and traditional public school students must take into account the many advantages that charter schools have in terms of funding and flexibility, and that students in charter schools are already inherently motivated to achieve, thus skewing the results of many studies.

Several research studies have pointed to positive student achievement results for charter schools (Betts & Tang, 2011; Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005; Solomon & Goldschmidt, 2004). In their comprehensive review of charter school research, Betts and Tang (2011) found that charter schools, on average, were "serving students well, at least in elementary and middle schools, and probably better in math than in reading" (p. 44). Hoxby and Rockoff (2005), in their study of the Chicago charter system, found more convincing evidence to support charter school expansion. The authors compared those students who won the lottery to attend charter schools with those who did not, and contended that students from both samples were typically from lower-income neighborhoods and of minority ethnicity. They concluded that students in the Chicago International Charter Schools who remained in the system for several years "have higher subsequent achievement than students who are lotteried-out" (Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005, p. 37).

Solomon and Goldschmidt (2004) looked at data on over 60,000 Arizona students in 873 charter and traditional public schools. They found that on average charter school

students started with lower achievement scores, but showed an overall annual growth of three points higher than their non-charter peers (Solomon & Goldschmidt, 2004). The authors pointed out that this outcome varied across grade levels, explaining that there were higher gains for charter school students in elementary schools, but there were higher gains for traditional public school students at the high school level (Solomon & Goldschmidt, 2004). Solomon and Goldschmidt (2004) commented that this latter result was likely due to the fact that charter high schools in Arizona mostly serve those who need vocational training and those who have been involved in the Department of Juvenile Justice, populations that typically have lower achievement levels. The authors acknowledged that researchers should first determine if charter school students and traditional public school students are substantially different before conducting research (Solomon & Goldschmidt, 2004).

On the other end of the spectrum stand research studies that question the charter movement's claim that the non-traditional public schools raise student achievement. In their study that included a sample of 1,727 students from a matched convenience sample of 44 charter and traditional public schools in Idaho, Indiana and Minnesota, Berends et al. (2010) sought to discover how elementary students in charter schools and traditional public schools compared in terms of math achievement gains. They found that there were no significant differences in students' growth between the two types of schools (Berends et al., 2010). Ironically, the authors also concluded that in schools where teachers reported more innovative strategies, a charter school premise, there was less achievement gain, regardless of type of school (Berends et al., 2010).

In a national study that included data from 16 states, researchers revealed that charter school students were underperforming as compared to their traditional public school peers (CREDO, 2009). The Stanford University study showed that only 17% of charter school students performed better than traditional public school kids, while 37% actually did worse (CREDO, 2009). Researchers acknowledged that high-poverty and English Language Learners enrolled in charter schools fared better than their traditional public school counterparts, but claimed that all other students' performance was worse (CREDO, 2009).

Another study using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores of fourth graders across the nation showed that traditional public school students outperformed charter school students in reading and math (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2004). A subsequent report from the governmental institution adjusted for "multiple student characteristics" and revealed that traditional public school students outperformed their charter school peers by 4.2 points in reading and 4.7 points in math, both scores being statistically significant (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2006).

With a focus on North Carolina's students, Bifulco and Ladd (2006) followed five cohorts of students, almost 500,000 in number, from fourth grade to eighth grade to see if students in charter schools would have greater achievement as compared to how they would have fared in traditional public schools. The study concluded that "students make considerably smaller achievement gains in charter schools than they would have in traditional public schools" (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006, p. 3). The authors admitted that the

high rate of student turnover in charter schools accounted for about 30% of this negative effect (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006).

In spite of these mixed results, charter school advocates claim that charter schools have positive influences on the achievement of charter school students, as well as on the academic performance of traditional public schools students. However, there has been very little research to date on this phenomenon. Winters (2009) wanted to find out if there was a relationship between the growth of traditional public school students in math and reading and the percentage of classmates who left for charter schools. The study involved students in New York City and revealed that "for every 1% who leave for a charter, reading proficiency for those who remain increases by about .02 standard deviations" (Winters, 2009, p. 2). The author admitted that when lower performing students leave for charters, this exit could increase "peer quality" at traditional public schools, thus raising achievement levels there (Winters, 2009, p. 9). Nonetheless, Winters (2009) pointed out that there is no research that shows competition from charter schools has a negative impact on the academic achievement of traditional public school students.

Based on the existing literature, it is difficult to come to any solid conclusion concerning student performance and charter schools. While some researchers have claimed that charter students outperform their traditional public school counterparts, just as many have argued the opposite.

Charter Schools as Innovation Labs

Charter schools were created on the premise that they would serve as innovation labs, leading the way in new educational programs and instructional strategies and in flexibility concerning staffing, curriculum and budgeting (Nathan, 1996). There are some

pieces of literature on the topic of how charter schools are different than traditional public schools in terms of innovation and flexibility; however, very little research exists on the impact of these notions on traditional public schools.

One area of flexibility for charter schools concerns school personnel. In North Carolina, charter school teachers do not earn tenure and only 50% of charter teachers must be certified to teach (NCSB337, 2013). Finn and Kanstoroom (2002) wrote that these types of innovative practices could lead to better schools because principals can place teachers with valuable experience into the classroom without worrying about state certifications, especially when it comes to shortage fields, like math and science. In addition, without tenure, charter principals are free to fire those teachers who do not perform well in the classroom or help students grow. Also, charter schools have flexibility to create unique programs based on their missions and target populations. Rhim and McLaughlin (2007) found that charter schools overall were not necessarily innovative in terms of instructional strategies or curriculum, but were in terms of programs that give students "a broader array of learning opportunities," such as Montessori, ungraded, K-12 and virtual schools (p. 3).

If charter schools were in fact created to improve the quality of traditional public schools, it is somewhat surprising that more research has not been completed to see if charter schools have met this goal. Over a decade ago, Dees (1998) challenged researchers to study how choice and competition would impact public schools. His findings, he claimed, "raised intriguing and largely unanswered questions. One such question concerns exactly how school districts change their behaviors in response to increased competition" (p. 424). In their study of North Carolina students, Bifulco and

Ladd (2006) concluded that there is not significant evidence that charter schools affect the performance of traditional public school students. Sullivan et al. (2008) used surveys and focus groups to ascertain if Washington, D.C. public school officials had done anything differently in response to the rise of charter schools in their area. The authors concluded that most leaders of traditional public schools decided to work on recruitment and retention of students using marketing and advertising. The focus was on "services for parents and the image of the school" (Sullivan et al., 2008, p. 21), rather than improving educational programs and student achievement. Likewise, in an earlier study, Teske et al. (2000) found that districts in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Washington, D.C. had not overwhelmingly changed their behaviors due to competition from charter schools. On a small scale, schools had mimicked some programs of charter schools like one-to-one laptop initiatives and Saturday school to appeal to parents, but had done little else in terms of innovation (Teske et al., 2000).

Chapter Conclusion

The literature on charter schools is abundant, but inconclusive in some areas. Research studies point to data that show charter schools are segregated in terms of ethnicity and are somewhat insufficient in serving the needs of special education students, although charter advocates deny these claims. Researchers have also debated data about charter school students' achievement compared to their non-charter peers. In addition, issues of funding surrounding charter schools have created a groundswell of literature, most focusing on recent legislation used to settle complaints of charter schools against districts whom they claim are withholding funds that belong to the charter schools. Finally, literature about charter schools as innovation labs shows that charter

schools may be affecting traditional public schools in terms of programs offered and appeasement of parents.

Even with the wealth of literature available on charter schools, it is clear that there is a lack of research concerning traditional public school principals' experiences and perspectives concerning charter schools. Research in this area is needed to better inform policy-makers of the potential effects of charter schools on traditional public schools as seen through the eyes of principals. This research would also give traditional public school principals a voice when they typically have been isolated from this hotly contested debate. Because principals are largely held accountable for the performance of their schools, this study could reveal what they are doing in response to the direct competition of charter schools in their districts. In turn, this study may reveal that traditional public school principals are not making changes as the result of direction competition from charter schools. Either way, findings from this study could inform legislators and school leaders about traditional public school principals' perspectives about and experiences with charter schools, providing information to consider when making additional legislative and policy changes. Findings from this study may also inform research on principals' roles and expectations placed upon them in terms of student achievement and enrollment.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This chapter is on the methods and procedures used to address the research questions guiding this study. This study sought to answer a primary research question and three sub-questions:

1. What are North Carolina traditional public school principals' perspectives about and experiences with charter schools?
    a. What concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?
    b. What do traditional public school principals consider strengths of charter schools?
    c. How have practices of traditional public school principals been influenced by charter schools?

The following sections are included in this chapter: a) rationale for qualitative methods approach, and descriptions of: b) setting, c) participants, d) instrumentation, e) data collection methods, and f) data analysis procedures. By carrying out this study, I attempted to understand principals' experiences and perspectives concerning charter schools.

Rationale for Qualitative Methods

Because I sought to discover North Carolina traditional public school principals' experiences with and perspectives about charter schools, I needed to ensure that I was including principals from across the state whose schools were in direct competition with charter schools. Qualitative data helped to address the research questions by providing specific examples and rich content. Creswell (2008) wrote, "Qualitative data, such as

open-ended interviews that provide actual words of people in the study, offer many different perspectives on the study topic and provide a complex picture of the situation" (p. 552).

I interviewed 13 principals to gain detailed information about their perspectives and experiences. These principals were employed at traditional public schools located in districts with charter schools. They were able to provide their insights about charter schools. Maxwell (2005) wrote, "This perspective is not simply their account of these events and actions, to be assessed in terms of its truth or falsity; it is part of the reality that you are trying to understand" (p. 22).

Charter schools are controversial in nature, as seen in the preceding literature review. To truly understand traditional public school principals' perspectives about charter schools, I spoke directly with principals who work in districts that have been affected by charter schools. Data gathered from these interviews created a more complete picture of their perspectives and experiences. Qualitative data can provide explanation of participants' feelings and emotions. As Patton (2002) explained, "Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions" (p. 21).

More specifically, a phenomenological approach allowed me to provide the reader a first-hand look at principals' experiences and perspectives regarding charter schools. According to Finlay (2008), "the quality of any phenomenological study can be judged in its relative power to draw the reader into the researcher's discoveries allowing the reader to see the worlds of others in new and deeper ways" (p. 7). I wanted to understand

principals' perspectives and experiences surrounding the existence of charter schools in their districts. "The primary objective of a phenomenological study is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people, around a specific phenomenon" (Simon and Goes, 2011, p. 1).

Moustakas (1994) recognized that "studies of human experiences are not approachable through quantitative methods" (p. 21). He valued participants' first hand accounts of life experiences, recognizing that the researcher's approach to synthesizing those experiences is crucial to understanding their meaning (Moustakas, 1994). "The task of the phenomenologist, then is to depict the essence or basic structure of experience" (Merriam, 1998, p. 16).

Setting

Over 1.4 million students attend more than 2,500 public schools in North Carolina. Of those schools, 72.7% are designated as elementary (K-8), while 19.1% are secondary schools. Another 4.3% house combined grade levels (K-12). All of those traditional public schools are housed under 115 school districts throughout the state. To date, charter schools make up just 3.3% of the state's public schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c). In the summer of 2011, state legislators passed a bill that removed a cap on charter schools and provided opportunity to raise enrollment at charter schools that were already established (NCSB8, 2011). Fifty-four counties currently have charter schools, while 46 do not (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013e). During the 2012-13 school year, 107 charter schools were in operation in North Carolina (2013c).

North Carolina's performance in terms of graduation rates and national testing data has improved in recent years, although the state's students still fall below the national average in some areas. The state's four-year cohort graduation rate in 2010 was 74.2% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011), below the 2010 national rate of 78% (Layton, 2013). In the last decade, the state's pupils have increased National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) scores so that math scores are above the national average and reading scores are only slightly below the national average (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011).

However, with a 15.2% decrease in the North Carolina Public Schools' budget since 1970, the state now ranks 44th nationally in per pupil spending at $8,436, and 46th in the nation in average teacher salary at $45,938 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013b). Over half of the state's North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's (NCDPI) budget is spent on teachers' salaries. School-based administrators' (principals and assistant principals) salaries make up 4.27% of the budget (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011).

Participants

Of the more than 5,000 school-based administrators in North Carolina, there are 2,424 principals leading traditional public schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011). Of those, 53% are male and 76% are White (North Carolina Department of Instruction, 2000). To become a principal in a North Carolina traditional public school, candidates must have completed a master's degree in school administration and passed the School Leaders Licensure Assessment test (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012a).

For this study, I chose counties that housed at least one charter school and in which at least four percent of its eligible students attended a charter school. Of the 115 districts in North Carolina, 29 met the criteria based on data from the 2011-12 school year (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012c). Because the state average of charter school membership is just over three percent (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013c), these criteria supported a credible picture of the perspectives of principals throughout the state.

Each superintendent in the eligible districts was contacted to gain permission before inviting principals in those districts to participate in this study (Appendix A). Of 29 superintendents, eight responded in the affirmative and allowed me to contact their principals for interviews. Two refused participation and 19 superintendents never responded. I telephoned principals in the eight districts explaining the purpose of the research and requested their participation. I contacted principals of schools with the grade span of kindergarten through eighth grade, because 82% of charter school students were enrolled in those grades during the 2011-12 school year (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011).

Principals are very busy individuals, so I gave ample time for them to respond for requests for interviews. If after a second attempt to set up an interview with no response, I discontinued attempts to contact a potential participant. If principals agreed to be interviewed, I set up appointments to interview them in person. Of the principals in the eight districts contacted, 13 people in six districts agreed to interviews. These principals led K-8, elementary and middle schools throughout North Carolina, ranging from districts in the mountains, central area of the state, and coast.

At the interviews, I brought along the consent form (Appendix B) that allowed me to use the participants' responses and explained their rights. Principals were asked to sign the form before the interview. The interviews took approximately one hour each. The participants' identities have not been revealed. All participants' actual names were changed to pseudonyms. All data were kept on a secure audio-device and computer, viewed and listened to only by me and a hired transcriptionist. Participants were also given contact information for me, my dissertation chair, and the Institutional Review Board at Western Carolina University in case they had any questions or concerns.

Role of the Researcher

Due to my position as a traditional public school principal in North Carolina, it is important that I share with readers my own experiences on this topic. Maxwell (2005) wrote, "Recognizing your personal ties to the study you want to conduct can provide you with a valuable source of insight, theory, and data about the phenomena you are studying" (p. 19). I work in a district whose leaders have fought against the approval of a charter school in our county and against House and Senate Bills that have supported expanding charter schools and tax credits to those families who wish to remove their children from traditional public schools. A neighboring county has a charter school, and it is the belief of many administrators in my district that this charter school has consistently stripped our traditional public schools of our best and brightest students, going so far as to recruit students who have qualified for the Duke Talent Identification Program. This program is offered to 7th graders who score fairly high on the SAT. The charter school states that it does not recruit and uses a lottery for enrollment.

For many years since this charter school's inception, I have been interested in the school's impact on my own district, not only in its seemingly homogeneous population in terms of ethnicity and achievement, but concerning money lost for traditional public schools. In addition, the news media and even Hollywood moguls have become more interested in charter schools. I have read numerous articles on both sides of the controversy, and I have viewed the popular film advocating for charter schools, *Waiting for Superman*. This dissertation is an expansion of that early interest. With the opening of a charter school in my district in the fall of 2013, I have been driven to study issues surrounding charter schools with more intensity.

I have recognized my own bias as I planned this study, and I have consciously made an effort to keep an open mind. As I researched the literature, I tried to take a balanced approach in regards to my conceptual frameworks on school choice and principals' roles, and in my literature review on charter schools in the nation, specifically focusing on North Carolina. Likewise, through data collection and analysis, I viewed all information as objectively as possible, so as to present a thorough and credible discussion of the results. According to Maxwell (2005), "If your data collection and analysis are based on personal desires *without* careful assessment of the implications for the latter for your methods and conclusions, you are in danger of creating a flawed and biased study" (p. 18).

In phenomenological studies, researchers attempt to "*bracket* or suspend previous assumptions or understandings in order to be open to the phenomenon as it appears" (Finlay, 2008, p. 2). As a practicing principal whose school is in direct competition with a charter school, I have attempted to put aside my own opinions and also what I believe

other principals may feel about charter schools while conducting this study. I aimed "to be open to and see the world differently" (Finlay, 2008, p. 2). Throughout the data collection and data analysis processes, I wrote about my assumptions concerning the topic. I began these notes at each interview and then referred back to them as I analyzed the data. "This process allows one to self-consciously and regularly check to see whether one is imposing meanings on the data and to re-look to see what other meanings might appear" (Fischer, 2008, p. 584). This served two purposes: to ensure that I was not allowing my own assumptions to rule my analysis process and that I did not discount other meanings that may be revealed.

Interviews

Before actually conducting the interviews, I piloted interview questions with colleagues from across the state, asking that they give honest feedback concerning the construction of questions and clarity. These traditional public school principals also were asked to provide other questions they felt were necessary to address the research questions. I used the feedback of these principals to improve my interview questions so that the data they produced would clearly address my research questions, understanding that I would need to remain somewhat flexible during interviews to maintain a conversational approach.

I followed the same protocol (Appendix C) when contacting participants. After setting up an interview time and receiving the signed informed consent form, I conducted the interview using open-ended questions (Appendix C). Interview questions were constructed with the aim of addressing the research questions. Participants were asked about their personal experiences as traditional public school principals and about their

perspectives concerning charter schools. The instrument served as a guide, ensuring that the interviews took on a conversational approach. The interviews were semi-structured, providing flexibility for both the participant and me. As Patton (2002) explained, "In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument" (p. 14). I used interview questions and topics as a guide, understanding that participants' responses could take us in unexpected directions.

Data Collection

Each interview occurred at a location of the participant's choosing, which was the principal's office or conference room. Before each interview, I asked that the participant sign the informed consent form. Interviews were digitally recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed into a word processing document for further analysis. All data were kept secure and a back-up copy was stored on my computer. Recordings of the interviews were kept secure in my home office.

It was important that I understood I could have influenced participants' responses based upon the questions I asked or what I said during the interviews. As Maxwell (2002) stated, "What the informant says is *always* influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation" (p. 109). I had to remain aware of this threat to credibility as I interviewed participants, ensuring that I was not asking leading questions or adding my opinion to the conversation. Maxwell (2002) added, "What is important is to understand *how* you are influencing what the informant says, and how this affects the validity of the inferences you can draw from the interview" (p. 109).

A transcriptionist and I transcribed each interview in its entirety, double-checking for accuracy. After transcriptions were completed for all interviews, I sent them to

participants for their review. I asked that they inform me of any needed corrections or clarifications before proceeding with my analysis. Most responded that the transcripts did not require any changes. Others only acknowledged receipt of the transcripts, while a few never responded. This member checking enhanced the credibility of the data, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Following each interview, I wrote vignettes about the participant. This allowed me to write about some of my thoughts as soon as the interview was completed. I was able to use this data to keep the interviews and the participants separate. After interviewing 13 different people, the interviews and data could have become muddled. In addition, these vignettes revealed some assumptions that I was making about the participants, their perspectives of charter schools, and meanings that I was gathering from the data. Finally, the vignettes were a part of an audit trail, a way in which I kept records to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Once participants had an opportunity to review transcripts, I read them multiple times, looking for patterns among participants' answers, as suggested by Creswell (2008). I looked for themes that would help address the research questions for this study. These themes would provide a thorough explanation of the data, enriched with participants' actual words. First, I read through each interview, being careful not to make any marks. Next, I read each interview a second time, underlining interesting comments and making notes in the margins about possible themes. With further readings, I marked data that addressed the research questions and wrote codes such as *funding* and *parent perceptions*.

Before I began to divide the participants' words into possible themes, I asked members of the Qualitative Research Group at Western Carolina University to review a few excerpts from the transcripts. I asked them to mark them for possible themes to see if what I was gathering from them was what they saw, as well. Throughout the session, members contributed ideas about possible themes, including several that I had discovered on my own. This step helped to validate my data analysis process.

Eventually, after multiple readings and markings, I was able to color-code phrases aligned with certain themes. I combined similar ideas under common themes. For example, I used codes like *competition* and *marketing*. I realized that these codes could be considered sub-clusters under one theme, so I highlighted them in the same color and labeled them under the broader category *principal reaction to a new world*. This aided me in narrowing my focus for data analysis and interpretation. From these multiple readings and codings, I was able to see trends in the data that helped to address the research questions. Instead of having an unmanageable number of themes, I was able to combine multiple codes or sub-clusters so that four common themes emerged.

In addition, I began noticing possible themes as I transcribed each interview, even before all interviews were completed. Data analysis was conducted with the understanding that "a qualitative design is emergent" (Merriam, 1998, p. 155). As I collected data, I began thinking about possible themes, even before all the data was recorded and transcribed. As Merriam (1998) explained:

> The researcher usually does not know ahead of time every person who might be interviewed, all the questions that might be asked, or where to look next unless data are analyzed as they are being collected. Hunches, working hypotheses, and

> educated guesses direct the investigator's attention to certain data and then to refining or verifying hunches. (p. 155)

With each interview, I was able to press for further explanation from participants, remembering previous interviews where perhaps I did not follow up enough. However, I had to be careful to continue to allow other meanings to shine through. "The researcher is prepared to be surprised, awed and generally open to whatever may be revealed" (Finlay, 2008, p. 5).

Phenomenological research allowed me to bring my own experiences to the study, while attempting to see the world from others' perspectives. As Moustakas (1994) wrote:

> The challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. The process involves a blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings; thus a unity of the real and the ideal. (p. 27)

While I had my own experiences with and perspectives about charter schools, I sought to uncover themes in the data gathered from my participants' words, not my own. My notes, vignettes, multiple readings of the transcripts, and coding process helped to create more reliable and valid findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to examine traditional public school principals' perspectives and experiences concerning charter schools in North Carolina. Participants included principals of traditional public schools with the grade spans of kindergarten through eighth grade. These principals worked in districts that had at least four percent of their students leave for charter schools. During interviews, I asked participants to describe their experiences with charter schools.

Analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in four dominant themes, which stemmed from 326 coded responses. These codes, or sub-clusters, were combined into themes to explain participants' responses. Each theme's sub-cluster will be discussed and will include evidence in the form of relevant quotes, interpretation of the data, and an explanation of how the data address the research questions. Each participant was given a pseudonym so as to keep his or her responses confidential.

One theme that emerged from the data was that principals perceived some parents and legislators as having hostile attitudes toward traditional public schools. Principals spoke mostly of the perceptions of parents concerning the quality of charter schools versus traditional public schools. They frequently reported they thought parents were making enrollment decisions based on perceptions and not facts. Some perceived that parents were trying to avoid sending their children to schools with students who were different from them. Other participants discussed the negative view that North Carolina legislators have been promoting of traditional public schools. They felt legislators paint an unfair and critical picture of those schools. Additionally, the principals in this study sensed a lack of support from legislators for traditional public schools and their teachers.

A second theme derived from the data revolved around principals' reaction to this new world of overt hostility toward traditional public schools. To combat these negative perceptions, many participants said they became more proactive in marketing their schools and programs. They turned to social media and other avenues to advertise their schools to parents who may be considering alternatives. Additionally, participants talked about competing with charter schools for students, something they did not worry about in the past. Principals in this study admitted they did not know much about charter schools and were less inclined to collaborate with them due to the intense competition. They also stated charter schools had not provided any innovative strategies to use in their traditional public schools.

A third theme that emerged from the data was that principals claimed charter schools had unfair advantages over traditional public schools. Principals talked about the loss of funding from their schools to charter schools, claiming this was unfair considering charters can play by different rules and are not required to enroll children from the neediest families in their districts. Many questioned the legitimacy of comparing test scores across charters and traditional public schools. Some believed that charters are not required to take all the same state tests. Furthermore, principals said charters in their districts were allowed to hire non-certified staff in teaching positions and they had more freedom with dissemination of funds.

Finally, principals discussed their concerns that charter schools could cause the return of segregation in public schools. Many said charter schools in their districts only enrolled those students who would boost test scores, not students who have disabilities or who live in poverty. Participants said charter schools do not typically provide

transportation or lunches, thereby discouraging low-income families from applying. Traditional public schools must enroll all students who are in their districts, regardless of need.

Summaries of Participants' Experiences

School district A. Three principals were interviewed from school district A, located in the central part of the state. The district contained 37 schools and offered a variety of options for students and parents. The local education agency (LEA) had International Baccalaureate Education (IB) schools, an early college high school, a magnet school for the arts and a technical/career school. The LEA enrolled over 21,000 students, comprising 70% White, 14% Black and 11% Hispanic (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). The county's median yearly income was $53,066, above the state average of $46,450, while 10.7% of the population lived below the poverty level, compared to the state average of 16.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Principal 1: Matthews. Mr. Matthews led an elementary school of approximately 600 students, comprising 82% White, nine percent Asian, four percent Hispanic and three percent Black. Twelve percent were considered economically disadvantaged. Mr. Matthews was beginning his second year as principal at the time of the interview. He was formally an assistant principal and teacher in the same district. His students typically have scored well above the state average in reading, math, and science. Mr. Matthews was knowledgeable about charter schools in his district and about the state's charter school legislation. He had grown concerned about losing additional funding and positions. He sent surveys to parents who had left his school for charter schools, desiring to know their reasons. He believed that charters have segregated public schools and was

concerned about unfair competition. He was also committed to the district's marketing plan.

Principal 2: Johnson. Mr. Johnson was the principal at a middle school. He was beginning his eighth year in the role and had previously served as an assistant principal for one year in the district. He served as an assistant principal in Florida for eight years prior to that, moving to that state when teaching positions were scarce in his home state of West Virginia. He spoke about the start of his teaching career when he was laid off due to budget cuts.

Mr. Johnson oversaw a middle school of about 550 students, made up of 87% White, six percent Hispanic and four percent Black. Seventeen percent qualified for free or reduced lunch. Mr. Johnson bragged often on his students and staff, explaining that his school is one of the top-performing middle schools in the state. Unlike Mr. Matthews, he did not believe in the marketing plan of his district, explaining that he does not like to play political games nor does he believe that he needs to market such a high-performing school. In spite of his affection for his students and staff, he was considering leaving North Carolina due to not receiving a pay raise over the last several years.

Principal 3: Barnes. Mr. Barnes was beginning his fifth year as the principal at an elementary school that has an enrollment of over 600 students. The student population consisted of 77% White, eight percent Asian, six percent Hispanic and five percent Black, while 27% of students were economically disadvantaged. Mr. Barnes had previously taught at a middle school and served as an assistant principal in the same district. After his first year as principal, four teachers resigned, all on the same day, to go work at a new charter school in the district. He said that he was very defensive at the

time, but has grown to understand that being proactive rather than defensive has more positive results. He has spent a great deal of time leading his staff on ways to create positive information about their school rather than spinning negative tales about charter schools. He said that the competition with charter schools has forced him and his staff to think more deeply about school improvement.

School district B. Located in the mountains, this district had eight schools, which included four K-8 schools, two early college high schools, one traditional high school and one alternative school. The LEA enrolled approximately 3,600 students, comprising 77% White, nine percent Hispanic, nine percent American Indian and one percent Black (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). The county's median yearly income was $36,403, below the state average, and 19.5% of the population lived below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Principal 4: Allen. Mrs. Allen was beginning her third year as principal of a K-8 school of over 600 students. She had previously served as an assistant principal in the district. She had also served as an assistant principal and middle school science teacher in another district. Seventy-eight percent of the students at Mrs. Allen's school were White, 13% were Hispanic, three percent were American Indian and one percent was Black (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). In the town where the school was located, the median yearly income was just $17,775 and 48.1% of the population lived in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Fifty-nine percent of Allen's students were considered economically disadvantaged.

Prior to her arrival at the school, Mrs. Allen said that the school had scored very low on state tests and was working out of school improvement status. Mrs. Allen

explained that many of the students who had left her school for charter schools have parents who are employed at the local university. She believed that those parents wanted more input into the education of their children and left her school because they were denied that level of access and influence. She was concerned about negative perceptions of her school that had caused many of her top-performing students to leave for charter schools.

Principal 5: Watts. Mrs. Watts was beginning her 13th year as principal at a K-8 school. She had worked at all grade levels, teaching and serving as an administrator in Florida and North Carolina. When she took over as principal, her school's scores were last in the region, but she said that the school had made at least expected growth every year since the state had begun calculating growth. Watts' school comprised 82% White, seven percent Hispanic, five percent American Indian and three percent Black students, while 59% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a).

Mrs. Watts admitted that she was very nervous about state testing because her school had consistently met growth expectations. With new testing, she feared that the bar would be even higher. She explained that founders of one of the local charter schools had invited her to help them get started, but she refused because she believed in the mission of traditional public schools. She believed that the charter schools were drawing away her best-performing students.

School district C. Of the 8,000 students in this centrally-located district, 55% were White, 28% were Hispanic and 12% were Black. The LEA supported 17 schools, including five elementary schools, five K-8 schools, three middle schools, and four high

schools, one of which was considered an alternative school (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). The county had a population of almost 66,000 people, 13% of whom were Hispanic, above the state average of nine percent. The median yearly income was $57,793, well above the state average, and the poverty level was 11.1% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Principal 6: Clemmons. Mr. Clemmons was beginning his fifth year as principal of a K-8 school. He had previously served two years as the school's assistant principal and had also worked in a private school. His school population of almost 400 students comprised 77% White, 14% Hispanic and five percent Black, while 40% were considered economically disadvantaged. Typically, the school has performed above the state average in testing.

Mr. Clemmons' biggest concern about charter schools in his district was that parents of students who have not been admitted to charter schools do not have a voice. He complained that those schools hand-picked well-performing students and believed that their recruitment practices were influenced by ethnicity. He said he believed in the concept of charter schools, but felt as if the state did not have enough oversight in place.

Principal 7: Tate. Mrs. Tate had spent 13 years in the school district, as a counselor, assistant principal and principal. She was beginning her fifth year as principal at a middle school with approximately 450 students. The school's population consisted of 68% Hispanic, 15% Black and 11% White, and 88% of the population qualified for free and reduced lunch (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). Mrs. Tate believed that the biggest reason for the existence of charter schools in her district was because of White flight. She said the school's demographics had changed dramatically in

recent years and that her Hispanic population had taken a sharp rise. Mrs. Tate was raised in private schools and said she believed in the concept of school choice. She even collaborated with charter school leaders concerning curriculum when the charter school in her district first opened; however, that relationship had not continued with the charter school's new leadership.

School district D. Total student enrollment for this mountain school district was over 3,500, consisting of 83% White, six percent Hispanic and five percent Black. The LEA was made up of four elementary schools, two middle schools and three high schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). The median yearly income in the county was $40,678 and 14.2% lived in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Principal 8: King. Mr. King was beginning his fourth year at a middle school enrolling over 550 students. He had served as an assistant principal, athletic director and career technical education teacher in the district. He had also worked for eight years in Colorado. The school consisted of 77% White, nine percent Black and four percent Hispanic students, and enrolled 55% economically disadvantaged students. Mr. King's school performs above the state average in testing (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a).

As a middle school principal, Mr. King claimed that many parents worry about their children leaving elementary school and have chosen charter schools as an alternative. He believed that in order for his school to compete he had to promote the various extracurricular activities and academic courses that made his school unique. He felt that charter schools played by different rules in terms of enrollment and testing.

School district E. There were nine elementary schools, one K-8 school, four middle schools, four high schools, and one early college high school in this coastal district. Of the 12,357 students, 68% were White, 16% were Black and 10% were Hispanic (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). The median yearly income for the county was $46,490 and the poverty level was 15.2%, both figures near the state averages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Principal 9: Smith. As a 39-year education veteran, Mrs. Smith had recently been named the district's principal of the year. She was beginning her fourth year as principal at the elementary school, where she had also served as an assistant principal and teacher. She explained the school was important to the community and she felt driven to serve the needs of that community. The school's student population of 500 students comprised 42% White, 29% Hispanic and 23% Black, and 65% of the students were considered economically disadvantaged (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a).

Mrs. Smith enjoyed good relationships with charter school leaders in her district until distrust began to emerge. She claimed that litigation and unfulfilled promises damaged rapport and she believed that charter schools often enrolled only those students whose families could afford transportation. She felt rejected by legislators and believed they had left traditional public schools "dangling" without financial resources and support.

Principal 10: Flay. Mr. Flay was beginning his sixth year as principal of a middle school of 600 students. The student population consisted of 66% White, 14% Black and 14% Hispanic, while 50% qualified for free and reduced lunch (North Carolina

Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). Mr. Flay had served as an assistant principal and French teacher in his district and in a district located in a mountain county.

Mr. Flay spoke frequently of the mission of public schools to serve students of all backgrounds and abilities. He believed that charter schools were private businesses that were given public money, and that they were not held to the same standards as traditional public schools. Mr. Flay felt as if the charter schools were enrolling only students who would succeed academically.

Principal 11: Beam. Mrs. Beam was beginning her sixth year as principal of a K-8 school, after serving as an assistant principal and business education teacher in the district. Her 560 students were made up of 70% White, 16% Hispanic and 12% Black, while 59% qualified for free and reduced lunch (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a).

Mrs. Beam believed that charter schools did not take the same tests as her school. She felt that students who returned from the local charter school had not benefitted and were behind academically when they re-enrolled in her school. As an African-American and a product of public school integration, Mrs. Beam was concerned about what she believed was racial and economic segregation brought on by charter schools.

Principal 12: Thurman. Mr. Thurman was serving as Mrs. Beam's assistant principal after returning from retirement to assist the school district. He had previously served as a principal in the district. Mrs. Beam asked that Mr. Thurman join us in the interview because of his knowledge of charter schools. He also signed an informed consent form. Mr. Thurman felt strongly in the mission of public schools to teach

students about citizenship and democracy. He believed that charter schools were re-segregating society and that they were negatively impacting funding for public schools.

School district F. This centrally located district consisted of 9,084 students enrolled in 17 schools. There were eight elementary schools, one K-8 school, three middle schools, three high schools, one early college high school and one alternative school. Forty-five percent of the LEA's student population was Black, while 40% were White and 11% were Hispanic (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). The median yearly income for the county was $34,440 and 24.9% lived in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Principal 13: Miller. The elementary school under Mrs. Miller's leadership enrolled 500 students who were 97% Black. That same percentage qualified as economically disadvantaged (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013a). In the school's town, residents' median yearly income was just $28,728 and 33.7% lived below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Mrs. Miller, who was named the district's principal of the year, was beginning her fifth year as the school's principal. She had served as an assistant principal, reading coach and elementary school teacher in the same district. Mrs. Miller believed that one of the charter schools in her district frequently was guilty of illegal practices. She said that the charter school threatened to suspend students it wanted to get rid of and withheld records of special education students to hide that they had not served them correctly. She also pointed out that the charter school had been in trouble with the state due to funding issues. Ironically, the charter school was forced to close shortly after our interview.

Hostile Attitudes

The theme of hostile attitudes dominated the conversation with principals, totaling 82 coded responses. Principals discussed their perceptions of parents and legislators, noting that these groups can harbor critical attitudes toward traditional public schools. For each sub-cluster the number of coded responses and the number of participants in these responses are documented in Table 2. All participants but one discussed topics related to this theme.

Table 2

Sub-clusters for Hostile Attitudes

Sub-clusters	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in the Responses
Principals' Perceptions of Parents	57	11
Principals' Perceptions of Legislators	25	10

Principals' perceptions of parents. *"Parents are taking a step into the unknown because a lot of them feel like it's a free or almost private school education they are getting for free." - Barnes*

The majority of participants discussed reasons they feel that parents are enrolling children in charter schools as opposed to the traditional public schools. Principals claimed that parents become dissatisfied with something or someone in the traditional public school and believe that the charter schools will provide a safer environment or higher academic expectations. Several principals stated that parents had become dissatisfied with how they handled disciplinary procedures or cases of bullying. One principal claimed that she had spent three days investigating a case of bullying, only to

find that the student who claimed to be a victim was actually the instigator and that both students had fought. The parents of the student disagreed with the principal's handling of the situation and withdrew their child to enroll her at a local charter school. "I could never have made those people happy no matter what," stated White. "But what are you going to do? The family has to come to that realization. There's nothing I can do to change that." Other participants reiterated that in an attempt to keep their children safe, parents often enroll them in charter schools where they perceive that there are fewer behavior issues. Principals explained that size matters and that parents believe larger schools tend to have more severe discipline issues. Several participants spoke of parents' concerns about their younger elementary students transitioning to the confusing age of middle school. Flay stated, "Everybody thinks that middle school is horrible, but it's because of the age group of the kids and it takes a while to get that message across." Participants claimed that parents hear rumors about negative behaviors occurring in traditional public schools and sometimes mistake the gossip as fact, further fueling their fears and encouraging them to choose another school environment for their children. As Johnson stated, "We've got a pretty good school, but living in this area, they're so much about perception; it's just crazy."

Participants also discussed parent perceptions about academic and enrichment opportunities in charter schools. Several principals worked in districts close to universities. Parents who worked at those universities often favored enrolling their children in charters because they perceived these schools to provide a better education for their children, according to some principals. Allen said, "I would say that's the single most reason of us losing to charter schools is parents feeling like we're not challenging

their children enough." She claimed that parents who were employed at the nearby university would often tell her what curriculum to include and what strategies teachers should use. "I think there was a feeling among some of them that they knew better than we did," she said.

Although participants recognized parents' perceptions about charter school curriculum, they often claimed that sometimes those supposed opportunities are not what they seem. Barnes said, "It's perception; it's a choice they're making based on what they've heard, not what they know. And I think a lot of those parents will move back; a lot them will come back." Like Barnes, many participants believed – and some had already witnessed – students and their families re-enrolling in traditional public schools after becoming disillusioned with charters. Miller stated, "They [parents] think they're getting small class sizes and technology. They think their students are going to get innovative educational opportunities. But, reality sets in once they start."

Many of the principals interviewed were concerned that parents were not adequately informed about charter school curriculum and teacher qualifications. Principals talked about charters not being required to hire certified teachers and believed that many parents did not know this. Barnes stated, "I do know there is not a requirement for those schools to have 100% highly qualified staff, and I think the general public does not know that, so, that's why I feel like some of the parents have not done their homework." Participants generally perceived parents who moved their children to charter schools as not acting responsibly or in the best interest of their children. They claimed that parents had not adequately researched the charter schools to find out if the schools would provide all they had claimed or that the schools would best meet their children's

needs. Matthews quipped, “Parents, they try out these schools like a pair of shoes! To me, that’s sad to see. With your children, that should be a pretty big decision that you make.”

Participants’ responses in this section addressed the primary research question: “what are North Carolina traditional public school principals’ perspectives about and experiences with charter schools”, and its first sub-question: “what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?” Traditional public school principals spoke at great lengths about parents’ reasons for choosing charter schools, largely attributing those to fear of unwanted behaviors and the need for more academic opportunities. Participants were concerned that parents were basing very important decisions regarding their children’s education on mere perceptions and not on reality or thorough research. A few principals claimed that parents send their students back to traditional public schools after discovering that what they were promised in terms of higher quality academics did not come true.

Betrayed: principals’ perceptions of legislators. *It’s all perception and our government has gone out of its way to talk about, and our politicians in particular, project how bad public schools are. - Flay*

Ten of the 13 participants expressed concern over legislators’ beliefs about traditional public schools and about treatment of those working in traditional public schools. Many perceived that government representatives have targeted traditional public schools in the state and have created charter schools to further threaten their reputation and funding. Some of the participants did not mince words when it came to their frustrations. Thurman said, “All these fools want to talk about is what’s wrong with public schools.”

Several principals spoke about legislators who continue to support the expansion of charter schools because they are convinced that traditional public schools are failing to educate students adequately or that those schools are not safe environments. Principals believed that legislators base their votes on news stories about poor test scores or school disciplinary issues. Watts stated, "The legislators are making these decisions based on negative publicity of what they hear about public schools – a one-time incident with an at-risk kid that made the headlines versus the other ones. That is my frustration." Others stated that legislators view test scores as testimony for the success of charter schools without acknowledging that many of those schools enroll only the most academically gifted students. Principals complained that it is the duty of legislators to consider all variables when judging schools, but that those leaders instead are basing crucial decisions on hearsay, skewed data and different guidelines for charters. Smith stated:

> With the current legislature and with the current things that are happening, it makes me feel that maybe some of our legislators don't understand what charter schools…the rights…the things that they can do that we must follow by state law…It makes me feel like we're almost becoming the second class citizen, the red-headed stepchild.

In general, participants did not feel supported by legislators, citing North Carolina's 2013-15 education budget that eliminated teacher tenure, denied additional pay for advanced degrees, and continued to freeze public school salaries (State of North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2013). Principals claimed that in doing so, government leaders hinder public schools from hiring and retaining the most talented teachers. "I think, right now, and I can say this after thirty-nine years in education, we

have pretty much doomed public education," claimed Smith. "I think we'll see the decline in that and that breaks my heart and actually lessens your confidence in what our legislators are doing for us."

Many principals spoke of losing teaching positions due to state funding following students to charter schools. Matthews said, "We are operating with bare bones here. We are not cutting the fat any more. We are cutting bone and muscle." He explained that three teachers had left his school during the summer and that he would not be able to replace all of them due to cuts in enrollment and funding. Others echoed this concern throughout the interviews, pointing to the negative impact charter legislation has had on staffing. Barnes stated, "It's difficult because we're going to lose funding and we're potentially going to lose staff because of the [charter] school." Participants acknowledged that they lose teaching positions because they have fewer children to educate, but claimed that if those students re-enroll in their schools after the first ten days of school, they are not afforded additional positions to cover the increasing enrollment. They said that legislators did not consider that students would re-enroll back in their traditional public schools, and that they have left those schools without the funding necessary to adequately provide for those students. Matthews summed up the sentiment by saying, "We can't afford to have kids leave and then come back."

Responses from this section address the primary research question and the first sub-question: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Principals said they felt betrayed by legislators, claiming that part of those leaders' duties is to support public schools. Allen stated, "We're being attacked from within." Matthews added, "I just don't see our state legislators being advocates for public

schools. They are making it more difficult for us." Participants overall expressed disappointment in legislators' lack of understanding of the negative impact of charter schools on traditional public schools in terms of publicity and funding. Principals were also concerned about being able to provide quality education when students re-enroll in their schools after leaving charters, and about the lack of support legislators provide public school employees.

Principals' Reaction to a New World

In 95 coded responses, principals reacted to negative attitudes toward traditional public schools. Participants found themselves in new territory when deciding how best to compete for students and market their schools. Also, principals claimed they knew very little about charters in their districts and were less likely to collaborate with charter schools due to competition over funding. Likewise, they had not gained any innovative strategies shared by charters. Coded responses and the number of participants involved in each sub-cluster are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Sub-clusters for Principals' Reaction to a New World

Sub-clusters	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in Responses
New Territory: Marketing	32	10
New World of Competition	29	9
Lack of Knowledge and Collaboration	30	10
Lack of Innovation	4	4

New territory: marketing. *We've done a lot as a school district in trying to beef up our marketing, which is something that is new territory for public schools. You know, we've never had to market what we do. It used to be this is the only option. - Matthews*

Ten of 13 participants commented on marketing strategies that charter schools and traditional public schools use to entice families to enroll. Many principals interviewed stated that charter schools put great emphasis on marketing their schools to families and they have found that their districts are being forced to do the same. Most principals stated that they were not necessarily offering anything different at their schools; they were merely advertising what they did offer, specifically highlighting activities and events through social media. Additionally, some principals admitted that they were trying to be proactive with their marketing instead of defensive.

Participants often commented on the marketing strategies that charter schools use, discussing ways that charters were appealing to parents. Matthews stated, "They are masterful at marketing." Principals described how charters employed strategies to entice families looking for specific curriculum or high academic expectations. King said, "This is a very musical and arts type community that's kind of evolving with tourism and that type of thing. Most of the folks moving into this community are kind of in that market and lend themselves to that type of school." He and others discussed how charters appeal to certain communities by highlighting similarities in what they offer and what families are seeking for their children. Miller stated, "They [parents] think they're getting, um, free technology because the charter schools will offer…they will send around a flyer saying that you will receive a free laptop when you enroll." Whether charters are appealing to high-income parents who are interested in challenging academics and arts,

or to low-income parents who are looking for ways to level the playing field for their children, traditional public school principals stated that charters have learned how to draw parents to their schools. Some participants felt that the marketing strategies employed by charters were not truthful and that parents were being tricked into enrolling their children. Miller said, "It's not what they thought it was. The selling points that were used…the marketing techniques...for lack of a better way of saying it…that were used to draw parents…once they were there they saw those things didn't exist." Miller explained that the charter school in her district did not offer the laptops nor the small class sizes that were promised. Other principals commented on charter schools not being upfront with parents by not revealing the fact that their teachers do not have to be certified or that they do not provide nutrition services. Participants stated that many parents are not aware that charters do not provide services or extracurricular activities they have become accustomed to in traditional public schools.

In a response to the marketing strategies of charter schools, traditional public school principals are becoming more aware of the need to market their own schools in order to maintain student enrollment. They commented on the emphasis their districts have placed on promoting what their schools offer to the community. Principals explained that they have communicated more about offerings, such as athletics, music programs, enrichment courses and foreign language classes. As Johnson said, "It's all about marketing. In our district right now it's, ah goodness, this second half of the school year it was all they talked about." Many principals commented on the district leadership's emphasis on marketing and stated that several principals' meetings were spent discussing strategies to promote their schools. Some participants stated that they realized they

needed to do a better job of advertising their schools, but felt they did not have time to focus on marketing. Watts stated, "That's an area where I need to be stronger. We do market our school, but because of time constraints, I'm not out there as much as I need to be."

Other principals were finding the time to market their schools through brochures, DVDs, social media, and letters to parents who had withdrawn their children for charters. Some principals had sent surveys along with those letters to find out what they could do differently to keep students from withdrawing for charters. Although they had not gotten much response from the surveys, they felt this was a good marketing strategy because it proved to parents they cared about their children and the reasons they left their schools. Other principals focused on increasing communication with current parents and students through social media, acknowledging that charter schools often employ this strategy. Allen said, "I think their PR is good for those parents who are accessing websites and always looking for something better for their children." Participants stated they had increased postings on their schools' websites and constantly updated parents about happenings at their schools. Matthews stated, "I know we are doing a lot as a district with social media. I think we can do a better job of that here because parents do look at that stuff, they check that stuff out." He and others were growing more accustomed to using Facebook and Twitter to alert parents to school news. Principals acknowledged that they have to keep information current because many parents demand instant updates about their children's education.

Many principals did not feel the need to offer different courses or extra curricular activities, but admitted they had to get the information of what they are already doing out

to the community. Johnson stated, “We are having to market our school, but we aren’t doing anything really different. It’s just getting the word out of what we’ve done, why we are successful. We feel that data don’t lie.” Others commented that they had to be careful about the emphasis they place on certain offerings so as not to oversell one area over another. Clemmons commented:

> So, what we probably need to do a better job on is promoting what we do. The difficult part of that is we do a lot so you try not to over-scale anything to make it seem like that’s all we do. Because it’s not all we do. It’s just one of the things we do very good. We try to do a good job with everything we do.

Most participants echoed this comment on the need for their schools to advertise to parents the successes their students and staff enjoy.

Not only were principals promoting curriculum and activities, many acknowledged that they and their staff members have to remain positive in spite of the heavy marketing from charters. Principals emphasized to staff that they should promote the good things about their own schools, especially when there is temptation to criticize charter schools in the community. Barnes stated, “And convincing teachers to say things about our school and what we are doing and be positive, rather than bashing or being negative about the charter school, when, in fact, they don’t know a whole lot about charter schools.” He added that as a school principal, others will follow his lead in how he reacts to the existence of charter schools, saying, “They want you to be just as upset as they are. It’s not that you’re not upset about it. It’s just that you have to handle yourself in a different way, especially when you’re the leader, everybody is looking at you.” Other participants have emphasized to staff members that appearances are also important, that it

is imperative that they appear to be amicable and united. “I tell them all the time, ‘you’re always a teacher, you’re always on as a teacher even when you’re sitting at the rec games. Somebody will want you to badmouth something,’” Clemmons said. “When I took over as principal I told them straight out, ‘we may not always get along, but the first perception people have is that we do get along.’ And I tell them, ‘you do not air your dirty laundry out front. You keep it in the back.’” This proactive marketing strategy, principals said, helps everyone keep focused on what they can do to improve their own schools, rather than becoming defensive about the impact of charter schools. Principals believed they could not control the marketing of charters in their districts, but that they could promote the positive relationships they have with staff members and the successes of their own schools.

Participants’ responses from this section address the primary research question and sub-question two: “what do traditional public school principals consider strengths of charter schools?” Principals acknowledged that charter schools had been successful at promoting and marketing their schools in order to draw parents. They commented that charters were able to plug into special niches and highlighted those things that would appeal to parents in their communities. Although some principals believed that charters were not always truthful with parents, they admitted that charter’s marketing strategies were very effective.

Principals’ responses in this section also addressed sub-question three: “how have practices of traditional public school principals been influenced by charter schools?” Principals stated that their districts had begun to emphasize the importance of marketing strategies in order to retain students. They were using various advertising strategies to

communicate events and offerings to parents. Most principals admitted they were not necessarily offering anything new to parents, but that they were making sure parents were aware of what their schools did offer. In addition, principals saw the need to be proactive, rather than defensive, reminding their staff members to be positive about their own schools and to not be negative about charter schools in their districts.

New world of competition. *And so enrollment for us has drastically changed over the last fifteen years. So you add the competition with charter schools in there, it's even more so. - King*

During conversations with participants about marketing, the idea of competition arose. Nine of the 13 principals interviewed commented on the notion of competition between charter schools and traditional public schools. Participants often pointed out that public schools only recently have felt the pressure of charter schools due to legislation that has allowed more charters to open. They acknowledged that traditional public schools have never really had to compete until now. In addition, some principals stated that their schools felt the need to offer different courses and extracurricular activities to compete for students. Finally, although most principals did not like the idea of competing for students, they admitted that competition with charter schools helped their schools constantly seek to improve.

With the growing number of charters in their districts, principals stated they have become more aware of the need to compete for students. Matthews said, "It used to be this is the only option. You know, private schools have been around for a very long time. But, that hasn't been near the competition, I think, that charter schools have created." Participants admitted that traditional public schools have had a monopoly on educating

students, but see a growth in competition now with the expansion of charter schools. Clemmons commented, “No longer can we just say, ‘Well, this is your only choice.’ We have to think differently.” Principals have seen first-hand the movement of students to charters. “Right now with us…this charter school that’s opening up…I will use the word threat, that’s been the biggest threat to my enrollment,” stated Johnson. “This has become a game. It’s competition. My students will tell you, and my teachers, I hate to lose!” The loss of students has weighed heavily on principals as they have seen staff and dollars dwindle with each student who has withdrawn.

Besides marketing techniques, principals are finding they need to offer additional courses or activities to compete with charter schools. Participants have encouraged staff members to research what charters are offering in an attempt to keep families interested. Barnes stated, “We actually did an activity in a principals’ meeting that required us to look at the different competing schools’ websites to see what they offered. The biggest thing is to look at enrichment courses that they offer.” Some schools have added foreign language programs like Spanish to entice parents to stay, while others have increased after school enrichment programs like archery, golf, science clubs and drama. Several principals commented on the need to not only promote their existing offerings, but to consider adding curriculum and opportunities to stay competitive with charters.

Many principals felt uncomfortable with the idea of competing for students, equating that to a business model, yet several commented that the competition had forced them and their schools to constantly question their missions and motivations. Clemmons admitted, “There are aspects we’re going to have to run like a business because we are vying for customers and I want to keep my customers. I want to keep my customers

happy." Some principals criticized charters for using a business model to run their schools and believed that charters were only concerned with enrollment numbers; however, participants acknowledged that they could learn from competition with charters. Matthews said, "I think that with competition, there's some positives that can come out of that. There's…I think it's requiring us to be on our toes, that we are providing the best product we can now." Tate added:

> So, I definitely have a perspective of choice. I understand why people want choice and that choice can be a good thing. It can keep you on your toes. Um, and I think that sometimes it's a good thing not to be the only game in town.

Principals stated that part of their role as leaders was to make sure their schools were in a state of constant improvement. King elaborated by saying:

> I mean we're not going to get any better if we don't listen…One of the things I tell my staff is 'the only constant thing in public education is change.' Our product is constantly changing. Kids are changing. The community changes. Each community does. It doesn't matter who it is.

Participants admitted that the competition with charters has caused them to be more introspective, to constantly survey the progress of their schools, and to acknowledge their students and their families as customers who could easily transfer to charters.

Responses from this section address the primary research question and sub-question three: how have practices of traditional public school principals been influenced by charter schools? Participants bemoaned the business model of many charters, but admitted that the competition between charters and traditional public schools had forced them to reflect more on school improvement. A few principals researched charter school

offerings to find out what might interest students and their families and keep them enrolled. Several participants had added enrichment courses and extracurricular activities to entice parents to stay. In addition, principals commented on the need to constantly improve and that this need may not be as evident without the competition from charters.

Lack of knowledge and collaboration. *You know, I wish it was better than what it is, but I understand that they're trying to keep their school as a charter school and so that connection to public school is not one that they usually want to maintain. – Smith*

The majority of principals perceived their schools' relationship with charters as poor or non-existent. Participants seemed to have little or no knowledge of what charters in their districts offered in terms of curriculum and were generally not familiar with the charter schools' missions. Likewise, principals explained that there was normally no collaboration between their schools and charter schools.

Most principals admitted they had not done their homework when it came to charter schools in their districts. They stated they had limited knowledge as to what charters offered because they had not had any communication with charter personnel nor had they done their own research. Matthews said, "I've never spoken to an administrator and I've never spoken to a teacher there." Barnes admitted, "I don't know…I haven't worked in their school or seen their classrooms." Others explained that they were not clear on the charters' purpose in the community. Clemmons stated, "I don't know what the mission or vision of any school is," and Tate added, "What their missions are, I'm not sure...I don't know anything about them." A few principals were vaguely familiar with the charter schools' curriculum, but the majority of participants had no idea as to what standards, curriculum or resources the charters were using to instruct students. Allen said:

> It appears to be…you would have to look, you couldn't quote me or bet money on this, but I'm thinking it was almost like thematic at different grades and they had these set experiences that that was the year they would have this experience and so on and so forth. I would say it was a well-coordinated growth movement and I think it was to expand – though they may not have used these words – when I look at it, I thought, that's trying to expand learning beyond the classroom. But I wouldn't take my word for it; I would look at the website.

Like most principals, Miller had not researched how charters were teaching students. "I don't know what text they use," she said. "I would hope that they're following the standard course of study for North Carolina, but I really couldn't tell you what they're using."

In addition to having limited knowledge about the charters in their districts, principals admitted that for the most part they had not attempted to collaborate with charters, nor had charter schools ever tried to share with them. Participants often spoke of the collaboration they enjoyed between traditional public schools in their own districts, pointing to principals' willingness to help other schools in their local education agencies (LEA). However, most had not benefitted from any collaborative efforts on the part of charters in their districts. Allen stated, "When they start talking about what they've done and start sharing information, I'll be glad to look at it, but the people who are sharing information are public school people." King added:

> I have not seen or had the experience of any charter schools where I've worked contact us and say, 'you know, we've been doing this and it worked and we've got good test scores or people have really bought into this so is there maybe an

> opportunity where we can share that with you and have y'all implement it into one of your schools?' I haven't seen that; I haven't heard that and I haven't heard of anyone doing that. Doesn't mean it's not happening; I haven't had that experience yet.

Others wondered if competition for students and good test scores was preventing charters and traditional public schools from collaborating. Johnson said, "I wish I had some inside information to share like how their scores are better, but they're not going to share that." Some were hopeful that charters would be open to sharing information and strategies if only traditional public school principals would contact them. Matthews stated, "If we called them up, I'm sure that they would be open to speaking to us. I would hate to think that we are that different or that the competition is that heated – this isn't Duke and Carolina!"

A few principals had experienced some success at collaborating with charter schools when those charters were first opening. Tate explained that the principal of the charter in her district had previously worked for her district and enjoyed positive relations with others in the LEA. She described their collaborative efforts, saying:

> It was more curriculum kind of things; things that we were doing here; we would share those things when we…things that he would find and they were trying at their schools and that kind of thing. Kind of informal, like colleagues talking about the situation.

Tate said the relationship continued until the charter school leaders decided to build a high school, which district leaders felt would further reduce their enrollment and their state funding.

Others had experienced initial success collaborating with charters, only to see the relationship become strained. Smith explained that she invited the charter school principal to question her staff about scripted reading programs her traditional public school offered. She said, “We tried to build a good relationship between the two schools because we know that we’re sharing children.” Smith and others described their efforts to maintain positive rapport with charter leaders because students often go back and forth between them. Smith commented that relations with the charter were good until mistrust began to build. She explained that the charter school principal promised to allow her students to participate in an elite cheerleading squad if she allowed them to use her school’s gym. However, once practices began, she discovered that her students were not allowed to join the team because they were not enrolled in the charter. She said that incident, along with lawsuits and a change in charter school leadership, damaged any hopes of future collaboration. Smith stated, “In the last year or two, there has not been much communication among us, very limited.”

Some principals also blamed lawsuits brought by charters against their school districts for the lack of sharing between them and charter leaders. They explained that their superintendents had not urged them to collaborate with charter leaders due to legal proceedings. Miller stated, “No, we never worked with them. He never encouraged us to work with them in any way. Not at all.” Thurman quipped, “The only thing they want to share is our money!”

Regardless of whether or not tensions existed between charters and traditional public schools, some principals said they saw no reason to collaborate with charters in the first place. Allen stated:

> On the other hand, is our district going to go out and ask those charter schools why they're so successful? No, because we think we're successful. So, why would I be going out and asking somebody something when they have shown me nothing that shows they are successful, if that makes sense.

Most principals, like Beam, had never been contacted by charters nor did they have any desire to collaborate with them. She said, "I personally have not had any opportunity to or have been approached about sharing between the two." Miller added, "We don't work together in any capacity."

Responses in this section address the primary research question and sub-question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Principals were concerned about lawsuits brought by charters against their schools districts and partially blamed those legal proceedings for the lack of collaboration. They also believed that mistrust and competition prevented the two types of public schools from enjoying any meaningful sharing of ideas that would benefit students.

Participants' responses in this section also address sub-question three: "how have practices of traditional public school principals been influenced by charter schools?" Initially, some principals had openly collaborated with charter schools, hoping to maintain positive relationships because they often shared students and facilities. However, participants had learned to distance themselves from charters due to competition over funding and general skepticism over charter leaders' trustworthiness.

Lack of innovation. *I find frustration when things are set up to be there for innovative reasons and I don't see a lot of innovation. – Tate*

Although charter school proponents originally promised that innovative strategies would be shared with traditional public schools, participants stated charters had never shared suggestions about curriculum or instruction. Principals commented that charters in their districts had not provided them with new strategies that would help educate their students. Participants did not believe that charters in their districts were implementing anything new in terms of curriculum, strategies or resources.

Some participants believed that charters in their districts intentionally mimicked what the traditional public school offered in an attempt to recruit students. Clemmons stated, "Everything they're doing there is pretty much what we do here. And they've done that on purpose. The headmaster's told me that." In general, principals had not witnessed any innovative strategies coming out of charters. Matthews explained:

> I think what aggravates me about charters is that the whole model was set up to try to pull the strings, remove the red tape and allow them to do some things innovative and out of the box, to see how it worked, and let the public schools know how it worked. That message got lost somewhere.

He and others expressed they would be open to new strategies that would benefit their students, but that charters had seemingly not discovered any. Allen said, "Maybe there's something out there that I don't know about, but I have not seen anything where charter schools have achieved successes doing certain things and they have shared." Miller also stated that she had not heard of any innovations from local charters. She commented, "I can't say anything positive or give you one strength about the charter school down the street from me. I can't tell you anything positive about the charter school across town."

Although participants acknowledged that collaboration involved more than one party, they believed that the majority of the burden for sharing sat with charters due to the original purpose of charters as innovation labs. Matthews commented:

> It's like, ok, do some things, but bring it back…that's the missing part…If it's going to work and that model works, what is it that they are doing? Let me know, because I would love to do it here. If we kept that idea, it would be fine. That's kind of the missing piece, right there.

Allen agreed by stating:

> They have not proven themselves as far as…they're only proving themselves because there are members of our elected officials who have it in their minds that public schools are bad. It seems to me that if your purpose is a lab, then that falls on the lab's responsibility to share their successes and their data. That's the way it would be in any other scientific discipline.

Responses from this section address sub-question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Principals had not witnessed any new strategies coming out of charter schools. They expressed frustration that charters were formed with the idea they would be innovation labs, yet participants had not benefitted from any innovations. Principals believed that it was largely the responsibility of charters to share strategies with traditional public schools; however, traditional public school leaders had not been contacted by charter schools about any new educational techniques. With only a few exceptions, those interviewed had also not contacted charter leaders to discuss innovative strategies.

Unfair Advantages

All participants but one commented on unfair advantages of charter schools over traditional public schools. This theme emerged from 86 coded responses. Principals spoke frequently about the unfair loss of funding to charters, claiming that charters do not provide many of the services they are required to provide, like transportation, meals and special education. They were also concerned about funding not being returned to traditional public schools when students initially enroll in charters, only to withdraw and return to traditional public schools during the school year. Additionally, participants complained that charters have an unfair advantage with it comes to requirements for accountability and teacher certification. Table 4 illustrates two sub-clusters of this theme, the number of coded responses for each sub-cluster, and the number of participants involved in the responses.

Table 4

Sub-clusters for Unfair Advantages

Sub-cluster	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in the Responses
Funding	45	11
Requirements	41	11

Funding. *They are not held to the same standards as public schools yet get the same funding source. For me, that is a prescription for disaster. - Flay*

Most of the participants commented on disparities between charter schools and traditional public schools in terms of funding from the state. North Carolina provides

funding to schools for each child enrolled. The funding is calculated based on the average daily attendance for the first ten days of school. Principals were concerned about the loss of students and how that loss equated to diminished funds and positions. They also described their frustrations that when students re-enroll in their schools the money does not follow them from charters. Some of the participants cited lawsuits in which charters in their districts had sought additional funding from their schools. Finally, participants complained that charter schools do not enroll as many special education and low-income students, and therefore do not need as much funding per student as do traditional public schools.

Several principals voiced concerns about losing teaching positions due to students leaving for charter schools. North Carolina provides funding to pay teachers based on the projected number of students in each school. Before the start of a new school year, principals were fearful that they would not be able to hire for open positions due to the number of students who would be enrolling in nearby charters. Matthews stated:

> I should be able to hire three teachers. Now, with losing that many students, I doubt we are going to be able to hire three more teachers back. I think we are probably going to lose a teacher because of that.

As part of their job duties, principals are required to hire teachers and have them in place before the start of the school year. Many who were interviewed explained the impact of losing teaching positions, fearful that their class sizes would grow and that they could potentially be forced to non-renew good teachers. Johnson added, “They’ll be taking about 40 to 50 of my incoming sixth graders. So that’s a hit. That’s a hit on my school because we will lose a teacher, maybe even two teachers that I will lose eventually.”

Although principals recognized they would have fewer students and therefore needed fewer teachers, they were unsettled about the possibility of students coming back from charters, because the principals would not be able to hire additional staff after the first ten days of school. “You know,” said Matthews, “I’ve got fourth and fifth grade class sizes with 27 to 30 kids in a class, so we can’t afford to have kids leave and then come back.”

Some principals had already experienced students re-enrolling from charters and complained that no funding followed the student back to their schools. One principal relayed a story about parents who were trying to enroll their students in her school from a charter before the tenth day of school. Smith stated, “Their children were here and we had a hard time getting the records when they came here and enrolled their children because I’m sure they wanted to make that tenth day.” Several principals accused charters of bumping up their first 10 days of enrollment so they could earn more money from the state. Johnson said:

> I always hear the rumor that they start a charter school, they get your money, and they head out of town. What’s also sad about that is a child goes down there and they will keep them for the 10 days or so to keep the headcount money. You can leave now and they get the money!

About two months after the interviews, one participant contacted me to share that the charter in her district had suddenly closed down and dozens of students had returned. Because this occurred after the first 10 days of school, she received no funding from the state or reimbursement from the charter for the returning students. She wondered what happened to the state’s funding the charter received. She was forced to overload classes.

Not only were principals concerned about the loss of funding's effect on teaching positions; they also were mindful of the fact they would have less funding for materials and programs. King stated, "As you know, that's a lot of money. If we're losing a hundred kids, if that's what they got, that's a lot of money we're losing." Principals have the primary responsibility of deciding how to distribute funding for instructional needs throughout their building. Participants expressed frustration over an already tight budget from the state. Barnes said, "And, of course, budget, um, the budget that we are constantly under the gun with, as far as having to do without, drives a lot of what you can and can't do." Barnes and others suggested that legislators should rethink how they distribute funds to schools. He said:

> North Carolina's funding of public education…I think government should look differently at. I think if we are going to lose students to a charter school, it's unlimited. You know, we should get some funding back if those students come back.

Principals talked about proposed legislation that would allow charters to get a portion of other school funds not simply tied to teaching positions and materials for instruction. For example, under the proposed North Carolina House Bill 273 (2013), charters would receive proportions of funding for programs like ROTC and pre-school, even if they did not offer such programs. As seen in Appendix D, charter schools would also be entitled to a percentage of grant money and dollars from fundraisers earned at the original traditional public schools of charter students. Flay stated, "People want to choose what schools they go to. They want to have complete input into it, but they want to do it with other people's resources, and I have a real problem with that." Participants disagreed

with the proposed legislation, believing that if their traditional public schools got grant money, those funds should stay with their schools. Matthews said:

> We wrote the grant and we foot the bill to get people to help us write the grant. We paid lots of money to get outside people to review our grant. We would hate to put all that work into it and then something like that could allow the charter schools to take some of that money. That, to me, that part is just not fair.

Miller added, "Charter feels as though they are entitled to any monies that the school system obtains through grants or whatever. That's the only thing we've had an issue with."

Data from this section address the primary research question and sub-question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Participants were concerned about losing funding for charters because less funding could affect their staff-to-student ratio and the amount of money they would have to spend on materials and programming. In general, principals who had lost students to charter schools worried about students coming back after the first 10 days of school, when they would not be able to hire more staff to compensate for the increased enrollment. Participants were also concerned that they could potentially lose funding from grants and other sources if charters were allowed to reap all types of funding from traditional public schools for students who enrolled in charters.

Requirements. *So I have real personal issues with the fairness issue. I feel, personally, that if they're going to take part of our money then everything needs to be fair and equitable like it is for me. - Watts*

All but two of the participants commented on the difference in teacher certification, accountability and enrollment requirements of charter schools. When speaking of their frustrations over funding, many principals led the conversation to issues of fairness. Flay said:

> It's billed to help public education, but you're taking resources away; you're filtering it to a place where the state has less control and you're depriving your schools of money they need to sustain and help grow. So I think our state's going the wrong way. It's really…it's heartbreaking, actually.

Participants cited different requirements for teacher certification and their belief that charters did not wholly participate in the state's testing program. In addition, principals generally felt as if charters benefitted from public school funding, yet did not serve all levels of students as traditional public schools do.

Several participants mentioned that charter schools, as opposed to traditional public schools, have flexibility in terms of teacher certification. Only 50% of charter teachers are required to have teacher certification, yet traditional public schools are expected to only hire teachers who are certified in the subject they teach (NCSB337, 2013). Principals were concerned that charter students were not afforded the best education due to the lack of certified teachers. Smith stated:

> It worries me that in these schools they don't have to have certified teachers for all positions. And again, the teachers are the ones who are going to make a difference to the child. One bad teacher, you might survive it. Two bad teachers or three, the child's not going to survive it.

Principals explained that parents did not seem to be aware of the difference in teacher certification requirements for charters. Barnes commented, "I do know there is not a requirement for those schools to have 100% highly qualified staff, and I think the general public does not know that." Flay added, "When parents go to charter schools they still expect that high level of service and they don't always get it, especially when the state doesn't require the same criteria."

Participants' discussions about teacher preparation led to comments about the state's expectations in terms of curriculum and instruction. Many principals complained that students who return from charters were not academically prepared to perform well in their traditional public schools. Thurman explained:

> Typically students come back from charter schools to public schools behind their age-appropriate peers. Our experience has been that very few students come back at or above grade level from the charter school experience. Um, whether that's because of a different set of standards, different quality of instruction, maybe even the nature of the beast itself…a lot of parents are looking for quick, easy fixes to why their children are struggling academically, and so they go to private school or they go to charter school."

Others have echoed this concern. Beam said, "I found those students to be lagging behind where we were and we had to teach to standards and test to standards." Participants believed that charters were not following state curriculum standards. Miller added, "They're doing things that are not legal. They're not following state policy. Children aren't prepared and it's just so frustrating. So frustrating." Some principals accused

charters of allowing students to skip grade levels due to parent requests, even if they felt the children were not ready. Barnes said:

> For example, if a parent wants a child to be grade-advanced in first grade, and there's a process we have for that, the charter school, it doesn't sound like is following a process. They're just taking what the parent is saying and putting them into the grade they want.

Watts also stated that parents had requested grade advancements at her school, but she was concerned that the students would miss out on mastering vital standards. "Because of the new curriculums we don't do that," she said. "You have gaps. It doesn't matter how brilliant the child is; the child still has to learn geometry one step at a time." Both principals commented that those parents who had requested advanced grade placements at their schools and were denied, left for charters.

Garnering the most conversation about the differences in requirements was the topic of state testing. Some principals believed that charters did not have to offer the same tests as traditional public schools. Johnson said:

> I think that if charter schools are going to be given the money they are getting, they need to follow the same guidelines. They should get the same testing. All that. It's not right to sugarcoat something. It should be equal. We all talk about equality…(laughs).

Watts stated:

> My understanding is they don't have to use the same tests. I think they have a choice of the tests. But in the past the kids would come to us and not have to have the same tests. They would just have to give an assessment.

According to the North Carolina State Board of Education, charter schools in North Carolina are required to give the same tests as traditional public schools in the state (North Carolina Board of Education Policy Manual. GCS-C-021, 2013). Most principals recognized this, but still viewed testing as unfair. They commented that charters' results appeared to be better because of their selectivity in the enrollment process. Principals claimed that charters are able to select their students and that they often only enroll those students who will perform best on tests. Watts said:

> But in my mind I don't see them as part of it [accountability program] because it's easy for them to make no child left behind because they don't have sub-groups; they have one. Or their sub-groups are limited. They can create a waiting list and they can pick and choose who they want to come. And then, if they don't like them they can send them to me, which is what happens. I get the ones they don't want.

Thurman added:

> So, anyway, it's just hard to compare their test scores to our test scores. Compare apples and apples or compare oranges and oranges, but don't compare one to the other because it's simply not a realistic view of the world.

Generally, principals believed that charters are held to different standards when it comes to accountability. They spoke of fewer restrictions in charters and the ability of charter leaders to have more flexibility in terms of whom they hired and how they spent their funding. Participants also raised concerns that with flexibility, charters are able to paint a better picture of their outcomes. Clemmons said:

> But I believe in the charter school concept. I just believe that there's not enough oversight in the process. And if you leave me alone to do what I want to do, I'm going to make it look really good.

Others did not begrudge the freedoms that charters enjoy; they just wanted the same benefits. Matthews said:

> I guess my fear is that the competition is not on a level playing field, that the whole model that makes charter schools pretty exciting…they can cut away a lot of the red tape that we are often frustrated with.

Thurman suggested:

> Actually what they should be looking at is a way to make public education or public schools streamlined, and to avoid some of the crazy things that we have to do in terms of the bureaucracy that we're faced with. Naturally, anybody who can eliminate some of those levels of bureaucracy can have an easier way to do things; teachers can focus.

The majority of principals interviewed commented on what they viewed as inequalities in terms of funding and requirements at charter schools compared to their traditional public schools. Overall, participants desired more flexibility at their schools, but were concerned with what they believed were different standards between the two types of public schools.

Responses from this section address the primary research question and sub-question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Principals were concerned that charter schools were not required to hire certified staff and the potential negative impact on student learning. They also viewed the

comparison of test results from charters and traditional public schools as unfair due to what they believed to be selective enrollment at charters. Some principals were concerned that charter students may not be required to take the same tests as traditional public school students.

Data from this section also address sub-question two: "what do traditional public school principals consider strengths of charter schools?" Several participants commented on the flexibility charter schools have in terms of hiring teachers and enrolling students. They believed their schools would enjoy more success if they, too, had less bureaucracy. Principals desired a more hands-off approach from the state.

Homogeneous Population and Segregation

A fourth theme emerging from the data centered on concerns over segregation. All 13 principals discussed their concerns about charter schools recruiting or only accepting students who historically perform well on standardized testing. With 69 coded responses, principals conveyed their beliefs that charters contained homogeneous student populations and were contributing to the segregation of society. Participants claimed that charter schools in their districts discouraged enrollment of students who lived in poverty or who were not White. They also stated that charters enroll the most academically gifted students and turn away students who require special education. Finally, a few principals gave examples of charter schools withdrawing students with disciplinary records and sending them back to traditional public schools. Table 5 shows the sub-clusters for this theme, the number of coded responses and the number of participants involved in each sub-cluster.

Table 5

Sub-clusters for Homogeneous Population and Segregation

Sub-cluster	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in the Responses
Socio-economic Status	23	9
Ethnicity	11	6
Special Education	14	8
Academically Gifted	15	5
Behavior Problems	6	3

Socio-economic status. *For me, I hope it doesn't become a segregated type thing and we fall back into the seventies and earlier. Not in race, but in financial. Those who have can go and those who have not get to go to public school. – King*

With the highest number of coded responses and participants, the sub-cluster of socio-economic status dominated the theme of homogeneous population and segregation. Participants claimed that charter schools discriminate against the poor in their communities because they typically do not provide transportation or lunch, and they often require parents to volunteer at the schools. They also spoke of poverty's negative influence on academic achievement and claimed that charters attempt to avoid those students who could harm their test scores.

Nine of the 13 participants expressed concerns that charter schools are causing public schools in North Carolina to be segregated in terms of socio-economic status. Principals pointed out that charters do not have to provide transportation to and from their

schools and, therefore, eliminate the poorest students whose parents could not drive them to school. Thurman said:

> While they say they don't discriminate, their very presence discriminates because they don't provide transportation. So, we have only students who can afford…their parents who have a vehicle or who have time to take them or have the time with their jobs to be able to take the kids to and from school.

Others pointed out that charter schools claim to be in existence to serve the underprivileged, yet policies such as not providing transportation contradict that. Principals stated that typically poorer parents are simply trying to survive and provide the basics for their children. Flay commented:

> Most people who are poor aren't going to have the time. They're going to be so busy – was it Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – on that bottom level that they're not going to go out and do what they need to in order to get into a charter school. So, it's kind of counterintuitive, in my opinion.

Principals explained that working class parents often cannot drive their children to school, either because they do not have vehicles or they cannot afford to miss work to drive the students to school. Clemmons stated, "They have to leave for work at seven in the morning and there's no way to get there." Participants also commented that transportation can be especially difficult in rural areas where parents have to travel farther to get their children to school, and they claimed that charter boards choose to build in more affluent communities in order to recruit from those families. Matthews said, "That wouldn't happen in a poor area of the county because those parents, they couldn't provide that. So, again, that kind of weeds out certain people."

Participants stated that in addition to not providing transportation, charter schools often do not provide lunch for students and, therefore, discourage poor families from enrolling their children. Smith commented, "They also don't have a lunch program. So they have to pack the lunch for the child to take to school. There are some things that deter those schools being diverse schools, I think." The federal government provides public schools with funding to pay for the lunches of students living in poverty. The amount schools receive depends on the percentage of students enrolled who meet poverty-level requirements. Participants claimed that because many charter schools do not provide transportation, they do not enroll enough poverty level students in order to meet enrollment requirements to receive federal funding for a lunch program. Some principals stated that charter schools avoid negative publicity by claiming that they enroll as many students in poverty as do traditional public schools in their districts. Clemmons said:

> I know that they will tell you, um, thirty-five percent of their kids are free or reduced lunch. I don't know how they know that because they don't offer a food service program, but for some reason they know that thirty-five percent of the kids are on free or reduced lunch. They'll tell you the demographics mirror the district they serve, but it doesn't.

Poor families who may be able to provide transportation or carpool with other students, according to principals, are caught in the second requirement of providing meals for their children.

Another way principals claimed that charter schools discourage poor families from enrolling is by requiring parents to volunteer at their schools. According to

participants, working class and poorer parents are too busy with their jobs or are not able to get transportation to the charters in order to volunteer. Watts said, "They don't have the number of single mothers that I have that are working three jobs to support their children and who can't volunteer. And I literally have parents who work three jobs here." Allen added that most of the families who leave her school for charters are financially able to spend time at schools. She stated, "The parents are going to have a better opportunity to be more involved. It could be a lousy school, but they could perceive it as very good because of the 'feel-good' aspect of having all those supportive parents."

Faced with the many requirements of charters and with the realization that they do not provide transportation or lunch, many poor students come back to their traditional public schools, according to participants. Smith said, "The one thing that we do find that happens a lot is some of our lower socio-economic students tend to come back to us, shortly after the start of school or into the school year." King added, "The ones who're staying, there's a definite economic difference." Principals claimed that poor families were not able to sustain the commitments it took to keep their children at charter schools.

In spite of complaining about students returning to their schools from charters, participants explained that it is the mission of public schools to serve all students, regardless of financial status. Watts stated:

> You understand that you have some students who drain your resources. And so, I serve everyone. I do that willingly. I compare my school to the Statue of Liberty. Bring your poor, tired, hungered. I have the poor, I have the tired and I have the hungry children. Every day I have them…Those schools, the majority of the

> children they serve, are two-parent families who are career professionals and that's why they can drive across the counties to transport their children.

Thurman claimed that it was public schools that actually provided him the opportunity to escape poverty:

> It was my education in public school that allowed me to move from an impoverished life to a middle class life. That's what American public school has done for this country...That's why we are the great country we are.

Many participants expressed concerns that parents flock to charter schools because they want an educational site free of students who have different financial backgrounds. One principal, Johnson, even called this concept "Never land," claiming that upper and middle class parents do not want their children to live in a diverse society. Flay agreed:

> What I find about the people who are taking advantage of these opportunities, they all tend to be upper class. Kids already know a majority of what they need, but they're missing out on socialization. You see them withdrawing to their own social groups and cliques. I'm really afraid of that. But people have these rights…But, I don't know if that's good, to keep dividing ourselves like that.

Participants stated that parents often want an elite, private school without paying for it and see charters as the answer. Watts commented:

> So a lot of the parents who want a private school experience for their children and they don't want to pay tuition and this is the only one that's near so the charter school affords that for them. It's like a private school, and so you survey the

> parent population that goes into our charter schools, a lot of them are more upper-middle class homes.

During the discussion about charters schools' exclusion of low-income families, principals acknowledged poverty's negative influence on academic achievement. Thurman stated, "We know that poverty presents a whole host of issues." Participants expressed concerns that charters' positive testing results merely reflect their lack of diversity and their exclusion of students in poverty. Watts said:

> They can select and choose. So, of course their success rate is going to be different. If you look at their percentage of two-parent homes, if you look at their percentage of how many parents have a high school education…I still have parents who are illiterate and an ESL population. The children don't speak English or the parents haven't finished sixth grade in another country.

Regardless of their frustration with charters, many participants firmly believed that public schools should serve students from all backgrounds, including the poorest.

Responses from this section address the primary research question and sub question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Principals were concerned that charter schools in their districts seemed to be making it difficult for poor students to enroll or to remain. They highlighted the fact that charters are not required to provide transportation or lunch, and that the lack of these services discriminate against families living in poverty. Participants believed that charters purposefully discouraged poor students from enrolling in order to keep test results high.

Ethnicity. *So we are unraveling what we have worked so hard for, what people 40 years ago worked so hard for, we are just unraveling all of that. – Matthews*

Six of the participants spoke specifically about segregation in terms of ethnicity and race, their comments mirroring concerns principals had about excluding students in poverty. In addition, principals who did speak about racial issues believed that it was the duty of the public schools to help desegregate society. They perceived the government as allowing segregation in terms of race to reoccur and they expressed concerns that White families were attempting to escape diversity by enrolling in charter schools.

Several principals believed charter schools in their districts were becoming less diverse in terms of ethnicity, mainly due to White parents seeking schools with populations like their own children. Participants explained that some parents seem to be growing less tolerate of differences and do not want their children exposed to other cultures. Tate stated:

> The feeling in the area was because of the increase in minorities that the charter school was built and it gave an optimum place for there to be some White flight from the schools. I think now that they are opening the high school, I think that feeling is there again and it's just providing a place for the White kids to go.

Other principals' comments supported Tate's. Clemmons said, "The students and the families that are leaving here and going to a charter school…especially now that they know it's going to be a K-12 school…are parents that are…um, it's race influenced. Here it's an unspoken race issue." Interestingly, even principals in largely homogeneous traditional public schools were concerned about only White families enrolling in charters. Matthews, whose school enrolls 18% non-White students, said:

> It's my opinion that we are re-segregating schools. What we did back in the 60s and 70s, something that we worked hard to make sure that schools are integrated

> and diverse, and now we are kind of allowing that to happen. I don't think that society makes those choices on their own to – I don't know what the word is – to integrate as a society. I think we do that...we kind of gravitate where we are comfortable and so it takes government action to desegregate schools. I think we are kind of going back to that.

Principals believed that part of the public schools' mission was to help desegregate society and that charters were threatening this goal. Flay proclaimed:

> I don't know how to communicate the message to people that public school has that mission of teaching democracy. It's what I call a great equalizer. If we don't start coming together as Americans we're going to lose what we've built. I can see it happening pretty quickly.

Matthews and others were concerned that government officials have essentially been legislating segregation through allowing charters to maintain relaxed enrollment policies and procedures. Johnson, whose school is 13% non-White, stated, "I also look at charter schools and is segregation going to come into play? Because if they are getting to chose who they want, what's going to happen there? I could easily see that." Clemmons maintained that charters in his district make it difficult for Hispanic children to enroll there. He said, "It's worse for them because if their parents do want a choice, there are way more barriers."

Some principals viewed the creation of charter schools as a way for parents to segregate their children at a time when private schools are not a financial option. Watts remembered that private schools sprang up in the era of desegregation, giving wealthier White families another place to educate their children. "Now, because of the economy,"

she said, “a lot of the long-time church-sponsored schools are closing because the people just couldn’t pay the tuition. Well, some of those people are creating charter schools because of the way the laws are.” Others commented that charter schools have taken advantage of location in order to enroll wealthier, White students. Matthews stated, “The charter schools are opening in communities with that type of clientele. I don’t see a charter school opening up where there’s a high free/reduced population and a large Hispanic population.”

Responses from this section address the primary research question and sub-question one: “what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?” Participants expressed concerns that the creation of charter schools has increased segregation in North Carolina’s schools. They claimed that White families have enrolled their children in charters in order to avoid racial diversity at traditional public schools. Principals were dismayed that government action seemed to be supporting segregation.

Special education. *We want them to get those services they need and deserve, but they do use our resources, a lot of our resources. These charter schools kind of get a bye on that. They don’t provide those services. - Thurman*

Eight of 13 participants provided responses on the sub-cluster of special education. Principals commented that charter schools in their districts do not always accept Exceptional Children (EC) because they either do not have the personnel to provide services or they are concerned about test scores. Participants complained that EC students’ Individual Education Plans (IEP) were not well written at charters and that charters were not providing adequate services for EC students. Additionally, traditional

public school principals stated that EC students often return to their schools due to lack of services at charters.

Several participants accused charters of not accepting EC students at their schools. They claimed that parents of EC students were discouraged from enrolling at charters. Clemmons explained that none of his EC students have ever been accepted at the charter in his district.

He said, "They're told, 'We can't accept your child.' And that just blows my mind." He claimed that the charter in his district had a habit of requesting test scores before enrolling students. "Well, that's the way the charter school does it," stated Clemmons, "They have to look at all your records before they'll accept you." Clemmons described a particular situation where a parent told him the charter school denied acceptance of her child because he had an IEP. She told Clemmons that she was considering denying services for her child so he would be accepted. The principal discouraged her from this and she eventually decided to keep her child at the traditional public school, which followed the student's IEP. Clemmons said:

> The only thing she told us was that with this EC he cannot get in over there. I told her, 'well then that right there tells you it's not the choice for your child.'…You've got parents who are making these choices for ungodly reasons to hurt the child.

Clemmons, like others, questioned how charters are able to exclude special education students, especially when they are considered public schools and receive federal funding. Thurman stated that charters use the excuse that they do not have enough personnel to

accommodate students with special needs; however, he claimed that traditional public schools must provide special education for any child with an IEP. He said:

> We've got a totally deaf kid. Last year, he had a one-on-one. We had to make that work for that kid. Special transportation, you know, we don't have those options, and those people that those kids use…we're happy to provide those services.

Beam echoed this sentiment. She said, "If charter schools are saying, 'we don't have enough kids to warrant hiring an EC teacher,' if a public school has one EC child, we have to make it work." In general, participants believed charters were excluding special education students in order to achieve higher test scores. Thurman claimed:

> They often also don't provide special education in charter schools. So it would be easy to report that your test scores are high if you don't have kids who are from poverty and you don't have kids who are exceptional, and kids who are ESL (English as a Second Language). They don't offer ESL services, so, of course, their test scores are going to be higher if you don't have any of those populations who are historically low in North Carolina and historically low in the United States.

Others explained that charters do not always offer all services that students need and that they often rely on traditional public schools to provide those services, like transportation and speech. Watts claimed, "We've even provided speech services for children who go to charters and who are home schooled because they don't offer the services." Many questioned why charters were not required to provide all EC services, when traditional public schools must; however, one principal seemed to understand why charters are not always able to provide all services. Smith said:

> You know, so I could see them having a class of SLDs (specific learning disability), SEDs (serious emotional disability), you know, autistic children all sitting in one classroom and that would be difficult to manage if you've got nine or ten in the class.

Smith acknowledged that the federal government provides charters funding to hire EC teachers, but explained that the funding would not necessarily allow charters to hire more than one teacher, based on the overall low number of EC students enrolled. Like traditional public schools, she said, charters would have to provide services for students with various disabilities using limited personnel, but traditional public schools within the same district have the luxury of combining services. "If we don't have the resources here, we may have them at another public school." Smith stated, "They have to serve all of them within their school."

Principals also provided their experiences with students returning to traditional public schools without properly written IEPs. They claimed that charter schools in their districts do not provide adequate services for EC students and that parents often bring their special education students back. Barnes stated:

> I'm estimating about 10-15 will probably come back, because I think, especially the one or two high needs students, I think they're going to get there and they're not going to see a huge difference in services or they're not going to have their needs met. I really do. It's just a matter of time.

Participants described charters as not providing services appropriate to meet students' needs and faulted charters for not updating legal documents. Miller explained that once

when a student enrolled at her school from a charter, the charter would not release the student's IEP. She said:

> We knew he was EC because his parents told us. We didn't know how to serve him. So we went about three or four weeks without his IEP. When my compliance specialist ….tried to get the child's EC records, she was told that we could not get his records until his parents signed a release. Well, I'm going to tell you the truth. All H-E-L-L flew into me, because that's not right. You can't hold that record hostage.

Miller added that when they do receive IEPs from charter schools, often they are not in compliance. She stated, "IEPs are a mess. The IEPs are always written with goals and strategies after the fact. We can prove it. We've known that that couldn't have happened; the child was here." King concurred with Miller, stating, "It was kind of disappointing because the IEPs were not well-written, and not giving those kids what we could give them." Several principals described situations when returning EC students' IEPs were not up-to-date or were non-existent. King added:

> If there was a weakness, I'd say that was definitely one that I've had association with. When those kids transfer in here who have special needs, the IEPs are usually not up to what I am accustomed to. So that's always been a real frustration.

Responses from this section address the primary research question and sub-question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Participants described situations in which EC students were not accepted at charter schools or were not properly served in charters. Principals also explained that

IEPs were not complete and that special education services were not always provided at charters. They questioned how charters could be considered public schools if they often denied services for EC students.

Academically gifted. *It's weird. We're under the guise of giving the poor an opportunity, but we're really just segregating that top cream right off and right out to somewhere else. - Flay*

Five participants specifically mentioned academically gifted students, their comments echoing other statements about subgroups. Principals believed charter schools were only picking the most successful students to enroll at their schools and they claimed that charters selected and recruited high-achieving students in order to boost their test scores. They stated that charters used this positive, yet tainted, publicity to promote their schools, whereas traditional public schools must educate and acknowledge test results of all types of students.

Several principals described charter schools in their districts as enrolling only those students who excelled academically. Those that worked close to universities stated that charters had been able to draw students of educated parents. Allen said, "The other reason why it would be so successful is because they would be getting all of the best-performing kids – not the best kids – but the best-performing kids." She added that none of her high needs, low-performing students had enrolled in the charter school. "I do not know of a single parent who has gone up there who's not a University parent," she said. "That's what it is. That's why I say they've already had all that parent support who are really focused on education." Other principals claimed that charters specifically targeted academically gifted students by requiring parents to send test scores with their students'

applications. Clemmons stated that charters would often request student transcripts before enrolling students, but he would not allow that information to be released. He believed the charters were using that information to only enroll top-performing students. Clemmons said:

> Well, that made the charter school mad. But what they did to circumvent that, they told the parents, 'Thank you for applying to our school, but we will need you to go to your school and, if you don't have it, get your test scores and/or report card.' Then, parents would come here and say, 'I need test scores for my child.'

Clemmons explained that when parents requested test scores, he obviously had to release them, but has grown frustrated that charters have been allowed to select only the most successful students for enrollment. He added that he does not typically lose students who are in kindergarten through second grade, because they have not been tested yet. He said, "It's when they get to third grade and that EOG that I see parents making different choices…It's really the cherry picking of students that's real bad once you have an EOG score tied to the student."

Other participants confirmed beliefs that charters were intentionally enrolling only students who were high performing. Flay stated:

> Most children who go there are on the upper end. So they're the type of kid that no matter where you plant them they're going to bloom. That's the kids I see going to charter schools. The ones who need the most help are staying in public schools and are getting the help they need. This is just my experience.

Principals added that although many charters claimed to hold lotteries for student enrollment, most required applications and seemed to be using academic information about students to weed out those who do not perform well. Smith said:

> And so, I think charter schools, and they have the perfect right to do it, are probably not going to be lottery as much as they're going to be filtering applications. And I know that even some of the charter schools in ---- and some of those areas, they do filter applications, like, 'you've missed so many days and that might affect your test scores so, we're sorry, you don't meet our standards anymore.'

Principals acknowledged that it would be tempting to only enroll those students who would benefit them in terms of high test scores, but rejected the notion of disregarding all levels of students. Allen explained:

> The good thing about it is you don't have those students who take more time, but would you really want to have a school where you didn't have those students who take more time? Those are the students who make it worth doing. Kids who are going to grow on their own you don't have to worry about.

Clemmons recalled a conversation he had with the principal of a new charter school. He said:

> I've flat out told him, you know, is don't let it become a school for 'the chosen'. He said he wasn't going to do that, but he's done it. But I get it. I understand it. It's got to look good. Let's keep people coming.

Participants believed that charter schools' enrollment practices reflected their desire to compete for funding. If charters are able to attract families, they can continue to grow.

Principals said charter schools recognized that they needed to maintain solid academic performances to recruit additional students. However, they reiterated that traditional public schools must enroll all students who live in their districts. Beam stated, "Private schools and charter schools can be selective. We take everybody. So whatever the scores are or the outcome of the school's results, it is everybody."

Responses from this section address the primary research question and sub-question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Participants believed that charters were actively recruiting only the top performing students in order to boost their public image. Principals stated that often charters sought avenues to screen students before enrollment, even though the charter schools claimed to hold lotteries for admittance. Finally, participants acknowledged that low-performing students negatively impacted their test results; however, they believed that public schools should educate all levels of students.

Behavior problems. *They have behavior problems because they don't fit into the standard at that school. They have a difficult time. – Smith*

Three participants spoke about students with discipline problems being excluded from charter schools, their responses adding to the discussion about segregation. Principals complained that charter schools, even though they are considered public schools, are allowed to dismissed students who misbehave. They pointed out that traditional public schools are then expected to enroll those students who have been released from charters. Participants believed that charters pushed parents to withdraw students with behavior problems so that the schools would average higher test scores and lower disciplinary referrals.

One principal in particular saw a high return rate for students who encountered disciplinary action at charters. Miller stated:

> The second thing that has happened that caused a lot of parents to leave the charter school to come here is suspensions. They are being told that they won't suspend them or suspend them for long-term if they withdraw them and take them to a public school. And when parents come here and tell me that, my first statement is 'They *are* a public school.' They cannot do that.

Yet, Miller explained that charter schools in her district are doing just that on a regular basis. She said, "It happens consistently down here. Consistently." Smith commented that she has seen the same things happen with her returning students. She added, "If a child has behavior problems, usually they don't have to keep them at their school. They can at any time terminate that and the parents bring them back to us." Principals stated that it was difficult to enroll these returning students, because those students typically put a strain on their limited resources and test scores. Thurman said:

> I mean, the worst behavior problems…we have kids who come straight out of psychiatric hospitals and when children behave improperly, they expel them from their schools. They can get rid of a kid. We don't have a lot of places for our kids to go, other than a few days of suspension or whatever. That kid is coming back to me in a day or two and I have to deal with him. We limp through a year.

Principals considered charter schools' treatment of students with behavior issues a double standard. They stated that traditional public schools must educate all students, regardless of needs, but charters are allowed to either expel students or blackmail parents into withdrawing their children. Miller said she consistently receives students back from

charters a month or two before testing. She said those students typically are encouraged to withdraw due to poor behavior and that they negatively impact her test scores at the end of the school year.

Participants' responses in this section address the primary research question and sub-question one: "what concerns do traditional public school principals have about charter schools?" Three principals provided information about charter schools in their districts dismissing students with poor behavior. Participants were concerned that those returning students would negatively impact their test scores and drain their resources, but stated that public schools should attempt to provide an education for all students. They also believed that charter schools were using unethical practices to reduce their number of discipline problems and to improve their test results.

Chapter Conclusion

Four themes emerged from the data in this study. Principals perceived hostile attitudes from parents and legislators about traditional public schools. They reacted to this unchartered area with increased competition and marketing. In addition, principals were less likely to collaborate with charters in their districts and found little to no innovation in charters. Participants complained that charters have unfair advantages over traditional public schools in terms of funding, testing and teacher certification. Finally, principals were concerned over the homogeneous populations at charter schools and an increase in segregation.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine North Carolina traditional public school principals' experiences with and perspectives about charter schools. Participants were employed in districts that lost at least four percent of their potential students to charter schools. These principals have experienced first-hand the impact of charter schools on their traditional public schools. This chapter discusses how each research question has been addressed and includes a comparison of what principals' perceive about charters in their districts and what is actually occurring in terms of funding, testing and legislation. In addition, implications and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Research Questions

Concerns of traditional public school principals. This research question was the most frequently addressed of the three. Principals spoke at great lengths about their concerns over charter schools. They highlighted what they perceived to be inaccurate judgments of traditional public schools by parents and legislators, commenting on the lack of research that both parties complete before making drastic decisions. Principals complained that parents were always looking for something better academically or were hoping to protect their children from students of different ethnicities or socio-economic levels. Participants also pointed out the lack of support from legislators for traditional public schools, commenting on the lack of raises and funding. They believed that government leaders had a duty to build up public schools, but were instead dismantling them with negative publicity and stripping of resources.

Another concern of principals was their perception of unfair advantages of charter schools over traditional public schools. Participants complained that charters often want funding for programs and services they do not provide. In addition, many responded about the unfairness of the 10-day rule, where students who return to the traditional public schools after the first 10 days of school do not bring their funding back with them. Several principals believed that charter schools were in the business of making money instead of providing a sound education. Similarly, participants voiced concerns over what they believed to be the lack of accountability in charters. Principals pointed to the lack of teacher certification requirements and inequality in testing, particularly commenting on charters' lack of at-risk subgroups such as Black students, students living in poverty, and students with special needs. In general, participants believed that charters and traditional public schools were not on equal playing fields when it comes to funding and accountability.

A third major concern of principals focused on the issue of segregation. The majority of the participants mentioned that very few students living in poverty attended charter schools in their districts. They blamed the lack of transportation and meals for keeping poor families away. In addition, principals spoke of a renewal of "White flight" syndrome, in which White families left traditional public schools and fled to charters, where they believed their children would be getting an elite education for free. Several principals felt the government was supporting segregation through charter laws and policies. Principals believed another subgroup that was discouraged from enrolling at charters included students with IEPs. Participants spoke of the vast resources required to educate special education students and the charters' inability or unwillingness to do so.

Instead, they claimed, charters preferred academically gifted students who would raise scores. Finally, a few principals spoke of incidences when students with behavior problems were sent back to traditional public schools. Principals claimed that charters discouraged at-risk students from enrolling or from continuing as charter students because they knew test scores would plummet as a result.

Lastly, participants were concerned about the lack of innovation they saw in charter schools. Some principals felt as if it were the charters' responsibility to freely share with traditional public schools because innovation had been the main reason for the implementation of charter schools. However, most participants explained they had seen little to no innovation in charters in their districts, and, in fact, claimed that many of the charters mirrored their own programs in order to compete for their students.

Strengths of charter schools. Principals commented on the successful marketing skills of charter leaders, even going so far as to admit they have mimicked charter schools' tactics for enticing students and their families. Participants recognized that charters have employed various marketing strategies such as social media to appeal to parents. Charter schools, according to respondents, have done an excellent job of showcasing what they offer to parents.

Principals also considered flexibility as another strength of charter schools. Participants commented on charters' ability to hire personnel who were not certified in a subject, but may have vast experience in the field. They were also mindful of charter leaders' ability to spend money with less constraints and oversight. Finally, principals pointed out that charters are often more successful on standardized testing because they have very few of the subgroups that typically diminish test scores. Although, principals

claimed this was a "strength" of charters, many were quick to point out that public schools should enroll all types of students. They believed that one of the purposes of public schools was to promote democracy and citizenship, not segregation.

Practices of traditional public school principals. Participants saw marketing as a strength of charter schools and they developed their own strategies to promote their schools and districts. Principals admitted that they had to compete more for students since the influx of charter schools, and that they primarily did this through marketing techniques. Principals engaged their staffs in positive promotions and increased the schools' exposure on websites, Facebook and Twitter. Most principals claimed they had not added any new programs, but that they had merely done a better job of advertising what they offered.

Although the original intent of charters was to promote collaboration between charters and traditional public schools, most principals had been discouraged from collaboration by district leaders due to competition for students and funding. Principals pointed out that charters had sued their districts for funding, which had created tension between charter and traditional public school leaders. Principals who had once had positive relationships with charter leaders, no longer collaborated with the charter schools due to lawsuits and competition.

Implications

The purpose of this research was to examine experiences and perspectives of traditional public school principals; however, those perspectives may or may not be supported by data. It is important to clarify here whether or not participants' perspectives equate with reality. It is also important to point out what traditional public school

principals and others can learn from this research. The four themes are discussed along with an analysis of participants' concerns and actions.

Hostile attitudes. Participants complained of hostile attitudes from parents and legislators. They believed that parents were making uninformed decisions about their children's education and were choosing charter schools due to fear of their children associating with others who were different from them in terms of social class. None of the principals had any direct evidence of this claim.

Several principals gave examples of parents who were dissatisfied with their decision on disciplinary or academic matters. Participants had admitted they had not considered parents' requests to allow their children to skip grade levels. Perhaps this is an innovative practice that charter schools have implemented with some degree of success. Traditional public school principals could consider this action if requested by parents. Keeping an open-door policy and listening to parents could strengthen enrollment at traditional public schools. Instead, many of the participants seemed to be closed-minded when it came to parent requests, believing that they knew what was best for students.

Principals were quite outspoken about what they considered to be lack of support from state legislators. They cited policies and laws that seemed to favor charter schools. However, none of the participants mentioned contacting their legislators to discuss their concerns. If legislators are not familiar with the daily workings of school, they may not understand some of the negative impacts of legislation. Traditional public school principals could have a louder voice, but only if they work to inform legislators about their concerns, including evidence of the effects of legislation at their own schools.

Principals' reaction to a new world. Participants admitted that traditional public schools had never had to compete for students. With the influx of charter schools in the state, principals have found themselves needing to market their schools. Participants spoke of advertising what their schools offered, making sure parents stay informed of opportunities at their schools. They focused on positive publicity, to combat what they believed to be negativity directed at traditional public schools by charter school parents and legislators. Most principals had not changed curriculum or offerings at their schools; they had merely increased marketing. This is concerning considering that competition with charter schools could spur true school improvement. School districts seemed to be more focused on lawsuits and marketing, than on collaborating with charter schools to improve student outcomes.

Most principals had made no effort to collaborate with charter schools nor had they researched much about the charter schools in their districts. Instead, participants were hesitant to cooperate with charter schools due to lawsuits and their own defensiveness. Some participants believed that the responsibility to share innovative strategies sat squarely on the shoulders of charter school leaders, yet they had made no attempt to communicate with charter schools. They complained that charter schools had not offered any innovative strategies and had made no attempts to share with traditional public schools. However, data from principal interviews actually pointed to several innovative strategies occurring in charter schools, perhaps without traditional public school principals realizing those practices were innovative.

Although some principals believed that charter schools promised parents anything to get them to enroll their children, charter school leaders, as mentioned by several

principals, seemed to listen to and work with parent requests more readily than traditional public school principals. Including parents in decision-making could be considered an innovative practice. Likewise, participants complained that charter school teachers did not have to be certified. Again, forgoing this requirement could be considered an innovative practice. Teachers with no certification, but a great deal of experience in a particular field, could be invaluable to schools. For example, an engineer could provide real-world lessons for his science or math students. Other principals admitted that with less bureaucracy, schools and teachers could possibly provide a more relevant and rigorous education for students. School-based decision-making is yet another innovative practice in charter schools. Apparently, there are some non-traditional and innovative practices in the charter school movement, but traditional public school principals may be blinded by their own perceptions.

Likewise, it would seem that some charter school leaders have forgotten the premise of sharing innovative practices with traditional public schools. Although a few principals mentioned that charter school leaders had contacted them about curriculum or shared facilities, most participants had never heard from charter schools in their districts. Helms (2014a) wrote an article about the tension between a start-up charter and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. The charter, Entrepreneur High School, planned to open as a trade school, and met with Charlotte-Mecklenburg leaders to explain their plans. Shortly afterwards, the school system announced their plans to turn Olympic High School into a trade school. The charter's leaders accused the school system of stealing their ideas, and, therefore, their potential students (Helms, 2014a). This is ironic considering that traditional public schools are supposed to benefit from the ideas of

charter schools. Helms (2014a) wrote, “The delicate dance of competition and cooperation is also a symptom of a changing educational landscape in North Carolina. Taxpayer dollars and the education of thousands of students are riding on state lawmakers’ growing investment in charter schools.” Both charter school leaders and traditional public school leaders should collaborate and share proven strategies if their priority is truly centered on student achievement.

One purpose of charter schools in North Carolina was “to encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods” (North Carolina General Statute 115C-238.29A, 1996). According to the principals involved in this study, no innovative strategies have come out of the charters in their districts nor have charters attempted to collaborate with traditional public schools concerning teaching and learning. However, traditional public school principals may be blind to some truly innovative practices due to concerns over funding and competition for students.

Unfair advantages. Participants raised concerns about funding inequities, claiming that returning students do not bring any funding back with them. This is true; however, students leaving traditional public schools for charter schools after the first 10 days of school also do not bring funding with them to the charter schools. One exception to the 10-day rule concerns Exceptional Children (EC). If a special education student leaves a charter school within the first 60 days of school, a pro rata amount of funding goes to the traditional public school that enrolls the child (North Carolina General Statute 115C-238.29H, 2007). The same is true if an EC student leaves a traditional public school within the first 60 days of school and enrolls at a charter school. Principals who

participated in this study would like to see pro rata funding following all students, no matter how long they have been enrolled in a particular school. This funding would perhaps offset some of the cost of materials and supplies, but legislators have not indicated they will visit this issue any time soon.

Shortly after the interviews were completed, one of the participants informed me that a charter school in her district had closed down just 10 days after the opening of school and, as a result, thirty additional students enrolled at her school. Her school received no additional funding for those students. Interestingly, the charter school in question received $666,818 in state funding in July 2013 for a potential enrollment of 366 students, and that money was supposed to last through October. However, the school only had 230 students enrolled and $3,000 in its bank account at its closing. The charter school's teachers also did not receive final paychecks (Ovaska, 2013). In e-mail communication, Joel Medley, the Director of the North Carolina Office of Charter Schools, confirmed that the charter school had closed and was being audited by the state for misuse of funds (Medley, personal communication, February 17, 2014). In her article, Ovaska (2013) also pointed out that the charter school's board chair was the charter principal's wife.

Other North Carolina charter schools and their boards have been accused of nepotism and financial mismanagement. Charlotte's Student First Academy, which opened in August 2013, came under fire "amid allegations of mismanagement, nepotism and financial irregularities" (Helms, 2014c). School creator, principal and board member Phyllis Handford hired her husband and son to work at the school. Within just a few months, she and co-founder Sandra Moss were fired by the other board members after

money went missing and bills were left unpaid (Helms, 2014c). The North Carolina Charter Board now no longer approves of school founders serving as both school leaders and board members, and plans to follow up with Student First's progress (Helms, 2014c). The state has had its fair share of funding problems at charter schools. Helms (2014b) wrote, "Since North Carolina started its charter-school program in 1997, the state has revoked 11 charters, mostly for financial and business problems. Another six were not renewed, and 32 have voluntarily closed in the face of problems." Although general statutes point to equitable funding among charter schools and traditional public schools, news stories corroborate some concerns principals have over misuse of state funding by charters.

Perhaps competition for funding has taken precedence over improving student learning. With charter school lawsuits and traditional public school principals bemoaning the loss of staff and resources, the focus has turned to money, or the lack of it. Principals have found themselves competing for students in order to garner more funding. Legislators should pay attention to the lack of sharing between charter schools and traditional public schools. Because charter schools have more freedom in terms of hiring and budgeting, they could potentially create some outstanding practices that would improve student achievement. In addition, a pro rata funding policy may help to make traditional public school principals less resentful of charters, whom they see as stripping them of their limited resources. Perhaps then charter school leaders and traditional public school leaders could focus on what is most important – educating students.

Principals also believed that charter schools had unfair advantages over traditional public schools in terms of testing. One complaint of participants was that charters were able to pick and choose which tests their students took. However, according to the Annual Performance Standards under the READY Accountability Model (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2013), charter schools must give the same tests as traditional public schools. In fact, a search of the North Carolina Public Schools' website reveals testing results for all public schools, including charters. Each charter in the interviewed principals' districts participated in state testing during the 2012-13 school year. The tests measured students' competency levels with the new standards and raised expectations of what is considered proficient. Table 6 (North Carolina Reports of Disaggregated State, School System and School Performance Data for 2011-2013, 2013) compares overall test scores and demographic information from participants' traditional public schools and charters in their districts.

Some principals recognized that charter schools must take the same state testing as their traditional public school students; however, they believed that many charters were able to outperform their schools due to more favorable demographics. Participants in some districts believed that charter schools purposefully only enrolled those students who typically perform well on tests, or that the charter schools opened in areas with more "favorable" demographics. For example, Tate in district C pointed out that the two charter schools in her area enrolled significantly more White students than her school, which is largely populated with poor, Hispanic children. Information from 2012-13 state testing supports this as seen in Table 6. Tate's school enrolled just 11% White students whereas the two charters in her district enrolled 65% and 85%. Likewise, Tate's

Table 6

Enrollment and Testing Comparison

District	School	Principal	Enrollment	White %	Special Education %	ED%	Prof.	% moved to charters (by district)
A	1	Matthews	591	82	5	12	59.1	5.7
A	2	Johnson	732	87	10	17	44.4	5.7
A	3	Barnes	628	77	11	27	38.6	5.7
A	Charter 1		524	84	18	*	23.5	
A	Charter 2		103	8	25	*	6.7	
A	Charter 3		1,599	99	12	*	62.1	
B	4	Allen	625	78	17	59	28.6	6.5
B	5	Watts	493	82	14	59	29.7	6.5
B	Charter 4		196	91	11	23	50.8	
C	6	Clemmons	393	77	9	40	42.4	7.9
C	7	Tate	454	11	15	88	15.0	7.9
C	Charter 5		328	65	11	21	47.7	
C	Charter 6		504	85	17	5	63.2	
D	8	King	554	77	15	55	30.5	4.5
D	Charter 7		201	86	15	30	27.5	
E	9	Smith	503	42	14	65	22.4	5.3
E	10	Flay	606	66	10	50	29.2	5.3
E	11	Beam/Thurman	566	70	8	59	33.2	5.3
E	Charter 8		924	77	9	37	43.9	
F	12	Miller	506	1	18	97	10.0	4.6
F	Charter 9		203	2	11	93	9.6	
F	Charter 10		297	1	15	89	<5	

**Population too small to report value.*

North Carolina Reports of Disaggregated State, School System and School Performance Data for 2011-2013, 2013

economically disadvantaged (ED) students accounted for 88% of her population, whereas the charter schools' ED percentages were just 21% and five percent. Those charter schools' proficiency scores (Prof.) were significantly higher. Likewise, in district E, charters enrolled more White and fewer economically disadvantaged students. Their scores were higher, as well. There were mixed results, with some traditional public schools in the same districts reporting vastly different enrollment percentages and proficiency levels. This was mainly due to where the schools were located in their counties. Tate's school, for example, was located in an area of the county that was inhabited by a large percentage of poor, Hispanic families, whereas, Clemmons' school was located in an area dominated by middle-class, White families. In district E, the charter school enrolled a higher percentage of White students and a lower percentage of ED students than the three traditional public schools who participated in this study. Likewise, the charter school's proficiency scores were higher. Again, in district B, one can find the same results.

Other districts experienced different results. The charter schools in district A had not enrolled enough poor students to create a testing subgroup, yet two of the charter schools' scores were lower than the scores of the three participating schools. Only one charter school's proficiency score was slightly higher than Matthews' school. In district F, Miller's enrollment was similar to the charter schools in her district, as were proficiency results. In district D, King's school enrolled more ED students, yet his school's test results were higher.

Homogeneous population and segregation. Although there is no evidence that charter schools in North Carolina are exempt from certain types of tests, the results here

do seem to echo Bulkley and Fisler's (2003) study that showed pockets of segregation created by charter schools throughout the state, not necessarily in terms of ethnicity, but in terms of socio-economic status. In five of the six districts, charter schools enrolled fewer poor students than the participants' traditional public schools, yet they did not always have higher test results.

It was the belief of several participants in this study that charter schools in their districts recruited only the top students and shied away from enrolling students who may bring down test scores. Principals shared experiences where students with learning disabilities and poor behaviors were either denied enrollment or were encouraged by the charter schools to re-enroll in traditional public schools. The data in Table 6 appears not to support participants' beliefs that charter schools are not enrolling special needs students; however, some principals argued that charter schools often have a higher percentage of special education students due to counting children who only receive speech services.

Perhaps as a result of some of the complaints about charter school enrollment practices, the North Carolina State Board of Education issued guidance to charter schools about enrollment and lottery procedures (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014). The Office of Charter Schools Director Joel Medley released a 14-page memo explaining how charter schools are to conduct enrollment in their schools. The Board requires charter schools to have at least 30 days of open enrollment and they must highly publicize those dates. In addition, charter applications may not include questions pertaining to "a student's Individualized Education Plan, race, gender, Grade Point Average, religion, or other nonessential information" (North Carolina Department

of Public Instruction, 2014). The memo addressed charter schools' obligations in regard to racially and ethnically balanced enrollments. Medley wrote:

> G.S.115C-238.29F9g)(5) clearly states that charter schools are subject to any court-ordered desegregation plan for the local school administrative unit in which they are located. Further, the law stipulates charter schools shall, within one year after the school opening, "make efforts for the population of the school to reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the charter school is located." (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014, p. 7)

Although this General Statute seems to make it clear to charters that they must be as racially balanced as the local school system, the wording in the second half of the above statement gives charter schools some leeway. If a charter school's targeted population is Academically Gifted (AG) students, its demographics need only reflect the demographics of AG students in the district. There is also no mention in the General Statute about reflecting the economically disadvantaged (ED) population in the district. This is troublesome considering that all of the charter schools in the participating districts enrolled a lower percentage of ED students than the respondents' schools.

Economically disadvantaged students have historically performed poorly on state and national tests. Legislators should continue to update charter school enrollment policies so that charter schools are actually enrolling students who are considered at-risk. According to the original intent of North Carolina charter

schools, these new schools were developed "to increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as at risk of academic failure or academically gifted" (North Carolina General Statute 115C-238.29A, 1996). The statute does mention AG students, but it also highlights those students who are historically less successful in school, namely poor and minority students.

Suggested Research

This study sought to analyze North Carolina traditional public school principals' perspectives about and experiences with charter schools. The participants worked in counties from the mountains to the coast; however, only six districts and 13 principals were accounted for in this study. Other districts' principals who experience higher or lower levels of competition from charter schools may offer different perspectives. Principals' experiences may be influenced by their years of experience, school quality, and location – rural or urban. Also, with increasing numbers of charter schools and students, and with new legislation, principals may provide different views in the future. Another possible study may compare and contrast the perspectives of principals in different states, using charter legislation and policies as variables.

School leaders of other types of schools, like private schools, could face challenges from the growth of charter schools. Research could uncover what private school leaders have experienced with charter schools in terms of collaboration and competition. In addition, charter school leaders could be surveyed for their perspectives on competition and collaboration with traditional public school principals.

Conclusion

This study filled a gap in the literature about charter schools and their impact on traditional public schools. Participants provided their unique perspectives about and experiences with charter schools in North Carolina, focusing on their concerns over competition, funding, accountability, segregation and legislation. They spoke of the advertising strengths of charter schools and how they have changed marketing practices for their own schools as a result. Principals' experiences with charters in their districts shed light on how they are dealing with the competition for students and funding. Their experiences also pointed to the need for legislators to consider traditional public school principals' perspectives when making decisions about public education in North Carolina, considering that principals are in a unique position to see students withdrawing to charter schools, taking potential resources with them. Likewise, analysis of the data showed that traditional public school leaders may be blind to innovative practices occurring in charter schools. Their willingness to collaborate with charter schools could possibly benefit their own students.

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Appendix A: E-mail requesting participation of North Carolina Traditional Public School Principals

Dear Superintendent:

I am writing to request that you allow your principals to participate in a study I am conducting to complete my doctoral research at Western Carolina University.

The purpose of this research is to discover traditional public school principals' perspectives about charter schools in North Carolina.

Their involvement in this study consist of answering a series of open-ended questions about their perceptions of charter schools in North Carolina. Your district is being asked to participate because there is at least one charter school in your county and at least four percent of your district's potential students attend charter schools. This percentage is comparable to the overall percentage of North Carolina students who attend charter schools. The face to face interviews should take approximately one hour. Your principals' participation is voluntary. They may withdraw at any time or decline to answer any question they choose. Their identity and the school district's identity will not be revealed. There is no compensation for their participation in the study, but I hope that you will see the value of your principals' participation. There are no foreseeable risks to you or your district for participating in this study. I will not include any identifiable data concerning participants in my study. When direct quotes are used from any interviews, pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality.

If you have any questions, please contact me at anytime: Amy Jones at 704-718-3398 or asjones4@catamount.wcu.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Mary Jean Ronan Herzog, Western Carolina University, at 828-227-3327 or mherzog@email.wcu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212.

If you agree to allow me to contact principals in your district in regards to this study, please respond to this email by *date.*

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Amy Jones

Appendix B: Informed Consent

As part of the requirements for graduation from the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Western Carolina University, I am conducting research for my dissertation. My dissertation chair is Dr. Mary Jean Ronan Herzog. Dr. Christopher Cooper and Dr. J. Casey Hurley serve on my dissertation committee.

The purpose of this research is to discover traditional public school principals' perspectives about and experiences with charter schools.

Your involvement in this study involves answering a series of open-ended questions about your perspectives about and experiences with charter schools in North Carolina. Your district is being asked to participate because it is in direct competition with at least one charter school. I have already received permission from your superintendent to ask for your participation. The face to face interview should take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time or decline to answer any question you choose. Your identity and the school district's identity will not be revealed. There is no compensation for your participation in the study, but I hope that you will see the value of your participation. There are no foreseeable risks to you or your district for participating in this study. I will not include any identifiable data concerning participants or their districts in my study. When direct quotes are used from any interviews, pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality.

If you have any questions, please contact me at anytime: Amy Jones at 704-718-3398 or asjones4@catamount.wcu.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Mary Jean Ronan Herzog, Western Carolina University, at 828-227-3327 or mherzog@email.wcu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212.

By agreeing to be interviewed, you agree to participate in this study. Please complete the portion below.

I do □ or do not □ give my permission to the investigator to directly quote from my responses in her research. If my words are quoted, I understand that I will not be identified by name or by any other identifying information. Instead a pseudonym will be used.

The investigator may □ or may not □ digitally record this interview.

Date: _____

Name: _____
print

Name: _____
signature

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Amy Jones

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Traditional Public School Principals

"Hello. My name is Amy Jones. I am calling from Western Carolina University and I am conducting a study concerning traditional public school principals' perspectives about and experiences with charter schools. Your superintendent has given me permission to contact you in regards to this study. Are you willing to set up a time to be interviewed for this study?"

If no, "Thank you for your time."
If yes, "Great! I am asking that you set up an interview time with me so that we will have uninterrupted time to talk about your perspectives about and experiences with charter schools. If you have any concerns about this process, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at Western Carolina University at 828-227-7212 or my dissertation chair, Dr. Mary Jean Ronan Herzog, at 828-227-3327."

Once a time is set up, I will come to the participant's requested location and ask him or her to read and sign the informed consent form. I will use the interview questions as a *guide* and digitally record the interview.

1. How many years of experience do you have as a principal of this school? How many years of experience do you have as a principal or assistant principal of traditional public schools?
2. What do you think about North Carolina's charter school legislation that removes the cap on the number of charter schools in the state and allows existing charters to increase their enrollment?
3. What can you tell me about your county's charter schools concerning curriculum, mission or types of students they serve?
    a. Think about a student who left your school to go to a charter school. Tell me about that student.
4. Tell me about your concerns with charter schools in your district.
5. What are the strengths or positives of charter schools?
6. Tell me about the relationship between your district's leaders and charter school leaders.
    a. How have charter schools in your district attempted to cooperate with the LEA or district schools?
    b. How has your school cooperated and/or learned from the charter schools in your district?
    c. How has your superintendent or district leadership encouraged cooperation between district schools and charter schools?
7. What changes (policies, curriculum offerings, strategic planning, marketing, etc.) have you made at your school in response to the presence of charter schools in your district?

8. What other experiences or perspectives about this topic would you like to share?

"Thank you for your participation in this study."

Appendix D: North Carolina House Bill 273

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2013

H **1**

HOUSE BILL 273

Short Title:	Charter School/LEA Accounting of Funds.	(Public)
Sponsors:	Representatives Hardister, Malone, Brandon, and Stam (Primary Sponsors). *For a complete list of Sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly Web Site.*	
Referred to:	Education, if favorable, Finance.	

March 12, 2013

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO REQUIRE ACCOUNTING OF CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDS AND A TIME LINE FOR THE TRANSFER OF FUNDS BY LOCAL BOARDS OF EDUCATION TO CHARTER SCHOOLS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. G.S. 115C-238.29H(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) If a student attends a charter school, the local school administrative unit in which the child resides shall transfer to the charter school an amount equal to the per pupil local current expense appropriation to the local school administrative unit for the fiscal year. The local school administrative unit shall provide to charter schools a detailed accounting of the funds to be transferred in accordance with this subsection and shall transfer those funds based on a preliminary projection of charter school enrollment provided to the unit by the school. The transfer shall occur no later than 15 days after the local school administrative unit receives its local current expense appropriation. Adjustments to this amount shall be made by the local school administrative unit within 30 days of the State Board of Education determining and certifying to the charter school its average daily membership for the school year. If the local school administrative unit fails to timely comply with the requirements of this subsection, interest at a rate of six percent (6%) of the amount required to be transferred to the charter school shall accrue from the date of delinquency until that amount, together with any interest, is transferred to the charter school. The amount transferred under this subsection that consists of revenue derived from supplemental taxes shall be transferred only to a charter school located in the tax district for which these taxes are levied and in which the student resides."

SECTION 2. This act is effective when it becomes law and applies beginning with the 2013-2014 school year.

Appendix E: Sample Interview

School #3/ District A

Fred Barnes

July 7, 2013

AJ: OK, so I just wanted to have a conversation about charter schools with you.

FB: It's funny. To start out, we knew in the spring that we were going to have a new charter school that's affecting us as far as, uh, maybe more than other schools because of where it's at geographically. Uh, ---- charter is opening K-6, I believe, and then increasing a certain number of grades each year after that.

AJ: I saw --- Road, so I assume it's going to be on that road.

FB: It's on that road. It's going to be on the other end of ----, uh, on the other side of the interstate, where you see all of the developments, buildings and there's a gas station there. It's in one of those buildings, I'm not sure. ------, our data manager, the one that greeted you, she's been there to drop records off. We've lost about 41 students, which is pretty significant.

AJ: It is.

FB: That's two classrooms. We've grown enough that I think we are going to be ok and not actually lose two teachers, but that could still change between now and day one of school. So, you know, the biggest thing started out in the spring that – which is what I was getting to – is making sure the staff members don't let this become a negative in the community, because we've been through this before when ------ Charter opened. That's just up (road name). And convincing teachers to say things about our school and what we are doing and be positive, rather than bashing or being negative about the charter school,

when, in fact, they don't know a whole lot about charter schools. I don't know as much about the charter school as I probably should, just because I haven't had time to do my homework. We've had some – we've done some research on websites. We actually did an activity in a principals' meeting that required us to look at the different competing schools' websites to see what they offered. The biggest thing is to look at enrichment courses that they offer, uh, and then, so we gave the teachers a scenario in that spring, in that last spring release day training – if a parent asked them – one of the scenarios was if a parent asked you what we have to offer at this school that ----- charter doesn't. Maybe not word for word what I just told you, but something like that. And the activity was very good, very well received by the staff. They understood kind of what I felt like we could go into the summer with because they're going to be the ones out in the community that people are going to be asking at the pool, at the mall, at the movies, wherever they see them, on vacation even. I can't go on vacation without seeing somebody I know, especially if you go to Myrtle Beach. You're still going to see people from ----- down there. But anyway, it was a well received activity. A week later, somebody come up to me and said, "That's scenario has already happened to me." Because I also gave them the scenario of, uh, the parent asks you which teacher should their child have, which teacher in the next grade is the best? That's always a test to answer that kind of question.

AJ: Oh, yeah!

FB: So, we gave them examples they could give and we talked about how it would be better to speak positively about our school rather than negatively about the charter school because I think that sends the wrong idea about the staff here.

AJ: You're being defensive.

FB: You're being defensive, instead of proactive. I can't say that if the charter school called that I wouldn't help answer questions, because I would. I would also have a couple of questions for them, and I know that parents have gone to open house meetings for the school and only met the principal and just got information from the principal about herself and nothing else. They don't have bell times; there's a lot of things they don't know. Parents are taking a step into the unknown because a lot of them feel like it's a free or almost private school education they are getting for free. We went on further to create a survey. I've got copies of it actually, um, because I've given the superintendent copies of the ones that came back. Uh, like an exit survey to our parents so we can – this is what one looks like – so we can sort of see what the reasons were the parents were leaving our school. A lot of them, like this one, time to move to 6th grade and their concern is the middle school, because when they rated our school, they gave us all fives and five is the highest score on that survey. So, uh, we've gotten about 20 of them back, and there were one or two that were pretty negative, and those, I know who they are. They were unhappy day one last year. It didn't have anything to do with me or the school; they were just unhappy and negative people anyway. So, um, that's been a pretty valuable little tool. At least it gives us some idea to know that it's not necessarily us; it's perception, it's a choice they're making based on what they've heard, not what they know. And I think a lot of those parents will move back; a lot them will come back.

AJ: And, you've been here at this school how long?

FB: This is our fifth year coming up.

AJ: Have you ever – is this the first year you have felt that you had to do surveys and talk to your staff about what to say, or have you been doing those things all along?

FB: We've been doing some of that all along. When ---- Charter opened in 2006-2007, I had been a principal for about a year. I was really defensive about it, especially when four of my teachers come in on the same day to take teaching positions at that school. I had been a principal in the building for a year. They all walked in on the same day, and the reason they all walked in on the same day is they were all right at that 30 day limit where you could hold them from getting the position, you know. It's state law if they don't give you the 30 day notice you can hold them.

AJ: Right.

FB: You could not release them and if they go any way, they could lose their teaching license. They all had done their homework and they knew that. The principal at ----- had told them you need to go talk to Mr. ------- and tell him what your intentions are. And they did, they just all did it the same day. I was devastated by that and very defensive, and so the way I reacted to that was very different than the way I've reacted as the school leader here – a little more experienced and understanding of knowing you've got to be able to play the political game in some ways, and you've got to do it right, because this is a business within our community and I don't necessarily want them to have a bad impression about us. But, it's difficult because we're going to lose funding and we're potentially going to lose staff because of the school. There are other people in the community that don't agree with the stance that I'm taking on it. I just don't feel like it's something that we're going to fight against. We're going to promote programs. We've already added an enrichment program at the end our master schedule that I think will make us more competitive. So, in some ways, we are doing more of that this year than we've done before, but it is something that we've looked at year by year, because I feel

like we need to be more competitive than we've been and I don't think that's because of the new charter school. I think that's just because we reach a point where we're doing the same thing year to year. People are going to lose interest in that.

AJ: What is the enrichment?

FB: Enrichment classes would include, like the last 45 minutes of the day, where kids have the opportunity to take something that they wouldn't normally take, like golf or Spanish, for example. Those are two examples that – those are two things that some of our kids have shown an interest in, and some parents have shown an interest in. We've actually had some parents say one of the reasons they liked the charter school is because it offered Spanish.

AJ: I've heard that, too, that's a big draw for them.

FB: And I don't know why. I don't know how effective the program is that they're offering, and when you go on the website to search, there's a lot of things on their web site that the general public can't see. You have to be a staff member, if guess, to sign into, and then they are updating their site, so I need to go back on and look at it. I think being more competitive is understanding what's out there that we are competing against, and that's something the school system has been a little more proactive with now, than it was, say, 18 years ago.

AJ: So, your superintendent encourages you to do that research and try to figure out what they are offering that you're not offering?

FB: Yeah.

AJ: OK. You mentioned the four teachers that left. Did they give you a reason why they wanted to teach there?

FB: They really didn't. One of them, uh, one of them did not like some of the things we were doing as a school. The other three, they said they just wanted a change, and it was for personal reasons. So, I haven't lost any teachers to ----- Charter, at least that I know of yet, any way. We did lose another one last year to -------- and she left like mid-year. That was a little bit harder to understand, but the difference was she had people in the school that she knew. She gave some pretty concrete reasons and she worked a notice. I don't know. That's almost harder leaving during the school year than the four coming in during the summer resigning because they had not started the year. So, we felt the impact of it. I don't know if you are interviewing any of the other southern end principals or not – we've probably felt the impact more than the schools in the ------- and north --------- area because geographically that's where the charter schools are. They're in this part of the county because they're going to recruit kids from (another school district) and (another school district) and (another school district) as well, not just here.

AJ: Is there a certain type of family that is attracted to the charter schools?

FB: No, it's all different demographics. Students that are EC, ESL and students that are high performing and students that are middle of the road. One or two that have behavior issues. It's really not earmarked to one group.

AJ: Have you had kids who have gone to charters and have come back to your school?

FB: Yes, we've had kids that have gone to ------- initially and have come back. Reasons vary. Some of it was things like they didn't have a cafeteria and the parents were tired of packing their lunch.

AJ: Really?

FB: Some of it was transportation. It's reasons like that. I don't remember it being poor teaching, so I can't say – that's what I'm saying – I can't say that the teachers are ineffective because I don't know what type of teachers they're going to have. I do know there is not a requirement for those schools to have 100% highly qualified staff, and I think the general public does not know that, so, that's why I feel like some of the parents have not done their homework. Some that we've had in here to meet with, I've talked with them and said, you know, you need to do your homework and make sure the teacher in the classroom that you're going into is highly qualified. I can guarantee that here, but I can't guarantee that for you.

AJ: So you are honest with the parents as far as those kinds of requirements and things?

FB: Yeah.

AJ: Do you think that changes anybody's mind?

FB: It hasn't so far, but it's still 40 families, thereabout, all different grade levels. Some are looking at it because of the middle school and the high school and the concerns they have there. Again, I don't know why. We're feeding into two of the strongest - --------

Middle

School, which is where most of our middle school students will go is a Blue Ribbon school and one of the best middle schools in the state. I taught there for seven years. I was a teacher there before I went into administration. ---------High School is one of the best high schools in the state. They run a solid program. They're a big school. Sure they have problems. All high schools do.

AJ: Do you think the size is what scares some parents?

FB: Some of it, and, again, what they've heard – they're perception, what they've heard.

AJ: OK.

FB: We do have --------- IB down the road, and we do have some parents that are leaving the district because their students did not get into the IB. The IB school is an application-based program. Unfortunately there's not enough space to house everybody.

AJ: So it's not lottery?

FB: It's application. They go through and choose students based on their application. They have not admitted everybody that's applied. There's like 100 kids or more on the waiting list, so that's part of it for some. At the same time, there are others that are fine with their kids going to ------- if they didn't get in. So, it depends on what they are looking for, and, again, I think it depends on perception of what they are going to get.

AJ: Hmmm. So, you said you really haven't had a lot of communication with the charter schools or those principals and teachers, but what would you say are some of the positives or good things about those charter schools that you are aware of?

FB: Um. I mean their facilities are very good; they're state of the art. They're supposedly going to have technology pieces in their classrooms, where the public schools don't have. But as far as program offerings goes, the biggest thing would be the enrichments they are offering, or they say they are offering that some public schools aren't. But again, I don't know enough about it to speak one way or the other, good or bad. Um, I'm basing it more on what I know, what parents come in and tell me and what you see on the website is not always updated, and some things that you're looking for you can't get to. Course offerings, class size, um, and, from what I understand, they're taking requests for certain things. For example, if a parent wants a child to be grade advanced in first grade, and there's a process we have for that, the charter school, it doesn't sound like is following a

process. They're just taking what the parent is saying and putting them into the grade they want. What I understand, they are being run like a business. The one on ---------- Road, has a CEO that's working out of Florida. So, it's like a business. It's not, it doesn't work with local leadership like our schools do. I think that's a great disadvantage. But as far as what they are telling parents, They're telling parents that they have student-friendly programs that none of the other schools have and that they're competitive as far as test scores go. Again, I think a lot of our parents are basing their decisions on perception and what they think is going to happen.

AJ: Do you think you would have added those enrichment programs and courses at your school if it weren't for the charter schools?

FB: We were headed in that direction anyway. Yeah, we were talking about that. We actually had some enrichment programs, uh, two years ago, that we didn't do last year, for whatever reason. One reason is because we were a K-6 school the first three years and we lost 6th grade and it changed the way we could do scheduling with our staff. And, of course, budget, um, the budget that we are constantly under the gun with, as far as having to do without, drives a lot of what you can and can't do.

AJ: That's true.

FB: But we've been looking at enrichment programs. I think it's just that we are probably just a little more serious about it now, because I do think it makes us more competitive.

AJ: Oh, definitely. So, that could be a positive…

FB: You could say that's a positive because it's really forcing us and other schools to look at what we offer students. Um, that's something that we do year by year, but I think we are taking that to another level. For example, the summer reading program we are

doing has nothing to do with charter schools. Our district feels like with the 3rd grade reading test and the reading initiatives from the state, they feel like every school should have some summer library hours, so we added that. Our library is open one day a week for about three hours. We average about 20 books checked out a week from that, which is better than none. We've never offered that program before. I think that kind of thing makes us more competitive, too, but that doesn't have anything to do with the charter school.

AJ: Does that 3rd grade reading test worry you a little bit?

FB: It does. Yeah.

AJ: My understanding is that they have to pass that in order to be promoted. Is that correct?

FB: Yeah. And that the district will have to provide some sort of enrichment or summer remediation, call it summer school, if you will, before they are considered to be promoted. Otherwise, they would have to be held back at the end of third grade.

AJ: Would they be retested at the end of that remediation or summer session.

FB: I'm not sure. I don't know that yet. I'm not sure about that yet. I would hope, some form of assessment.

AJ: That will be interesting.

FB: That adds a lot more pressure to that third grade year. That's the class I'm really looking at now.

AJ: You've got to place them just right.

FB: Yeah. We've got one new teacher on that great level. There's some EC students. We can't upload them in the computer yet because of PowerSchool, but every summer, other than interviewing and hiring teachers, this is something that we spend a lot of time on.

AJ: I understand completely.

FB: Yeah. It's busy. A lot of people in the general public, think the principals have the summer off and don't do anything.

AJ: I get that question a lot. What are doing this summer? Are you enjoying your break. I'm like, yeah! I'm doing nothing, just twiddling my thumbs.

FB: Yeah. It is nice to not have staff members in the building, as far as what you normally have, other than custodians and some of your office staff. Every once in a while people trickle in to get something out of their room. That is kind of nice. You are able to focus in on your own work.

AJ: We're getting our whole building painted this summer. They are reinsulating all the AC ducts. We had a big dumpster in the front of our school. It was really pretty.

FB: That will be nice though.

AJ: It will be nice. I don't think the building has been painted in 10 to 12 years.

FB: It's needed!

AJ: Oh, yes! That's kind of some of the things our district is trying to do, make it look better, because we have a new charter school coming this fall in our district. Maybe we have to make it look as good sometimes, the beautification part of it is key.

FB: Yeah.

AJ: Um. So, do you know much about the charter legislation that has come out? Do you know anything about the new legislation? A recent one was that they lifted the cap on the number of charter schools…

FB: Yeah, I had heard that. As far as specifics go, I have…we heard about the cap being lifted, that there's not a limit. And we heard about the fact that they can hire teachers who aren't highly qualified at their discretion. So, uh, I don't know any more than that. Probably need to do a little more homework and understand where the government is going with it.

AJ: Do you see, I mean, you said you were losing 40 kids this year, do you see that trend continuing, growing, lessening?

FB: I think we'll probably level out. We'll just see it…I don't know. I think some of those kids will come back. I'm estimating about 10-15 will probably come back, because I think, especially the one or two high needs students, I think they're going to get there and they're not going to see a huge difference in services or they're not going to have their needs met. I really do. It's just a matter of time. Unfortunately, that's going to effect funding because of that 10 day rule. North Carolina's funding of public education…I think government should look differently at. I think if we are going to lose students to a charter school, it's unlimited. You know, we should get some funding back if those students come back.

AJ: Maybe prorated?

FB: Yeah. That would affect us with all of our other students that leave, too. What's fair for one should be fair for the other. That's part of the reason why people in the public get defensive about it, because when they find out we are losing money because of it, a lot of

parents and PTO members tend to get very defensive about that, especially when they're working fundraising to put money into our school for things we need. I know there's legislation that's come out that's not passed through completely, because I think that certain politicians have actually agreed to take it off the books that charter schools would get part of our funding.

AJ: Is that Fund 8?

FB: Yeah, so that would have been a huge negative impact for us.

AJ: That worried me. We have a pretty sizeable PTO fundraiser. I thought, goodness, surely they wouldn't be able to take part of that. But I think that was part of…

FB: They would have taken a percentage of that if that had gone through. So, uh, the district…we got knowledge of that thing kind of passing late and they got word to us, uh, we were actually in a principals' meeting and they got word to us to go ahead and get your folks to send e-mails out to your local representatives. So we worked on it and ended up sending about 2,000 e-mails from our district that went to Raleigh.

AJ: So how did you promote that here?

FB: Well, through the staff and through the PTO. There were a couple that I knew were at a place where they would stop what they were doing, contact ---------- or some of the other politicians. They needed to hear from us. Hey, this doesn't need to happen. So, as far as the question you were asking about the governmental piece of it, I'm aware of it to know there's a lot more detail that a lot of people don't know. The more that you do know, the easier it is to speak about it. I try to keep up with it in the media and what's out there in terms of newspapers to read to make sure I understand and all that.

AJ: As a leader, do you feel that's part of your role?

FB: I think it is now. I don't think it was in the past. We didn't have as many competitors when I started in 2005. I mean, you're going to have some who decided on private school, regardless, but most of those are your higher affluent parents. So, and then you've got some who are homeschooled. You're going to have that at every school, but this is different. This is very different. Yeah, I think you do have to be a little more knowledgeable of what's out there as far as the forces that be that effect your negatively, or even positively. Sometimes it can be a positive effect and you didn't even think about it. Things that you are doing indirectly that you may have not done that really changed your school for the better.

AJ: You said earlier that it's a balance between being proactive, getting the information out there to people, but at the same time, not being negative.

FB: Yeah, and it's hard because there are certain people who want to draw you in to that. They want you to be just as upset as they are. It's not that you're not upset about it. It's just that you have to handle yourself in a different way, especially…when you're the leader, everybody is looking at you. How is he going to react? How is she going to react?

AJ: How is your superintendent in that role? Is he…

FB: He's very positive. He's good at that. He's a people person. ---------- is very people friendly. He will sit down and meet with anybody. I think he's frustrated, but I don't see, um, negative bashing. He models that pretty well. He gets frustrated. He shares things with us and letting us know, look guys, here's what's happening, what you need to know. We've gone through things with budget the last five or six years that don't seem like they're getting any better. We don't get the funding we need from the state and we end up going to county commissioners. In our county, we're one of the lowest funded tax-based

counties in the whole state. The county commissioners are very conservative and they're not willing to budge that much.

AJ: Most likely because they see those high scores. You're doing great…why do you need more funding?

FB: That's right.

AJ: Any other experiences or perspectives that you would like to share just from a principal's position, about charters?

FB: Not that I could think of. The survey has been interesting to read. There was only one, like I said, that came back, that I felt was from a negative person. They said the reason they were leaving is because I never returned their call. That's not true. I think that person was negative.

AJ: You wonder if the charter school is going to be able to please them. You kind of hope they do.

FB: Yeah. You've got to be willing to work with everybody. That's the thing that is frustrating. When we get those students back, I don't always feel like the other school is willing to work with everybody. If you are building an elite school, who fits the elite? Who fits the mold? In a true public school, it should be everybody, but in a private school, or in an elite academy, if you will, it's not advertised that way. I don't know…I haven't worked in their school or seen their classrooms. I just tell my staff that I don't think it's fair to tell negative things about what I don't know. And, yeah, maybe I do need to do my homework and know what is happening there, but instead, I've chosen to tell them, here's what we're doing, here's what we need to do, and focus it there.

AJ: Focus on serving all of your kids.

FB: Yeah, because we've got our share of work to do and we don't have time to sit here and complain about what's happening at the charter school. That message was sent very clearly at the end of the year. Now how many of them received it and have done the right things this summer kind of stands to reason, but I feel like we…I feel like, based on the ratings on the surveys that have come back, it's not…they're not making that decision because our staff is doing a poor job. They're making that decision because they feel like they are not going to get what they need at the middle school. The perception is that this is an elite school of choice that's open, the opportunity's there, so let's try it. That's what I think is happening.

AJ: You mentioned that you have all kinds of kids going.

FB: Yeah.

AJ: Special ed kids…

FB: That was a surprise, especially when our special ed teachers and the programs we have provide so much for those kids. I don't understand the reason. That's why I think, more than the others, those kids will come back. I really do. If they don't come back next year, I think they'll come back the year after. The trend, I think, is for some of them to come back.

AJ: You've seen that before?

FB: Yeah.

AJ: Do the parents ever tell you why?

FB: Not enough that it would make a difference in the trends. I don't remember. I don't remember doing an exit survey when we lost kids to ---------. That's difference in approach, as well. We didn't do anything like that. The district may have; other school

may have, but we didn't as a school. I think the district planning things that we all do collectively in principals' meetings help, because we are all more so on the same page than we were when some of the first charter schools opened. Actually, I gave a copy of the completed surveys I received to the superintendent. He's going to share them with the school board to see at least some of these answers. I don't know what will come of it, but, uh, hopefully, the survey is not too little too late. I think our programs and what we offer on our schedule is more important than having a real good exit survey to give your reasons. It's just like the EOG. What you do during the year, uh, as far as assessments is more effective than the EOG, because the EOG, by the time they take it, it's too late to do anything about their learning gaps. It's just an autopsy…it's one way to look at it, unless you are going to have a summer program. And, see, they cut summer school because of the budget. Again, I think budget, and how it's funded, is the biggest advantage because they're telling out parents that they're going to have programs that we don't because of they way the school is being funding, because of the way it's being run, like a corporation.

AJ: Are you finding that you are having to advertise those things that you are doing more than you did before?

FB: Yeah. Uh, we use connect Ed phone calls and newsletters. But our web site, we have a twitter account. We're part of a communication pilot in our school district to promote social media and communicate in various ways, because a lot of times the parents don't read the newsletters. So, we've adjusted our newsletters to just include important bullets.

AJ: Do you tweet?

FB: Yeah, yeah.

AJ: I haven't learned the art of tweeting yet.

FB: Yeah, it's a little different. I think we have 50 followers, something like that.

AJ: You find that parents like that method?

FB: They do.

AJ: They can get quick messages.

FB: Yeah.

AJ: Well, I appreciate your time.

FB: You're welcome. Good luck to you.

AJ: Thank you.

Appendix F: Sample Coded Responses from Unfair Advantages Theme

	Funding	Requirements
1A Matthews	As far as how those schools are graded or evaluated, that part is kind of left to be determined how all of that is going to play out. We wrote the grant and we foot the bill to get people to help us write the grant. We paid lots of money to get outside people to review our grant. We would hate to put all that work into it and then something like that could allow the charter schools to take some of that money. That, to me, that part is just not fair. I do know the problem that we have a lot of times, you know you said before about the students who leave and then come back, if they do it after the count, then the charter school is still getting the money for those students. You know, I've got fourth and fifth grade class sizes with 27 to 30 kids in a class, so we can't afford to have kids leave and then come back. so I should be able to hire three teachers. We are operating with bare bones here. We are not cutting the fat any more. We are cutting bone and muscle. Now, with losing that many students, I doubt we are going to be able to hire three more	I guess my issue lies with how fair that competition is. Are we comparing fairly, would be my concern with it. If they are opening up the cap and allowing it to happen, then is that happening on a level playing field? I'm not so sure that it is. AJ: Do you mean in terms of the types of kids they are enrolling? SM: Yeah, the types of kids and how schools are evaluated, that put together. As far as how those schools are graded or evaluated, that part is kind of left to be determined how all of that is going to play out. I guess my fear is that the competition is not on a level playing field that the whole model that makes charter schools pretty exciting…they can cut away a lot of the red tape that we are often frustrated with.

	teachers back. I think we are probably going to lose a teacher because of that. At ----- Middle School, I talked to that principal a few days ago, he said they were losing like six teachers. I'm sure that charter school had something to do with that.	
2A Jones	We have a brand new one starting up right down the road here this year, that will be a K through 6 school. They'll be taking about 40 to 50 of my incoming sixth graders. So that's a hit. That's a hit on my school because we will lose a teacher, maybe even two teachers that I will lose eventually… I'm losing seven positions this year. We have to go out and raise money for whatever resources for my teachers. We haven't had a book adoption in five or six years. My math books are duct taped together now it's so bad. I always hear the rumor that they start a charter school, they get your money, and they head out of town. What's also sad about that is a child goes down there and they will keep them for the 10 days or so to keep the headcount money. You can leave now and they get the	Charter schools, you know supposedly you don't have to be certified. I think that if charter schools are going to be given the money they are getting, they need to follow the same guidelines. They should get the same testing. All that. It's not right to sugarcoat something. It should be equal. We all talk about equality. (laughs) If they ask me how I feel about the charter school, I will mention things like the testing. I would mention the fact that our teachers have to be certified. Every one of my teachers is a highly qualified teacher. I've got a high percentage of masters teachers. I've got a good portion – probably about, nearly 25% - that are nationally board certified. I wish I had some inside information to share like how our scores are better, but they're not going to share that. They're not going to have anything. All they're going to have is

	money! We're not getting a raise now for six straight years. We're going to cut your supplement for a little bit.	90% of our kids made As this year. What, on homework? All the kids can make As on homework, but did they learn anything? Also, if you have a teacher who wants to go to a charter school, you have to keep their position for a year; they get a leave of absence to go teach at charter schools. You have to save that position. DJ: Really? AJ: Yes. That's a new law. They can come back the next year and still have their position. DJ: See, that's the kind of thing that upsets me politically, because there is no equality there.
3A Barnes	We've lost about 41 students, which is pretty significant. But, it's difficult because we're going to lose funding and we're potentially going to lose staff because of the school. What I understand, they are being run like a business. The one on ---------- Road, has a CEO that's working out of Florida. So, it's like a business. It's not, it doesn't work with local leadership like our schools do. I think that's a great disadvantage. And, of course, budget, um, the budget that we are constantly under the gun	I do know there is not a requirement for those schools to have 100% highly qualified staff, and I think the general public does not know that, For example, if a parent wants a child to be grade advanced in first grade, and there's a process we have for that, the charter school, it doesn't sound like is following a process. They're just taking what the parent is saying and putting them into the grade they want.

	with, as far as having to do without, drives a lot of what you can and can't do. Unfortunately, that's going to effect funding because of that 10 day rule. North Carolina's funding of public education…I think government should look differently at. I think if we are going to lose students to a charter school, it's unlimited. You know, we should get some funding back if those students come back. AJ: Maybe prorated? FB: Yeah. That would affect us with all of our other students that leave, too. What's fair for one should be fair for the other. That's part of the reason why people in the public get defensive about it, because when they find out we are losing money because of it, a lot of parents and PTO members tend to get very defensive about that, especially when they're working fundraising to put money into our school for things we need. I know there's legislation that's come out that's not passed through completely, because I think that certain politicians have actually agreed to take it off the books that charter schools would get part of our funding. AJ: Is that Fund 8? FB: Yeah, so that would	

	have been a huge negative impact for us. We've gone through things with budget the last five or six years that don't seem like they're getting any better. We don't get the funding we need from the state and we end up going to county commissioners. they cut summer school because of the budget. Again, I think budget, and how it's funded, is the biggest advantage because they're telling our parents that they're going to have programs that we don't because of the way the school is being funding, because of the way it's being run, like a corporation.	
4B Allen		
5B Watts	And they would argue that they are a public school… They're getting part of our money, so they are. So I have real personal issues with the fairness issue. I feel, personally, that if they're going to take part of our money then everything needs to be fair and equitable like it is for me. But yet, I'm sharing my services with them and they're getting part of my money but they don't have to offer it. I have to offer it. So my question is with the	But in my mind I don't see them as part of it because it's easy for them to make no child left behind because they don't have sub-groups; they have one. Or their sub-groups are limited. They can create a waiting list and they can pick and choose who they want to come. And then, if they don't like them they can send them to me. Which is what happens. I get the ones they don't want. The parents thought the child should skip a grade. Yes, but with the new curriculum does the child

	fairness issue and the way the families go and come. Now there's even a law about grants. If you write a grant, they get part of that. Well, who did the work? You see. So I take issue.	have the maturity to skip a grade? That's why we have the AIG program. I'm not going to have a child skip a grade. I'll give the child the option for the advanced class but the child is going to have to do the work in the previous grade level because of the new curriculums we don't do that. You have gaps. It doesn't matter how brilliant the child is, the child still has to learn geometry one step at a time. And therefore, if I have a child skip sixth-grade math and go to seventh-grade pre-algebra and eighth-grade algebra they don't get that foundation, there's going to be gaps. So then, when the child doesn't come in with the assignment, well he still has to be responsible we'll just go to charter school because some of them skip grades. AJ: So did they? They did let them skip grades? FW: Sure they did. They promise everything. So you understand. And sometimes it's class size. Because we are too big to be small and too small to be big. I have had fifth-grade classes with thirty-one children. And so, I don't have enough to draw down another teacher. We get a tutor. But see the charter school has twelve kids in a class. They have

		very, very small classes. … So, consequently, they can offer classes with ten children. That's what they have. Eight, ten. They rarely have a class of over seventeen. In both of the charter schools. So, class-wise, they get a lot of individual attention. Though not everyone is certified, as their teachers. They only have to have a certain percentage of certified teachers. So it's very different. They don't have to do the testing like we do. They have different things. They have the options of what types of tests to give, and then when they do apply the "No Child Left Behind" their outcomes are different. They don't have to tag the teachers like we do for the tests. They don't have the same standards. They don't have Standard Six. Therefore, they're not participating in EVAAS. So, you see, they have a lot more flexibility in testing than we do. And don't quote me on this but my understanding is they don't have to use the same tests. I think they have a choice of the tests. But in the past the kids would come to us and not have to have the same

		tests. They would just have to give an assessment. But can I really force a parent's hand to contribute? At those schools they can. The highly qualified, the parent contracts, the services…all the different things that Title I brings with it. So those types of teachers are not always willing to be into that or it's scary for them. We've had children who've come to us from the charter schools and the environments they had were so free. And, again, a lot of the wonderful learning projects and those types of things that we do also but our accountability is different because of the testing that we have. Some of our children took a little longer to transition because the classes were so free. There were children who, if you wanted to dress up as a character coming to school you could do that all the time. Well, here we do character dress-up too but it's called character storybook day. And that's when we do it. But we want, me especially, I want the bar to be fair. You know, I would like to be able to say, "I'll put you on a waiting list"… You know, it would be nice to

		have some options.
6C Clemmons	charter schools aren't going anywhere. We did have a cap on that kind of helped us. But now there's no cap. We're going to see all types of charter schools popping up. but there's a number of kids you serve before you get federal funds even for a charter school. But that lets me know why so many charter schools are denying these kids. Because they don't want to have to bring some money into the funding but they don't want to use their own money to fund that position. Um, plus there's just such a small number of kids that we're vying for. I guess we only have about seven thousand to seventy-five hundred kids in our district. But when you go somewhere like Raleigh, who's the largest school system in the state…things can be tougher, be different.	But I believe in the charter school concept. I just believe that there's not enough oversight in the process. And if you leave me alone to do what I want to do, I'm going to make it look really good. I understand that but I wish there was some type of…and I know there is… oversight. I just wish there was better oversight, especially for the parent that doesn't have a voice. And there are so many parents that do not have a voice. Um, not because they don't want to, but because they don't know how. And that's my biggest problem.
7C Tate	So I think there's been a little more feeling of so now you're going to have this…you're going to hurt the high school. Their goal was to pull fifty kids ninth and tenth grades and there's only probably two hundred kids per grade	

	level at --------. So that's significant. He feels some frustration about the money. He'll send articles and information to us, especially when there was this thing that came out most recently where they were going to be able to access all kinds of money… that was a frustrating thing.	
8D King	As you know, that's a lot of money. If we're losing a hundred kids, if that's what they got, that's a lot of money we're losing. I don't think it'll ever take over completely public schools but it will definitely add a burden and a drain to public education and what we do. Um, just for the simple fact that you're going to lose those dollars. If you're going to take tax dollars and put it into charter and private schools that's going to cause a burden on the state for sure.	So, are the rules aren't the same? That's where I don't think there's been a clear delineation yet. Because the rules are not the same… Just everybody's playing with the same rules. And that's the piece I think has not been solidified yet. AJ: Do they not have to teach Common Core or Essential Standards? PK: Well, supposed to. But those aren't clear delineations either.
9E Smith	I had a parent who applied to attend there because school starts in July. And so she withdrew her child from here, took them to the charter school and they got pulled, and then in August and brought them back to us. They never intended the child to really stay there, but it was a good baby sitter for the summer. AJ: Oh, my goodness! KS: So that in itself and, see	With the current legislature and with the current things that are happening it makes me feel that maybe some of our legislators don't understand what charter schools…the rights…the things that they can do that we must follow by state law. Most charter schools don't accept federal funding so they don't have to follow those federal guidelines and so it makes it difficult for

	then, with the money after their tenth day, our tenth day is not until September or twentieth day. So this child has been there and they withdraw and bring him here. AJ: So you never got the funding for the child. KS: Right. Their children were here and we had a hard time getting the records when they came here and enrolled their child because I'm sure they wanted to make that tenth day. But with the funding and the vouchers taking those funds away from public schools I think we're going to see a challenge for the academics in public schools and we're going to see the students that parents will now start moving to those schools will be those parents that, had they had the money, they would have already sent them. But now that they're going to be given the money they will take them to charter schools.	us. It makes me feel like we're almost becoming the second class citizen, the red headed stepchild, however you want to put it. not all of their teachers are certified teachers. And I don't know if they have to follow Title IX regulations, probably not because it's federal. And then again it worries me that in these private schools they don't have to have certified teachers for all positions. And again, the teachers are the ones who are going to make a difference to the child. One bad teacher, you might survive it. Two bad teachers or three, the child's not going to survive it.
10E Flay	They are not held to the same standards as public schools yet get the same funding source. For me, that is a prescription for disaster. It's billed to help public education, but you're taking resources away, you're filtering it to a place where the state has less control and you're depriving your	When parents go to charter schools they still expect that high level of service and they don't always get it, especially when the state doesn't require the same criteria.

	schools of money they need to sustain and help grow. So I think our state's going the wrong way. It's really…it's heartbreaking, actually. By the end of the nine weeks, they were back. ----- had the money and we had to serve the students without the staff we lost. That's the problem. If you're going to a charter school you need to realize it's a yearlong commitment. With public schools, if you move from public school to public school the money's going to be there within the system. My experience at ---- Middle, when people go stay a while at a charter school then come back, the public school has to take them back but they've given away the money and the resources. As a school district, we're losing a lot of funding. There's a lawsuit where they're trying to get into local money. Two years ago there was talk that we were going to have to hand over a part of our PTO money. It's convoluted. People want to choose what schools they go to. They want to have complete input into it, but they want to do it with other people's resources, and I have a real problem with that. That's what I'm wondering, if charter is going to be	

	education for profit? Is that where we're headed? Is that where we really want to be? I think it would be a great private school. If folks want to go there they should be paying their money. Public education is just that, because this is my question: If they can take money from our school system, what about our community colleges, our state universities. Where does it stop? I see this kind of weird dichotomy going on between... Should UNC-CH have to give part of their money to Wingate College? People from NC choose to go there and they have paid their taxes. I don't understand where folks are coming from on this. When you make that decision you take on that burden.	
11E Beam		but I found those students to be lagging behind where we were and we had to teach to standards and test to standards. But selectivity, that's a big thing that I find. Standards…what standards are students held to there? What standards is the school held to? Do they have the same testing and scrutiny that public schools are

		under?
11E Thurman	Certainly those kids impact the use of our resources. You know, we have, sometimes…one of our kids last year, there would be six adults in the room with this child. You know, that's a lot of one on one. While those other 600 children are out here fending for themselves, this one child has taken the full-time attention of six professionals. The only thing they want to share is our money! They sued us recently. That's what they want to share. They want to share our money. They want to make sure they get…before this year they got a percentage of our budget after certain things were taken from that budget. Based on the new budget, they're going to get it off the top. Like for instance, if we had a pre-K program or school lunch program, whatever programs they didn't have, or transportation, they would then get a percentage excluding programs they didn't offer. Now it's going to be the very top of all of our money. That is a big boost for them. Of course they support that legislation.	Almost without exception. Typically students come back from charter schools to public schools behind with their age appropriate peers. Our experience has been that very few students come back at or above grade level from the charter school experience. Um, whether that's because of a different set of standards, different quality of instruction, maybe even the nature of the beast itself…a lot of parents are looking for quick, easy fixes to why their children are struggling academically, and so they go to private school or they go to charter school. a charter school is able to have sometimes, um, substandard instructional standards for its staff, or can avoid certain testing standards or can avoid other conditions that we have to endure, and somehow that's better. Actually what they should be looking at is looking at a way to make public education or public schools streamlined, and to avoid some of the crazy things that we have to do in terms of the bureaucracy that we're faced with. Naturally, anybody who can eliminate some of those levels of bureaucracy can have an easier way to do things; teachers can focus.

		Well, when they do that, they are testing a different population, and so it's easy for them to make growth, easier for them… But it's a different population taking that test. So, anyway, it's just hard to compare their test scores to our test scores. Compare apples and apples or compare oranges and oranges, but don't compare one to the other because it's simply not a realistic view of the world.
12F Miller	Um, one of the things that has happened at the charter school that you passed coming here….they ran into some financial issues and they had to lay off teachers. (talked about not getting funding when kids return) Charter feels as though they are entitled to any monies that the school system obtains through grants or whatever. That's the only thing we've had an issue with. We've had an on-going legal battle with ---- Charter about funding. They feel as though they're supposed to get a portion of funds that come to --- County in any form they come to us. If we write grants, they feel they're entitled to a portion of the grant monies. But no, he doesn't …and this is with our former	Their scores, if they come here, their growth doesn't count, but it counts for our proficiency. And so, you know, that is a concern. When they come back close to test time…quite honestly the kids are behind and it's been that way consistently. Here in --- County with the charter schools and the kids who come back, they are consistently behind and it's throughout the county…um principals are saying that the kids who coming from these two charter schools that they are behind. And so quite honestly it does disturb me greatly that they will be there until February or March and then the parents will withdraw them for whatever reason…because they're trying to keep them from being suspended or they find out that they're in a

	superintendent…our current superintendent hasn't shared anything…but that's something that's been ongoing for a while. I don't know what happened with their funding, but they had to lay off teachers in the middle of the year…the middle of the year…which forced them to combine classes that were very large. Um, and I don't know where their funding issues came from, but I just know they had to lay off teachers in the middle of the year. We do, of course, have to provide funding for our students that leave our system who go to them.	class of forty and didn't know and then they come here and we find that they're not as prepared and we test and it counts on our proficiency. That bothers me greatly. Yes, it does. because they do things that are unorthodox and out of order and not in line with North Carolina laws sometimes. Those are the kind of tactics that I don't deal well with but that we have to put up with. Um, that's not what you do. They're doing things that are not legal. They're not following state policy. Children aren't prepared and it's just so frustrating. So frustrating. But the charter school here, I'm just very disappointed in the things that are being allowed to happen.