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Being Scrappy: Charter School Leaders and the Transition to the Principalship at Title I Schools

Kalin Balcomb
Loyola Marymount University, kalinbalcomb@gmail.com

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Being Scrappy:

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by

Kalin Balcomb

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Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Kalin Balcomb, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Date

Dissertation Committee

[redacted]
Jill Bickett, Ed.D., Committee Member

[redacted]
Maureen Kindel, Ed.D., Committee Member

[redacted]
Heather McManus, Ed.D., Committee Member

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the strong Title I charter school leaders in Los Angeles that I have encountered in both my leadership journey and my dissertation research. Working in charter schools can be brutal work. Charter schools are often subjected to the shifting tides of politics and the ever-evolving landscape of educational reform. Charter school leadership can be lonely, and entails long hours, wearing multiple hats, learning quickly, and constantly adapting to changing policies and reforms.

My own charter school leadership journey has been fraught with challenges, and times where I have given up hope that the work means something, and makes a positive difference. Sometimes it is hard to see the end goal, and to see the successes amongst the struggles. However, my belief in charter schools as a tool towards K-12 educational reform is fortunately not bounded by my own limitations and experiences as a charter school leader.

I have encountered charter school leaders who encapsulate transformative leadership for social justice. I have seen an unwavering passion for eradicating inequity in education that is bolstered by relentless hard work and sacrifice, but most of all hope. Hope that the status quo doesn't have to be so forever, and that education can do more and be better for our students. Charter school leaders are a diverse set of people, with different journeys to leadership, however, every charter school leader that I have known has inspired me to critically reflect on my own leadership practices, and have pushed me to do more and be better. This dissertation is about charter school leaders and is for charter school leaders, with the hope that together we can work towards a new vision for leadership in education.

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ABSTRACT

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While the experiences and challenges of principals at Title I schools has been studied, this research builds on those studies with the added dimension of exploring the perspectives of charter school principals who are new to the role and are working in the landscape of Title I schools in Los Angeles. This dissertation examines the history of charter schools and provides a contextual overview of charter schools and charter school accountability measures in the United States and in Los Angeles, with the added political context of the charter school landscape in Los Angeles after the historic Los Angeles teacher union strikes in 2019. The dissertation utilizes qualitative research to explore the experiences of six new charter school principals at Title I schools through semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and reflective field notes. The experiences of the new charter school principals are analyzed through transition theory and the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) and transformative leadership practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Findings explore the experiences of leaders who take on the mantle of principalship at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles, and how being new brings a unique dimension to those experiences. Findings also indicate that charter school principals value collaborative leadership and often use transformative leadership practices throughout their transition to the principalship during the first few years. The findings highlight the need for structured mentorship, coaching opportunities, and support

for new charter school principals and brings credence to the myriad of responsibilities and challenges inherently unique to leading Title I charter schools in Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Personal Context in Educational Leadership

I began my teaching career on the Big Island of Hawaii through the Teach for America program. Teaching in Hawaii provided an opportunity to work in a location that was the ideal solution to the long upstate New York winters of my undergraduate years. The program appeared to be a cost effective and efficient way for educators to start their teaching careers, and for others, like myself, to solidify their career paths whilst tackling educational reform and working with children on the frontlines.

We were told that the schools that we were placed at were in dire need of teachers, and that the work that we did would benefit marginalized groups through providing a quality of education that students would otherwise not receive. Teach for America challenged us to hold ourselves and our students accountable, and instilled the maxim that all students can and should succeed. Despite positive intentions, the Hawaii Teach for America program did not always align with the needs of the communities served, and outcomes were mixed. Despite my perceived failings of Teach for America, my time as a Corps member ignited a passion for social justice through education, and highlighted the complexity of educational reform within the current landscape of public education.

When I moved to Los Angeles, California from the Big Island of Hawaii, I had no idea how different my journey in the educational system would be. In Hawaii, I worked at a district school, where I was the union representative for my school. When I moved to Los Angeles, I took a position at a very small charter school organization. Although working for a charter

school after my union work in a district school felt somewhat antithetical, I was attracted to the mission and vision of the charter organization, and the belief that educational reform could happen in a space that was not bound by the limitations of teacher unions and district bureaucracy.

Due partially to the turnover and the fluidity of the charter management organization during the initial years of my employment in the latter half of the 2010s, I was able to quickly move into increasingly higher leadership positions. During the seven years at my current charter management organization, I have moved up the ranks from Inclusion Specialist to Director of Special Education to middle school principal, Director of Schools, which described my position as principal of two schools, and finally, the Executive Director. I now run two charter schools that serve 600 students in grades K-8 and oversee a School Food Authority Program that oversees meal services for 40 charter schools.

Part of the reason for my relatively quick progression into leadership roles has been the high attrition rates of leadership. Since the inception of the schools, prior to my taking on the principalship, there have been six different principals in as many years, including one year with no principal. Numerous other leadership roles have had similar attrition; leaders who were able to stay more than one year were rare. While the circumstances at my school might have been unique, it was unclear to me if my experiences were part of a larger trend of the struggles inherent to leadership in charter schools.

Former school principals at my organization had attempted to create systems and improve upon the work of prior principals. The former school principals were tasked with implementing transitions to new structures, methods, and policies in order to effectively manage and lead the

organization. The transitions attempted were often met by staff with resistance and sometimes outright rebellion. Reluctance to accede was not necessarily based on the enormity or incongruity of the change. Even small changes, such as the decor of the staff lounge or the opportunity to wear college shirts on Fridays were often met with resentment. Necessary changes that were crucial to the success of the organization also received pushback. When the principals left, often even positive endeavors left with them. The leadership at this time felt episodic, there was a revolving door of reforms and initiatives, and there were few chances to reflect or provide input on what changes had been successful and what changes had not.

The high rate of principal attrition at my worksite seemed to be intertwined with the difficulties to manage transitions in the face of change and the sheer magnitude of the work entailed in the principal position. Former principals at the organization had anecdotally shared mutual experiences of isolation, feelings of failure due to staff pushback, critical scrutiny, and an inability to execute their leadership visions. However, it was unclear if there were persistent patterns with potential solutions, as it is a difficult task to reconcile the complex reasons for leaving positions of leadership due to the demands and struggles of the job (Johnson, 2005).

When I took on the role of Director of Schools, I was tasked with challenging circumstances. Both the elementary and middle school principal had left the prior year. A new school had opened up in the same building, and was actively recruiting from the same pool of prospective students. Due to the changes to the organization, it felt necessary to implement transitions that would dramatically improve our program while building consistency and stability. In my first year, in order to build morale and respond to external and internal pressure, I increased the teacher and staff pay scales, redesigned the physical exterior and interior of the

school, and reallocated the budget towards purchasing books and instructional materials; positive changes that I felt would be visible to staff, students, and parents. In fact, I made a lot of changes. Amongst many changes included changes in evaluation systems, hiring practices, the math curriculum, the socio-emotional curriculum, the school benchmark system, the professional development structure, and even the length of the school day.

The changes in the structures at my schools were designed to increase effectiveness and reduce attrition of both teachers and leadership. While the challenge of sustainability and retention at charter schools is part of a more prevalent trend (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2014; Hargreaves, 2005; Ni, Sun & Rorrer, 2015), I felt that there were changes that could quickly increase morale, efficacy, and job satisfaction. However, not all the changes that I made were popular or successful. Even changes that I still feel were worthwhile fell flat or were difficult to sustain. At the end of the 2017-2018 school year I had staff and leadership reflect on the year. I was surprised at the level of resentment for certain changes, and even more surprised to discover (despite having experienced it myself on the other end), that staff were often not resistant to the change, but rather the method of implementing the change. I was told that I had not created enough space for collaboration and reflection. Some of my decisions failed to take into account the collective feedback of all stakeholders. I had initially felt that I was leaning in and leading with confidence (Sandberg, 2013) but instead left the school year with the feeling that I was perceived as bossy and overly didactic. The feedback was disheartening because I knew that my ability to effectively manage others was an area that had to improve quickly. In order to become an effective leader, I had to learn that leading others

through transitions was a multi-step strategic implementation process that requires planning, collaboration, and reflection (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Duda, 2013).

Then, my schools faced another huge change. The elementary and middle school no longer shared a campus effective the 2019-2020 school year. The need to successfully transition the elementary school to a new site while maintaining morale for the middle school families and staff was another difficult undertaking. In the upcoming 2020-2021 school year, the middle school will also move to a new school site, yet another big change requiring carefully planned transitions.

The implications of effectively leading others through transitions were threaded through all the decisions I made as a school leader. I needed to ensure that the organization continuously evolved and adapted to the needs of our staff, students, and families. This was no easy feat as a new charter school principal, and continues to be a challenge in my new role of Executive Director.

I share this collection of experiences to highlight two things: 1) transition to leadership in charter schools is a complex endeavor, and 2) the necessity and resistance to change in the charter school setting can complicate that leadership journey.

Background and Problem

Charter schools are often seen by critics as the wild west, where school policies do not exist and where success is driven by market-based reform and neoliberalist theories (Ferman, 2017; Ravitch, 2013). The very nature of charter schools has been perceived by anti-charter critics as antithetical to the collective good and public education reform and sustainability (Ferman, 2017). Studies of charter school student achievement elicit mixed academic outcomes;

with some studies showing charter schools outperforming their district school counterparts, and others showing less stellar results (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005; Heaggans, 2006; Owens & Valesky, 2015; Ravitch, 2013). Charter schools have been accused of numerous infractions; increasing segregation due to serving a larger percentage of students of color and low income students than district schools (Heaggans, 2006; Lake & Hill, 2006; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013), while at the same time not meeting the needs of students with disabilities (Barnard-Brak, Schmidt, & Almekdash, 2018; Mead, Mitchel, & Rotherham, 2015). The sustainability of charter schools has also been called into question (Payne & Knowles, 2009), with studies asserting teachers are less likely to stay in charter schools, and upwards of half of charter school teachers indicating that they plan to leave their charter school at the end of the school year (Cannata, 2011).

Despite the perceived controversy, charter schools keep on growing, and an increasing percentage of the K-12 student population attend charter schools each year (Mead et al., 2015). Recent studies show long term socio-emotional and behavioral benefits to charter schools (McEachin, Lauen, Fuller, & Perera, 2019) and long-term improvements in academic outcomes (Harris & Larsen, 2016). Clearly, despite the detractors, there is something that charter schools are offering that is perceived as meeting the needs of students and that attracts new families. If charter schools exist in this space where many of the practices and perceived outcomes are considered unknown territory, more must be done to contextualize and explore the experiences of students, families, teachers, and school leaders.

Thus, within the landscape of charter schools, the role of leadership needs to be considered. While the influence of school leadership on student academic outcomes is not

comparable to the impact of teachers, it is still a critical component of school success (Fullan, 2016; Gawlik, 2018a). Although the school principal is not designing or delivering instruction, and thus is not equal to the direct and continuous influence of teachers; the impact, while indirect, is still significant, and might account for about 25% of student outcomes (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). The influence of school leadership is further heightened in Title I schools that are composed of a larger proportion of students with low socioeconomic status (Dressler, 2001; McKay, 2019).

In Los Angeles, one in ten students attends a charter school (Baratte, 2017). Charter schools often serve students who are of lower or comparable socio-economic status than their district school counterparts (Lake & Hill, 2006; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). Title I schools in this category are more likely to be impacted by issues such as low teacher retention rates (McCullough, 2012). When teachers leave, the work and investment in building community and family relationships leave with them. More experienced teachers have been tied to increased efficacy (Peske & Haycock, 2006). However, beyond teacher retention and job satisfaction, studies have shown that the instructional leadership of schools is a significant contributor to school success (Fullan, 2016; Gawlik, 2018a).

The role of charter school principals is difficult and varied, and includes instructional leadership responsibilities, human resources, student and staff recruitment, and retention, community engagement, politics, fundraising, and finances (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Cetinkaya, 2016). Charter school principals must create an environment of continuous academic improvement to ensure high student achievement outcomes (Fullan, 2016; Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017). Due to the necessity for continuous academic improvement, the need to adapt and

effectively implement change is evident in the charter school context (Gawlik, 2018b; Payne & Knowles, 2009; Wohlstetter, Smith, & Farrell, 2013). The responsibilities of charter school principals are numerous and varied (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017), and their ability to influence the outcomes of their schools is significant and requires a leadership style that is transformative (Fullan, 2016). While the district principal might be mired by the bureaucracy of governance at the district or even state level, a charter school principal is freed from some of the restrictions that hamper (or support) the district school principal (Wohlstetter et al., 2013).

Perhaps due to both the responsibilities and influence, charter school principals report feeling greater amounts of stress relative to other principals (Payne & Knowles, 2009; Robey & Helfenbein, 2018). The complexity of the charter school's principalship is revealed in attrition rates, the average charter school principal stays at a school for less than three years, and there are higher turnover rates for charter school principals compared to their district school counterparts (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2014; Ni et al., 2015).

Charter school principals at Title I schools have additional challenges because Title I schools serve a greater percentage of students with socioeconomic needs (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). Title I schools often underperform academically on metrics such as state testing compared to more affluent schools (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). Charter school principals in Title I schools have the challenges that come with serving students with increased academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional needs due to poverty related trauma (Dressler, 2001; Metcalfe, 2014; Rawles, 2010). With higher need comes the need for additional resources and experience (Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2000), and yet Title I schools often have teachers with less experience (Papa, 2007) and less revenue at their disposal (Robey & Helfenbein, 2018).

The challenges that new principals faced were apparent in the numbers, as less than half of new principals continued in their roles (Lackritz, Cseh, & Wise, 2019; Viadero, 2009). Thus, many charter schools have new principals each year, and each year these new principals struggle as they transition into their roles as leaders.

The majority of charter school principals expect to leave their position within five years (Lackritz et al., 2019). Therefore, principals who work at charters, are new, and work at Title I schools, have a myriad of additional obstacles in a position that is already challenging. Thus, to further explore and understand the triumphs and challenges of new charter school principals, my research provided opportunities to hear the voices of current charter school principals, who are new to the role, and who are leading at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles.

The exploration of the experiences inherent in being both new to the role of principal and being a charter school principal sheds light on what charter school principals struggle with and excel in, and can be better understood through delving more deeply into theories of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) within the context of educational leadership.

Research Question

In order to analyze perspectives and experiences of new charter school principals within the context of transformational educational leadership and transitions to the principalship, I utilized the following research question:

> What are the experiences of new charter principal leaders transitioning into the principalship at Title I charter schools?

This research question was developed to better understand the challenges and experiences of being new to the role of principalship at Title I charter organizations. The research contributes

to the research that has come before on the phases of transition within leadership journeys and transformational leadership practices, as well as recent research exploring the experiences of new charter school principals (McManus, 2018; Woodley, 2018). The following theoretical frame supports this research.

Theoretical Frameworks

This research is based on the importance of the theory of the three phases of transition within organizational leadership (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) conjoined with transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1996; Fixsen et al., 2013; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Northouse, 2019), particularly during the transition to leadership that new charter school principals experience. For charter school principals to be effective, they must understand both the nuances of transition, and their role as transformational leaders.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership first introduced by Burns (1978) and further explored by Bass (1996), that places importance on meaningfully connecting with and motivating others to work innovatively towards a shared vision (Bass, 1996; Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2019; Sirin, Aydin, & Bilir, 2018). Burns (1978) analyzed the differences of transformational leadership compared to transactional leadership, and postulated that transformational leadership propelled both leaders and followers through a method of leadership centered on increasing motivation. Bass (1996) introduced four key components in transformational leadership: Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, and Idealized Influence. All four components created a paradigm for contextualizing how leaders influence followers. Transformational leaders have a vision based on values that can

be turned into actionable goals that both motivate and challenge their followers to be innovative leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). A core component of motivation building for transformational leaders involves creating and strengthening relationships (Northouse, 2019). Transformative leaders build relationships through providing individualized coaching and support and through creating opportunities to participate in decision making (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Charter schools are held to the tenets of parent choice, innovation in education, and student outcomes accountability (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Campbell, Heyward, Gross, & Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2017). Parents choose to send their child to a charter school; charter school enrollment is not an automatic choice (Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). Therefore, to ensure charter schools stay relevant and fully enrolled, charter school principals must continuously determine the needs of the staff, community, families, and students (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). Innovation is also an integral component of charter schools (Lake, 2008). Charter schools, per their charter petitions, provide educational experiences that differ from their district school counterparts (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017).

To make it possible for charter schools to provide unique educational experiences, their leaders must be visionary and innovative. Charter schools are supposed to revolutionize the public education system (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). This type of change requires dramatically changing school practices and thus necessitates transformational leadership (Berkovich, 2018). New charter school principals transitioning to leadership need to be transformational in their approach and vision as they lead, it is not enough to continue the status quo.

Thus, transformational leadership is a core component of charter schools. Charter schools promise to do more with less (Flanders, 2017; Larkin, 2016) and charter school staff are tasked with doing more than what is expected. Charter school teachers often work longer hours than district school teachers (Goldring, Gray & Bitterman, 2013), while receiving less pay and less job security (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003; Torres & Oluwole, 2015). Transformational leadership allows charter school leaders to connect with, motivate, and influence others, inspiring them to do more than what is expected (Northouse, 2019). Leithwood created six core characteristics of transformational leadership that operationalize behaviors of transformational leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The six characteristics utilized by transformational leaders as they inspire, motivate, manage, and empower others is shown in the table below.

Table 1
Leithwood's Six Characteristics of Transformative Leadership

Building vision and goals
Providing intellectual stimulation
Offering individualized support
Symbolizing professional practices and values
Demonstrating high performance expectations
Developing Structures to foster participation in decisions

Note: Adapted from "The Effects of Transformational Leadership on Organizational Conditions and Student Engagement with School" by K. Leithwood, & D. Jantzi, D., 2000, in *The Journal of Educational Administration, 38*(2), pp. 112-129. Copyright 2000 by Emerald Publishing.

Transition Theory

In addition to the requirements of transformational leadership, new charter school principals need to effectively transition into their new role while being bound by the responsibilities and accountability inherent in the role of the principalship. Schlossberg and Goodman (2005) introduced transition theory as the idea that expected events, unexpected events, or non-events can challenge prior assumptions, responsibilities, roles, routines or relationships, and navigating these shifts requires an understanding of the impact and

complexities of the transition. Transitions require a change in the perception of oneself and one's role. Transitions alter relationships and routines, and thus can require a deep change in one's behaviors and relationships (Haim & Amdur, 2016).

Bridges & Bridges (2016) postulated that transitions are a three phase process that is psychological in nature. Each change has a transition; how people come to terms with, adapt to, and then implement and internalize the change are all part of the process (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

Principals transitioning into charter school leadership must understand that change has phases in the process of transition, and how leaders effectively plan for and implement the initial phases of ending and letting go, the neutral zone of adaptation, and the new beginning of embodying and embracing the change will determine success and permanence of the change (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Integrated with this, new charter school principals must experience the challenges of each phase of transition while embracing the necessity for transformational leadership. Further discussion of these two frames of study will appear in Chapter 2.

Purpose of the Study

While there are multiple reasons why new charter school leadership in Title I schools might experience greater attrition rates (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017), understanding the context of new charter leaders in a specific setting through transition theory (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) and transformational leadership theory (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), provides more understanding into how those new charter leaders perceive and approach their leadership journey while transitioning to the new role of charter school principal. The research provided a space for the participants to reflect on their leadership practices through the lens of their experiences as new

charter school principals and helped determine how the ways that new charter school principals approach transitions impacted their sense of efficacy and ability to be transformational leaders.

While this research was exploratory in nature, the findings of the research also allow for common leadership transition practices (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) to be better understood, compared and analyzed through the lens of transformational leadership for social justice. This research was conducted in 2020 by a former charter school principal with the insight and contributions of other charter school principals, with the hope that those within the current charter school system add to the discourse on transition theory and the challenges inherent in being a transformational leader and new to the role of charter school principal.

Research Design and Methodology

It is important to create leadership capacity through dialogue, collective action, and ensuring that the voices of all are heard through the building of partnerships and collaboration (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009). Qualitative research aids in the collection of perspectives and can be the start of collaborative action. Leadership is often seen as a top down initiative (Shava & Tlou, 2018), with singular figureheads who propel a vision forward. However, leadership through a social justice lens needs to be a collaborative endeavor (Liu, Bellibas, & Printy, 2018), viewed from the ground up, and needs to consciously dismantle the oppressive practices that can be part of institutions (Darder, 2015). Conducting research on charter school leadership practices that uses the perspectives and experiences of charter school principals ensures that the research is bounded in contextual understanding and is collaborative in nature.

In order to provide an in-depth exploration of the perspectives of charter school administrators as they transitioned to the role of charter school principal, I conducted qualitative

research through a series of semi-structured interviews with new charter school principals at different charter organizations, a focus group, and reflective field notes. I selected charter school principals with less than five years of experience, because I wanted to ensure that the participants could recollect their experiences and challenges in the first few years of their principalship. Participants were principals at different sized charter management organizations, with the assumption that different levels of support might exist for principals depending on the size of the network of schools. I selected participants working at Title I schools with high percentages of students of low socio-economic status in the Los Angeles area. As mentioned prior, Title I charter school principals have unique contexts due to the student needs that arise from poverty related trauma and increased academic needs (Molnar, 1997; Brennan, 2015).

Limitations

Limitations of this study were that I, as the researcher, was bounded by time and had limited access to participants, settings and evidence (McCullough et al., 2018). During most of the research, I was a full-time principal of two schools in Los Angeles. In addition, the participants that I interviewed worked full time as charter school principals. Another limitation was the small sample size of six principals. This small sample size narrowed the transferability and impact of my research. Lastly, a limitation to this study was my role as a researcher. While I was also a charter school principal during the research portion of this study, and thus had potential credibility, I might have impeded the ability of participants to fully share their experiences, particularly as they were still employed at the organization in which they were reflecting on.

Assumptions in my research included that there was a value to the self-reported accounts

of leaders. I assumed that soliciting and analyzing the perspectives of new charter school principals added value to the discourse on transition and transformational leadership practices in charter schools.

Positionality

At the time of most of my research, I was a charter school principal in Los Angeles at two Title I charter schools within a small charter management organization consisting of only two schools. I was within the first few years of my principalship. I had worked at only two organizations during my professional educational career; a district school in Hawaii and a charter management organization in Los Angeles. Both organizations were Title I schools. I did not hold an administrative credential, and had worked previously as the Director of Special Education and as a special education teacher. While my experience brought credibility and an ability to connect more quickly with participants, it is also possible that my experience colored my findings and perspectives.

Significance

What Do I Hope this Study Will Accomplish?

The charter school leadership of K-12 schools can either perpetuate the cycles of injustice or can be the realm where social justice advocacy is developed and explored. Charter schools have the ability to be innovative in practices (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017), and it is possible that this autonomy and ability to make changes quickly (Brown & Roney, 2003; Kern & Kim, 2016), can create the foundation for a socially just school system. Conversely, charter school principals are tasked with the education of a significant proportion of some of our most marginalized populations (Lake & Hill, 2006; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013), and might unwittingly perpetuate

the oppressive policies and practices that exist in public education (Darder, 2015; Turnamian, 2011). In pursuance of ensuring that charter school leaders are learning from each other and reflecting on the effectiveness of their leadership practices through the lens of social justice (Fullan, 2016), it is valuable to deepen the field of research and more thoroughly understand the challenges of new charter school principals as they navigate the transition to leadership. It is important to deepen the understanding of the context of new charter school principals because being new has its own unique set of challenges, and thus new charter school principals have struggles that are unique to being new to the role.

Change and thus transitions might be the inevitable result of human interactions, but it can be incredibly difficult in school institutions (Lambert, Zimmerman, & Gardner, 2016). To counterbalance the mentality of fear that transitions can often bring, everyone must feel part of the process of identifying the need and potential solutions (Lambert et al., 2016). I believe collecting and sharing the voices of charter school principals allows for a better understanding of leadership sustainability and the struggles of new principals as they try to become transformational leaders.

There is a burden of leadership, and sharing the responsibilities of leadership can mitigate feelings of isolation (Woods & Gronn, 2009). Through my research, I provide increased contextual understanding of the responsibilities of leadership by highlighting common struggles and practices that charter school principals have faced during their first years of leadership. I hope that this research helps charter school leaders, particularly new leaders who might come into an organization with differing perspectives on leadership and without the skills to lead in the context of unique school settings and culture (Gage & Smith, 2016). Until leadership visions,

practices, and structures are addressed through a transition theory lens that highlights the importance of planning and implementing transitions, the ability of leaders to create lasting and effective change might be impeded or be executed in isolation from the experiences of other charter school leaders. This research can help charter schools at the local and national level, and the charter management organizations that oversee those charter schools, understand the unique challenges that new charter school principals face when transitioning to the principalship.

On a larger scale, through continuing to deepen research into the leadership practices of charter schools, more can be understood about whether there can be a positive role for charter schools and education for social justice in our existing school system. Understanding how new charter school principals transition to the principalship at Title I schools matters from the perspective of social justice, because charter schools serve a large percentage of our school population (Reed & Rose, 2018) and a significant proportion of students of color or lower socio-economic status who might have few other academic options (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Lake & Hill, 2006).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 detailed the background of the study and an overview of the problem, research question, the purpose of the study, the significance, the theoretical framework, the method and research design, limitations, and the overall organization of the study (McCullough et al., 2018).

Chapter 2 is a comprehensive literature review that details the history of charter schools in the United States, the context of charter schools in Los Angeles, the context of charter school principals in Title I schools, and the prevalent themes in transition theory and the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). In addition, the literature draws connections between

transition structures and the implications for social justice within the context of charter school transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Chapter 3 shares the method of research and how the study was conducted and how data and findings were analyzed (McCullough et al., 2018). A discussion on the background of the participants and the selection process is shared. A comprehensive overview of the interviews, observations, and journal is discussed, as well as the rationale of why such methods were used. In addition, this chapter delves into how rapport and trust was gained, and the process of selecting interview questions, determining the tools used for observations, and the analysis methods. In Chapter 4, I share the findings of my research, through the data generated from interviews, the focus group, and reflective field notes. Lastly, in Chapter 5, a discussion of the implications of my research and possible next steps is explored.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is considerable research on leadership in education (Gunter, 2009; Normore & Issa Lahera, 2019; Orr, 2006; Page, 2010), Title I education (Hirn, Hollo, & Scott; 2018; MacMahon, 2011; McFarland et al., 2017; Stichter, Stormont, & Lewis, 2009), and the history of charter schools (Cohen, 2017; De Luca & Wood, 2016; Gawlick, 2016). These studies provide valuable information on some of the current challenges in education, educational leadership skills, strategies and styles, and the current contextual landscape of K-12 education. Additional research that synthesizes these different aspects of education *and* explores how these components in education can shape the experiences of new charter school principals in Title I schools deepens contextual understanding of charter school leadership and practices.

This literature review explores the context of new charter school principals as they experience the phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) into leadership at Title I charter schools that belong to different sized charter management organizations. This literature review focuses more narrowly on the unique cultural, political, and economic context of new charter school principals at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles, California, through the lens of transformational leadership practices (Bass, 1996; Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2019).

The rationale for focusing on new charter school principals at Title I schools in Los Angeles was twofold. First, I, as the researcher, was a Title I charter school principal in Los Angeles. The research conducted directly shaped my leadership practices, and will be shared with the network of charter school principals in Los Angeles. While each charter school is different, some of the experiences have similarities. Second, Los Angeles has the largest

concentration of students attending charter schools relative to other places in the United States (Mead et al., 2015). Charter schools have exponentially increased in Los Angeles. In the space of less than ten years, charter schools expanded threefold (Dauter & Fuller, 2011). There are over three hundred charter schools in Los Angeles County alone (California Department of Education, 2019). In the Los Angeles Unified School District, which is located in the urban and densely concentrated city of Los Angeles within Los Angeles County, over 20% of school aged students attended charter schools in 2015 (Mead et al., 2015), and while enrollment in public district schools in Los Angeles as a whole has been declining, enrollment in charter schools has been steadily increasing (Mead et al., 2015). Therefore, concentrating on leadership in charter schools in Los Angeles can have an immediate impact on educational leadership and the instruction of the thousands of students who attend charter schools in Los Angeles.

This literature review begins with a brief history of charter schools and the impact of charter schools in K-12 public education in the United States. Next is a summary of the different structures and contexts of charter schools, the political landscape of Los Angeles charter schools, an exploration of leadership in charter schools, a further discussion of the theoretical frame used for this study, and finally a synthesis of the literature and research in order to better understand the experiences of new charter school principals as they transition to leadership at Title I schools. This information provides context for the shared stories of charter school principals in Title I charter schools in Los Angeles that was the subject of this research.

Search Strategy

The search strategy of this literature review was constructed through creating an outline that addressed the history, growth and structure of charter schools, and the leadership of charter

school principals in the United States and more locally in Los Angeles, through the lens of transitions (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) and transformational leadership (Bass, 1996; Burns, 1978; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Keywords for this literature search included: Title I public schools, formation, administrator preparation programs, charter schools, principals, principalships, charter school leaders, leadership styles, transformational leadership, organizational culture, change theory, transitions, charter management organizations, charter school history, charter school legislation, charter schools in California, Los Angeles public education.

The following databases were used: Education Research Information Center (ERIC), EBSCO, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar. Sources of information included newspaper articles, peer reviewed journal articles, books, government acts, government statistics, and dissertations. The research used in this literature review spanned from the sixties to the present, and several hundred sources were ultimately used, as evidenced in the References section of this dissertation. Much of the research was from the last ten years (2009 and onwards). However, older research was also used, in particular to explore the history of charter schools, pivotal moments in education and educational reform, and the context of charter schools in the current socio-political landscape of K-12 public education in the United States.

History of Charter Schools in the United States and Public Education Reform

Charter schools have been able to flourish in the United States due to the unique history of public K-12 education and subsequent public education reform (Nathan, 1997; Ravitch, 2013). The concept of public charter schools that are federally and state funded but privately run, without the degree of oversight and governance that traditional district schools are held to by the government and local districts is unique, with few countries offering such choices (Whitty,

1997). While public education is available to all students in the United States, according to Noguera (2009), public education is a product of a society that has treated its constituents unfairly, through the injustices of nativism, classism, and racism.

Inequity in Public Education

The quality of public education in the United States has differed considerably between individual schools and student populations due to historical and structural injustices that still have ramifications today (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Whitehurst, Reeves & Rodriguez, 2016). School funding is relegated to state governments instead of through federal oversight and a national school system (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Due to the limitations of federal funding revenue, states are in the difficult position of determining how to use an insufficient pool of money to serve the needs of students. States supplement federal funding through property taxes and other tax endeavors. Wealthier communities are able to generate school funding through property taxes on a much more significant level than poorer communities (Baker, 2014; Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018). Thus, public K-12 schools in the United States can have dramatically different budgets, teacher quality, and services because education in the United States has been heavily decentralized (Hamilton, Stecher & Yuan, 2008). The construct of the public school system in the United States has led to a paradox where schools in wealthier districts or areas have more funding, and schools in areas with lower socioeconomic populations have increased levels of need but decreased levels of funding (Ayadi & Jones, 2000; Brunner & Vincent, 2018; Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018).

The United States Educational Reform Movement and the Inception of Charters

The insufficient funding and resources available to K-12 public schools in the United States and the subsequent disparities in student outcomes was thrust into the limelight in the last fifty years through landmark acts and increased federal oversight, which often go hand in hand (Wong & Langevin, 2005). *A Nation at Risk* (1983), *No Child Left Behind* (2001) and *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), all paved the way to an institutional and cultural shift around educational policy (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). The federal government became more involved in education, and decision making moved away from local town and city governments and politics to state and national interests (Ferman, 2017). Scholars asserted that market-based reforms in public education became more popular, with the neoliberalist perception that the economy and market-based competition could improve schools faster than additional regulations or other forms of educational reform (Lee, 2018; Owens & Valesky, 2015). Thus, charter schools became coupled with the notion of democracy and liberty became defined as choice in education (Wells et al., 2002). Charter schools were seen as the dramatic solution needed to substantially reform educational inequity in the United States (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017).

The first charter school law was enacted in the state of Minnesota in 1991 (Stetson, 2013). The purpose of the charter school initiative in Minnesota was multi-pronged: to support innovation, provide parent choice, and to address parent dissatisfaction with existing district schools (Gawlik, 2016; Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Stetson, 2013). By 1994, eleven states enacted legislation that allowed for the existence of charter schools (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995.) Charter school laws now exist in forty-two states and school choice laws (magnet schools, voucher programs) exist in forty-six states (Gottfried & Conchas, 2016).

The Reform Movement and Charter School Growth

The need for educational reform was largely initiated by *A Nation at Risk* (1983), a federal report published in the early 1980s by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A Nation at Risk* (1983) provided an incredibly grim view of education in the United States, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves" (Gardner, Larsen, Baker, Campbell & Crosby, 1983).

A Nation at Risk (1983) portrayed widespread low academic achievement and compared the United States public education unfavorably to other countries at a time when there was a genuine fear that socialist countries would overpower the United States culturally and economically (Fullan, 2016; Hunt, 2008; Owens & Valesky, 2015; Ravitch, 2013; Thattai, 2001). The premise of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was that the United States had a public education system that was declining in quality and failing students and the country as a whole (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Hunt, 2008; Ravitch, 2013). External fears from international influence and competition was coupled with national civil unrest, and protests on the ways that people of color were treated (Kindel, 2011).

Early Charter Schools

In 1988, Albert Shanker, the President of the American Federation of Teachers, endorsed charter schools as the reform needed for public education (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2015; Karp, 2013). Charter schools were originally conceptualized by Ray Budde, a professor in education who proponed giving power back to teachers through his experiences with successful teacher led

schools (Budde, 1996; Nathan, 1996). Charter schools were considered to be a dramatic reform initiative, but the political climate was primed for intensive educational reform through the pressure to raise educational standards quickly (Hunt, 2008). Early charter school proponents conceived of a reform that would operate outside of existing K-12 public education institutions (Wronkovich, 2000).

Charter schools were envisioned as free public schools that operated without district regulations and that served the needs of students who have been historically underserved (Gawlik, 2016). The earliest advocates of charter schools introduced the notion of schools that were unencumbered by bureaucratic restrictions and which would allow for higher levels of teacher freedom and teacher empowerment in both instructional practices and school leadership (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Budde, 1996; Nathan, 1996; Wronkovich, 2000).

District schools were considered to be too slow moving and district regulations were considered too cumbersome, particularly in an era that was propelled by urgency and the fear that the United States was being left behind in educational achievement and progress (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2015). New educational practices took a long time to reach district schools, and proponents of charter schools felt that if the bureaucracy and constraints of districts were removed from schools, that educational change led by teachers could happen more quickly, and help achieve educational equity and improve education (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2015; Wronkovich, 2000). The earlier charter schools targeted students that were considered ‘at risk’, students with disabilities, and students with English language needs (Stetson, 2013). The first charter schools often prioritized innovation, with new methods of teaching and new curriculum (Gawlik, 2016; Lake, 2008; Wronkovich, 2000), and early charter school teachers reported

greater satisfaction with the teaching practices and curriculum at charter schools (Bomotti, Ginsberg, & Cobb, 1999; Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003).

The Second Wave of Charter Schools

The second wave of charter schools in the era of *No Child Left Behind* (2001) sought to increase accountability and improve district schools through market-based competition (Gawlik, 2016; Lee, 2018). The neoliberalist reform movement led to an era of high stakes testing and accountability measures that were tied to student performance (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2007). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) was created to increase accountability nationwide (Hamilton et al., 2008). The articulated goal was to have every child achieving proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year (Spellings, 2005).

Schools were held accountable for academic results through funding measures, school takeovers, and school closures (McGuinn, 2016). Under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), schools were measured for "adequate yearly progress" through annual state assessment data. Schools or subgroups within schools that were identified as "in need of improvement" were given supports to improve. When a school was identified in its first year as "in need of improvement," parents were provided with the choice to move their child to a different school or a charter school. If a Title I school was identified as needing improvement for two years or more, then the school had to provide additional free educational services, such as private tutoring and consultation through companies that helped 'turnaround' schools (Ravitch, 2013; Spellings, 2005).

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) opened up the premise of school choice to all families, instead of just the families that could afford private schools (Renzulli & Roscigno,

2007). The concept of school choice for all students shaped the new wave of educational reform at both the national and state level (Gawlik, 2016). Charter schools could grow in an era which formalized the notion that some traditional public schools were failing students and that parents and students should be offered an alternative choice to failing public schools (Spellings, 2005).

No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act

After the implementation of *No Child Left Behind* (2001), there was significant pushback over the standardized testing, school choice, accountability, and teacher evaluation reforms (Heise, 2007; Luke & Woods, 2008). Pushback was often led by teacher unions (McGuinn, 2016), but there were also grassroots movements led by parents and other coalitions at the school and local levels who primarily pushed back against standardized testing requirements (Ferman, 2017). However, President Obama agreed with two of the main components of *No Child Left Behind* (2001): firstly, that the federal government had a place in eradicating problems that were caused by previous historical and political injustices, and secondly, that teachers and schools should be held accountable for student achievement (McGuinn, 2016). Due to this, the next government reform, *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), focused again on charter school options, and expanding charter schools and school choice (Stout, 2009). The market-based reform of school choice was seen as a way to improve the public-school system by some school reformers (Fullan, 2016), and a way to weaken the public-school system by anti-charter school critics (McGuinn, 2016; Ravitch, 2013).

As of 2020, the Trump Administration had provided fewer opportunities for discourse on educational reform (Carr-Chellman, 2018). However, Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education,

had continued the trend of supporting choice through measures that included charter schools (Cattaneo, 2018; Kaplan & Owings, 2018).

Current Context of Charter Schools

Charter Schools by the Numbers

In the last three decades the concept of school choice and accountability measures coupled with a shift towards a desire for schools to have a higher degree of autonomy has provided the foundation for the increased influence and abundance of charter schools in the United States (Ferman, 2017; Nathan, 1997; Wohlstetter et al., 2013). The rise of charter schools in the United States has been dramatic. Currently, over 60 million children in TK-12th grade receive a public education in the United States and over three million of those students receive their public education through a charter school (Betts & Tang, 2019; Reed & Rose, 2018). In the 2017-2018 school year, there were over seven thousand charter schools in the United States (David & Hesla, 2018).

Charter school laws now exist in 42 states and school choice laws (magnet schools, voucher programs) exist in 46 states (Gottfried & Conchas, 2016). Charter schools continue to grow. Charter school enrollment in 2017-2018 grew 5% from the previous 2016-2017 school year, and 17 states now have at least one hundred charter schools (Gottfried & Conchas, 2016). It can be asserted that charter schools have become an integral component of the public education landscape of the United States. Charter schools no longer exist in the margins, but are now a major contender in public K-12 education (Mead & Green, 2012).

Charter Schools in California

California Charter School Law

The *California Charter School Act* (1992) provided the legislation for the creation of charter schools in the state of California. *The California Charter School Act* (1992) was followed by *Assembly Bill 544* (Cal 1998), which provided guidelines and requirements for charter schools (Hart & Burr, 1996; Kindel, 2011). The assembly bill was signed by Governor Pete Wilson, and was the second charter school law adopted in the United States (Kindel, 2011). The political climate at the time of the *California Charter School Act* (1992) helped pave the platform for charter school support (Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger, & Clayton, 2008).

History of Educational Reform in Los Angeles

To better understand the context of charter schools in Los Angeles, it is important to take a step back and understand the history of reform in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and how public education in Los Angeles created the platform for the exponential rise of charter schools in Los Angeles. Los Angeles was ripe for the growth of charter schools for several fundamental reasons (Kerchner et al., 2008).

LAUSD was lauded as an exemplar district in the early 1900's, due to the span of social services and wide array of programs in elementary and secondary education. However, in the span of 50 years, the demographics of Los Angeles changed from over 80% White and middle class, to over 80% students of color and lower class, by the late sixties and seventies (Kerchner et al., 2008). A school district that was previously considered successful was tasked with showing how it served the needs of all students, and the onslaught of a major desegregation lawsuit and the rise of student activism protests made it apparent that the needs of students of

color were not being met (Kerchner et al., 2008). The Los Angeles riots of 1992 (Johnson, 2017) and the death of a young Black man named Rodney King through police violence created a society that decried the opportunities available for people of color, and providing more educational opportunities was seen as a necessary step forward towards educational reform (Kindel, 2011).

The California charter school legislation provided a space for a performance-based system that allowed for competition within the realm of public school education. The state legislation was designed to improve student learning outcomes, increase learning opportunities, increase the use of innovative or experimental educational methods, provide greater school choice for parents, hold schools responsible for learning outcomes and increase the autonomy of teachers (Kindel, 2011; Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], 2019). Charter schools were heralded as a pivotal revolution in education, infusing healthy competition and market-based reform in education (Ferman, 2017; Goenner, 1996; Merrifield, 2001).

Charter schools were seen as a popular option on both sides of the aisle, Republicans liked the notion of market based reform and school choice, and Democrats also liked the premise of school choice and that private school vouchers were being curtailed and thus public funds were staying in public education (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017; Kerchner et al., 2008; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

California Charter School Expansion

Charter schools rapidly expanded in California. California is now home to 20% of the United States charter school population (Reed & Rose, 2018). In California, 1 out of every 20 public schools is a charter school (Edwards, Perry, Brazil & Studier, 2004), and 10% of students

are educated in a charter school (Lake, Jochim, Hill, & Tuchman, 2019c). However, it is important to note that where charter schools are located in California differs. Most of the charter schools in California are located in urban areas, such as Los Angeles and Oakland. More than half of California's school districts have not authorized charter schools (Cano, 2019). The school districts that have approved charter schools are concentrated in areas with high poverty and higher percentages of students who receive free and reduced lunch (Cano, 2019). Charter schools are unlikely to exist in wealthier suburban districts, and thus the choice that many families make are between public district schools that have a significant percentage of students of low socioeconomic status and charter school options with similar demographics (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

Los Angeles Charter School Expansion

While charter schools rapidly grew in California, the growth of charter schools in Los Angeles is particularly notable. One striking example of the growth and success of the charter school movement in Los Angeles occurred at Locke High School, where only a quarter of the senior class graduated from high school and where 60% of the class left high school by sophomore year (Lazarín, 2011). Locke teachers petitioned the district to allow the charter management organization Green Dot to take over the school (Corbett, 2015; Lazarín, 2011). Within two years, the percentage of students who were still in high school by sophomore year more than doubled (Lazarín, 2011). Student acceptance into college went from 5% to 60% percent within the space of a few years (Doyle & Iyengar, 2013).

Successes like Locke High School helped pave the way for continuous charter school growth (Corbett, 2015). In 1993-1994, the first school year after the *California Charter Schools*

Act (1992), LAUSD had 14 charter schools. By 2006, LAUSD had over one hundred charter schools (Kerchner et al., 2008.) By 2018, LAUSD had almost three hundred charter schools. About a quarter of all students in the geographic borders of LAUSD attend charter schools (Cano, 2019).

Structure of Charter Schools in the United States

According to the *California Charter Schools Act* (1992), charter schools are open to the public and a child need not reside within the boundaries of a school district in order to attend. If there are more students who want to attend than there are spaces per school capacity/enrollment, then a randomized school lottery is held. Charter schools cannot be converted private schools and cannot be religious, sectarian or discriminatory in nature. Charter schools cannot charge tuition (Nathan, 1996). Charter schools can be nonprofit or for profit, but the majority of charter schools are nonprofit organizations (Strauss, 2018).

Charter schools are public schools that are privately run with a reduced degree of district and state oversight. Charter schools are also tasked with meeting certain academic achievement and financial standards during a fixed period of time (Dawson, 1999; Nathan, 1996). Charter schools are public schools that have a larger degree of autonomy compared to their district school counterparts (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). In exchange for a greater degree of freedom, charter schools are held to the promises made in their charter, which are usually centered around innovative educational practices and higher academic outcomes than their neighboring district school counterparts. Charter schools can differ in size, and many are smaller than district schools (Lake & Hill, 2006).

There are many differences in the structure and size of charter schools across the nation. The accountability methods can also vary. Charter schools are created through state policy, and depending on the state, different degrees of accountability and oversight are provided (Lake & Hill, 2006).

Standalone Charter Schools and Charter Management Organizations

Standalone charter schools make up about two thirds of all charter schools (Lackritz et al., 2019; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Standalone charter schools are schools that operate independently, and without belonging to a larger network of schools. While standalone charter schools are still the majority of charter schools, charter schools that belong to charter management organizations are a fast-growing segment (Farrell, 2015).

Charter management organizations are nonprofit organizations composed of charter schools that share the same educational mission and practices and receive support from a central office. About a third of all charter schools belong to a charter management organization (Lackritz et al., 2019; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016), and the percentage of charter schools that belong to a charter management organization (CMO) has increased over time (Furgeson et al, 2011). Charter management organizations essentially replicate the successful practices of one charter school and duplicate those practices across other charter schools, while benefiting from the economies of scale (Lake, Dusseault, Bowen, Demeritt, & Hill, 2010; Wohlstetter, Smith, & Farrell, 2013). CMOs are able to provide more robust support than those offered within standalone charter schools, but are also able to quickly adapt and innovate, unlike traditional school districts (Farell et al., 2012).

While the types of supports that charter management organizations can provide differs across various CMOs (Lake et al., 2010), one of the core functions of many charter management organizations is recruitment, and hiring the right people for the right positions, who are aligned to the mission of the organization (DeArmond, Gross, Bowen, Demerritt, & Lake, 2012). Another key component charter management organizations provide to their schools is data analysis and suggested responses to data. CMOs are able to provide structures for accountability and systems to improve student achievement (Farrell, 2015). The success of CMOs varies, with some showcasing exemplary results on a statewide or nationwide scale (Furgeson et.al, 2011).

Higher rates of teacher turnover are a potential drawback to charter management organizations. Teachers who belong to charter management organizations perceive having less autonomy than those at standalone charter schools, and this perception of less autonomy has been linked with higher rates of attrition (Torres, 2014). It can also be difficult to start a charter management organization, as most CMOs rely on significant additional funding in initial years in order to make it a financially feasible option (Wohlstetter, Smith, Farrell, Hentschke, & Hirman, 2011).

Structure of Charter Schools in California and Los Angeles

There are two different types of charter schools in California: conversion schools and start-up schools. Conversion schools are existing district schools that become charter schools and start-up schools are charter schools that are created from the ground-up (LAUSD, 2018). Start-up charter schools can be created by anyone, there is no prerequisite that requires the creators of charter schools to have had prior experience in education. Charter schools must strive to achieve a student population that is reflective of the district population per rate of English Language

Learners, students with disabilities and with similar socio-economic, racial and ethnic demographics (Blanton, 2012). Slightly over 60% of charter schools operating in Los Angeles belong to a charter management organization that runs three or more schools (Dingerson, Regullano, & Gutierrez, 2018).

Demographics of Charter Schools in the United States

Initially, there were concerns by charter school critics that charter schools would become havens for White middle class students, separated and segregated from the minority students who would be left behind in district schools (Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000). There are data that suggest students exit district schools into charter schools that are more racially segregated (Garcia, 2008). Nationally, charter schools serve a larger proportion of students of color and low income students than traditional district schools (Almond, 2012; Lake & Hill, 2006; Levy, 2010; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). While the majority of states have charter schools with a slight overrepresentation of students of color (Chapman & Donnor, 2015), the demographics of charter schools are largely due to where charter schools are situated. Charter schools are more likely to be in urban locations (Lake & Hill, 2006; Ritter, Jensen, Kisida, & McGee, 2010) and urban school districts have continued to have a shrinking White population (Billingham, 2019).

Wealthier suburban communities are more likely to quell the growth of charter schools that could potentially siphon public funding from high performing district schools (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). Charter schools are more likely to be located in areas where district schools are struggling, as communities are more likely to advocate the opening of charter schools in areas where student achievement is low (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013), which disproportionately impacts students of color (Chapman, & Donnor, 2015; Hill & Lake, 2010).

The confluence of students of color and areas of low academic achievement is notable in places like New Orleans, where over 70% of the K-12 population is in charter schools, with the vast majority of those students being students of color. In Washington D.C., almost 40% of students are enrolled in charter schools, and the demographics of those schools are also primarily students of color (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). While some charter school detractors have alleged that charter schools increase segregation, recent comprehensive studies on charter schools and race shows that the impact of charter schools on segregation is minimal at best (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2016; Monarrez, Kisida, & Chingos, 2019). Studies on charter school demographics provided evidence that charter schools are more segregated when compared to national norms, but have similar levels of segregation compared to the district schools students would have originally attended (D'Entremont & Gulosino, 2008; Ritter et al., 2010).

Despite serving more students of color and students of lower socio-economic status (Yancey, 2004), studies have shown that charter schools also tend to serve lower percentages of students who are English language learners or students with disabilities compared to their district school counterparts (Heilig, Holme, LeClair, Redd, & Ward, 2016; Lee, 2018). However, this might be changing, and some regional studies have shown areas where the gap between district and charter school enrollment of students with disabilities and English language learners is negligible or decreasing over time (Mead & Weber, 2016; Wolf, & Lasserre-Cortez, 2018). In addition, studies have shown that there might be multiple reasons that charter school enrollment of students with disabilities is smaller, including fewer students exhibiting a need and becoming eligible for special education in charter schools (Winters, Carpenter, & Clayton, 2017) and

higher rates of charter school students exiting special education (Wolf, & Lasserre-Cortez, 2018).

Demographics of Charter Schools in Los Angeles

The demographics of charter schools in Los Angeles tends to mirror the trends seen on the national level, with a higher percentage of students of color and low socio-economic status, and lower percentages of English Language Learners and students with disabilities (Shin, Fuller, & Dauter, 2017). The demographics of charter schools in Los Angeles largely mirror those of LAUSD, with a slightly higher percentage of African American students, and comparable percentages of Latinx and White students (Dingerson et al., 2018). There are slight differences in the demographics of students in Los Angeles when comparing independent charter schools versus charter schools that belong to charter management organizations. Schools that belong to charter management organizations in Los Angeles have a significantly higher percentage of African American and Latinx students, and a significantly lower percentage of White students (Dingerson et al., 2018).

For Profit Versus Non Profit Charter Schools

While for profit charter schools are often made to sound ubiquitous with the charter school movement (Dykgraaf & Lewis, 1998; Ferman, 2017; Posnick-Goodwin, 2018), for profit charter schools make up less than 15% of the charter schools in the United States (Strauss, 2018; Lackritz et al., 2019) and are by no means the majority. In some states, due to either legislation or low per pupil funding, for profit charter schools are almost nonexistent. This is the case in California, where the per pupil funding ranks among the lowest in the nation relative to cost of

living (Kerchner et al., 2008). Simply put, for profit charter schools would not be very profitable in California.

Often, critics of charter schools convey that all charter schools are privatized and in pursuit of profits (Ravitch, 2013, Posnick-Goodwin, 2018). However, charter schools in California are part of non-profit organizations and have largely been non-profit throughout the entire history of charter schools in California. Out of the over twelve hundred charter schools in California, only 35 were part of for-profit organizations. In fall 2018, Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill that would no longer allow for profit charter schools to be operated in California (Strauss, 2018). Even before the bill, for profit charter schools made up less than 3% of the charter schools in California (Strauss, 2018). Therefore, while for profit charter schools might potentially be part of the discussion on charter schools on a national scale, in California, the impact of for-profit schools is almost nonexistent and should not be considered relevant to the conversation on charter schools.

Charter School Accountability Measures in California and Los Angeles

Charter school renewals in California have historically been for a period of five years in order to ensure that charter schools have a degree of autonomy and the ability to borrow funds, as shorter renewal periods might make it impossible to be considered stable enough to borrow funds (Blanton, 2012). The structure of charter schools is largely based on their charter, and components of the charter proposal include mission and vision, student outcome goals, the students who will be served by the charter school, and how success will be measured. Charter schools are exempt from portions of California Education Code and, in exchange, are overseen by a charter school authorizer (Blanton, 2012).

In California, local school districts review and accept new charter petitions. Charter petitions provide a comprehensive plan of governance, including the ways in which the charter school will provide an innovative education that is different for students than the other educational opportunities currently offered. After this period, charter schools have to undergo a process of renewal, to determine whether the charter will be renewed for another five year period. The process of renewal can be comprehensive, with reviews of fiscal policies, governance and academic outcomes. Schools can be closed for fiscal mismanagement, lack of strong or inept governance, and academic outcomes that portray low growth or low academic achievement (Blanton, 2012).

Overall, charter schools in California are unique due to the amount of accountability measures that are used to provide oversight. Nationally, 300 charter schools opened in the 2017-2018 school year and 238 charters schools were closed. In California alone, 70 charter schools opened and 68 charter schools closed in the 2017-2018 school year (Baratte, 2018). California is considered to be a leader in charter school accountability measures, due to the federal accountability measures, state charter school accountability measures, and the accountability measures provided by the local authorizing agencies (Reed & Rose, 2018).

The degree of oversight provided to charter schools in California can be cumbersome and expensive, and there is a push to increase the use of consistent oversight measures that utilize professional standards and multiple metrics of success (Blanton, 2012; Ark, 2013). In addition, there are exceptions to the level of oversight that occurs for charter schools in California. Smaller district schools have approved charter schools that are beyond their geographical boundaries in order to obtain the funding that charter schools have to contribute towards the oversight process

(Philips, 2019). This oversight funding money might be reallocated to district expenses, instead of using it for the intended purpose of oversight. There have been cases of small districts comprised of only three or so schools approving an additional dozen or more charter schools in order to generate funding (Philips, 2019). While there are consistent accusations that charter schools do not receive oversight (Posnick-Goodwin, 2018), the reality is that most do (Palmer & Gau, 2003), and often at a greater level of scrutiny than their district school counterparts. This is the case in Los Angeles, where a significant portion of the Los Angeles Unified School District budget is allocated to providing oversight to charter schools (Kerchner et al., 2008).

Regardless of the fact that charter schools often have a high level of accountability to their district approvers, demands for increased charter school oversight is a common refrain due to the incorrect perception that charter schools are unregulated and lack accountability (Posnick-Goodwin, 2018; Sacks, 2019). Increased charter school oversight was also a major component of the January 2019 United Teachers of Los Angeles union strike and subsequent agreement with the Los Angeles Unified Schools District (Reilly, 2019). Demands for increased charter school oversight was also a key issue in the February 2019 Oakland Teachers union strike, and in the 2019 State Address, Governor Gavin Newsom connected charter school growth with the achievement gap, staffing issues in schools, and budget difficulties in school districts (Cano, 2019).

Due to the political landscape of public education in California and the position of Governor Gavin Newsom at the time of the study, it was probable that additional charter school oversight measures and restrictions will be enacted (Freedberg & Lambert, 2019). One recent measure was *Assembly Bill 1505* (Cal. 2019), which allowed for differing renewal periods of

two, five, or seven years, based on the achievement outcomes of the charter school. No charter schools have been approved for two or seven years as of August 2020, but the next round of renewals might include differing renewal lengths.

Financial Impact of Charter Schools

One of the primary critiques against charter schools is the perceived detrimental financial impact of charter schools on district schools (Ravitch, 2013). Charter schools have been derided as siphoning much needed monetary funds from district schools (Dean, 2019). Educational funding is primary generated through attendance and enrollment, and funding follows students. Thus, when students leave district schools to attend charter schools, the funding leaves with them. However, research has shown that charter schools are not the cause of fiscal distress in school districts, and that there are other more relevant causes to fiscal distress in school districts than the presence of charter schools (Lake, Jochim, Hill, & Tuchman, 2019b). While charter school enrollment can financially impact school districts (Dean, 2019), school districts that are financially struggling have other factors that have caused fiscal instability, such as increasing encroachment costs and deficits in state funding (Lake et al., 2019b).

Financial Impact of Charter Schools in Los Angeles

Regardless of whether charter schools have provided differences in student outcomes or have instilled a sense of market-based competition, in Los Angeles, the impact of charter schools is significant, because the amount of charter schools is large compared to other areas in the country (Cano, 2019). As of 2019, there were 277 charter schools in Los Angeles under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Unified School District (Charter Schools Division, 2019). The

Los Angeles Unified School District itself was huge. It oversaw almost nine hundred schools, and was the second largest employer in Los Angeles (Fuller, 2010).

There are financial implications felt by the Los Angeles Unified School District due to charter school enrollment and a myriad of other recent factors. The enrollment of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) had declined by 245,000 between 2001 and 2016 (Zoller, 2016). While other factors may have led to this decline, such as the 10% of students in private schools (Kolko, 2014) and the reduced number of Los Angeles residents having children (Aron, 2017), charter schools have also contributed a significant percentage (Cano, 2019). The impact of declining enrollment has been dire to LAUSD, as there have been increasing encroachment costs (retirement, health care), rising building costs, and increasing costs of administrative staffing and personnel (Aldeman, 2019; Aron, 2017). However, it is important to note that student enrollment in LAUSD has always been variable over time, and was so before the inception of charter schools (Lake et al., 2019a; Spurrier, 2019).

Beyond declining enrollment costs, there are other financial implications of charter schools for LAUSD (Heaggans, 2006; Kerchner et al., 2008). These financial implications include more nominal costs, such as the office space used by the Charter Schools Division in the LAUSD Beaudry Headquarters, and more significant costs, such as the increased percentage of students with higher special education costs in the district versus charter schools (Miron, 2014).

Students with identified disabilities are significantly more likely to be of color, of lower socioeconomic status, of English language learner background, and have a lower quality of life as measured through environmental factors (Ralabate & Klotz, 2007). Charter schools still serve fewer students with disabilities than their district school counterparts, however this number is

growing (Miron, 2014; Zoller, 2016). Detractors of charter schools assert that charter schools have created a structure for attracting higher performing students and leaving students with higher needs and lower test scores in the district schools (Barnard-Brak et al., 2018; Mead et al., 2015).

The additional costs associated with higher proportions of students with special needs is significant for district schools, and the amount of federal funding provided to states has been dramatically less than the total funding necessary, hovering around 15%-17% of total special education expenditures (Ziegler, 2008). Instead, district schools are forced to consider how to spend overall education funding in order to support the growing costs of special education. During times of budgetary cuts, states are still required to exhibit "maintenance of effort," in order to show that they haven't cut education funding for special education compared to previous years even if global cuts to education were made (Klein, 2013). The shifting demographics of district schools due to the departure of students to charter and private schools can have particularly dire effects when per pupil spending is limited. In the state of California, per pupil spending consistently ranks less than the national average, despite the higher costs of living (Fensterwald, 2017; Kerchner et al., 2008).

In short, charter schools have been one of the factors, but not the only factor, contributing to negative financial implications for the district; and this financial impact potentially impacts the services that traditional district schools can provide (Zoller, 2016). The financial problems faced by LAUSD are not solely caused by charter schools, as declining enrollment has multiple causes (Spurrier, 2019) and LAUSD is also facing increasing encroachment costs (Aldeman, 2019), due to an aging teaching population.

Current Political Landscape of Charter Schools in Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, charter school operators must work within the current political landscape which is composed of heightening opposition of charter schools by the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) Union (Cano, 2019). Los Angeles Unified School District has recently experienced a historic teacher strike that lasted a period of six days during the winter of 2019 (McCullough, 2019). The teacher strike included rhetoric by the UTLA teachers' union that targeted charter schools in Los Angeles as antithetical to the best interests of students, teachers and the school district (Shepphard, 2019).

Misinformation about the level of accountability of charter schools and their nonprofit status was disseminated by members of the United Teachers of Los Angeles Teachers' Union during this time (Alvarez, 2019). The teacher strike led to negative press and a level of scrutiny for Los Angeles charter schools that was reflected both in news articles and recent educational research (Ladd, 2019; Lake et al., 2019b). In addition, *Proposition 39* (2000) which led to *The Charter School Facility Grant Program Senate Bill 740* (2001) and had allowed independent charter schools in Los Angeles to share unused school space in district schools (Spurrier, 2019), has recently become a source of financial contention, as LAUSD has charged over forty independent co-located charter schools with retroactive overallocation fees, financial penalties that have cost charter schools hundreds of thousands of dollars and impacted their fiscal sustainability (Stokes, 2019).

Recent legislation at the state level, *Assembly Bill 1505* (Cal. 2019), now provides the opportunity for school districts to broadly consider the financial impact of charter schools for the school district when determining charter school renewals and approval (Fensterwald, 2019;

Primer, 2019), while charter school determines have not yet been made under AB 1505 (Cal. 2019), this has brought a level uncertainty to the future of charter schools in California and Los Angeles.

Success of Charter Schools in the United States

Since *A Nation at Risk* (1983), education was seen as a system in crisis, with charter schools as the answer (Ferman, 2017; Fullan, 2015). Charter schools were considered as the next step in educational reform and were lauded as social justice activism enacted within market-based competition (Nathan, 1996). However, by 2004, The American Federation of Teachers issued a report that stated that charter schools were tested and did not measure up to their promise, and asserted that studies showed no significant difference in the outcomes of charter schools compared to district schools (Carnoy et al., 2005; Lake & Hill, 2005).

Rising Condemnation of Charter Schools

Charter schools have increasingly become viewed by critics as part of the quest for corporate reform and the privatization agenda, with critics claiming that charter schools lead the way in making public education an anti-union, entrepreneurial capitalistic endeavor (Ravitch, 2013). Even the premise of school choice is questioned, with critics positing that charter schools offer a subpar choice to low socioeconomic students of color, who thus have the limited choice between failing district schools or failing charter schools (Waitoller & Super, 2017; Wohlstetter et al., 2013).

Charter schools are supposed to provide innovation in education, whether it be through innovative instructional, financial, staffing, or leadership practices. Whether true innovation is actually happening was considered by some to be uncertain (Lake, 2008) or virtually impossible

in the educational landscape of *No Child Left Behind* (2001) and high stakes testing and compliance initiatives (Martin, 2015). Similarly, the portrayal of charter schools in the media has swung from the laudation of innovation and student choice to the condemnation of charter schools with assertions of mismanagement and lack of accountability (Feuerstein, 2015).

Academic Outcomes of Charter Schools in the United States

According to the 2017 *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, the majority of schools on the top ten list were charter schools (U.S. News, 2018). This was similar to the Washington Post ranking of America's Most Challenging High Schools, with charter schools taking nine out of ten spots (Mathews, 2017). Studies of charter school student outcomes elicit mixed results; it is not always apparent that charter schools outperform their district counterparts, and different studies yield different results (Carnoy et al., 2005; Owens & Valesky, 2015; Ravitch, 2013). It is worthwhile to remember that generalizing studies on charter school outcomes can be difficult when charter schools are so varied in mission and educational practices (Dillon & Tucker, 2011).

While research on the performance of charter schools has shown mixed educational outcomes (Carnoy et al., 2005; Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Owens & Valesky, 2015; Ravitch, 2013), research showed that charter school performance was not a stagnant entity, and the outcomes can differ based on the scope and quality of the research conducted (Hoxby, 2004a). Studies that encompassed the majority of charter schools compared to smaller percentages in select geographic locations provided evidence that charter school students had greater proficiency in reading and math compared to the national norm and the neighboring district schools that charter school students would have attended instead, particularly for students of color and low socio-economic status (Hoxby, 2004b).

Another study corroborated the increased academic performance for students who were socio-economically disadvantaged, with charter school students of low socio-economic status making greater improvements than their wealthier peers (Walters, 2018). Despite accusations that charter schools do not serve the needs of students with disabilities, some studies have shown that charter school students with disabilities are in more inclusive environments and have higher test scores than their district school counterparts (Setren, 2015). Charter school performance is improving, when compared both against traditional public schools and previous charter school performance (Raymond, 2014). Charter schools offer a choice to socially economically disadvantaged students of color who otherwise have no option but failing district schools (Rosenblith, 2018; Yancey, 2004), and according to some studies, those socially economically disadvantaged students of color perform better in charter schools than in the district schools they would have attended (Hill & Lake, 2010).

The Academic Impact of Charter Schools on District Schools

Proponents of market-based reform assert that charter schools would force district schools to improve, through providing competition and school choice (Ravitch, 2013). Some studies have shown that district teachers work longer hours in districts where charter schools were introduced and that district student outcomes did improve as a result of the introduction of charter schools within the district (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). Other studies have posited that opportunities for collaboration and dissemination of teaching practices can occur between district and charter schools (Opalka & Yatsko, 2018). Examples of the changing practices of school districts due to charter schools include the small school movement. Studies have shown that

small school structures can increase academic and socio-emotional benefits to students and decrease financial costs (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002).

However, some findings seem to indicate that district schools have not responded to the academic competition of charter schools, and that district school student outcomes have *not* improved through the introduction of charter schools (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). As mentioned, additional studies have pointed to the financial impact of charter schools on school districts (Bifulco & Reback, 2014), and whether the efficacy of charter schools should be measured first through the detrimental financial impact to school districts.

Controversy of the Efficacy of Charter Schools

As evidenced by different reports exhibiting different outcomes, measuring the success of charter schools as a single entity can be difficult, due to the variations in the types and management of charter schools, the metrics used (Mead & Green, 2012), and the changing political landscape. The changing position of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) on the benefits of charter schools highlights the controversial context of measuring the success of charter schools (Ravitch, 2013).

Charter schools exist in this dichotomous space; lauded for leading educational reform, and attacked for destroying public education. Charter schools are seen as both the solution and the problem of public education (Fullan, 2016). The third wave of charter schools, which encompasses the current context of charter schools, exist in this controversial landscape of perceived mixed academic outcomes and reform initiatives (Ravitch, 2013). Despite the critiques that the charter school movement has faced (Ravitch, 2013; Fullan, 2016), charter schools have

flourished, and public schools have changed some of their practices to reflect charter school models (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002).

The Success of Charter Schools in Los Angeles

The efficacy of charter schools in Los Angeles has also been challenged, with different studies yielding mixed results (Betts & Tang, 2019; Willis, 2019). Some studies of Los Angeles academic outcomes conducted in 2011 showed a positive effect in reading for charter schools, but the effect was just large enough to be considered statistically significant and was small compared to the academic outcomes of charter schools in other regions (Betts & Tang, 2019).

However, according to a highly lauded and rigorous study conducted in 2014 by Stanford University's Center for Research on Academic Outcomes, charter school students in Los Angeles gained a total of 79 additional school days in math and 50 additional school days in reading during the span of their academic K-12 career (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2014). According to data collected from California state testing, charter schools as a whole have increased the percentage of students proficient in reading and writing every year (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2014) By the time charter school students have graduated, they are three times more likely to have completed the courses necessary for college admission compared to students who attend traditional LAUSD district schools (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2014). Other studies on charter school performance in Los Angeles showcased higher academic outcomes for students of color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students in reading and math (Almond, 2012; Gutierrez, 2012).

Not all charter schools in Los Angeles are deemed successful. According to 2018-2019 data from the California School Dashboard, 29 charter schools and 118 district schools were

identified as needing comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) under Every Student Succeeds Act (Willis, 2019).

Leadership in Charter Schools

Studies have shown that the instructional leadership of schools is a significant component of school success (Fullan, 2016; Gawlik, 2018a). While the success of a school is based on many factors, where leadership is just one of many; the school principal can ensure that those other crucial factors are in place and are allowed to thrive (Fullan, 2016). Through numerous studies in quantitative and qualitative research, it is evident that while no one variable is the tipping point for academic success, it is necessary to bring those variables together through effective leadership in order to see measurable results in improved student achievement (Louis et al., 2010; Carpenter & Peak, 2013). Despite research that indicates that the leadership of a school is a significant component of success, there are few studies on instructional leadership in the charter school setting (Carpenter & Peak, 2013; Gawlik, 2018a).

Prerequisites of the Charter School Principal

If leadership is a crucial part of a school's success, the qualifications of school principals could be deemed an important consideration. Charter school principals do not need administrative credentials and in fact need not have a background in teaching or in education at all. While many charter school principals have prior teaching experience, and hold degrees in education and have administrative credentials, there are no prerequisites to administrative work in charter schools (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). Charter school principals might come from traditional administrator preparation programs but they might not. However, despite the lack of

formal prerequisite requirements, most charter school administrators do have prior leadership experience and experience in education (Dressler, 2001; Vickers, 2014).

It might be alarming to some that charter school principals are not required to complete traditional administrator preparation programs. However, a multi-year study by the President of Teachers College at Columbia University revealed almost two thirds of administrator preparation programs were considered inadequate and that more than 95% of principals considered on the job learning and experience to be more valuable than administrator preparation programs (Hess & Kelly, 2007). While it could be valuable to ascertain the quality and type of administrator preparation programming that charter school principals experience, the degree and quality of formalized preparation and training is varied and can differ greatly. Even other methods of formalized preparation can fall short, in a study of urban principals, the perceived efficacy of principal coaching was mixed (Lackritz et al., 2019).

While traditional administrator programs yield mixed results, formalized training is only one method of principal preparation. In fact, charter school principals at both standalone and larger charter school networks have indicated that the mentorship and network of other principals has been the most instrumental in guiding their practice and training as a principal (Torres, Bulkley, & McCotter, 2018; Zellner et al., 2002).

Who are Charter School Principals?

According to a study on the demographics of charter school principals compared to district principals (Vickers, 2014), charter school principals are slightly less likely to have participated in a principal preparation program than district principals. Charter school principals are slightly less likely to have a higher education degree in leadership, such as a masters. Charter

school principals are more likely to be female than district school principals. Charter school principals are less likely to be White than district school principals. Charter school principals are also more likely to be younger than district school principals. Therefore, charter school principals are more likely to be younger women of color compared to their district school counterparts (Vickers, 2014).

Responsibilities of the Charter School Principal

Charter school principals exist in a landscape where they are held to expectations of delivering high academic student outcomes while providing a unique educational experience (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). The role of charter school principals includes the instructional leadership responsibilities facing district principals, but can also include responsibilities in human resources, student and staff recruitment, community engagement, school and local politics, creating and implementing the mission and vision, fundraising, and finances (Cetinkaya, 2016). Charter school principals are in effect leaders in both sales and education: they need to ensure that their school model is cost effective, meets the needs of the community, and is sustainable over time (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). Charter school principals are also bombarded with the same ever-changing reforms, initiatives and bulletins that besiege district schools (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Ferman, 2017).

High accountability, high academic achievement. Thus, charter school principals operate in a paradigm where they are held to higher student accountability measures than many of their district school counterparts while simultaneously are held to the decree of offering an education that is innovative (STEM, college readiness, the arts) and different than the educational services offered in district public schools (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Wohlstetter et

al., 2013). Charter school principals must utilize this high degree of accountability and innovation in education to enact a culture of continuous improvement and learning in order to provide high student achievement outcomes (Fullan, 2016; Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017).

To make matters more challenging, charter school principals are tasked with delivering higher student outcomes without the district supports that district schools receive. While district principals might have structures that they can both rely on and are inhibited by, charter school leaders are often left to rely on their own judgment (DeArmond et al., 2012). Charter school principals have more freedom but also more accountability (Brown & Roney, 2003; Kern & Kim, 2016). They are expected to use this increased autonomy to make instructional changes that quickly improve student outcomes (Gawlik, 2018b; Wohlstetter et al., 2013).

Human resources and teacher retention. Charter school principals are also taxed with needing to recruit and retain teachers. While charter schools are not held to the same human resources hiring policies or teacher salary scales as their district counterparts (Jabbar, 2018), teacher recruitment in the charter world can be difficult. In one charter school human resources study, over 40% of charter school teachers stated that they only started working for a charter school because they were not offered a district school position (White, 2016), and charter school teachers are significantly more likely to have higher rates of attrition than district school teachers (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017; Stuit & Smith, 2010). One study indicated that half of the charter school teachers interviewed planned to apply to another school position at the end of the school year, compared to 15% of their district school counterparts (Cannata, 2011).

The difficulties of teacher hiring and teacher retention are exacerbated in Los Angeles. Due to the budget cuts in 2008, prospective teachers were unable to obtain positions in Los

Angeles and fewer people signed up for teaching programs (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Currently, Los Angeles has significant teacher shortages (Freedberg, 2018; Provenzano, 2019). Charter school principals are tasked with ensuring that all teachers are appropriately credentialed, despite about 40% of new teacher hires in LAUSD lacking the appropriate credentials (Freedberg, 2018.)

Charter School Principals in Title I Schools

While the success of charter schools is consistently under scrutiny, there is an additional focus on the success of Title I schools, which have consistently struggled to show success in academic achievement for students of low socio-economic status (New York State Teachers Association, 1967; Travers & Christiansen, 2010). Charter school principals in Title I schools are tasked with the same expectations as their more affluent charter school counterparts but with the additional difficulties of supporting students with higher levels of academic, behavioral and socio-emotional needs due to poverty related trauma (Dressler, 2001; Metcalfe, 2014; Rawles, 2010). In addition, charter school principals must be cognizant of celebrating the strengths of students and communities through recognizing identity and creating a multicultural learning environment, and the benefits of embracing cultural competence pedagogy and practices has been linked with stronger student performance (Edwards, Holtz, & Green, 2007). The task of charter school principals is not easy, as they are held to high levels of accountability but grapple with the dichotomy that an over emphasis on the end result of assessment scores has been connected with losing culturally relevant practices (Sondel, 2016).

Starting from an asset-based approach can be difficult when Title I schools often do not reflect the traditional theories of multi-tiered systems of support and the pyramid of Response to

Intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), where the majority of students can do well with tier 1 supports. Instead, a greater percentage of students might require higher tiers of support in order to succeed (Brennan, 2015). Higher levels of support require more time, resources and expertise, and these necessary components can be found in more experienced teachers and principals (Taylor et al., 2000). However, studies of Title I instructional practices in district schools revealed more time wasted, less academic talk during instruction, and higher levels of student disengagement (Stichter et al., 2009). This might be attributed to the lower levels of teacher qualifications and experience found in Title I schools (Papa, 2007), and both teacher qualifications and years of experience have been linked to teacher efficacy (Peske & Haycock, 2006).

These additional academic, behavioral and socio-emotional needs are coupled with additional struggles with financial funding (Robey & Helfenbein, 2018) and the fact that often, principals in Title I schools are less experienced than their counterparts in more affluent schools (Wilson, 2017). Sometimes, leadership in Title I schools is considered a prelude to the principalship at more affluent schools, with less experienced principals leading the schools in need of the most guidance (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). The lack of comparable experience of Title I principals is especially striking when research indicates that Title I schools have the most need of effective leadership (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth; 2008) and that the leadership in Title I schools has an even greater influence on academic outcomes (Kochan, 2010). In addition, a culture of trust between administrators and teachers has been seen as an integral component of Title I school success (Metcalfe, 2014), which can be a difficult task for new administrators.

Charter schools seek to change the outlook of Title I education practices, and are under increasing pressure to provide measurable examples of high levels of rigor, accountability, and student success, as evidenced by the focus on reformed accountability measures for charter schools in California (Reed & Rose, 2018). Balancing academic success with other notions of success that might be linked to non-traditional measures of student outcomes can be challenging for all schools, but particularly charter schools, who are often held to a need to show quick improvements in assessment scores and who can struggle to find the balance in culturally relevant practices and academic outcomes in such a high pressure environment (Ali, 2019; Sondel, 2015). In addition, Title I charter schools can also struggle with showing high student outcomes through traditional measures with a small student population size, or within the multi-faceted complexity of working with socio-economically disadvantaged students, which can mean that traditional metrics for success and a one size fits all approach might not be the best way to measure student outcomes (Reed & Rose, 2018). Studies have shown that success in Title I schools can be predicated on increased services, such as greater outreach to families and providing opportunities for parent input (Finkel, 2011; Westat & Policy Studies Associates, 2001) and collaboration from the community (Freire, 1993; Salle & Boske, 2013).

Some critics of charter schools have included the critique that charter schools are linked with a testing culture that does not allow teachers to utilize culturally relevant practices (Ali, 2019). However, charter schools differ in their approaches, and there are many charter schools that have pioneered culturally relevant practices in K-12 education at Title I schools and have been at the forefront of showing success by connecting academic learning with the needs of families and communities (Keehne, Sarsona, Kawakami, & Au, 2018). Practices that link the

purpose of education as not to move away from one's identity and cultural practices, but instead connect the purpose of education to providing students with the tools to learn skills to give back and strengthen community ties have been linked to student success (Keehne et al., 2018). In addition, studies have shown that creating a strong culture of care and providing strong adult-student relationships in schools have elicited positive results (Warren & Bonilla, 2018), and this high culture of care can be a core aspect of charter schools (Harris, 2018).

Principals in Title I schools are tasked with a herculean task: addressing and eradicating inequities in the school setting that have roots in the infrastructure of society; a task that is considered impossible by some (Molnar, 1997). Once again, the difficulties of the role can be seen in the numbers. Principals at Title I schools are more likely to leave the principalship compared to other principals at more affluent schools (Fuller & Young, 2008; Gates et al., 2006; Papa, 2007).

Challenges for New Charter School Principals

New charter school principals have a unique context and set of challenges. Beyond the tasks of human resources, instructional leader, financial manager, fundraiser, and community organizer, new charter school principals have to acclimate to a new organization and new set of roles and responsibilities. When a new principal starts at an organization, the principal might be newer than the organization, or come with less experience than others in the organization. Others in the organization might have been there longer, and just as the new principal is grappling with adjusting to a new position and role, others in the organization are adjusting to new leadership and potentially new structures and a new direction (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017).

New principals inherently must grapple with change; when starting a new leadership role, change is inevitable because innovation is necessary to survive (Tidd & Bessant, 2018). The principal is where change in the organization originates (Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018). Teachers and staff can struggle with the need to adjust or adapt in order to be responsive to the needs of their students, and can push against new initiatives (Ellsworth, 2000).

A new principal must become accustomed to the ever changing federal, state, and district initiatives (Jäppinen, 2017), and the necessity to create a culture of continuous improvement in order to achieve the goal of increased student achievement (Fullan, 2016; Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017). Improvement often entails reform, but it can also be through reflection and determining what works and should be continued or left unchanged (Kerchner et al., 2008). Understanding when to create new initiatives and reform and when to stabilize and have consistency is one of the crucial tasks of new principals (Walters, 2012). New principals also work longer hours, almost ten more hours a week compared to their more seasoned counterparts (Winters, 2018). It is no coincidence that the difficulties of new principals can also be seen in the numbers, less than half of new principals continue in their roles (Viadero, 2009; Lackritz et al., 2019).

Charter School Principal Sustainability

The position of principal at both district and charter schools has high levels of attrition (Goldring & Taie, 2014). While attrition is relatively high for all principals, the difficulties facing charter school administrators can be seen in the numbers, when other factors are taken into account, charter school principals are still slightly more likely to leave than district school principals (Winters, 2018). 70% of charter school leaders surveyed said they expected to leave their schools within five years (Gawlik, 2015; Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017). This percentage

might not seem significant compared to the 60% of district principals that expect to leave their positions in the next five years (Gajda & Militello, 2008), but district principals are more likely to leave due to retirement, instead of a career change (Gajda & Militello, 2008).

Research indicates that charter school principals have a higher rate of turnover than their district school counterparts (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017; Ni et al., 2015). It is concerning that the majority of charter school principals expect to leave their position in within five years, because studies have shown that at least five years is needed for a principal to bring about positive improvements (Lackritz et al., 2019), and when principals leave, the trust of teachers and the organizational culture is damaged (Finnigan & Daly, 2017).

Potential causes for attrition. The causes of higher rates of charter school principal attrition are not fully known nor documented (Winters, 2018). Charter school principals in general report feeling greater amounts of stress relative to other principals (Robey & Helfenbein, 2018). Charter school principals can also feel that they lack the requisite skills and support to do their job successfully (Foreman & Maranto, 2018). The higher perception of accountability might be a factor, as charter school principals are tasked with additional responsibilities to those of district school principals (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Winters, 2018).

It is possible that higher rates of charter school principal attrition are due in part to the differences in demographics of charter school principals compared to district school principals, as charter school principals are on average more likely to be female and younger than their district school counterparts (Vickers, 2014). It is possible that life circumstances, such as maternity leave or child care might be a cause of attrition. In addition, studies have shown that female principals are paid less than male principals (National Center for Education Statistics,

2019), even when other factors (type of school, location) are taken into account. It is possible that perceptions of long-term sustainability might also be linked to adequate compensation.

Transition Theory

Schlossberg theorized that transitions are any event or non-event that force a change in relationships, routines, roles, or assumptions (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). For new principals, this can include the building of new relationships, or redefining prior relationships, the creation of new routines, the defining of new roles and responsibilities, and the creating and dismantling of prior assumptions on the organizational culture. The ways that new principals' approach and respond to the transitions that are inevitable when entering the position of principalship can be connected to a framework of transition theory that asserts that all transitions have phases, and that successfully transitioning through these phases is instrumental to successful organizational change (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Transition theory is important because it posits that while change is situational and external, and is based on circumstances that can be beyond control, it is what happens to people; transitions are internal, it is what people experience as they go through change (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). The phases of transition are not necessarily linear, and can happen simultaneously and differently depending on the context (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

Transition theory puts the focus on the followers within the organization and how those who follow leadership adjust to changes (Hollander & Offerman, 1990; Van Oord, 2013). Often leadership theory concentrates on the characteristics and behaviors of leaders (Hollander & Offerman, 1990), but transition theory analyzes the impact of leadership on those in the organization. Transition theory tasks leaders with being good communicators, grief counselors,

systems builders, and navigators of organizational change (McDonald, 2018). Transition theory posits that while adjusting to leadership might be hard for new leaders, it is also very difficult for those who follow to adjust to new leadership and new initiatives, and it is the responsibility of leaders to ease the difficulties of transition for others in the organization (McDonald, 2018).

Transition theory is relevant to educational leadership and the transition to the charter school principalship, because school leaders are tasked with the pressure to be accountable to continuous school improvement (Saunders & Stockton, 2005). Improvement by definition, necessitates change, and thus the navigation through transition. However, while transitions pertain to change, transitions are also part of ensuring continuity, and building on prior successes (Boyle & Wilkinson, 2018). Therefore, the success of transitions is based on a leader's ability to ground their improvement initiatives on contextual understanding of the structures and relationships in place, and the strengths and needs of the organization, and those within the organization (Boyle & Wilkinson, 2018). The ability of school leaders to guide their organization through transitions has been linked to school success (Kelly & Saunders, 2010), and thus is critical to the leadership practices of charter school principals.

Three Phases of Transition

According to Bridges and Bridges (2016), the three phases in transitions are letting go, the neutral zone and new beginnings. Using the three phases of transitions as an analytical lens allows for the human factor within organizational change systems to be understood and acknowledged (Misiunas & Stravinskiene, 2010). Within these phases of transition it is also crucial to realize that different people have different levels of resilience to transitions, as change

can be psychologically challenging and impact different people in different ways (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Letting go. It is important to honor the first phase of transition and provide a space for processing the end and letting go of the past (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). The first phase of transition posits that every beginning starts with the end of something else (Burns, 2010). When a new principal starts, it can be helpful to reflect on prior initiatives that have contributed to the organizational culture in ways that others might deeply miss and grieve (Hall & Hord, 2016).

If the new principal assesses the roles that were played by both leaders and followers prior to their inception, they can be more strategic in creating opportunities to connect to others, and allow for there to be spaces for others to connect as well. (Hall & Hord, 2016). New principals might be eager to share their vision, but first they have to allow others in the organization to grieve their losses (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Often, staff might be discouraged from talking about the way things used to be, particularly if the transition to new leadership was abrupt or unexpected.

New principals should recognize that their organization has multiple cultures (Saunders & Stockton, 2005), and the dynamics within each of those microcosms might have factors that mean that the approach to transitioning to new leadership should differ (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Simply put, different factions within the organization might process the loss of old leadership and the start of new leadership differently, and it is important to understand the different factors within each group that need to be considered and potentially addressed in different ways (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). The context, individual characteristics, support structures, and behaviors of each person in the organization need to be understood (Griffin &

Gilbert, 2015). Understanding the past and the context of the organization can reduce the need to manage every aspect of the organization and allow for the initiation of adaptation and growth (Hall & Hord, 2016).

The neutral zone. After the phase of letting go, principals have to grapple with the neutral zone (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). New changes might be introduced, but those in the organization need time to adapt and to learn new ways. During this time, practical and concrete support should be given to employees (Miller, 2017). The new principal has to address how others in the organization feel about changes in their roles and responsibilities, as well as how changes in the organization impact them, and this can be an anxiety provoking time due to the uncertainty on what systems are working and what is not (Bohanon, Wahnschaff, Flaherty, & Ferguson, 2018). Morale and productivity can suffer during this time (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

The neutral zone is the time where principals assess and build new systems and procedures. The neutral zone can also encompass redefining roles and responsibilities for oneself and others. The neutral zone encompasses: building and dismantling systems, creating new support structures and building new relationships (Boyle & Wilkinson, 2018).

New beginnings. Lastly, all leaders hope to get to a new beginning, where those in the organization can embody the changes that are introduced and see that the changes are bringing about positive results (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). In the new beginning phase, people in the organization have fully embraced their roles and the new changes being made and are invigorated by the present and excited by the future. In the new beginning phase, a culture of collaboration and learning can occur (Fullan, 2016). The phase of new beginnings is where transformational leadership practices can occur.

The three phases of transition are a method to understanding the steps involved in organizational transitions (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Transition theory can provide contextual understanding of existing research on the challenges that new leaders face during their initial time in a new leadership role.

Transformational Leadership

The majority of leadership theory can be separated into two overarching models of leadership, transactional leadership and transformational leadership (Bass, 1996; Hay, 2006; Sirin et al., 2018). Transformational and transactional leadership are considered two very different ways of leading. While transactional leadership is based on an exchange of services for compensation, or recognition, or position (Khan, 2017; Northouse, 2019), transformational leadership is based on the idea that leadership is the process of connecting with and thus influencing others to work towards common goals through igniting their own motivation, instead of due to the desire for power, authority or the exchange of services (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2019; Sirin et al., 2018). Although charismatic leadership is often tied to transformational leadership, the two are separate (Shulman & Sulivan, 2015). Both are often connected with leadership characteristics, but transformational leadership is also about the process of leadership and the behaviors of leaders, not just the innate personality of the leader (Strong, Wynn, Irby, & Lindner, 2013).

Transformational leaders are inspired leaders who have the energy and passion to inspire others and empower them to help lead and create a sustainable and more permanent change (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Chirichello, 1999). Transformational leaders are considered to be visionaries, they can inspire others to think creatively and be innovative in their own practices

(Nielsen, Randall, Yarker, & Brenner, 2008). Transformational leaders need to have strong core values that they are able to articulate to others through both words and action (Carlson & Perrewe, 1995). Transformational leadership engages followers, and allows them to be fully engaged with each other and the work that they do (Batista-Taran, Shuck, Gutierrez, & Barralt, 2013). Transformational leadership in action often has democratic components (Denhardt & Campbell, 2006), as transformational leadership is designed to empower others to become leaders. The relationship between followers and leaders is a fundamental component of transformational leadership (Jung, Bass, & Sosik, 1995), and transformational leadership propels followers to put the interests of the group before their own (Hay, 2006). In fact, transformational leadership often exists in spaces that need dramatic reform, as more traditional notions of loyalty and years of service are considered less important than innovation (Hay, 2006).

Simply put, transformational leadership is considered to have crucial characteristics: leaders with strong values, leaders who are able to translate those values into a vision and create goals from that vision, leaders who challenge their followers and hold high expectations for them, leaders who provide individualized coaching and support, and leaders who create forums for participation in leadership and decision making (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Transformational leadership is often proponed in industries in which there is significant competition, rapid changes in technology and services, and changing demographics (Hay, 2006). District public schools that are undergoing restructuring often have principals who aspire to transformational leadership (Berkovich, 2018). Schools that serve underserved school populations have also found success with transformational leadership (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014). Transformational leadership is often toted as necessary in systems of high accountability

(Sahin, 2004) and transformational leadership has been linked to higher student academic outcomes (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019). Transformational leadership helps leaders build capacity in others (Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017), which is crucial in charter schools, where staff are often tasked to work hard, work long hours and have a 'no excuses' mentality (Mathews, 2009; Rudo & Partridge, 2016). Fundamentally, transformational leadership has shown evidence of success in many of the circumstances that describe charter schools: quickly changing reforms, significant competition, changing demographics, high levels of accountability, and serving students with low socio-economic status.

Conclusion

The context, responsibilities, successes, and controversies surrounding charter schools in the political and cultural landscape of K-12 public education makes leading in charter schools a difficult task (Bickmore & Gawlick, 2017). In Los Angeles, the challenges faced by charter school principals is magnified due to the large number of charter schools and the impact and politization of those charter schools on a struggling school district (Cano, 2019).

Charter schools have become an entrenched part of public education in the United States as more and more families are choosing charter schools each year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). Understanding how new charter school principals transition to leadership and how charter school principals lead at Title I schools matters from the perspective of social justice, because charter schools serve a large percentage of our school population (Reed & Rose, 2018) and a significant proportion of students of color and lower socio-economic status who might have few other academic options (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Lake & Hill, 2005).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 detailed the responsibilities and struggles of charter school principals within the context of charter school history, and through the lens of transitions and transformational leadership. The struggles and decisions that each charter school principal experiences during their first few years of leadership can vary considerably. However, the transition and leadership strategies that they use to address those necessary decisions have key commonalities. The research provided a space for the new charter school principal participants to reflect on their leadership practices and their ability to execute transformational leadership through the lens of their transition to the principalship, with the premise that how change is approached is just as important as the change itself (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

The purpose of this research was to explore the leadership practices of new charter school principals as they navigate the principalship during their first few years. However, the findings of the research also allow for common charter school leadership transition practices to be better understood, compared, and analyzed through the lens of transformational leadership for social justice. The success of charter schools is of paramount importance to the over three million students that are served within charter schools (Wohlstetter et al., 2013). While there is an expanding body of research on charter school accountability (Blitz, 2011; Boyce & Bowers, 2016), research on the struggles of principals is still limited (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018), and often charter school principals are excluded from the research (White & Agrawal, 2011).

This research was conducted by a former charter school principal with the collaboration of other charter school principals and leaders, in the hope that those currently operating within

the current charter school system can add to the discourse on transition planning and transformational practices for charter school leadership. The improvement of leadership practices within charter school organizations cannot happen without the collaboration and input of charter school principals, who are experiencing the challenges that embody the realities of transition and leadership theory on a daily basis.

This chapter provides additional context on the research question and the methodological design of the study. The use of qualitative research techniques, including semi-structured interviews, the use of focus groups and the use of field notes for reflection, and the rationale for such research strategies is shared. This chapter also delves into the criteria used for selecting participants, the sites chosen, the methods of data collection, and the strategies used for data analysis. Lastly, this chapter explores the researcher's positionality in relation to the research and the validity of the study, including the limitations, credibility, and ability to transfer this research to other contexts in educational leadership for social justice.

Research Question

For the sake of deepening understanding on the perspectives of educational leadership on the transition of new charter school principals, I focused on the following research question:

> What are the experiences of new charter principal leaders transitioning into the principalship at Title I charter schools?

This research question was developed with the aim to bring meaning to why leaders act in certain ways within their context (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The purpose of this research question was to deepen understanding of how and why charter school leaders approached the transition to the principalship at their school site, and the struggles that they faced along the way.

Through exploring the context of different new charter school principals through the lens of the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016), and transformational leadership, the findings are designed to add to the collective pool of the strategies and theories on charter school leadership practices.

Rationale of the Use of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was used to deepen contextual understanding (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992), of charter school leadership at charter school sites, with the knowledge that charter school leadership, structures and schools can vary considerably. Qualitative research allows the stories of a few to be told thoroughly and in-depth (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Qualitative research is often more collaborative in nature (Paulus, Woodside, & Ziegler, 2008), the participants are not just test subjects or receptacles of information that can be collected and analyzed. Instead, participants have a voice (Delyser, 2008). Qualitative research allows for multiple perspectives to be shared, and it propels the continued discovery of more information by deepening understanding without offering simplistic answers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The challenges of charter school leaders when transitioning to the principalship is fraught with complexity and can be unique to the context of the space, time, culture of the organization, and a myriad of other factors. Qualitative research allows for the details of feelings and emotions to be shared (Broussard, 2006). Qualitative research allows the participants to share their story in a way that allows exploration and nuances (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The participants have more control with how their story is told, and the new charter school principals were a part of the process of attributing their own meaning and perspective to the events surrounding transitions and their leadership journey.

Methodology

For the purposes of this study, three forms of data collection were utilized: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and reflection through field notes. These three forms of data collection were used in conjunction in order to collect data from multiple perspectives: the independent insight of principals, the collaborative insight and discussion through the focus group, and the reflection of the researcher through the interview and focus group interview process through reflective field notes. The three forms of data collection are detailed below, and the ways that these forms of research were used are also shared.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed because of the flexibility elicited through this less rigid form of interviewing (Jamshed, 2014). While closed and open-ended questions were prepared beforehand (See Appendix A), the questions were adjusted by the interviewer as needed, and the participants were allowed to deviate from the questions and have a degree of freedom in their responses (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The semi-structured construct allows participants to share what they feel is important (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015; Longhurst, 2003). Semi-structured interviews allow for the ability to collect data with depth, detail, and the perspective of the participants while at the same time permitting for analysis of the responses (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Leech, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are one of the fundamental tools used in qualitative research (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013).

However, semi-structured interviews can be held to scrutiny, as there can be a perception that the information collected is not always credible (Barriball & While, 1994). Therefore, during

the process of research, care was given to the types of questions that were asked, the order of questioning, and the reliability of the coding of the interviews afterwards. Allowing for participants to answer open-ended questions provided the opportunity for the participants to guide the conversation as well, and bring up pertinent perspectives that enriched the interview and data collection process. In addition, the researcher can observe non-verbal cues and ensure that the perspectives shared are directly those of the participants (Barriball & While, 1994).

The questions were designed to deepen understanding, but also to build rapport with the participants (Leech, 2002). The semi-structured interview started with some grand tour questions (Leech, 2002), which are questions that were designed to provide opportunities for participants to become comfortable with talking by starting with an area that is familiar to them. When participants deviated off topic, the participants were allowed to speak, and were only brought back to the topic if needed. This allowed for valuable information to be extracted.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a method of qualitative research that rely on the communication between participants in order to generate data. Focus groups are semi-structured discussions with a group of participants (Jamshed, 2014; Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007). The data collected through group interaction and shared group knowledge is part of the focus group research method (Kitzinger, 1995; Morgue & Krueger, 1993). Focus groups are based on three core premises: that focus groups are a research method for collecting information, that the interaction between members of the group is the source of the data, and that the researcher has an active role in the process through facilitating the focus group (Morgan, 1996).

The use of focus groups was selected as a way to deepen the knowledge collected from one on one semi-structured interviews. The ideas and information generated from a group of charter school principals with potentially common experiences interacting with each other provided additional perspective and knowledge (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). The focus group questions were formed through initial themes and topics that emerged from the semi-structured interviews (See Appendix B). The focus group was comprised of participants who had participated in the one on one semi-structured interviews.

Reflective Field Notes

Reflective field notes (See Appendix C) were used in conjunction with the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. While the interviews were recorded and transcribed, field notes allowed for insights to be derived from researcher observations, connections and reflections during the interviews and focus groups (Tessier, 2012). Observations during the semi-structured interview and focus group process supported in understanding and interpreting behavior and responses and provided insights into group dynamics and interactions (Mulhall, 2003). Reflection through field notes is the process of exploring the experiences of data collection through interviews and using those experiences to deepen understanding (Wald, Davis, Reis, Monroe, & Borkan, 2009). The use of field notes felt appropriate, as I was also a new charter school principal in a Title I setting in Los Angeles. Therefore, my perspectives and experiences brought value to data analysis and is acknowledged in the observation and data collection process and the subsequent reflection process.

Research Setting

The setting of this research was at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles. The choice of selecting Title I charter schools in the geographic location of Los Angeles was due to two primary reasons. One, because I reside in Los Angeles and secondly because the state of California is one of five states that hold the majority of charter schools in the United States (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Edwards et al., 2004; Reed & Rose, 2018). Many of these charter schools are housed in concentrated urban areas like Los Angeles, where higher populations of low socioeconomic students in Title I schools that have historically underperformed compared to their suburban/wealthier counterparts has created a breeding ground for charter school growth (Reed & Rose, 2018). Los Angeles houses one in five charter schools in the state of California and is one of the most concentrated areas of charter schools in the nation (Fuller, 2010). Charter schools in Los Angeles are competing against district schools that have been hampered by large class sizes, budgetary cuts in the arts, counseling, and enrichment services (Aron, 2017). Charter schools have become an attractive choice for parents who might be discontented with the choices within the district. In Los Angeles, about a quarter of the considerable TK-12 school population now attend charter schools (Cano, 2019).

I also chose to conduct research in the Los Angeles region because I worked as a charter school principal in Los Angeles, and because since Los Angeles is a hub of charter schools, as such, Los Angeles can be seen as a litmus test of the changing perceptions of charter schools on a national level. In addition, the current struggles within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) have intensified the spotlight on Los Angeles charter schools. In January 2019, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA teachers' union) organized and participated in a one

week strike with the aims of increasing teacher pay, putting caps on staff size, increasing nursing and counseling services (amongst others) and increasing the accountability and transparency measures of charter schools with the aim of stemming the growth of charter schools (Cano, 2019). While most charter schools did not participate in the strike, the focus on improving the conditions of LAUSD teachers brought attention to the state of education in Los Angeles and the teaching conditions of all teachers. Leading in such a climate is fraught with the additional difficulty of negative public perceptions of the role of charter schools (Medina & Goldstein, 2019).

Title I charter school principals were chosen because Title I schools in general have struggled to show success with student academic achievement (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). The needs in Title I schools are also greater, with a larger percentage of students requiring more intensive tiers of support in order to succeed (Brennan, 2015). As mentioned in Chapter 2, principals at Title I schools are more likely to leave the principalship compared to other principals at more affluent schools (Fuller & Young, 2008). As the needs of Title I charter schools differ from schools in more affluent areas, it is probable that the needs and experiences of charter school principals in Title I schools were more similar to each other than to the needs and experiences of charter school principals in wealthier localities.

Participant Selection

The participants of this study were new charter school principals from different Title I charter management organizations in the Los Angeles area. The charter school principals were chosen from large, medium and small charter school management organizations, with a total of six charter school principals. Current charter school principals with less than five years of

experience were selected because all charter school principals were asked to reflect on their first few years of leadership as a charter school principal, and it might have been more difficult for charter school principals to reflect on their first years after a longer number of years in the role.

The age and demographics of the participants varied. The selection criteria that was utilized based on the number of years in the principal role, current employment status, size of the charter management organization and Title I status of the school is shown in the table below.

Table 2
Participant Selection Criteria

	Standalone Charter Schools	Medium Charter Management Organization (Two to Seven charter schools)	Large Charter Management Organizations (Eight or more charter schools)
Experience less than five years in principal role	Two Participants	Two Participants	Two Participants
Currently employed as a principal			
At a Title I charter school in Los Angeles			

The size of the charter school management organizations was determined by the number of charter schools that belonged to the charter school management organizations.

Size Definitions of Charter School Sites

For the purposes of the study, large charter school management organizations were considered those with eight or more schools, medium charter school management organizations were those with two to seven charter schools, and standalone charter schools were singular independent charter schools.

The original structure of the research study was to choose participants from charter management organizations of different sizes because it is possible that the perspectives differ

depending on the size of the charter management organization and the possible structures in place to support and train new charter school principals. Larger charter management organizations might have additional resources and training supports that standalone charter schools or smaller charter management organizations do not have. The additional supports in place at larger charter management organizations might be comparable to the supports provided at district schools.

Recruitment

In order to find participants, an email was sent to all charter school principals in the Los Angeles area through obtaining a list of charter schools and charter school leaders. Originally, the plan was to obtain such a list from CCSA, which did not end up being possible. Instead, Dr. McManus, a former charter school principal and CAO and current educational leader, and a member of my dissertation committee, shared resources on how to find charter school contacts.

Charter school principals with five or less years of experience were encouraged to participate through sharing the purpose of the study and its emphasis on the experiences of new charter school principals. In addition, charter school principals were accessed through my network of charter school leaders, obtained through my status as a charter school principal, my association with the Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE) network, and the contacts made through the Loyola Marymount University Educational Leadership for Social Justice doctoral program.

Once participants agreed to participate, they were provided with the informed consent document (See Appendix D) and Experimental Subjects' Bill of Rights (See Appendix E). After

receipt of this signed document I reached out to participants to schedule the semi-structured one on one interviews, at the participant's convenience.

Participant Criteria

Participants were selected who:

- worked currently as a charter school principal in a Los Angeles charter school;
- have had less than five years of charter school principal experience at their organization;
- worked in a large, medium or small charter management organization;
    - The aim was to interview two participants from each size of charter management organization (This ultimately was not possible, and is discussed in the limitations section of Chapter 5).
- responded to the email requesting participation from a generated list of all charter school principals in the Los Angeles area or responded to an email based on a prior connection/introduction (convenience sampling);
    - The email iterated that participation was voluntary and introduced the topic of the study as leadership for organizational change and the experiences of new charter school principals.
- had availability to interview in the months of December and January during the 2019-2020 school year.

Once participants expressed a willingness to participate in the study:

- an additional email was sent to confirm participation with the informed consent document;

- after the receipt of the informed consent document, a phone call was made to set up an interview time.

Interviews

A total of six participants were interviewed. The interview took place mostly in one setting, however one participant required two interview sessions.

- Interviews were audio recorded and were initially transcribed through a transcription computer-based application.
- The interviews were 45 minutes to an hour and a half long.

Focus Group

After the semi-structured interviews, participants were invited to a focus group comprised of all the participants.

- Initially two focus group days and times were scheduled. Ultimately, the focus group had to be rescheduled and only one focus group with five of the participants took place. The focus group took place during one meeting.
- The focus group was audio recorded and was initially transcribed through a transcription computer-based application.
- The focus group was an hour and a half long.

Procedures

Interview Questions

Interview questions were created through a consideration through the lens of the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016), and the characteristics of transformational

leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Northouse, 2019). Interviews were conducted once with each participant.

Coding

The interview responses were viewed through the lens of leadership and the phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016; Northouse, 2019). In order to ensure the reliability of the coding, attention was given to the stability of the coding, and whether the use of coding remained consistent throughout the coding process, with multiple checks to ensure that coding was as accurate as possible and that there was intercoder reliability, with the lens of reviewing the coding through determining if other researchers would code the transcripts in the same way (Campbell et al, 2013). Further, emerging codes outside of the frames of transition and leadership were considered and are shared in Chapter 5.

Focus Group

After a period of two to three weeks, principals who participated in the initial interview process were invited to participate in a focus group. The focus group consisted of five principals who all participated via phone. The focus group occurred after the initial interviews to allow for a period of reflection before the focus group came together. It is possible that the period of reflection time shaped the perspectives of the participants and allowed for a more fruitful and thoughtful focus group. The focus group setting allowed the participants to share experiences and perspectives with each other in a collective and collaborative setting. This discourse was valuable data that was used in conjunction with the one on one semi-structured interviews and the reflective field notes. The focus group took place through a phone conference.

Methods of Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled individually for each new charter school principal participant. The interview time was set for two hours, and I offered the choice of either conducting the interview in person at a neutral site (such as a coffee shop or park), or at the participant's workplace for the sake of convenience, or via phone interview. The participant was offered several dates and times to choose from. All interviews besides one occurred in one setting. One interview was broken up into two parts, both parts took place on the same day. This accommodation was made due to a time constraint of one of the participants. The interview questions were not shared beforehand. However, the participants were notified of the types of questions that were asked, and that the interview questions would focus on their experiences as new charter school principals and how they adjusted to the principalship.

Focus Group

All the participants were invited to participate in a focus group after the completion of the semi-structured interviews. The focus group was scheduled at least a week after the last semi-structured interview. The period of time between the semi-structured individual interviews and the focus group allowed for the participants to reflect on the questions that they were asked during the semi-structured interviews.

The focus group was originally conceived as being held at one of the school-sites in order to ensure adequate space. However, participants were offered the ability to phone in to the focus group if preferred, and all participants chose to do so. The focus group was scheduled for a

duration of two hours at a time that was convenient to all participants. In the end, only five of the six participants chose to participate in the focus group.

Reflective Field Notes

One of the most significant differences between quantitative and qualitative research is that in qualitative research, the researcher is able to analyze the data and the data collection process through reflection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Reflective field notes are based on the premise that the researcher is integral to the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and that the researcher is a valuable research tool (Xu, & Storr, 2012). Reflective field notes move beyond descriptions and allow the researcher to provide a personal account of the journey and data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Reflective field notes can detail mistakes made in the research process, misunderstandings, and prejudices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The process of reflection through field notes allows for the researcher to interrogate themselves and their research process which can allow for the impact of the researcher on the research to be better understood (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). In order for field notes to be reflective, I detailed my perceptions, thoughts, and reflections after each semi-structured interview and after the focus group (Jasper, 2005). I utilized the reflective field notes template used by McManus (2018).

Method of Data Analysis

In qualitative research, there is no set formula to determine what patterns exist in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Thus, the method of data collection and data analysis rely on the thought processes of the researcher, and data collection and data analysis must occur simultaneously (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In order to interpret the data and determine the

patterns and connections within the data, data analysis is a crucial component of qualitative research (Merriam &Tisdell, 2015).

First, the data was transcribed through notes taken during the interviews, the preliminary transcription provided by Otter.ai, an online transcription resource, and the recordings through the QuickTime Player on Mac OS X. The transcription was protected by only being accessible to the researcher through a username and password. The benefit of using the QuickTime Player on Mac OS X was that the recordings were housed on the researcher's computer during the period of the research study, which was password protected and only accessible by the researcher. The notes, voice transcription, and recordings were used in conjunction in order to obtain a high degree of accuracy in the transcriptions.

After transcriptions were completed, two rounds of coding were conducted. Coding can be one of the most difficult aspects of qualitative research (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014), and through coding twice, a higher degree of credibility was attained. During the primary coding stage, I looked for prevalent themes in the data related to the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) and transformational leadership practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). A summative content analysis was utilized for coding (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), as this allowed for both determining how frequently certain ideas or phrases occurred, and allowed for an interpretation of those patterns through making comparisons and connections. After the primary coding, I conducted secondary coding in order to condense the codes created during the primary coding stage. The secondary coding connected similar codes together, allowing for a deeper analysis of the patterns and themes that emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Limitations

There were several limitations to the research that was conducted. One large limitation was the narrow focus of research. The number of participants was small and participants were from a select group of charter schools within the county of Los Angeles. The ability to generalize the findings to other settings and even other charter schools might be limited. However, the research does allow for a deeper understanding within the specific context of new charter school principals at Title I schools in Los Angeles.

Another limitation was that the participants in the study were currently employed at the organization on which they were asked to reflect. This required a level of vulnerability and reflection about a context that is not over yet, and in which the participants may have been still immersed. A third limitation was the potential difficulty of relatively new charter school principals having the language and experiences necessary to fully reflect on their own approaches to leadership during the first few years of their principalship. Larger patterns or strategies for organizational change might not be as apparent to them as they would have been given the passage of time and the development of their career in the principalship. Finally, a limitation was the researcher. During the time of the research study, I was a charter school principal. While this might allow for a degree of trust between the participants and myself, it might also have provided constraints in the ability for the participants to fully share, and for me to conduct the research and interpret the data without bias.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a crucial component of the research and reflection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The method of determining trustworthiness needs to match the method of

qualitative research (Krefting, 1991). The researcher must establish that the study's findings are authentic and are reflective of an in-depth and thorough analysis of data that is both meaningful and representative of the context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Trustworthiness in this study was determined through the goal of deepening understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) by following four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morrow, 2005; Siegle, 2015).

Credibility

Credibility was based on three different factors: a rigorous method of collecting and analyzing data, the credibility of myself as the researcher, and the belief that qualitative research has value (Patton, 1999). Credibility was determined through a rigorous method of collecting and analyzing data with carefully followed protocols and data triangulation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Data triangulation occurred through conducting interviews with participants from different sized CMOs, and through gathering data through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and reflective field notes. The use of reflective field notes has been used in other qualitative research studies to establish credibility (Flynn, Korcuska, Brady, & Hays, 2019).

My credibility as the researcher was determined through member checks and providing the data, interpretations, and findings to the participants of the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A member check allows for participants to establish credibility and gain trust in the researcher. Qualitative research has been established as valuable and a legitimate form of research due to the ability to explore complex issues and behaviors within a context or field of study (Johnson & Wakefield, 2004). In addition, qualitative research has therapeutic value for

the participants, and can be a method of reflection and collaborative learning, which in itself gave value to those involved in the process of research (Rossetto, 2014).

Transferability

Transferability was established through a thorough description of the settings, the participants, and any relevant details, most notably apparent through the reflective field notes. This allows others to understand and find meaning in the context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Siegle, 2015), and potentially extrapolate the findings and speculate about how the findings can be applied to deepening the understanding of similar contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Transferability in qualitative research is not the assumption that the research can be easily replicated in another context, but rather that the research methods fit the context and that the context can be more deeply understood through providing a clear description of all relevant details (Frost & Nolas, 2013). Trustworthiness allows the researcher and the reader to make connections and derive meaning within the research (Talburt, 2004), and thus the purpose of this study was to deepen understanding in the context of Los Angeles charter school principals, not to generalize or replicate the findings to broader contexts.

Dependability

Dependability can be determined through similar results being found by other researchers when looking at similar participants in a given time period and/or context, however, in qualitative research, dependability is more often used to measure the degree in which the researcher can generate understanding in an area that might otherwise be confusing or complex (Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem, 2008). Dependability in qualitative research is not designed to isolate the causes of human behavior (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), but rather to understand the

experiences of participants. Dependability was established by clearly detailing the steps taken throughout the research project and ensuring that the steps of research are able to stand the test of time (Golafshani, 2003). In addition, dependability was established through ensuring that the data accurately represents the participants in the study (Golafshani, 2003) and that the results make sense (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Confirmability

Confirmability was shown through a clear audit trail to ensure that the findings were linked to the data and not created from researcher bias (Siegle, 2015). Confirmability was established through proving that the data had shaped the outcome, not the researcher (Shenton, 2004a). While qualitative research recognizes that the researcher's thought processes, experiences and perspectives shape data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), identifying my positionality and outlining the steps of research and data analysis helped to establish confirmability and thus trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Shenton, 2004b).

Positionality

I was a current new charter school principal during the time of the research process. While this might have allowed participants the ability to be more vulnerable and honest, it was possible that the impact could be the opposite, where participants felt reluctant to share with someone who could have been perceived as a colleague and even a potential charter school competitor. However, I believe that my own experience as a charter school principal helped to establish credibility with the participants, and helped to facilitate honest and thoughtful interviews.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In the previous chapter, the research design and methodology of the study were outlined. The study utilized qualitative research through semi-structured interviews, a subsequent focus group with the participants, and reflective field notes. The three forms of qualitative research were used in conjunction to explore the research question:

> What are the experiences of new charter principal leaders transitioning into the principalship at Title I schools?

Participants were all charter school principals within the first five years of the principalship at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles. All participants were working as principals at the time of the study, which occurred during the months of December 2019 and January 2020. The focus group occurred one to six weeks after the semi-structured interviews. After each interview and after the focus group, I reflected on the participants' experiences and perspectives, and analyzed and made connections to the interviews through reflective field notes. All six of the participants participated in the semi-structured one on one interview, and five of the six participants were able to participate in the follow-up focus group. Due to scheduling constraints, distance, and preference, all participants completed the semi-structured interviews and focus group through either Facetime or phone call.

Participants were selected who fit the criteria of working at an independent charter school (instead of affiliated with LAUSD), who were in their first five years of principalship, and who also taught at Title I schools. Ten principals initially responded to the research study, however, two did not meet the requirements of the study, one principal chose to decline after reassessing

her workload and responsibilities, and one principal did not respond to confirm their continued interest in participating in the study. All participants who fit the criteria and wanted to be a part of the study were selected to participate in this study.

Participant Demographics

While it was not an intentional requirement of the study, all six participants who decided to participate were female principals. All of the participants had a graduate or doctoral degree in education, business, leadership, or non-profit management. Five of the participants had participated in some type of formal preparation program and the sixth participant participated in robust leadership training provided by her charter school network. All of the participants had prior successful teaching experiences in Title I schools in the K-12 public school setting.

Four of six of the principals identified as women of color. Participants worked at a range of small and large schools, at standalone charter schools, and schools connected to a charter management organization. It is important to note that two of the participants held the dual role of Executive Director and Principal. Three of the six participants were the founding principals for their charter schools. One of the participants was known to me, since she worked in my school's organization. She decided to participate due to wanting to share her own struggles and hear and connect to the experiences of others, particularly due to how lonely the role of principal can be. The other five participants were unknown to me until the time of my research study.

Although the participants shared the commonalities of being new charter school principals and were all women with higher education, there were many differences in the participants that shaped their perspectives and experiences. As evidenced by who the participants were and the table below, charter school leadership is varied and diverse. The participants had

different levels of leadership experiences, had different educational careers, and had different areas of strengths and struggles that had been shaped by their unique context. In the next section, the different pathways towards the charter school principalship showcase some of the different journeys that the participants took towards the charter school principal role.

Table 3
Participant Demographics

Participant	Prior charter school employment at the same organization	Founding Principal	Dual Executive Director/ Principal Role	Master's or Doctoral Degree in education, business, non-profit or leadership	Administrative Credential	Teaching Credential and Teaching Experience	Years in Principal Role	Number of schools in the network	Title I School Percentage
Jolie Hentwater	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two	One	80-85%
Felina Basil	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Four	One	95-100%
Magdalene Sands	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Five	Two	95-100%
Lila Kona	Yes	No	No	Yes	In process	Yes	One	Two	95-100%
Xiomara Diaz	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Four	Three	80-85%
Opal Piper	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Two	Ten plus	85-90%

This chapter starts by exploring the paths that participants took to entering the charter school context and their role of principal at a Title I charter school. Then, the chapter shares the prevalent themes of the research, including: the initial challenges of taking on the complexities of the principalship, the prerequisites necessary to be successful in the charter principal role, the necessity to learn on the job, the experiences of working in Title I schools, the current political landscape, and the challenges of being a charter school principal in an increasingly anti-charter school district and state; and follows with a discussion of the experiences and challenges of building, supporting, and inspiring others, while holding themselves and others to a high level of

accountability. Lastly, the chapter delves into the participants' shared desire to increase their network and connection to other charter school leaders, and create a system of support to build solidarity, particularly during an era with significant anti-charter rhetoric. And finally, the chapter explores the participants' perceptions of the struggles of balancing work and life, and their planned trajectory moving forward.

It is important to note that one component that the research did not address specifically by the interview questions was the experiences of the participants that they felt were unique to being female, as all of the participants were women. Four out of the six participants specifically spoke to the challenges of balancing motherhood with the principalship, and the implications for long-term sustainability.

Themes

The table below highlights the prevalent themes evident in the research.

Table 4
Themes

Learning the Role		
Complexities of the charter school principal role *Redefining leadership* *Running a business* *Wearing multiple hats* *Size of the charter management organization* *Island life*	**Preparing for leadership** *Prior teaching experience and Contextual Understanding*	**Learning on the job** *Education and Development* *Mentorship and Coaching*
Contextual Challenges		
Leading in Title I schools *High needs, low funding* *Challenges and triumphs in Restorative Justice Practices* *Keeping the rigor, addressing the trauma* *Parents as resources* *Lack of Time and Compassion Fatigue*	**Navigating relationships with LAUSD** *Hostile co-location experiences* *Challenges of oversight and compliance measures*	**Leading through the shifting tides of politics** *Challenges of Prop-39 and AB 1505* *Planning and innovation with uncertainty*
Leading Others		
Casting the Net *Los Angeles teacher shortage* *Challenges of advertising* *Challenges of interviewing* *Flexibility in hiring* *Hiring the right people and keeping the right people*	**Challenges of high expectations and high support** *Managing others* *Evaluation and accountability* *Accountability for self* *Letting go*	
Leadership for Social Justice		
Leadership that transforms *Creating and owning the vision* *Sharing the vision with others and changing mindsets* *Collaborative leadership* *Triumphs and Challenges of collaboration*	**Sacrificial leadership** *Students first, self last* *Challenges of work-life balance* *What the future holds*	**Building solidarity** *Sharing knowledge and practices* *Sticking together and fighting back*

Entering the Charter School Context: Pathways to Charter Leadership

The participants who were interviewed all came to the role of charter school principal through different career pathways, with differing experiences in education.

Pathway 1: Alternatives to the School District

One prevalent trend was the obstacles in accessing teaching or leadership roles in the Los Angeles school district during the budgetary cuts of the earlier part of the last decade. Two of the participants were unable to find teaching positions in the school district when starting their teaching careers. Lila spoke to this in her interview:

> When I finished my credentialing program, I was not able to access LAUSD. They were on a hiring freeze, not only on a hiring freeze but they were laying off a lot of teachers in 2011. A friend of mine from my credentialing program told me about a charter school that was opening and looking for a replacement founding teacher. So, rather than subbing for LAUSD I decided to give it a try.

Lila came from a background with several family members who worked for LAUSD in various capacities. Lila grew up attending Los Angeles district schools and was not originally seeking out a charter school teaching position. Lila was a founding teacher at a small charter school, and had to share her classroom with another teacher and class, with a cubicle divider in the middle of the room. Despite this, she thrived. Opal also spoke to her inability to access LAUSD and traditional school districts as a new teacher during the same period of time.

> When I graduated with my credential, California was in the opposite position where it is now, where there was not a teaching shortage. And I applied to so many places just trying to get a job and nobody wanted a first-year teacher. I probably applied to over 500 schools across the country. I really just wanted to teach. I interviewed in New York and New Jersey; it was crazy.

Opal ultimately ended up at a smaller charter management organization, and quickly excelled in her role as a middle school English and history teacher, despite originally wanting to be a multiple subject teacher at an elementary school. Other participants were able to find initial teaching positions within LAUSD, but then faced other challenges, including being let go despite demonstrated success in the classroom. This was the case of Felina, who shared her experience teaching at a district school and ultimately becoming disillusioned that her exceptional teaching performance in the classroom and additional leadership roles within the school did not lead to job stability. Felina shared her frustrations after receiving her second layoff notice during the LAUSD budget crisis, "It just was a catalyst for me in my sixth-year teaching to take a step back and try and figure out where I felt I could really make the impact that I wanted to make."

Despite six years of success in the district, including taking on additional leadership roles and yielding high academic outcomes, Felina still received multiple layoff notices. Felina shared that this instability led to her feeling demoralized, and ultimately, she decided to take a break from her teaching career to continue her own education. The negative experiences in the school district led to Felina exploring charter school opportunities. The limitations of the school district were also felt by Xiomara, who shared, "I was a classroom teacher with LAUSD. And when I looked around and realized the opportunities to be a mentor at my school site were very limited, I explored the option of leaving the classroom and starting to work at a charter school."

The experiences of the participants who were unable to access LAUSD resonated with me, which was noted in the reflective field notes for Lila, Opal, Felina, and Xiomara. When I was moving from Hawaii to Los Angeles, it took me almost six months to transfer my credential. Despite initially applying at multiple LAUSD schools, I received no responses in the timeline

that I needed to find a job, and I was worried about moving without job security. Due to my sense of urgency, I started applying to charter schools. I ultimately ended up interviewing and receiving a job offer at my current charter organization on my first day in Los Angeles, which I immediately accepted. For most of the participants, teaching at a charter school was not their initial plan.

Pathway 2: Addressing Deficits in Traditional Public Schooling

Participants experienced deficits in what the school district was able to offer children, and felt that this deficit could be corrected through the innovation that could exist in charter schools. Jolie started her educational journey as a teacher assistant and was able to find a position as a teacher within the school district. During her first-year teaching, Jolie was approached by the school district to become a mentor teacher due to her implementation of successful teaching practices within the classroom. Jolie then shifted into consultancy work outside of the school system, but when she became a mother of school aged children, she decided to start her own charter school due to the inadequacies that she had seen in traditional district schools.

Jolie spoke about the "opportunity gap" and how this gap was often conflated with a perceived achievement gap for children of color and children of low socio-economic status. Jolie shared that she felt strongly that there were children with the intelligence to excel who were hampered by their circumstances and limited in their potential and future prospects by the schools that they attended. Jolie shared her frustration that the perception on teaching students of color or of low socio-economic status as needing "special ways to teach these kids as if they learn differently, or there's something wrong with them." Jolie shared that this perceived deficit thinking differed from her experiences and successes in the classroom, "I don't buy into an

achievement gap, I really think it's more of an opportunity gap and I wasn't seeing a lot of schools that saw it that way." Jolie's experience as a mother was the driving force to leave the school district. Jolie desired to translate the success she experienced in the classroom onto a "larger scale."

> I am an African-American woman and I have two Black boys, children. And when it came time to finally find a school for them, I would not put them in any school here and we live in what would be considered a resource rich community on the westside, and I still was not pleased with what the options were for public school.

The sense that charter schools could provide something that district schools were not providing students in Los Angeles was also the catalyst that inspired Felina when she decided to take a hiatus from the district after her second lay-off notice and go back to school. Felina shared, "My initial reaction was that LA does not need another charter school, not really interested." Felina was approached by the Building Excellent Schools fellowship during her time obtaining a graduate degree and given the ability to spend some time visiting charter schools across the country that "blew my mind" and "recalibrated what excellence in education" could look like, and that "If I could create a school like this in South LA that would be a meaningful thing, that would be a meaningful battle for me that I could potentially win in the larger educational war."

Participants shared what brought them to the charter world from the school district, and the themes of lack of access and growth for themselves and lack of educational opportunities for students were apparent. In the reflective field notes I noted that none of the participants had

originally sought out work in charter schools, and in fact had all tried to initially work or find work in the school district.

Complexities of the Charter School Principal Role

Redefining Leadership: Adjusting Expectations

The initial transition to principalship was marked by some participants as a transition in perspective, and coming to terms with what the role of principal would actually entail. A few of the participants spoke of the transition to becoming the principal through having to redefine what it meant to them to be a leader and realizing that the role of charter school principal actually differed from their original assumptions, particularly in the limitations and challenges unique to being new to the role.

Lila shared that "I'm sort of taking in a lot but the amount of what I'm able to immediately apply is limited. I feel like I'm learning and trying to ground everything that I'm learning in our school context but what I've been able to directly implement has been very limited." While Lila felt that she was learning a lot through her experiences, her mentors, and her leadership program, she felt that her capacity to translate that learning into her leadership style and the work that she was doing as principal was still in the emerging stages, and that translating theory into action was difficult and would take time.

Jolie compared coming terms to what being a charter school principal would entail to having children for the first time.

> After I had my kids, I called my friends and I said, why didn't you tell me, I would never sleep again, and they're like oh if I told you, you wouldn't have had the kids. It's like that to me.

Jolie shared that she was determined, or "hell bent" to become a principal and start her own charter school, but that she had no idea of the scale of work needed, and more specifically the type of work that it would entail. Felina shared her experiences having to adjust her leadership plan, and slowing growth of her school and readjusting the school's trajectory due to initial challenges, and coming to terms with the sheer scale of the work entailed in founding and running a charter school.

> I think I had some level of clarity, but it might have been good for me to have more clarity on how meaningfully different the role is, because especially in the founding year, but still right now, a lot of the work that I do that I must do, that is critical for the school to survive, is not instructional leadership work and not even what traditionally might be thought of as principal work.

Felina continued with the unexpected demands of the role of founding principal and Executive Director, sharing that to her, the role was difficult, because "there is so much in education or in teaching that you can tell people that you don't really believe or know fully until you're in the role." Felina described the challenges of charter school leadership as, "everything that is challenging about teaching times a thousand." This feeling of adjusting and redefining leadership was corroborated by Opal, despite having experience with other leadership roles at the same school, and belonging to a large charter management organization with significant supports and coaching opportunities. Opal iterated, "It's hard, because until you see, it's very difficult to understand the demands of the role."

Running a Business

Another adjustment to participants was the amount of business acumen they would need as charter school principals, and the complexities of charter school funding, revenue timing, and constraints, and the many components of fiscal policy. Jolie and Felina both had a particularly challenging introduction to school finance, as they both were founding principals of standalone charter schools and shared dual roles as both principal and Executive Director. Jolie shared in her interview, “I think highly of my level of intellect, but running a business is hard. And I don't think I understood the level of business that went into the charter school part.” This was echoed by Felina during her interview.

> But it's like this is how you're going to be spending your time. Are you sure that you want to do this? You’ll be dealing with facilities and lease negotiations, and health insurance, and retirement benefits, and the different political nonsense and whatever else. Is that worth the extra autonomy of being a standalone operator?

Jolie shared the difficulties of not having clear financial guidelines and having to learn along the way, “So there is no playbook and you don’t know.” Jolie also spoke of the frightening reality of not being able to make payroll and shared, “I just wish I knew more about the business side of it,” and the stress and exhaustion that came from having to lead the fiscal leadership of her school due to the budgetary constraints of her new school in the first years, “I don't like it, I have to do it because I have to, but it just wears me out, it stresses me out, and I can't wait until I can afford a business manager.” The fear of not making payroll was a real one, during the time of the interview, Jolie shared she opted out of her salary to keep the school afloat. A few weeks later, at the focus group, Jolie shared that she was finally receiving a salary, but at the same pay

scale as the teachers. Jolie shared that this was a “sacrifice I'm willing to make because I want my program to run with fidelity the way that we stated it would in the charter petition.”

Xiomara spoke about the financial impact of providing the innovative educational experiences described in her charter petition when enrollment was unexpectedly low. Xiomara gave the example of one particular instructional practice that required additional teachers and additional costs not required of other schools, “Those are three full time teachers with benefits that other schools don't have. So, you can guess and ballpark the cost of that because of benefits plus salary times three.” Xiomara deeply believed in the innovative instructional practices of her charter, but shared, “I mean, it's enrollment, you know, is how we break even and it's not happening this year. Yeah, we are under-enrolled.” Xiomara’s school was experiencing fiscal challenges despite doing “all the cuts” and having “incredible fundraising.” During the time of the interview, Xiomara was leading her school in actively recruiting a significant number of additional students by the mid-year point, which resonated with me, and was shared in the reflective field notes, as I have had similar experiences with recruitment goals and budgetary shortages, which can be hectic and demoralizing, as it can lead to staff cuts, over enrollment in some grades and cuts to additional programming, and services. Xiomara shared the implications of the under-enrollment at her school, including lost field trips and special activities for the children that had happened in prior years. Xiomara shared the worry that it is “probably as low as we can go without having to make more significant sacrifices like a reduction in workforce.”

Opal’s experience at a larger charter management organization differed when it came to finances. Opal shared that she hasn’t experienced a time where she felt that there were not enough resources, but she sometimes struggled with where those resources were allocated. Opal

expressed concern that there wasn't "enough money" paid towards teacher compensation and wondered if " insurance and benefits are enough to compete with what district school offers", and wished that she could have more flexibility and freedom in determining how the finances of the school were spent, as she sometimes felt it did not fully alight to students' needs or the context of the school.

Wearing Multiple Hats and Playing Multiple Roles

All of the participants described the many roles that they played in their charter school organization, which were varied and required very different skill sets and levels of expertise based on their own aptitude, but more so the immediate needs of the school. This was a prevalent theme even for participants in larger schools and with bigger charter management organization support networks. Participants spoke about their responsibilities with recruitment, LAUSD and state compliance, organizing substitute teachers, navigating public relations and navigating politics, teacher and staff hiring for the positions on campus, teaching and supervising students on a regular basis, behavior check-ins and discipline, providing often all the functions of human resources, balancing budgets, providing instructional coaching, overseeing special education, and the list goes on.

The participants all had different responsibilities, some time consuming and far encompassing, such as Lila's role in ordering supplies which entailed "All the ordering from the teachers as far as their classroom supplies and materials that go beyond the consumables." Lila shared that she had a hand in almost everything, and described some of the day to day tasks as instructional, "designing and planning for PLC and staff meetings," "looking at data and

intervention cycles," and operations such as planning field trips, coverage schedules, and report cards.

Magdalene shared that she was always the earliest staff member on campus, and thus was in charge of opening the school. During the initial part of the interview, Felina, was in the process of setting the alarms and locking up the school, as she was the last person to leave. Jolie expressed frustration, and shared that being spread too thin sometimes hindered her ability "to drive our growth versus managing our problems."

Size of the Charter Management Organization

For principals who held the dual role of Executive Director at standalone schools, there was a perception that some of the work was exacerbated by the difficulties of having to create everything and do everything themselves. Felina shared that it often made it easy for her to forge a "scrappy, go it alone mentality," which could be at odds with the collaboration that larger organizations might value. Felina shared that this independence came with its own struggles.

> I think there is a lot of things where you end up reinventing the wheel because you don't have access for that template or that format, you spend time on stuff that is stupid or not the best use of time, because you feel like there is no one else to do it or you don't know who to ask. In larger CMOS there are more delineated lanes, you are able to delegate things more effectively and efficiently, you are able to take more space to step away from and think more strategically and do more of the data analysis and be more thoughtful and efficient, and maybe less responsive to day to day things.

Jolie, who also held the dual role of principal and Executive Director, spoke about the perception that larger charter management organizations might have additional resources and

that she has had to prove herself in a different way because she is a woman of color without the same access to resources.

> I will say this, and I could be speaking out of line, but I think also being a woman of color, you know, a lot of those charter schools were started, usually by White men who had connections to resources. Um, I think my fight is bigger, I have to prove myself, because I don't look like the typical charter developer.

Lila spoke to some of the strengths of being the principal at a smaller school and organization.

> The first thing that comes to mind is just knowing all of your teachers, and being able to have that. That relationship that's not only professional but that feels personal and that you see teachers, every day, whether it's in the staff lounge or walking down the halls, and that, our staff meetings, feel intimate, they feel like all voices can be heard, and when someone's not there it stands out. And so that feeling of community I feel is really special at our school because of its size.

Opal was the only participant who came from a large charter management organization. She spoke about some of the strengths of belonging to a larger support network,

> There are eighteen schools now I think, so there's eighteen different school leaders that I can reach out to and I can talk to. There are just people that I can lean on and ask for resources for. That to me is pretty big.

Opal expressed that it could be frustrating to not always have "autonomy around decision making" and it could be difficult for new principals in her organization to navigate the numerous "regional asks" and determine "what balls are worth dropping and what are not", but

that being able to “lean on” the supports from the organization was valuable and made it worthwhile.

Island Life

Participants spoke about a sense of loneliness or isolation in the role, due to their unique role on campus, which was often difficult and required a period of adjustment. Lila compared being a principal to being on an “island.” Felina spoke about how it was difficult to reach out to others for support or guidance despite “drowning” in the work. Magdalene spoke of initiatives that she was trying to do to connect to her team, through checking in and creating initiatives for get together potlucks, “just to let them know I am human,” but shared it was tough replacing the previous principal who was well liked by staff.

Magdalene spoke of the isolation of being new to the principal role, “Sometimes as a principal, and because I am new at this particular site, I take a lot of complaints and concerns, and because I am new, people want to see a change, so sometimes it can get kind of daunting.” Felina also spoke in her interview about the loneliness of being the “final arbiter and being the bad guy,” which was echoed by Jolie, who shared “you're always going to be the bad guy just because of the title.”

Felina spoke about the isolation of being the principal and having to manage others within the organization, and ultimately being the only one in the role.

> Holding people accountable while also supporting and developing them and creating the positive culture you want, and understanding how isolating that is, there is literally no one on your team that you can talk about those things with, that is all part of the learning curve of an early career leader.

Preparing for Leadership

Prior Teaching Experience and Contextual Understanding

During the focus group, the participants were asked to speak to the most crucial components necessary for charter school leadership and the principal role. Opal shared, "I feel like a prerequisite should be being a teacher in the community that you are serving as a leader." Jolie echoed this assertion, calling it "One of the greatest assets." Jolie explained that having that contextual knowledge brought a level of credibility to the role for the families, and gave her the ability to be approachable. Jolie shared, families have "to be able to sit down at any point and to have a conversation," and having experience in the community and contextual knowledge also brought a level of credibility that allowed families "to trust that they can leave their babies with us." Jolie reiterated the importance of being a part of the community before stepping into the role,

> Spend time with the principal, in a charter school, spend time, not even just a day, a couple weeks, or a month, course of months, really understand what it is. And I think that for a principal, that would be my best advice and know your community, know all parts of your community.

Lila also shared the importance of contextual understanding, "I would say to really listen to the things that are happening around you, before you get into this role." Xiomara had never articulated this aspect of being better prepared to take on the role to herself, but agreed with others.

> I would have never thought about the significance of that. But looking at my own staff, I have three teachers who grew up in the neighborhood of my school and they're all three

different races. And when I think about the relationship that the students have, when I think about the classroom culture, and when I think about the why, it all aligns, it does make a significant difference.

Participants agreed that beyond connecting with teachers and families, having experience teaching brought a level of empathy and perspective that was crucial to supporting teachers. Lila shared, "something that I hope for is to not to lose sight of what it feels like to be a teacher in the classroom," and that she has heard about the frustrations of teachers "who have administrators who are very disconnected and sort of are so far away, or so distant from the feeling of being a teacher." Lila spoke of the benefits of the leadership team at her school having experience teaching at the same school, "I know that we are all here very mindful of not only how much physical work" there was in the position but "how much emotional work it takes to be a teacher."

The importance of contextual understanding, teaching experience, and staying connected with families, students, and the needs of teachers was reflected in several of the participants' duties, which included teaching or supervisory duties. The participants who did not share the dual roles of Executive Director and Principal all had teaching or supervision duties on a regular basis. Xiomara led a morning class every day. Opal taught classes every Monday. Lila supervised lunches every day and conducted valet service every day. Magdalene opened the school and greeted families every day in the morning at the gate.

Learning on the Job

While principals all came into the position with teaching experience and higher education and leadership experiences, it was noted in my reflective field notes that participants felt that continued learning while in the role of principal was crucial. The most prevalent supports that the

participants found value in and discussed were continued education and development, mentorship, and coaching.

Education and Development

Charter school principals do not have mandatory prerequisites to becoming the principal, however, all of the participants interviewed had some level of formal education in leadership. Four of the six charter school principals had participated in administrative credentialing programs or held leadership degrees. The other two charter school principals had received robust training through other leadership programs offered from Building Excellent Schools and the charter management organization. All six participants had education degrees. Felina had a degree in education and an MBA. In addition, she received training through her fellowship with Building Excellent Schools. Lila also had a degree in education and was currently in a Principal leader institute program at a university. Opal, Lila, Jolie, and Magdalene all had higher degrees in education. Most of the participants had administrative credentials, Lila was in process of obtaining her administrative credential and Opal had years of training through courses and programming that her large charter management organization offered on a national scale.

Lila shared that her participation in obtaining her second master's in education while working in the role of principal provided valuable development and "supported in always reminding us why we do the work we do," and ensured that she was surrounded by "like minded educators" for leadership who kept in mind the "bigger social justice purpose of the work," that was grounded in "what you do for your students," and allowed her to keep in mind what it means for family engagement and teacher support.

All six participants shared during their interviews that the education that they received better prepared them for the challenges of the principalship. The value of formal training in leadership was also highlighted in the reflective field notes taken immediately after the interviews, noting that this has been my experience as a principal and now Executive Director, while simultaneously attending school for my doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Mentorship and Coaching

The importance of mentorship came up during the semi-structured one on one interviews, through the reflective field notes, and during the focus group. All of the participants had some form of mentorship and coaching, whether it was through formal or informal structures. Three of the participants spoke about the mentorship they received through the former principals that had previously held their role and were still connected to the school. In fact, all three principals who were taking over the role from someone else were able to utilize the former principal for support. Lila spoke about how her transition into the principalship was guided and supported through the mentorship of the previous principal.

> I think that that transition into being the principal was really nice because I didn't feel like I was thrown into this into this role, completely by myself, but that I had someone who had done it before and it's still doing it sort of there, you know, easing me into it.

Magdalene had similar experiences, as the principal at her organization was still working for the school, and shared that she is able to call him as needed when she had questions. Opal also spoke about similar support, as the former principal stayed in the organization several months after Opal took on the principalship. Opal shared, “I did a lot of work and then I would

share it with the former principal to get feedback on it. She was pretty open to helping me in whatever way I needed help."

While having the former principal as a mentor was helpful for participants, there were also elements that made it difficult. In the reflective field notes, it was noted that having the prior principal available for support appeared to be more positive than negative, and more common than I had previously thought, but that there were difficulties in replacing a leader that was still present. One prevalent struggle that participants shared they experienced in varying degrees, was the challenge of creating a vision that felt authentic and unique to them. Another hindrance was the time it could take to build relationships. Opal shared that the former principal "was the founder of the school and had worked here for a long time. I was worried about the deep relationships that she had built with the families and what that would mean in terms of a transition." Magdalene shared, "It's apparent that he (the former principal) still has a huge pull at the school, people will still call on him and tell him what's going on, and he'll pop in frequently." Magdalene further elaborated during the focus group when she shared, "I am replacing someone they love. So, it's difficult to form relationships." Xiomara felt that in order to benefit from mentorship, a degree of openness and honesty was needed.

> Always ask questions, it is important to ask questions, it is always better to ask questions so that you don't get caught in an issue so that you are now much deeper in a problem than you should be. Always be transparent with your vulnerabilities, I think that it will save you a lot of trouble later.

The three other participants who were founding principals at their charter school did not have the opportunity to utilize the mentorship of former principals, but were able to receive

mentorship through other methods. Felina shared that she received formal coaching through Building Excellent Schools, and that the weekly coaching calls have been "critical to my leadership development." Jolie shared that she had a mentor who used to be a charter developer several years ago, and while "the game has changed," she knew the complexities of running a charter school, "from the inside," and was able to predict potential problems before they arose. Jolie shared her mentor gave her advice generated from her prior charter school leadership experience, "I'm going to suggest you keep your eye on this happening. I've seen this before, I experienced this, and this is what I did." Jolie found great value in receiving coaching from someone who had gone through the same challenges and had been in the same role, however, Jolie needed to receive mentorship from multiple people due to the different skills needed for the position. Jolie reached out to others for guidance when needed, and received support as requested, but shared "no one has really taken me under their wing."

Xiomara spoke about the mentorship that she received through the Executive Director. Although the Executive Director had not taught before, her years in charter school management enriched her perspectives and yielded helpful feedback. Xiomara appreciated this support, and found that it allowed for the sharing of resources and tasks based on their different experiences and skill sets.

For the five charter school principals at smaller charter management organizations or standalone charter schools, mentorship required a level of seeking out of support. However, Opal, who is part of a large charter management organization, received additional formal mentorship that was a structured component of the support provided to all new principals within her charter management organization. Opal met with her coach "every other week to do a

walkthrough the school or sit down and talk through challenges." Opal also received additional coaching through a charter management leadership program in her first year in the principalship. Her leadership program was "specifically designed" to "start planning for the next year" and solicit feedback through listening tours. Opal found this structured support helpful in strategic planning.

Felina felt that the fact that principals at standalone charter schools had to actively solicit support made it tough.

> They need a lot of support and they are drowning too much to even ask for it or seem like they are willing to accept it, because they might not respond to this email, because they are dying, so anything that is proactively going to them and not judging them, but going and walking through and being really action oriented. I think that has been so helpful with a coach that calls even when they are remote, and being like hey, what are you in right now, how can I help lift the burden for you, and how can we get a win for next week? That same kind of ongoing coaching cycle, and ideally anything that gets them to step away a bit more, going to visit other schools, talking to other school leaders, I think that's really critical and important, but that is a bigger and harder lift for people, especially in their first years of leadership.

The Support and Development of the Charter School Board

Similar to district schools, charter schools are overseen and held accountable by a school board. The experiences of the charter school principal participants and the strengths and needs of the support and guidance received through the charter school's board varied considerably. None

of the participants brought up the role of the school board until explicitly asked about the role of their school board during the focus group.

Xiomara shared, “I actually feel very fortunate with the board that I work with.” Xiomara shared that she had clear expectations given to her by the school board, and was expected to complete a principal’s report for each board meeting. Expectations were coupled with support,

> I can receive constructive pushback but I also feel tremendously supported, the Executive Director manages the relationships with the board more closely, but there are multiple people on my board who worked at a founding charter school like myself . . . or have a deep context of a district environment, and they are all powerful players who play nice in the sandbox together, and it is just a really effective team.

The high level of accountability that Xiomara felt with her school board differed from the experiences of others. Jolie shared,

> We're still developing. We're only in our second year. And I have a new board for the second. My founding board stayed on through the first year, they were very supportive but weren’t super actively engaged through the first year. They were very supportive. But weren’t super actively engaged. And I felt the burden, if you will, of that. I loved their support. They showed up for meetings, they listened. But there was not a lot of feedback or engagement. So, we're in the middle of rebuilding our board, developing that. The people we have now so far are very actively engaged. But not a whole lot of knowledge yet, not a whole lot of knowledge about the district. So, we're learning together.

Jolie was appreciative of the support that was provided by the board, but there was a sense that the support was not yet grounded in contextual knowledge or a wealth of experience in

charter schools. Jolie, who shared the dual role of Executive Director and principal, was also tasked with building and sustaining the board, and found herself in the position of having to rebuild the board completely in just her second year. Magdalene echoed similarities in her experiences with her board, but also had a positive view of their support, sharing that her board was "more of a come as you are called, but picking up is important and knowing that they are willing to work is important."

Opal, who was the only participant who worked at a larger network, had a very minimal relationship with her board sharing, "I work for a larger network and my interaction with the board is just about zero. So, the network representative will represent me to the board and work with them directly and then report back to me with anything required … but usually close to nothing."

Leading in Title I Schools

The participants all felt that there were unique aspects to working at Title I Schools, with a school population comprised of very high percentages of students of low socio-economic status. However, this was a notion that many of the participants had to think through, as the fact that their school was a Title I school was not a primary aspect that they considered when thinking about their school. Participants spoke about having only worked in Title I schools, and thus being unsure of some of the differences, and what were potentially needs and challenges that were inherent in all schools. When asked to reflect, participants shared that several of the struggles included a heightened degree of student need but fewer resources and access to resources, challenges with restorative justice practices, constraints of time, a need to change the mindset of others in the community, and healing the trauma associated with working in Title I

schools for teachers and staff members. Despite the struggles that participants spoke about, there were strengths shared as well, such as the support of the community, and the ability to use restorative justice practices that pushed back against traditional punitive disciplinary measures.

High Needs, Low Funding

Magdalene shared that for her, the difference in working in Title I schools was about access, "So, whether it's access to resources, like curriculum, instructional materials, or people." Magdalene gave an example of the struggles of providing access to extracurricular opportunities without facilities, and the experiences of her students at the neighborhood park, which could sometimes be dangerous. "We have a really good football team, a really good soccer team, but we don't have facilities, they are practicing in the park, the other day there was a shooting close to where they were practicing."

The ability to access resources was echoed by other participants. Felina shared her experiences at visiting other schools across the country and experiencing the extreme difference in resources and funding that existed in different communities and geographical locations.

> I don't think any of our schools have what is needed. I mean having visited schools around the country to see what they're able to do in New York and New Jersey with 18,000 dollars per student or 23,000 per student as opposed to 10,000 for students, that's a really meaningful gap. There is a reason that we feel crazy here, and is it even possible to do what we are doing if we don't have enough money? We don't have enough money to have the ongoing training and supports that we should all have as leaders, our teacher preparation programs are not good, I don't think any dimension of our system is as

supported and resourced as it should be if we really prioritized education as a critical leverage.

Felina spoke about how the lack of funding and significant disparities sometimes brought a sense of hopelessness and exacerbated the difficulty of the work. Felina shared that there were deficits in every component of education in Los Angeles. The difficulty of not having enough resources was spoken about by other participants. Jolie felt that "I think the whole funding structure for schools is ridiculous in and of itself, and in charter schools it is terrible." Jolie shared the challenges of not being able to afford adequate counseling services for students who had a need for higher levels of socio-emotional services.

> We have students that would benefit from some counseling. I have a six-year-old, who tries to strangle, who does it, takes a kid by the throat, punches, tells a kid I want to kill you, but a brilliant kid, we love him, best personality, funny, hilarious, but he is angry, he's got anger. I'm not going to punish him to suspend him, because that's not going to solve his problem. He needs counseling, he needs support, he needs anger management, but we don't have the resources for that, so my hands are tied. And that's the story of many of our children.

Opal shared that the difficulty was not just lack of resources, but being able to choose where resources go and how funding is spent in Title I schools at a larger charter management network, and that even within her network she experienced inequity through differing student needs but a one size fits all approach.

> I've been able to gain more perspective on what it is like and what is a discrepancy between South LA and East LA. And I do feel one of the biggest things was trauma and

> the number of students who come from a lower income background. The low socio-economic population seems to possibly be higher in South LA schools, I haven't looked at those numbers directly so I don't know. It's just different in that sense.

Opal wondered if there should be more flexibility in meeting the needs of students in her network as "the model that currently exists is a standard model", and adapting practices would allow schools with higher or differing needs to "reallocate their resources in different ways." Opal shared that in her charter management organization, all deans were first and foremost academic deans, but that in schools with higher poverty, there might be a need to change this model because, "in schools where the culture is not safe," there should be different priorities, and "it's worth having a dean of culture, someone just focused on that to get the school where it needs to be, before you move into taking the school to the next instructional level."

Felina spoke to higher needs based on poverty related trauma. "It manifests in higher level nonsense like how it informs student behavior, or lockdowns due to things that are going on down the street, there are so many gaps that you want to fill for your kids that you are not able to." Xiomara was able to creatively use her school's resources to pay for counseling services by partnering with Teach for America for a part time counselor who grew with the organization and who utilized mental health practitioners (MFTs) interns to provide additional coaching and socio-emotional support for students. That being said, Xiomara still experienced frustrations, sharing,

> I mean, the amount of times I've had to call DCFS this year is just ridiculous. And I'm extremely conservative about that, because it often brings just more stress and struggle to

a family. The amount of high needs that we have is something that's not even on the radar of a school that is located in a different zip code.

Challenges and Triumphs in Restorative Justice Practices

The ways that discipline and restorative justice practices were utilized in schools was addressed to some degree by five out of the six participants. The sense from participants was that discipline challenges existed everywhere, but might be heightened at Title I schools where more students have experienced trauma. Restorative justice practices are considered an equity-based form of discipline (Gregory, Soffer, Gaines, Hurley, & Karikehalli, 2016) that is an alternative to traditional methods (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016) and concentrates on teaching new strategies and repairing harm (Song & Swearer, 2016). Challenges and successes were experienced. Challenges included the time it takes to facilitate restorative justice practices and the difficulty in changing mindsets and the perception that insufficient structure was provided through restorative justice. Successes were celebrated by participants when the restorative justice model led to meeting the needs of staff and students.

Felina spoke to some of the challenges that were experienced by both leadership and teachers at her school, that led to "predictable tensions around behavior management approaches," most particularly between the behavior and culture team and teachers, and "frustration on both sides and a system pushback." Felina shared that there was a "restore room" but that this was really more of a timeout room, and the lack of efficacy made the behavior and culture team feel "that teachers were abdicating responsibility for students with challenging behavior," and "just submitting referrals," and not taking "ownership of their own classroom." Teachers felt consequences that were being enforced in the "restore room were not effective

enough in addressing student behavior." Success was found by Felina when, "We switched to a much more comprehensively built restorative approach," that worked to "keep kids in the classrooms and empower teachers more."

Xiomara shared pride in the restorative practices at her school, and shared that it was an integral part of her school's practice, with both students and adults. "We really run a restorative community. You've heard of restorative practice; you've heard of restorative justice. But we have a restorative community." Xiomara shared that what made her program unique was "the amount of social emotional support and learning," both with students and also adults, "We include a self-care component into our PD for the teachers. We have some routines and rituals around that, like freeform writing, and trios, and art therapy."

Jolie spoke about the restorative justice program at her school and the importance of aligning philosophies with practice, "How are we designing our programs to master our mission? We don't do punishment, we do more restorative but what does that mean, that's language, how is it in action?" Jolie also shared the difficulty of ensuring that all adults understood and practiced restorative justice, sharing that there would sometimes be teachers who would continue to utilize punitive measures, and resort to old habits, such as benching.

> Like all the kids are benched. What is that? I don't understand. If a child needs a consequence for a behavior. Making it meaningful, make it something, you know. And so, we had a teacher who got frustrated and sent all her kids out and told them to tell us they're benched. No. What is this, and this was like the umpteenth time of her doing these types of things. And it is damaging to the culture, right. And the kids don't deserve that.

Opal shared that despite "doing tons of training on restorative practices, community circles, responding to misbehaviors," and "getting teachers mindsets to align with our beliefs and our philosophies," it "took years to get to just having people on the same page with mindsets around restorative practices, and responding to student behavior." Opal also expressed challenges in supporting teachers with restorative justice practices on the administrative side. "In order for me to know how to support teachers in the development of students that have experienced a lot of trauma, I need time with kids myself to understand them and what the challenges are." Opal shared that this took contextual knowledge and relationship building with the students, and that this process also took time.

Parents as Resources

The ability to collaborate with parents as equal partners was a challenge expressed by some of the participants but a strength of others.

Jolie spoke to the strength of her community and the high level of support that her school has received from within the school staff and from the community as well, sharing, "So, I'm blessed that I have a tremendous support circle, within the school, more people are supportive of the school and our visions than not." While Jolie had not had experience with large donors, she shared, "But locally, people love what we are doing ... a lot of people want to come by and offer support and volunteer and donate books and donate time." Jolie spoke about her own responsibility in keeping the connection with the community and families strong, and shared, "We build a community, we are open to it, we have what is called an open door policy." Jolie also spoke about the need to receive feedback and input from families, sharing that one important aspect of her leadership was "just going in, having that spirit, being humble, receiving the

feedback," and spending the time "in the community to know what they want, what they need," and then most importantly respecting the feedback of families and the community.

Xiomara spoke about the fundraising goals at her school, and how the Executive Director did the bulk of fundraising through going after donors and grants, "instead of taxing our families" with an onslaught of "chocolate bar, wrapping paper, or cookie dough opportunities that yield so little." Xiomara shared that her school tries to limit what they ask of their parents, "we don't do an annual fund ask for our families either. Because we just believe that's not fair to them." Xiomara compared this to her differing experiences with her own children, who attended a more affluent school on the westside of Los Angeles,

> My youngest goes to [name of school], which is in Westwood, walking distance from UCLA. And parents literally run that school, all the programming, all the support, all the sales, it's all them. And it's on autopilot. That's a school where if you have a kindergartner you're expected to and asked to give an annual contribution of $2,750. If your kid is in grades one through four, your expected contribution is $1,850. There's a banner that goes up for all the families, I made a contribution.

Xiomara stated that the resources of parents at more affluent schools goes beyond their ability to fundraise or contribute money. "There's families that those schools have families with deep pockets, but also with an incredible network and potential to contribute in various ways." Felina felt that "parents do care and they are involved in different respects", but it was her own "willingness to make asks of our parents" that was lower than it might be in another context.

I know of all the different challenges that they are facing, and I don't want to put another burden or ask on them. In a more resource rich setting I might ask parents to hold a fundraiser for that, or coordinate this, or those kinds of opportunities.

Felina felt that the desire to not overwhelm parents could sometimes make it feel like there was not an equal partnership between the school and parents, even if that wasn't the case. "The enormity of the work is even more magnified in a Title I setting and feeling sometimes, maybe rightly or wrongly, that you are alone in the work."

Lack of Time and Compassion Fatigue

Opal spoke about the increased time needed to address higher levels of student needs, both due to socio-emotional needs and also the need for increased resources to support the families. "The amount of time that an administrator, school leader spends with students and helping to restore trust is probably more."

Magdalene spoke with regret about a situation with a former pupil, where ultimately the decision was made for the student to change schools, which ended with the child coming back and attacking another student, and the police becoming involved. In retrospect, Magdalene wished she would have spent the time to mediate the situation, but "you know, when you're busy, you don't necessarily have time. I didn't have time to sit down and help them mediate." Felina also had a similar regret, when asked what she could do over if she could, she shared, "Probably a decision that we made to expel a student in the past. I didn't really understand the full ramifications of what that meant, I would love to do that over." Xiomara also spoke about feeling that there was not enough time to adequately address certain students in the past,

> I would say, there's a student that stands out to me, and our first year was, incredibly challenging. She was just so tough. She left and then she came back and it was just over. There was a lot of complexity in her personal life that impacted her difficulties at school. And it was really hard for me to extend the compassion that I needed at times. So, I do regret, how, I wasn't able to like to support her while I had her, as best as I could. I had never experienced a student as challenging as that, and then in year one, it was really hard to have the bandwidth to extend that grace to her.

Felina also echoed the difficulties faced by staff at Title I schools, sharing about the demands that working with students who are dealing with poverty related trauma entails. “I think the emotional toll of this work is significantly more, when you are working with kids there is always an emotional toll to that.” However, Felina felt the emotional fatigue was exacerbated in Title I schools, “The trauma that our students experience, both before and during their time with us,” matters, and impacts the difficulties of the job for “you as a leader and your staff and your school community.”

Lila spoke about the difficulty of holding staff accountable to the vision and the belief that every child can and should perform at a high academic, socio-emotional and behavioral level when teachers are dealing with the trauma of working with students with high needs and low socio-economic status,

> It’s difficult to then hold teachers and staff accountable to meeting those academic goals and really pushing the rigor and all of those things when you also have to consider the socio-emotional development of the students, whereas in an affluent school you know your kids, don't come to school maybe with a whole lot of trauma or are not hungry or

you know, we're not worried dirty clothes, and all those sort of factors that teachers have to deal with here, every day.

Navigating Relationships with LAUSD

All six charter school participants spoke of the difficulties of navigating LAUSD and being a charter school principal in Los Angeles. Magdalene spoke to this, and wanted to reiterate that it was "extremely important to talk about charter politics, and the relationship and the sometimes adversarial relationship between charter schools and LAUSD." Felina shared, "The political landscape of LAUSD is just as horrible as you think it is, and it is only going to get worse." This was a common theme that appeared during the interviews and the focus group, and was a key component in the reflective field notes, because it also resonated with my own experiences of the increasing difficulties of leading an independent charter school and collaborating with the LAUSD school district in the aftermath of the UTLA teacher strikes.

The challenges of being a charter school leader in the current anti-charter climate of Los Angeles emerged in two key areas: the experiences of co-located charters and district schools in Proposition 39 (Prop-39) space, and the experiences during oversight and fears about renewal.

Hostile Co-location Experiences

Sharing LAUSD schools was a struggle that deeply impacted two of the participants. Prop-39 allows charter schools to rent empty classroom spaces from district schools that are significantly under enrolled. This option was attractive to a couple of the participants, as real estate in Los Angeles is costly and in high demand. Xiomara's school is a Prop-39 site, and she spoke about being forced to move multiple times.

> This is our second time as a Prop-39 site. That's where it particularly impacts us. That's where we see it first, and foremost. So, our first year it was so hostile, we had to move. So, we moved three times in three years. We're very fortunate to have returned to this campus for the first time. I mean, the rumors you couldn't even imagine. They're like the school is shutting down, the school is moving again. We're like, no, we're not. We're here.

In the reflective field notes I noted that moving schools is not just difficult from a logistical perspective of moving students, staff, and parents. Moving a school three times detrimentally impacts the budget, wasting money, time, and resources. Instead of using the time to strategically plan and meet the needs of staff, students, and families, Xiomara wasted valuable time on being forced to facilitate three large scale school moves. For her, it led to a feeling of instability for families and the frequent moves were emotionally taxing and stressful for the school's leadership team and teachers. Xiomara had to constantly assert that her school was staying open and was not shutting down, which was damaging to her ability to keep school culture positive and build morale.

This challenge was echoed by Felina in her experiences with Prop-39, and she expressed it damaged school culture and the growth trajectory of the school in the crucial first years.

> We also really prioritized finding a site of our own, because the co-location (with a district school) we were finding was another really toxic and challenging element to our school culture in a variety of ways, and ultimately was able to secure a lease to our new site, and we moved last summer and we are finally in year four where I would have liked to be in year two.

Felina spent time and resources trying to remedy the negativity of the Prop-39 environment, time, and resources that could have been spent in growing and developing her school program. For both Xiomara and Felina, the ability to grow and develop their schools was deeply hampered by the negative interactions precipitated by being a Prop-39 school and sharing space with a district school. Felina shared that the negativity from the Prop-39 experience detrimentally impacted her school culture in multiple facets for several years. In the reflective field notes it was noted that time is an incredibly valuable asset for charter school leaders, as the short length of charter school renewals leaves little room for stagnation or failure.

However, Prop-39 experiences are not all negative, Xiomara noted that after changing Prop-39 sites she now has "an amazing relationship with our host school. Amazing, and I think it makes a difference that they're a high school and we're a middle school. So, we're not competing with students." However, it took multiple moves before finding a Prop-39 space that was workable for her school.

I used the reflective field notes to reflect on my own experiences with Prop-39, and the negative experiences of having UTLA LAUSD school district teachers protesting outside of our school site when there was a consideration to move our middle school to a co-located space. Even though the determination had been made not to move forward with the Prop-39 move, there were still two demonstrations outside of the school that frightened parents and students. This only happened twice, but was still incredibly damaging to school culture and morale. Protests outside the charter school while students walked to and from school, led to frightened children and damaged the perceptions of safety for families.

Challenges of Oversight and Compliance Measures

All participants shared the challenges of Los Angeles Unified School District oversight visits. During annual LAUSD oversight visits, district representatives from the Charter School Division (CSD) of LAUSD assess the fiscal, governance, and academic performance of each charter school. The outcomes of the annual oversight visits are used to help determine what schools will be recommended for closure or renewal. The process of oversight includes a thorough fiscal audit, the compilation and review of hundreds of compliance documents, answering in depth questions on data and academic performance using a variety of metrics, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers, parents, other staff, and the leadership team. The process can take weeks to complete.

While there were also some positive experiences from oversight feedback, there was a perception amongst participants that the process was not reflective of the differing needs of the schools. Some participants shared that there might be bias in how schools are treated in some instances, and that it was unfair that district schools did not have the same degree of oversight. Xiomara connected the laborious process of oversight from the district as being a major obstacle towards feeling that the principal role was sustainable in the long term.

> The things that make it unsustainable, are the what I call death by a thousand paper cuts, whether it's compliance to the district, to the state, the LCAP, different paperwork from the charter school division, it's just ridiculous, just ridiculous. So, then I get particularly frustrated when people think charters don't have as much accountability.

Xiomara shared that there was still a perception that charter schools were not held accountable, despite the multiple measures used to oversee and audit the performance of charter

schools, and despite the fact that there is nothing comparable that is used to oversee and audit the services, practices, programs and academic outcomes of district schools. Jolie spoke about the additional expenses that her school has had to absorb in order to navigate the oversight requirements.

> At our oversight it was, you did this, you did this, so now I call and I ask everything. So now I'm ok, like how will this impact us, our back-office provider, our attorney, I'm like I don't care, charge me, I'm going to ask everything. And I'm a very proactive person.

Jolie expressed that spending the additional money on conferring with her charter school lawyer was necessary in order to ensure that her school was adhering to all of the numerous compliance requirements. Despite being the principal of a high performing charter school that was deemed as successful according to all the metrics that the district uses for oversight, Opal still shared frustrations.

> When it comes to LAUSD coming to our school I feel like there's just so much that you have to do that is extra, that if you're in a LAUSD school you would not have to do, that takes a ridiculous amount of time.

Opal felt that the time spent was often time wasted, and time that could have been spent more constructively elsewhere. The perception that charter schools are being held to a higher degree of accountability that district schools are not held to was a prevalent theme during the interviews and the focus group, and was also noted in the reflective field notes. Xiomara shared during the focus group that while she "appreciates the feedback that has usually been constructive, and I have been impressed by it, I just wish that it applied to every school in the

district.” The helpfulness of the oversight feedback was echoed by Jolie in the focus group, who shared,

> What I tell my team is as we're preparing, I'm telling them that really everything we're putting in place, it's just best practices. And it's our things that we think we're putting in place to prepare is just about best practices. So, if we do all these things, yay for us, whether or not the district is coming to provide the oversight, but I know, I do really, really appreciate the feedback.

There was a sense that the feedback generated from the oversight was helpful and useful in improving the practices of the schools. However, Felina also noted that it hampered the ability of her school to serve the needs of students and be innovative with hiring.

> We ended up running into credentialing issues because everybody was having trouble transferring their credentials and arguably the best staff were the ones that the district flipped out about when they saw the status of their credentials in that first year.

Magdalene spoke about feeling singled out by the district at her previous school, and shared it felt that the LAUSD auditors were overly critical in how they assessed the school.

> I've actually had a really bad experience where we were at a charter school and the Executive Director was told, we opened you to close you. So, it was basically like no matter what I did to create a sustainable program, and no matter what our success rates were, if the I’s weren’t dotted and the t’s not crossed, it was a negative thing.

Magdalene shared that it felt that LAUSD had already made up their mind on her charter school, which made it difficult to feel like she could be successful in improving the outcomes in a way that would be recognized by LAUSD. During the focus group, Magdalene spoke about

perceived favoritism within LAUSD due to having a very different experience at her current site, and compared actions that were targeted at the previous school and that were not mentioned at all by the Charter School Division during the oversight visit for her new school. “I definitely think there is favoritism amongst LAUSD and I say that because now I am at a site where there are a lot of things that I learned from the nitpicking that I had to go through,” and that is still occurring now “but it is not addressed because there is a favorable opinion.”

Magdalene shared that through the process of having participated in very different oversight experiences, she “learned a lot”, and that it made her “strategic” in her practices and “helped with planning” for future audits. However, receiving different treatment due to being at a “different place and a different organization,” was perceived as unfair, and Magdalene expressed she would like to see that bias fixed.

During the focus group, the participants also shared frustrations with the one size fits all nature of the oversight visit. Xiomara propounded, “If you are at an outstanding school and you have a track record, there should be ten-year renewals. There should be situations where you get to skip oversight, it should be differentiated.” Opal concurred to different metrics being used, and that her school’s high academic, fiscal, and governance performance should speak for itself for some areas of the oversight audit. “It just feels like an extra step to prove ourselves when our results are there and our enrollment is there and all the other pieces are there.”

Opal shared that despite being part of a high performing school, there are areas that the oversight visit does not review as closely, that could be beneficial, such as leader and teacher retention.

> I was just going to add, it's interesting because, I also think that there's something about the school leader who is also in that seat, and when there is a change in the school or the school leader, how that can affect the school. So, in terms of differentiation, I do wonder, even in a successful school, if there's some sort of turnover, whether that be the number of staff turnover or turnover in leadership, that has huge implications for schools, and I feel that could be another layer to consider in differentiating the process.

Jolie spoke about wishing that there was a different metric used to measure success at brand new charter schools in their first couple of years. Jolie expressed frustrations with having to explain the obvious,

> They definitely put a lot of emphasis on, why is this your budget? Well, clearly, because we have 40 kids, you know, we have 140 this year, so it's going to be different, but they don't seem to acknowledge that.

Jolie shared that the circumstance of her school in the founding year was unique to the challenges faced during founding years, and was no longer the circumstance of her school now that enrollment has grown. However, she felt that the district did not take into consideration the unique context of a school that has just opened, and how growing enrollment in the first year for a new school might impact the school's fiscal position.

Opal agreed that the differentiation in what metrics are used could make the process helpful to all schools, including those that might traditionally be considered to be high performing or successful. Opal also shared that she received a lot of support in the oversight preparation and process from her charter management organization, "I find the process to be pressure filled and there's quite a hustle to prepare. For me, I feel fortunate that the region that I

work for, they actually own a lot of it." Opal shared that this support eased a lot of the stress of the oversight visit.

Jolie also spoke about a lack of contextual understanding that would be difficult for the Charter School Division oversight team to grasp as each charter school has a different mission and has different methods of teaching.

> I do feel that we consider ourselves a progressive school, so some of our practices don't align with very traditional things that occur in schools, and while obviously our charter school was approved, I felt in some instances, not because they're not being fair, but because of their lack of knowledge about these progressive practices, that we were maybe judged in some ways, I don't want to say unfairly but inaccurately.

Jolie shared that this lack of contextual understanding was also hampered by having a new oversight team in the following year, so that previous contextual understanding was lost. Through the focus group reflective notes, it became apparent that the principals who kept the same oversight team had more positive experiences than those that had a new oversight team each year. Those that had changes in the oversight team expressed frustration that contextual knowledge was lost in the transition, and that it was harder to predict what areas would be targeted.

Lastly, the participants in the focus group explored the ability to push back on the district with outcomes to the oversight visit that were not considered fair or accurate. Jolie spoke to being new, and having a hard time giving "pushback or redirection" due to being "overwhelmed and nervous." Xiomara shared, "Just so you know, you absolutely can, when you get the report, our director was not okay with two of our scores." Through the advocacy of the Executive

Director at Xiomara's school, "they did agree and changed one of them." The fact that charter school principals could provide rebuttals or feedback to the district was new knowledge to some of the focus group participants, and was deemed by participants as being helpful information to know.

Leading Through the Shifting Tides of Politics

Additional Challenges of Proposition 39 and Assembly Bill 1505

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has recently retroactively charged penalties to charter schools who have utilized Proposition 39 (Prop-39) spaces but not used all of the classrooms that were originally requested. This process has debilitated smaller schools that might have incurred fines that equal or surpass the school's yearly allocation for rent. Felina spoke about feeling defeated with the newly enforced penalties of Prop-39 co-location, sharing that it was tough to lead in "an environment that is so politically toxic," and that "everything looks so bleak and uncertain."

Assembly Bill 1505 (Cal. 2019) has had a similarly damaging impact on the state level. Opal, despite being the principal of a highly successful charter school with strong academic outcomes, and being a part of a large charter management organization with a good relationship with LAUSD, also expressed fear with the increasingly anti-charter climate under *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019), "I feel we're under a microscope. So, every little thing matters. Every data point matters. Every form of communication matters." Jolie echoed this view, sharing in her interview that she is encouraging her team to leave a "paper trail, you don't have to tell me everything but cc me on everything. Make sure a memo goes out. I'm a lot more mindful about that type of stuff now."

Magdalene spoke to feeling that the political climate of LAUSD has led to charter schools being targeted for school closures, and that LAUSD was trying to find reasons to shut down charter schools, and that it was important to highlight "there might be some schools that are mismanaging their resources, and people, and instruction, but then there are also schools that are doing well." Magdalene also expressed frustration with the role LAUSD has taken in allowing charter schools to open, only to shut them down.

> I definitely think that years ago, when charter schools were opening up, I would say ten, fifteen years ago, the political climate was different. LAUSD was open to opening charters, and even California in general, but now it seems like things have turned around and they have taken a balcony view and it's like oh my gosh, now we have too many. And so, they are really trying to weed out schools.

Magdalene expressed that this process would detrimentally impact Los Angeles families and students who had opted into the charter school system, and didn't take their input into consideration, "the positive thing about charter schools is that it's pro-choice, school choice," and that families should have "the right to choose where to go," and that they shouldn't "be tied to their large district schools if they don't want to be."

Planning and Innovating with Uncertainty

Participants shared that the uncertainty surrounding the outcomes of enforcing retroactive Prop-39 penalties and the lack of clarity on how *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019) would be implemented made it difficult to plan and to experiment with the innovative practices that were in their charter school petition. Felina felt that it impacted her ability to strategically plan for the future.

> It is hard to have the headspace for long term strategic planning. It is hard no matter what in this work, and there is so much day to day, and taking a step back to have this perspective is difficult.

Felina shared that there were also additional struggles experienced by charter school principals due to increasing difficulty in hiring teachers in such an uncertain political climate, "it hurts from a talent perspective, the more that there is negativity about charters, closes the talent pool to us," and makes candidates "pessimistic" and choose not to apply.

Magdalene and Felina spoke about the difficulty to provide innovative educational experiences to students when living in fear of non-renewal and the oversight visits. Felina shared that instead of teaching being "holistic," there was a need to "focus on explicit test prep," and this perceived difficulty was echoed by Lila, who shared that it was difficult thinking about innovative leadership when the district was keeping "such a close eye on things like test scores," particularly due to the renewal process that her school would be going through next year. Lila spoke about the risks of innovation, "I think about exploring new methods and trying new models," but that a risk is that "it might take a few years to really see the impact of a change," and "there could be dips before you really see growth." Lila concluded that she would need to put a hiatus on some of the innovative practices she wanted to try until after renewal, and that she felt that her "hands were tied," by the school district.

Casting the Net

Participants shared that finding and hiring strong teachers was difficult due to the teacher shortage in Los Angeles that was brought about by the LAUSD hiring freeze of several years ago. The need to aggressively advertise and the ability to offer a compelling financial and benefit

package to attract, find, and hire the right candidates was weighed against having a rigorous hiring process that led to hiring teachers who would be a good academic and cultural fit for the school.

Los Angeles Teacher Shortage

Most of the participants spoke about the difficulties presented by the teacher shortage and the subsequent issues that arose as a result. Xiomara shared that she found a teacher that she liked, but that the teacher was unable to return due to credentialing issues. These difficulties were also expressed by Felina, who said that she ran into "credentialing issues" during oversight, when her strongest teachers were the ones who had had difficulty transferring their credentials over to another state. "The human capital pool for education in general, I think is a huge, huge challenge. And I think the credentialing environment in California dramatically compounds that challenge." Felina shared frustration that teachers had to be turned away who had valid teaching credentials in other states, due to the complexities of the credentialing requirements in California.

Opal shared, "I really find value in hiring people whose desire to teach is their life goal, to teach, but, because of the teacher shortage I don't really have a choice." Opal spoke about needing to hire Teach for America and intern teachers, which were not her first preference. Jolie shared, "I'm sure you know, in Los Angeles the pickings are slim. The pickings are slim. There's a teacher drought and I want a teacher with innovation, innovative spirit, and a progressive mindset." Jolie shared she tried to find the right teachers, but sometimes it was a question of needing to ensure that there was a teacher in the classroom when the school year started.

Advertising Teaching Positions

Participants who belonged to standalone charter schools or small charter management networks spoke to the difficulty of standing out from the competition. Felina shared, “We're not a brand name that high performing teachers might just come to on their own.” Xiomara spoke to this challenge,

> I don't have a marketing budget. I don't have PR. All I've got is Edjoin, all I've got is a Teach for America job board. I was counting on the uniqueness to attract because there's nothing else, but I didn't have the budget to be splashy, or really advertise that this opportunity is now here in Los Angeles. So, it was just hustle, it was all hustle.

Felina predicted that the difficulties that her school experienced with attracting teacher candidates would only compound with time. “As time goes on, we might face more challenges in that respect because now we're not new and shiny. And we're just small and kind of okay as a school, we don’t have results.” Felina shared that she felt that her interview process was strong after teachers applied and went through the process, and stated that her job offers are compelling, and that “typically 90-95% of our offers are accepted, but it is getting those people in the funnel in the first place.” Felina shared that it was easier when her school was founding, and there was the excitement of newness. Now, her school was just one small school amongst many. In order to fight against the difficulties of being a small organization, Felina spoke about the need to “shake the tree” and “checking your network, and getting phone calls, and coffee, and different things, that people want people to know people, and trying to get those candidates even interested in or aware of your school.”

Challenges of Interviewing and Hiring

Felina shared, "As a leader of a single site charter, I never have enough time to devote to hiring." Felina spoke about hiring as a full-time job, and that it was a "zero sum game," because she needed to devote time to the running of the school, but she also needed to remove herself from that work to plan for the future success of the school. This lament was echoed by Xiomara, who spoke about the tactics that she had to use to find good teachers.

Xiomara spoke about the challenges of not being able to compete with schools that could offer better financial packages to teachers.

> I thought I was done hiring, and then somebody backed out and they went to take an LAUSD job. I thought I was done hiring, and someone backs out to work for a CMO that has deeper pockets, and pays slightly better.

Opal also spoke about the challenge of being able to offer an attractive financial package, but from the perspective of belonging to a large charter management organization that offered no discretion in what she could offer prospective teachers, as she was unable to deviate from the organization's teacher salary scale. Opal pondered if she would have higher retention if she had more flexibility, "If a goal is to retain teachers, are we offering enough compensation? Are their insurance and benefits enough to compete with what district school offers?"

Hiring the Right People, Keeping the Right People

The importance of hiring was summed up by Felina,

> I said from the very beginning, maybe coming from my own perspective as a teacher, that good teachers will make the difference, right? Like I can have the best plan on paper and bad teachers can, you know, ruin it.

Jolie shared that she needed to refine her system of hiring teachers, and that "I have not refined it, I am refining it now." The need to refine the system was evident to Jolie based on the challenges of "having experiences where people will tell you what you want to hear in an interview." Jolie gave one striking example, "I mean I had a teacher sit and tell me everything I wanted to hear, she gave me examples of the innovation and restorative practices in her classroom, and then went into the classroom and went straight traditional."

Lila also spoke to the importance of hiring the right teachers, and shared that she felt successful in this area: "I think that we already select and onboard teachers who are very much aligned with our philosophy and aligned with sort of my vision of what our school could and should be." Xiomara also felt that hiring was a strength of hers, and shared that she felt hiring the right people in the first place ensured low attrition rates:

> I pride myself and my hiring methods, I have a reputation for hiring very well. And it's because I have a process that I understand from working across so many different charter school networks and experiences. And I can testify to that because in my founding year, I didn't lose a single teacher.

Opal also spoke about the difficulties of hiring and retention when there is a transition in school leadership. Opal experienced this, as half of her teachers left during her first year in the principalship.

> I think maybe the biggest challenge was we did end up having a ton of turnover, so we lost 50% of our staff. And I don't know, on some of those it was almost impossible not to take it personally, however, I did meet with every single teacher to talk to them about it, and then I had my manager do exit surveys with people because I really don't know if

people are being honest with me or not. I think it really wasn't a personal thing, I think it was people using it (new leadership) as an opportunity for something different in their lives.

Even though the reasons for low teacher retention were not known with certainty, the impact of high attrition made Opal's job significantly harder in her second year of the principalship.

Xiomara shared that teacher retention was a strength of her leadership, "My retention has been phenomenal." Xiomara attributed it to her system of teacher hiring, "It's because when I do job postings, I have a high threshold already, like there's a naturally built in filter where I don't want to just read your cover letter and your resume." Xiomara also attributed her success to utilizing networks, sharing, "If it had not been for strategic partnerships, like Teach for America and Scoot education. I wouldn't have the staff that I have today."

High Expectations and High Support

Managing Others

The difficulty of managing adults was a prevalent theme for all of the participants to varying degrees, both during the one on one interviews and during the focus group. Some participants felt they possessed successful aspects of management, and others struggled. Lila shared that the difficulty of managing adults was unexpected and Felina shared it was far "more difficult than managing kids." Jolie agreed, and shared, "I wish someone had told me, managing adults is much harder than managing children."

Jolie discussed the difficulties of managing others, "I don't like it. I just don't, you know, I think, no matter how much good I tried to do, you're always going to be the bad guy just

because of the title you have," and that it "sucks and it hurts," but that in the role of principal, "I'm not really allowed to have feelings," and need to "just roll with it." Jolie shared that she felt that managing adults was an integral part of her job, but one that she struggled with, "I like to inspire people. I don't like to manage people, and I've had to really grow up, and grow in ways that are really uncomfortable for me." Jolie shared that her process of managing and holding adults accountable was a work in progress, "I have to find another way. I think the system of onboarding, setting expectations, and managing those expectations is something I definitely need to develop."

Lila felt that even though managing adults felt like, "trial and error," her ability to effectively manage others was strengthened by her relationships with teachers. "One benefit that I did have was knowing the team that I was overseeing or managing," and the relationships that she had been able to build previously in her prior role became beneficial when she took on the principalship.

The development of structures for managing others was shared as a crucial component by Opal. Opal highlighted a system that incorporated professional development, the use of multiple data points, and a system of meetings and observations that was utilized across her charter management network. "Each member of our leadership team gets a one on one meeting and on the ground time every week." Opal said that consistency was important and that her leadership consistently met each week to discuss data and next steps. Opal shared, "On Fridays we sit down together to look at the data from the week, and then make some decisions about what needs to happen the next week." Teachers also received consistent support from her management team. Opal said:

> Teachers get a one on one meeting every week or every other week depending on their development. They get observed at least once a week. They are responsible for submitting data as well, and then as part of their one on one meetings.

Teachers and leaders in Opal's network also had access to regular development at the charter management organization level, which was beneficial as it "provides an opportunity for us to have some common language, and utilize some of the resources that have been shared to norm our work together."

Lila spoke about the need to have systems, but also the importance of having flexibility in adapting those systems of evaluation and coaching based on the needs of teachers. Lila talked about needing to shift her practices with observations and coaching, because she had a "one size fits all support system, where I was observing and debriefing every week. Observing instruction and debriefing, and that didn't work for some teachers who felt like that wasn't really helpful for their practice." Lila redesigned the structure to give different types of support for veteran teachers, and adjusted to "meet their wants and needs for the type of support they were looking for from me."

Evaluation and Accountability

Keeping teachers and staff accountable and the struggles inherent in doing so were prevalent patterns in the interviews, focus group, and reflective field notes. Lila lamented about the pedantic ways in which she felt like she had to keep adults accountable. In her previous role of assistant principal, she was able to focus on instruction and coaching. Most of her time was spent observing teachers and with students, "but now in this role, it's about, are you coming on time, are you wearing appropriate clothes, are you, speaking to other adults appropriately?"

Jolie shared that holding teachers accountable was often met with resistance, even if she was holding them accountable to things that they had agreed with during the interview and hiring process.

> It's a professional growth thing, and they don't want to do that part because they feel I have my credential. I have my master's degree, I'm good. And so, they resist going back to read the article. We underlined it, we digested it, went back and continued. And it's just, it's tough resistance because they feel defensive as if I'm attacking them as a teacher.

Felina also spoke about resistance, but without a known cause, "pushback has not come explicitly but more of an implicit feedback of people just not getting it done." She shared that a big part of accountability and coaching was determining the cause for certain behaviors.

> So, we as a coaching team are really working with people on an individual basis trying to figure out when it is not happening, what is the root cause? Is it that they don't believe that it's valuable? Or is it a time management thing, or if they don't know how to do it well, so that they are just avoiding it?

Felina shared that there was a big "difference between knowing what somebody needs to improve and getting them to be able to do it," and that being able to keep people accountable was a "real skill-set."

Lila also spoke about the difficulties of holding various staff members in very different positions accountable, while still supporting them and not leading to people feeling overwhelmed, which was a very delicate balance, and being "the top supervisor on campus," meant that she had to be mindful of weighing the needs of the operational and instructional staff

members who held very different roles, which was tougher than just being an advocate for the teachers.

> I have to think about the office manager, and operations manager, and special education coordinator, and the counselor, and they all also have a lot on their plates and are very overwhelmed. And, you know, having to meet the needs but also hold those roles accountable, has been challenging.

Magdalene also spoke to the challenges of meeting the coaching and accountability needs of all teachers in a smaller organization, and shared that it differed for larger schools that have "instructional coaches for almost every discipline." Magdalene perceived heightened difficulties for a principal to have to give feedback if there are no structures for others to also provide feedback and coaching on a regular basis. At a small or standalone charter school, "the only instructional feedback that a teacher will receive is from the principal and possibly a peer."

Accountability for Self

Participants often took moments to pause and speak to their vulnerabilities or areas of need. Jolie spoke about her need to change her management style. Jolie spoke about wanting to lead with love but not always being successful in the outcome, which led to a change in strategy in "ways that might be confusing," to those that she manages. "It's hard. I don't like to have to do this but I think the way I manage people. I really lead from my heart, I really do. A lot of, come on, you can do this." Jolie expressed the desire to "put systems into place" and the need to be very clear about expectations," and making it clear if there were no outcomes, "then we have to have a conversation about what's next."

> I can admit that I think sometimes I have done things, like, I'm nice, and sweet, and fuzzy, and all of that, and then I just get exhausted and I literally come from left field going, I need you to get this together by tomorrow. And it's like, whoa who is that person and where did that come from?! And I can own that, and so I have to figure that out.

Xiomara spoke to the challenges of determining what were areas that needed to be fixed, and what were areas that were blown out of proportion due to "water cooler talk." Determining what the real needs of the teachers were was tough, as Xiomara had the "difficulty where a lot of the people who work, this is all they've known," due to hiring Teach for America and due to high retention from the founding year. Xiomara experienced cases where the concerns of the teachers were blown out of proportion and "not that serious," which was apparent to her because "I've worked across multiple charter networks and across multiple settings." Sometimes it was almost impossible to figure out the exact issue and resolution. "We had to dig a little bit deeper, like, where is this coming from? And honestly, you find that some people will say something. And then that noise, it's like playing telephone."

Letting People Go

Determining when and how to let someone go was an area that several participants highlighted as a struggle. The risks of losing the trust of parents, students, students and staff had to be weighed against losing a teacher mid-year. Jolie shared about a teacher who consistently used disciplinary practices that were at odds with the vision of the school and restorative justice, but difficulties arose because "parents love her, just because she's a teacher, she's a good person."

Jolie spoke of the teacher being damaging to the school culture, but that it was ultimately very difficult to determine the timing of transitions, and questioning, “So do we do it over Christmas, or do we let her finish out the year?” Felina also spoke about the challenge of knowing when to let people go, sharing that “a continued point of development for me, is knowing when to cut the cord with somebody, knowing when something is my failure as a leader, versus their lack of capacity.”

Xiomara also spoke about teachers who were not a good fit, and having to counsel them out, including a teacher who shared, “In his words, he likes numbers more than people. So, I was like, I'm going to help you out, buddy. Not a problem, the feeling is mutual.”

Despite all participants belonging to organizations where staff were at will, letting someone go was still deemed as a difficult process. Magdalene called being at will a “double edged sword,” and the necessity of having “documentation about why they may have been let go.” Opal shared that despite being an at will organization, being able to let teachers go in her larger charter management network was very difficult. “Our charter says that we're at will, but I don't really feel like we are.” Opal spoke about the necessary prerequisites before letting someone go, including getting prior approval from her manager, improvement plans with “formal documentation and a certain timeframe,” and that the reasons to let someone go have to be “pretty extenuating circumstances and or, a pretty clear plan in place.” Opal felt that sometimes this documentation and approval process was overly constraining, and shared, “In a way it’s a little bit blurry because it says we're at will,” but, “I have to jump through hoops.”

Leadership that Transforms

Creating and Owning the Vision

Being able to create a vision that participants felt spoke to their own core beliefs came up during several of the participant interviews. For the participants that took on the principalship at a school that had a previous principal, and had held other positions at the organization, there was discussion in the interviews about the challenges of making the vision theirs. Lila shared, “I'm still learning so much about my leadership style,” and that because she was developing and learning how to draw “lines for things that I really strongly believe in, and not sort of allowing pushback, or other people's opinions to sway me. I think that I've improved a lot but I don't think my school leadership is there yet.” Lila added that part of creating a vision was about understanding that it was ok not to be perfect and sometimes people were going to be upset or give pushback, “it's okay to not to not make everyone happy, every day, all the time.” Felina echoed this thought, sharing, “there are days where I can do it well for certain people and there are days where I am failing.”

Opal also experienced similar struggles when she transitioned into the role of principal at the same school she taught in and held other leadership and instructional positions, even though she was ultimately given the support of her charter management organization in creating strategic planning around her vision, feedback, and support in planning a forum for conveying her vision.

> Something that was missing in my development I think was my own definition of leadership and what is my own style, what is my own voice. And I think if I had a better idea about walking into it, I would have been more confident and been able to be a better

decision maker. One thing that I learned in those months was a lot of the things that I was doing just taking the previous principal's vision and trying to internalize it instead of making it my own.

Magdalene shared the importance of keeping her priorities in order when actualizing her vision, "I still keep trying to work hard for the students and serve them and their needs." For Jolie, who was the founding principal, she shared satisfaction when her ability to convey the vision improved from the initial year of the principalship, "It's very clear this year, what the vision is. That's one thing I'm really proud of." Felina, another founding principal, also expressed that "I think that I have, it has become a self-selected group, that to some extent or another works to my leadership style, I think that my leadership style is really authentic to who I am." For Xiomara, another founding principal, she expressed that she has always been "upfront" about the vision, and since it has been "built together, everyone knows the core components."

The Importance of a Shared Vision

Having a mutually shared vision was deemed to be an integral component of feeling fulfilled in the principal role by participants. Xiomara expressed pride in the sharing of her school's vision, and talked about the strengths of perceiving the vision as a work in progress, and if something can be "enhanced," "we make it happen," and "we pilot things often, we evolve." Initially, Jolie struggled, and that this was the case even with staff that she felt had resonated with the vision when initially coming on board.

And so, when they come here and they are like this is a beautiful vision, but they don't understand. I might be the architect, but we're but we're all on the construction ground.

> We're at the construction site, we're building this thing, they missed that part and the extra work needed.

Opal shared her pride in hearing feedback from a schoolwide teacher survey at her school, "I have never seen an adult culture that has so many people on the same page and fighting for the same thing." Opal expressed both pride and happiness in the sharing of a mutual vision and that, it was "genuinely such a pleasure to get up to come to work every day to work among people who are like minded and willing to work just as hard as you. And that is very, very, true here, and that definitely makes me proud."

Lila echoed the sentiment that having everyone in on a shared vision was important to the role of principal.

> And I think just having staff that you enjoy being around, and, you know, feel comfortable with and feel like you're kind of on the same page with, makes this job sustainable. I don't feel like I'm coming to work every day and sort of fighting against people, or systems, or anything that could make this job even more exhausting. I feel like, for the most part, we come to work, and everyone is on the same drive towards what the vision is for our school.

Felina spoke about how ensuring that everyone shared the vision and took on leadership roles was not only necessary in making the job more satisfying, but it was crucial in moving the vision and work forward.

> The whole reason I started a school was my feeling that one classroom was not enough, that you needed a whole school to make things happen . . . and maybe I would have articulated this in the past, but I feel this more clearly and deeply now, but one leader is

> not enough, you can't lift the whole school on your back. . . . And so, at this point, it's less about my strengths and weaknesses as principal myself, and more about how I can better build and equip the team . . . because it is going to be that team that gets it done, not just me alone.

Jolie shared that it was not enough to share a vision with staff, it had to be contextualized in the way the school functioned and how the mentality of the community changed as well. Jolie spoke about the challenge of being up against "culture and mindsets" and the perception that in a Title I school "they're poor," "they need structure," "they just need to learn to follow rules so that they stay out of jail." Jolie shared how she had to be strategic in who she brought in, ensuring that they taught in innovative ways, with high expectations and the belief that every child can succeed, through the use of restorative justice, or "there's no reason these children shouldn't leave here having trademarked their inventions, and having intellectual property." Jolie shared that finding teachers who were able to teach in such a way was difficult, because in her experience, traditionally, "at a [Title I] school it's about survival. It's about teaching them to shut up, and keep quiet, and be compliant, so that they can survive." Jolie also iterated that the need to change mindsets was not only a need of teachers, but also of families, and how it was initially a struggle to get families on board with open charters and a private school, choice-oriented set up, "they deserve open charters." Despite families believing in the vision, trusting the vision took time, and Jolie shared:

> There's a mindset that comes with that, that, you know, for lack of better word, the community doesn't have. And so, we learned very quickly. We have to get their personal

beliefs and educational values in a certain place before we can really move forward in what it is we are trying to do.

Collaborative Leadership

When describing how they led, participants favored a collaborative approach. When asked to pick three words to describe themselves as leaders during the focus group, participants chose words that depicted the importance of collaboration and working together, which is shown in the table below.

Table 5
Self-Identified Leadership Characteristics

Jolie	Lila	Xiomara	Magdalene	Opal
Collaborative	Collaborative	Vulnerable	Collaborative	Collaborative
Empowering	Hands on	Open	Servant Leader	Authentic
Supportive	Learning Together	Personable	Passionate	Collective

Out of the five participants who were able to participate in the focus group, four out of five used the word 'collaborative' to describe their leadership style. Most of the descriptors that the participants chose highlighted their ability to work with others, for others, or be accessible to others. The answers of participants during the focus group and the semi-structured one on one interviews, also reflected the emphasis that participants put on the importance of collaboration and the struggles that participants experienced in their transition to the principalship and in finding the collaborative structures that worked for their organization. Participants also expressed an interest in collaboration across networks, and with other principals.

Triumphs and struggles of collaboration. Creating systems for collaboration was an area of focus for most of the participants. Most spoke about the importance of collaboration, and

some of the participants spoke about how the structures for collaboration needed to change based on the growth of the school. Xiomara shared that during the first year,

> We were all- the whole community, the teachers, the leadership, the families, the students, as a first year founded here, like you're all in it together. Everyone gets to see under the hood and you can't hide much. But then after that, then you realize everyone else coming into your school is just going to treat it like it's a school.

Xiomara expressed that in the beginning, there was a perception that everyone was in it together, but over time, and as the organization expanded, there were natural shifts. Jolie also spoke about the need to create structures around collaboration as the school grew in size.

> Everyone loved the concept. Everyone got it, in theory, they love that we wanted democratic collaboration, and I was very fortunate to have a number of people step up in that capacity. We were small, we only had about 40 students. Our staff was really small. So, it was much easier for us to kind of pilot or test this, if you will. So, we would just try things, and then we would come to the table and talk about it. So I don't think we knew, I knew what I wanted it to be, but creating it was just kind of trial by fire, the real test came the second year, we tripled in size, our second year, and that's when it became very apparent that I had to have real systems in place.

Felina also spoke about how the size of the school initially allowed for a different mode of collaboration to be utilized.

> In that founding team, it was a more of a collaborative approach, sometimes maybe too much so, because we had like five teachers, so I think there were some core beliefs, everybody came in very bought into the idea of high expectations and a college going

mission, but some of the mechanics of it, I wasn't super dogmatic about it has to be xy and z for certain things.

Collaboration structures were already evident in schools with principals who had transitioned into the role after another principal had left. Opal shared that she joined her charter management organization because of a desire for more collaboration with her colleagues, despite experiencing successes at her first school, "There was a lot of autonomy, which, as a first year teacher, is a little daunting, and at the same time, I was able to thrive in that." Despite receiving accolades and receiving recognition from others, Opal felt that something was missing.

I realized, that something I really valued was professional development, and something else that I really valued was working among a team of people who were all in it together. And so, I sought out an organization and a place that had those things.

Opal valued the way that her organization forced her to grow, which to her was a big component of collaboration. Initially, it was in ways she didn't even know she had to grow. Opal described one of her initial experiences with challenging professional development, as walking in with overconfidence and a "pretty big head and I was like, oh wait I don't know what they can teach me. And I remember, just eating a huge slice of humble pie." Opal described her school culture and management organization as one where everyone is coaching and receiving feedback, and working to develop their practice, whether it be as a leader or teacher.

Sacrificial Leadership

Students First, Self-Last

Participants had numerous examples that evidenced how they prioritized students over self, but the perception was that this was just a natural component of the principal role. Opal

shared, “Whether you're in a charter school or not, even if you're in different charter management organizations, as a school leader, everyone experiences struggles.”

Magdalene said that reminding herself about putting students first was crucial to her sense of efficacy and desire to continue in the role.

> Trust me, there's some days I tell my husband, this is what I want, right? I’m convincing myself; this is what I want, right? But it's like I said, at the end of the day it’s about the level of resilience. We have to keep the students in mind, we do it for them, the impact, to influence them. That hopefully they have the tools they need to be successful in college and beyond.

Lila spoke about feeling like she needed to give her all to the work, “I don't think I could do this if I like had a family or had children to take care of, so I feel like where I'm at in my life allows me to really fully give everything that I have to this.” Felina talked about putting perceptions of self aside, and it was “less about me as a principal” and more about “how can I better build and equip the team that gets things done for kids, because it is going to be that team that gets it done, not just me alone.”

The level of sacrifice was high for all participants, but differed. For Opal, in a larger charter management organization, even having additional support did not lessen the load for her.

> I had the opportunity to have an additional administrator, and interestingly enough it didn’t reduce the workload for myself or any other administrator on my team. I think that part of that is because we are all so dedicated to the work, and with the extra person it allowed us to get even better, or work on something we always wanted to, which is interesting, because anyone in this role has that similar mindset of, okay, what is next?

Challenges of Work-Life Balance

Participants discussed what made the job sustainable or unsustainable. Participants spoke about the number of work hours necessary to do the job, division of labor, and job duties, raising families, struggling with teachers who felt that the work was unsustainable, how long they saw themselves in the role, and suggestions for what would make the role more sustainable.

Felina and Jolie, who both had dual roles of Executive Director and Principal at standalone schools, shared the biggest struggles with work-life balance. Felina spoke about the struggle putting in the necessary number of hours to do the job well while raising a family.

> I have two kids and there is a hard cap for me, at this point, I am willing to put in about 60 hours of work a week, and I have grave concerns about the level of quality I can achieve for my school, working that number of hours, and I have grave concerns about the sustainability of work for anyone working significantly more hours. I still do feel, as much as I love the idea of working smarter, not harder, fundamentally, I think that more is more in this work, it is messy work, and if I am not putting in these extra four hours on a Saturday, and staying at work, that there are meaningful ways that the school is not as good as it could have been if I put in those additional hours, and that sucks.

Jolie mentioned both in her interview and during the focus group about going without a salary to keep her school afloat, which was a sacrifice that she was willing to make, but that wasn't sustainable in the long run. She also shared that the work felt non-stop.

> I feel like I've never stopped working. I mean, even when I'm not, some days I don't go in, but I am still working because my door is being knocked on, I'm being pulled. I'm going to be working tonight after I get my kids to bed. It just doesn't stop for me.

Despite working non-stop, Jolie still felt that “There is a balance, I have a family. So, I do spend time with my family, but I have never taken a vacation, I’ve never taken a day off. The only day that I have taken off is my birthday.”

Despite sharing that there were days, or weeks, or times where the number of work hours that needed to be put in were tough, Lila felt that her school struck the balance.

> I think that our organization as a whole really does value work life balance, and you know, doesn't really expect, I don't think it is part of our culture necessarily to expect all staff to be working, super late nights or super early mornings, or working through the weekend. And so, I think that part of that culture has allowed this work to be sustainable.

During the focus group, Xiomara shared that she felt the work of a principal required, “more than 40 but less than 60 hours,” and Opal agreed and shared that her work hours fluctuate during the year based on the need but that she worked on average at least ten hours a day at work and a bit more some evenings and weekends.

> I usually start at seven and my goal is to leave by five. And then I usually work at home four days a week for nights, like on the weekend, I would say, it just fluctuates. There are some weeks where I just literally get home and don’t look at my computer and then there's sometimes where you just don't have a choice.

Division of Labor

Several of the participants spoke to the work being difficult to delegate, due to either the complexity, desire to hold onto the vision, or the constant quest to continuously improve the programming and services for students. Felina and Jolie both felt that holding the roles of

Executive Director and Principal was not sustainable in the long run, and both spoke about it in their interviews. Felina shared that she needed a bigger team.

> The whole reason I started a school was my feeling that one classroom was not enough, that you needed a whole school to make things happen, and I think that I feel the same way, and maybe I would have articulated this in the past, but I feel this more clearly and deeply now, but one leader is not enough, you can't lift the whole school on your back.

Jolie shared that she needed more support and that it was a struggle to be both the Executive Director and the principal, but that it would also be a struggle to let go of some of the autonomy if another person was brought on board.

> I am the Executive Director and principal, and I just need a whole person to take on one of those positions. I can't see clearly right now, but definitely 50%, completely, just take that whole job and just do it. But it is also hard because I have to admit that it is still in the infancy stage, and I don't know that I am ready to let go, so I do struggle with that, because I do want things done a certain way, I don't even know that I could fully let go if I brought somebody else on.

Xiomara started out as a founding principal without an assistant principal, but shared that having an assistant principal was just "incredible how much now I got to share or hand over to her that I would not have been able to sustain this if I did not get that support" and that the extra support allowed her to "deepen the work" that she was able to do for the school.

Opal was the only participant from a large charter management organization, and the only one who highlighted the sustainability of her job as being mainly impacted by the retention of teachers. Opal shared, "I think what makes it unsustainable is teacher retention. It makes it just

so hard because you have to start from scratch. Yeah, over and over again." Opal detailed the outcomes of a schoolwide survey, where zero percent of her teachers described their work as sustainable in the long run and the work that she did in her organization to change that mindset. Opal then celebrated her successes,

> So, in our most recent survey, which we just got back our results in the beginning of December, 23% of teachers found that this work was sustainable. So, yeah, I was like sweet, and also, it's one of the highest in the network. So, I felt really proud about that, I think it's the mindset. So, we'll see. My hope, my goal, is to get that number up even further by the end of the year, but, you know, we'll have to see how that goes.

What the Future Holds

All of the participants were passionate about the work that they did. All of the participants planned on staying in their roles for at least the next few years, and participants felt strongly about continuing the work in their role. Opal shared that she planned on staying in the principal role "for a while, I don't have plans to move from this place. Like I genuinely love working here, and it's hard for me to imagine something going somewhere else." Lila echoed similar thoughts in her interview,

> I don't see myself going anywhere, anytime soon. I feel like, especially moving from last year to this year, I feel we have created something that I would really like to see grow, and I'd like to see how our instructional program and how our school culture in this environment, and this not only this building, but in this neighborhood, how it can thrive over time. I think the only thing that would sort of move me away from this are unexpected life events or changes.

Xiomara also shared similar thoughts, expressing a desire and a drive to "Just get better, since every year is so different," and that she used to be one who wanted to see what "other opportunities are available and go after things," but that being principal at her school made her see the value in staying. "I feel like you really don't have it down as a principal until you're like in year eight. From what I can tell. Yeah. So at least that long, and I'm in year four." Magdalene had done some initial thinking about future career moves and upwards trajectory, but still planned on staying in the role for the next few years. Jolie, who juggles the roles of principal and Executive Director, shared that she hopes to leave the principal role by next year, but was committed to staying at the school in the role of Executive Director.

> As principal I do not want to stay in this role. I'm an introvert, by nature, I appear very outgoing and I do have a great outward personality. But that day to day grind. Just being with parents, teachers, it exhausts me. And while I do it really well, I don't do it very easily. Yeah, it takes a lot of effort, and a lot of energy for me and then once the day is done, I crash. Yeah, so it's not you know having to maintain certain things in that principal role is very challenging. I would like to have a principal by next year. But I would love it to be a partnership. I do love being here, I do love interacting. I don't like the responsibility of having to do it all day. So, I would like to maintain the role as Executive Director.

Felina, who also has the dual roles of principal and Executive Director, shared the challenges of holding both roles but also the risk of giving up one of the roles and the potential impact it might have. "I really want to develop more of a leadership team of people because I am not sure that I can do this work for more than maybe two or three years without a significantly

more robust leadership team and support around me." Felina also wanted to recruit a principal and stay as the Executive Director, but she also had hesitations about it potentially impacting what she wanted her school to achieve, "I don't know that I want that. It is very challenging to find any kind of balance between something approaching sustainability and delivering the results that you want to see for kids."

None of the participants had immediate plans to leave their organization in the near future. For the four principals who only held the role of principal, all four planned to stay in their role for the next few years. For the two principals who also held the role of Executive Director, both wanted to shift to just holding the Executive Director position, but had no plans of leaving their organization.

Building Solidarity

Sharing Knowledge and Practices

The importance of sharing knowledge and practices across schools and networks was a prevalent desire expressed to some degree in all of the interviews, the reflective field notes, and the focus group. While support from mentors or others in the organization was deemed helpful, support that came from outside of the organization from different perspectives and different people were considered valuable tools. Xiomara had several years of prior teaching and leadership experience prior to her role of charter school principal, and shared how she could draw on the resources from her previous relationships. Xiomara connected working with others and sharing resources with sustainability, and shared, "when you try to do it all yourself, it's not sustainable."

Xiomara shared the benefits of belonging to the Teach for America alum network, and the "phenomenal" support that was available in a TFA principal cohort. Xiomara spoke to the ability to get in touch with experts in the areas of special education or human resources or credentialing, based on the expertise within her network. Xiomara also spoke about the network that the members of her charter school board offered,

> If they don't have an in-house expertise, then they have a very big network. And they will recommend people to reach out to or even if there's like a cost incurred, then there can be an option that we have, because we recognize that need is there, but we've always had the support to outsource or connect with another as needed.

Lila spoke about networking within her organization, "when I realized something that I was doing wasn't working," she would look to others within the organization. Lila also spoke about the ability to network and collaborate with others in her leadership program at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Felina spoke about the importance of building relationships but also the difficulty of reaching out when leading a standalone school, in particular when wearing "a hundred hats" and constantly "putting out fires."

> I did try to cultivate relationships with other charter school leaders during my planning year and I don't reach out to them as often as I should, I try to do that piece but a lot of the time I very much fall into that unfortunate mold of staying in my own hole in my school but not learning much, or developing much with other people.

Sticking Together and Fighting Back

The participants did not speak to the challenges that they faced in their roles as being less than the struggles faced by principals at district schools. However, there was a sense that charter

schools were increasingly under attack, and that sticking together was important. Magdalene also spoke about the importance of building relationships with other charter school leaders in the current anti-charter climate, "there needs to be a network of schools and charter leaders that come together frequently. I don't think a weekly newsletter or a monthly newsletter is enough, there has to be more."

Lila shared during the focus group that being the principal can be a "pretty lonely island," and that belonging to a committee or network of principals "that are in the same role in the same trenches and learning alongside you," would be "impactful." Xiomara spoke about a charter school leader support group that was led by Teach for America that was "phenomenal," and if something similar was offered by California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) or LAUSD she would, "sign up in a heartbeat." Despite belonging to a very large network of charter schools, Opal agreed, and shared,

> If there were to be something like that, or some sort of network, I would definitely be interested. I think it would be awesome to see other schools, and to have the support and time to share what is on your brain, and challenges, and work through that with people who would understand.

In fact, the focus group concluded with Xiomara asking the other participants if they would be interested in getting together at some point to share experiences and resources, and the other participants all expressing their interest in such an opportunity.

Despite a feeling of having to fight back against negative charter school rhetoric, there was still a sense of possibility and optimism. Xiomara shared that the recent struggles in Los Angeles have propelled her organization into being a part of a coalition of other charter schools

that perform advocacy work on behalf of CCSA, with one of the most recent conversations being with Superintendent Austin Beutner on the ramifications of the Prop-39 overallocation fee. Xiomara shared that due to the proactive advocacy work of her school, “We're just a small fish in the whole landscape, but we get to have basically a front row seat and get ahead of any political problems.”

During the focus group, Xiomara shared with others what a charter school principal needed in order to navigate the political waters in Los Angeles.

> The word that comes to mind is scrappy, and I don’t mean grit, I mean scrappy, you don’t need to set yourself on fire, you don’t need to sacrifice yourself, you need to roll up your sleeves, you need to be hands on, you need to be solution oriented in an out of the box kind of way, you need to be crafty, you can be political in a scrappy way, you don’t need to be polished and be political and play the district, but enough that you can hold onto your innovation and your model and your true north, and it is hard to do that if you aren’t scrappy.

This definition of the skills needed to lead in Los Angeles was agreed upon by the other participants in the focus group. Felina shared an unexpected positive change that has come from the negative climate.

> I think there's a potential upside, in that arguably it brought me closer together to other charter leaders, in terms of solidarity, we have more of an imperative to check in with each other and have collaborative conversations, which I think is always a positive thing.

Conclusion

The participants in this study came from very different charter schools, and yet they shared many similar experiences. The challenges and triumphs that they shared were often focused on their ability to serve and connect with others, whether it be teachers, other staff, or students. All of the participants had the capacity to be reflective and were eager to learn and connect with other principals. The participants valued the opportunity to share their experiences and spoke of it as being a chance to reflect, and shared that in many ways it was a cathartic experience.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study sought to answer the question,

What are the experiences of new charter leaders transitioning to the principalship at Title I charter schools?

The research consisted of interviews with six new charter school principals who were currently working at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles, a follow up focus group with five of the six participants, and the use of reflective field notes throughout the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of new charter school principals as they transitioned into the role of principal at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles. The study focused on the unique leadership role of principals in schools, the unique context of charter schools, the challenges and experiences of charter leaders in the current political landscape of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the experiences inherent to leading in Title I schools, where the majority of students are of low socio-economic status.

Significance of the Study

New charter school principals at Title I schools in Los Angeles face unique challenges in their role for multiple reasons. Title I schools serve some of our most marginalized students, and exhibit higher needs with fewer resources to meet those needs (McGee, 2019). Charter schools are more likely to serve students of color and students of low socio-economic status (Parker, 2000; Rebarber & Zgainer, 2014). Los Angeles is home to many charter schools, the majority of which are Title I charter schools (California Charter Schools Association, 2015). Currently,

charter schools in Los Angeles are facing an onslaught of negative media coverage and legislation that is designed to curtail the growth and longevity of charter schools (Burke, 2020; Oster, 2020; Primer, 2019).

The challenges that principals experience is reflected in the high rate of attrition and the nationwide principal candidate shortage (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005). Charter school principals have even higher rates of attrition (Torres, 2018), and new principals have higher rates of attrition compared to more veteran principals (Lackritz et al., 2019). New charter school principals work almost ten more hours a week, working on average almost seventy hours per week (Winters, 2018). This study sought to understand the experiences of new charter school principals and the struggles that might be unique to their context.

This research study aimed to provide deeper understanding of the experiences of new Title I charter school principals as they navigated the principalship and being new to the role, with the aim of providing greater clarity on their experiences and struggles, as well as potential recommendations that provide support to our charter school principal leaders. Charter schools seek to provide educational opportunities that would otherwise not be available to some of our most marginalized students- students who might be living with poverty related trauma- including insecure housing, environmental injustices, lack of adequate resources, parents who work multiple jobs, and other challenges.

Theoretical Frameworks

Transition Theory

Transition theory pertains to the idea that each change consists of transitioning from one state to another, and that transitions have psychological steps that need to be navigated (Bridges

& Bridges, 2016; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009; Schlossberg & Goodman, 2005). Bridges and Bridges spoke to a theory that transitions are composed of three phases, letting go, the neutral zone and new beginnings (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). These three phases of transition need to be navigated, and each phase has unique psychological challenges and steps (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

For new charter school principals, there are several key transitions that must be faced in order to be successful in the role, whilst taking on the numerous responsibilities and roles inherent in charter school leadership (Cannata, Thombre, & Thomas; 2017; Gill, 2018). These key transitions take place within the first few years, as new charter principals transition to the role, and take on the responsibilities of being principal. There are both internal transitions and external transitions that are crucial to the role of new charter school principal (Gill, 2018).

Transformational Leadership Theory

In transformational leadership, a leader must find ways to meaningfully build relationships with others (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformative leaders use strong relationships to support in building a vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, symbolizing professional practices and values, and demonstrating high performance expectations (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Transformative leadership is a leadership style that is predicated on collaboration, trust, and continuous improvement through shared leadership responsibilities, and a collective vision (Northouse, 2019; Shields, 2017b).

Transformative leadership is considered a valuable skill for school leadership, particularly for charter school leaders (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Leahy & Shore, 2019). The traits of transformational leadership are supposed to result in organizational transformation (Hill,

Melon, Laker & Goddard, 2016). Charter schools are based on a premise of transformation- that the state of education needs to be transformed through providing schools that utilize innovative teaching, high accountability, and increased educational opportunities for all students (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017). Charter schools aim to change the state of education quickly, and must do so, as charter school petitions are only provided to charter schools for a finite period of time. During this short span of five years, charter schools must show that they are able to uphold the unique tenets of their charter petition, that must involve innovative teaching practices that are unique to the school. In addition, charter schools must show that they are able to outperform the resident schools that students would have otherwise attended (Betts & Tang, 2019).

Intersectionality of the Theoretical Frameworks

As charter school principals navigate the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016), they utilized transformative leadership practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), in order to move themselves and their team through the phases to the final phase of new beginnings, where everyone in the organization shares the vision, and are given the skills, opportunities and supports necessary to collaborate and work on the goals of the vision together (Astin & Astin, 2000; Miller, 2017). While not all charter school principals are automatically transformative leaders, all of the charter school principal participants in the study spoke to aspects of transformational leadership as they described their leadership styles, journeys, and successes. Both the phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016), and transformative leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), focus on both the leader and the follower, and the necessary behaviors and skills that the leader must utilize to facilitate the ability of followers to adjust, adapt, and embrace new leadership.

In my analysis, while transformational leadership practices were evident in research when the participants spoke about the grief inherent in the initial phases of letting go, and the neutral zone, transformational leadership behaviors and strategies were most notably apparent in the third and final phase of new beginnings (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). New beginnings, the phase when everyone is united and has embodied the vision, is where transformational leadership behaviors were most successful, were used in conjunction with each other, and were able to be fully realized. The shift to the phase of new beginnings is not inevitable, but it can be supported by successful leadership practices. It is important to note that the phase of new beginnings is not an all or nothing proposition, and there were aspects that participants shared in the leadership journey that were mired by struggling through the letting go phase, or struggling with building effective systems in the neutral phase. Each phase does not automatically lead to the next, and there were initiatives or endeavors that the participants spoke about that failed, or needed to be adjusted, or that still had not come to fruition. However, all of the participants spoke of arriving at the new beginnings phase in some portion of their leadership journey, and the success in that area was predicated with words that are aligned with transformational leadership practices.

Several of the charter school principal participants spoke to a need to share the leadership roles and vision with others in the organization so as to achieve long lasting change that was sustainable over time. The successful implementation of transformational leadership practices is integral to the phase of new beginnings, because the ultimate success of transformational leadership is in its continued sustainability (Leybourne, 2016), which can only occur when others join the leader in taking on leadership roles and working towards the same vision. The intersectionality of the two frameworks is shown in the figure below.

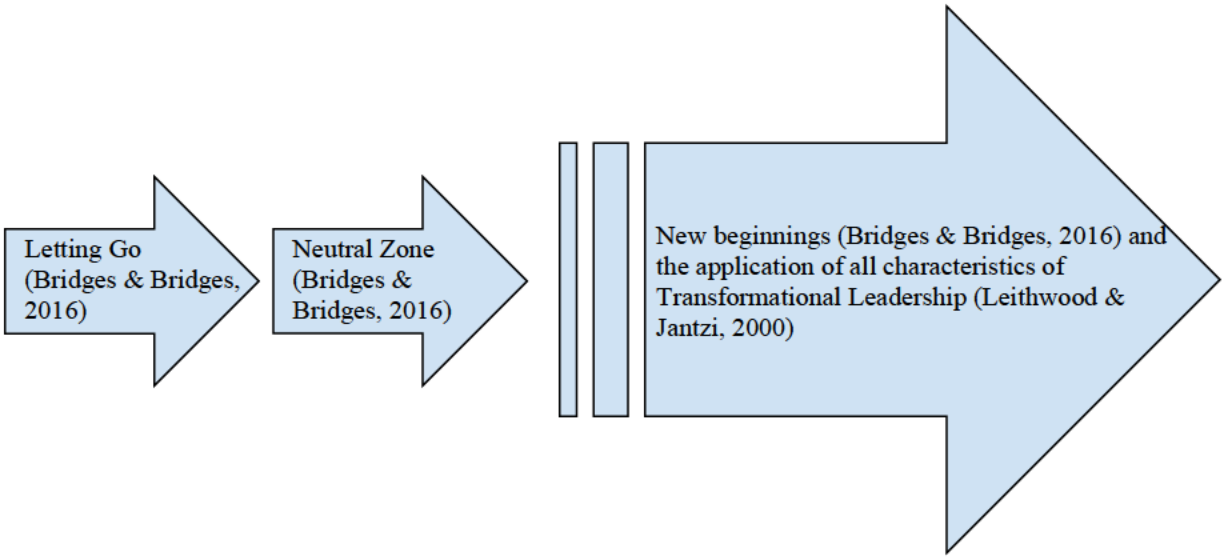

Figure 1. Adapted from "Managing Transitions: Making the most of change (4th ed.) by W. Bridges & S. Bridge, 2016, Copyright 2016 by William Bridges Associates and "The Effects of Transformational Leadership on Organizational Conditions and Student Engagement with School" by K. Leithwood, & D. Jantzi, D., 2000, in *The Journal of Educational Administration, 38*(2), pp. 112-129. Copyright 2000 by Emerald Publishing.

Discussion

The major findings of this research can be filtered through the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) and the traits of transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Transformational leadership behaviors are integral to successfully navigating the initial phase of letting go, the neutral zone, and lastly, leading a school and others in the organization to the final phase of new beginnings. Transformational leadership practices were evident in all three phases of transition, and participants spoke of transformational leadership practices throughout their leadership journeys. However, it was in the final phase of new beginnings that transformational leadership practices were deemed to have elicited the successful result of having others take on leadership roles and share in the vision. Transformational leadership cannot only be measured in the behaviors of leaders, but must also be evident in the behaviors of followers, or others in the organization.

Letting Go and the Process of Reconciliation

Letting go is the first phase of the three phases of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Letting go is about processing grief, and adjusting to new expectations and circumstances, a process that can be psychologically difficult (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). According to the research, the process of becoming a new charter school principal is aligned to the first phase of letting go, as new charter school principals must adapt and reassess their sense of self as a school leader, and must also lead their organization through the initial changes intrinsic to new leadership, or in the case of founding principals, a new organization.

In the research, the participants spoke about the phase of letting go through the internal changing perceptions of their own educational career path as it deviated from district to charter schools, through redefining their definitions of leadership, and through coming to terms with the responsibilities inherent to the role of charter school principal and how it might have differed from their previous understanding. Participants also spoke about letting go through external shifts, in redefining their visions for schools, creating their own philosophies and visions for teaching, pedagogy, and community practices. Both internal and external shifts required a psychological component borne from readjusting expectations, assumptions, and understandings (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

Internal Grieving Paradigm Shift

Redefining self as an educator. While the participants had different reasons for changing from a district role to a charter one, all of the participants spoke of some aspect of limitation that existed in the school district as being a driving force behind their decision to enter the charter school world. The inadequacies of the school district were directly tied to the desire

to work and lead in charter schools. The participants' first experience with letting go was in their initial shift to working at charter schools. Participants spoke of being unable to find teaching jobs or leadership opportunities in the school district. The practice of letting go of high performing teachers due to seniority (Bucciero, 2013) was demoralizing enough that it led to some participants transitioning out of the school district and ultimately into charter school leadership. Other participants spoke about the desire to access leadership roles or impact the state of education on a larger level. Several participants spoke about feeling that the school district would be too slow in providing leadership opportunities, and others spoke about feeling that transformative educational practices could not exist within the confines of the school district.

Participants had to adjust to the shift to charter schools, none of the participants had initially chosen to work at charter schools or had identified as charter school educators. Several of the participants spoke about adjusting to the idea of working at charter schools, and having had experiences with anti-charter school rhetoric and a reluctance for charter schools prior to their transition to the charter world. The fact that none of the participants had initially envisioned working in charter schools was a key finding. Participants were not initially dismissive of district schools or district pathways, but were ultimately disillusioned by the lack of teaching or leadership opportunities. In a way, this made the choice of working in charter schools stronger, as participants had initially considered or even experienced working in district schools prior to making the transition. District schools were connected with disillusionment and disappointment, and were found to be lacking in integral areas of opportunity, growth, and long-term sustainability. It can be surmised from the research that charter school leaders are not an entirely different subset of educational professionals compared to district school leaders. Instead, they are

leaders who found district schools deficient in a key area, and this deficiency created an insurmountable obstacle in their educational journey that could only be circumvented by the alternative pathway of charter schools.

Redefining responsibilities. Participants spoke about coming to terms with a new definition of the role of charter school principal borne out of understanding the many responsibilities and roles of the charter school principalship and how it differed from initial expectations. The participants had to come to terms with their assumptions about the role versus the realities of the role (Carpenter & Peak, 2013; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). This process involved a period of letting go, and of grief, as it necessitated shifting their understanding of what it meant to be a charter school principal. The participants spoke about coming to terms with the amount of business acumen necessary, or needing to learn about human resources, and taking on responsibilities that deviated from instructional leadership, such as choosing health plans, and retirement plans. The new charter school principals in the study also spoke about the often mundane compliance tasks that befell them, and how focusing on relatively prosaic activities felt like a departure from their instructional vision or prior instructional leadership practices in previous roles.

Participants in the study had to undergo a process of disappointment or reconciliation when coming to terms with the role of instructional leadership comprising only a small portion of their many charter school principal responsibilities. So often, the principal position is connected first and foremost with being an instructional leader (Fullan, 2016). The participants in the study all became principals due to their vision for instructional leadership and practices,

and thus the realization that instructional leadership was one of many tasks, and would often have to be put on the back burner, particularly initially, was a bitter initial disappointment.

It is necessary for new charter school principals to come to terms with the roles and responsibilities of the charter school principalship in order to create new definitions of leadership, success, and sustainability in the role. For the participants, expanding the definition of the principalship to roles such as business leader, politician, and human resources manager, allowed them to reflect on what was working and what was not, and provided the ability to recognize growth and successes in different areas of the role. If new charter school principals only view their triumphs through the lens of instructional leadership, they are inevitably set up for disappointment. New charter school principals must accurately define their role of charter school principal to encompass the many responsibilities beyond instructional leadership, and must understand the responsibilities inherent in the role (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017; Gill, 2018).

Redefining self as a leader. New charter school principals must define their own leadership style and apply it to their new role and context (Dressler, 2001). Participants spoke to the struggle of desiring collaborative structures and a leadership style that was shared, when the position of principal was inherently lonely and isolating. Participants had to come to terms with how lonely it can be, to be the one ultimately responsible for holding others accountable. Participants also shared the struggle of actualizing a vision that others could share, and which would lead to transformative results. Part of letting go, was the process that participants went through when realizing that their vision for leadership could not be immediately implemented to fruition, and that the capacity of the participant and thus their ability to lead was still developing and evolving over time.

Through the research, it became evident that new charter school principals must understand that creating collaborative structures necessitated evolution and adaptation, and it was unlikely that the initial structures that are created at the inception of their leadership journey will never need to be adjusted or improved upon. Collaborative structures must be reflective of the strengths and needs of those in the organization, and the collaborative structures that work for a small new school, compared to a more established larger school, will differ.

New charter school principals should also consider their vision to be a work in progress. The participants in the study struggled when aspects of their vision were not realized within the first couple of years. The ability for themselves and others to be bound by the expectations within a vision will grow, as the capacity of the organization and those in the organization grow. New charter school principals should consider strategically planning concrete steps within their vision, with the understanding that success should be defined differently in the earlier years of the principalship.

External Grieving Paradigm Shift

The new charter school principal participants in the study also had to reconcile their vision for their school through adjusting their vision with the realities of their organization, whether it be differing philosophies, or the differing strengths and needs of others in the organization. The participants spoke about the difficulties of leading teachers and staff through the process of adjusting to new ways of teaching, or disciplining, or collaborating, and how this process was necessary in order to ensure that their vision for school leadership could be actualized. The participants had to come to terms with how their vision might have initially differed from the abilities or capabilities of those within the organization, and how it might need

to be adjusted accordingly. Similarly, according to the participants, others in the organization also experienced aspects of letting go, as they had to become accustomed with new leadership practices that impacted expectations, teaching practices, and the school culture.

Redefining school educational pedagogy and practices. A key component of letting go (Bridges & Bridges, 2016) was evident in the need for the new charter school principal participants to lead their teachers through understanding the differences in the innovative practices that they were trying to implement in their schools, compared to the teaching philosophies and practices that teachers already possessed. One participant spoke about having to help her teachers adjust to the idea that their teaching practices needed to continuously develop and grow, and that despite years of teaching, additional professional development was needed. Several of the participants spoke about having to adjust and develop restorative justice practices, and that this adjustment was difficult for teachers and staff for numerous reasons. Teachers had to shift from traditional methods of discipline and correction, which they had used for years, and move towards restorative practices that were often still developing and lacking structure.

One of the participants spoke about having to shift the mentality of both teachers and the community alike, and shift from a compliance model of teaching that was militaristic and punitive in nature, to one that was innovative, and that celebrated student choice and creativity. All of the participants spoke about needing to shift structures and practices in their school, and shared that there was an adjustment period for others in the organization, that often involved grappling with the loss of prior methods of teaching or teaching philosophies, and thus required a period of letting go and reconciliation.

New charter school principals must ensure that there is a firm grounding in professional development for all teachers and staff within the organization at the beginning of the school year, and then throughout the school year. Through the research, the new charter school principal participants spoke about the importance of hiring the right people. However, another consideration that became evident was the importance of training and supporting the right people. Even those with similar educational philosophies can falter when there are challenging circumstances, such as lack of systems, structures, or training. The participants in the study might have underestimated the psychological impact on others in the organization during the process of letting go, and that shifting teaching philosophies, pedagogies, and practices is incredibly difficult, and necessitates a grieving and adjustment period.

Neutral Zone

The neutral zone is considered the second phase of transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). In the neutral zone, systems are assessed, and leaders need to determine what is working and what is not, and make the necessary changes and adjustments in order to actualize the leadership vision. The neutral zone is about getting to know oneself as a leader, learning the strengths and needs of the staff, and understanding the organization's strengths and needs.

Assessing and Building Internal and External Systems

In the neutral zone, the new charter school principal participants spoke about assessing what was working and what was not in their role of charter school principal. The participants spoke about internal systems of support for themselves as leaders, and the difficulties of isolation, the sacrifices and difficulties of sustainability, and the value of mentorship, networking, and continuing education. The participants also shared their experiences building

external systems of support, and navigating LAUSD and the current political climate, and building systems for hiring, teacher sustainability, building systems for collaboration, evaluation and coaching, and the struggles of working in Title I schools.

Internal Systems of Support for Self as a Leader

Difficulties of isolation. In the phase of the neutral zone, the participants all spoke about some degree of isolation, particularly initially, when they were new to the role or new to their staff. The principal position can be a lonely one (Mooney, 2019). The principal has to juggle many roles within the school, and grapples with the pressures that come with the position. Each school has one singular principal, and the struggles of the position are unique to that principal within the school. One of the participants spoke about how difficult it was to be the one who was ultimately holding everyone accountable. Another participant shared the challenges of needing to coach and evaluate, and that it was difficult to both inspire and to hold others responsible at the same time. Another participant described the job of charter school principal as an 'island,' and all of the participants felt that there were aspects of the position of principal that made it unique and thus separate from the other leadership or teaching roles at the school.

Principals can be viewed as wearing multiple hats and having multiple roles and responsibilities (Bickmore & Gawlik, 2017), but despite needing to be everywhere, all the time, principals can still feel alone and isolated from others. The degree of isolation that all principal participants felt in the study was significant, as feelings of isolation or the uniqueness of the principal role compared to other roles in the school were expressed by both participants at standalone charter schools and also from the participant from a very large charter management

organization. Participants believed that there were aspects of being the principal that could only be related and empathized with by other principals.

Sacrifice and sustainability. Another aspect of the neutral zone was the notion of sacrifice, sacrifice was an element that all participants had in common, and participants all had to come to terms with what they were willing to sacrifice and what they were not. All of the participants spoke about working long hours, and working evenings, and weekends. All of the participants spoke about the struggles of work life balance, with some participants sharing that the position forestalled starting a family, going on vacation, or spending time with family. One of the participants had forsaken her salary in order to keep the school afloat. With the sacrifices that all participants made, came the consideration of long-term sustainability.

While all the participants planned on staying at their schools for the foreseeable future, the two participants who worked at standalone charter schools shared that they needed to split the role into an Executive Director and principal position, and only take on one portion in order to feel that the position was sustainable in the long run. The participant who had given up her salary shared that this was not sustainable, and would need to be rectified. Another participant shared that the position was sustainable because she didn't have a family and children, and thus could sacrifice all her time and efforts to the position.

In the neutral zone, new charter school principals must explicitly address what the sacrifices they are making are, and determine if those are sacrifices that should be made, and if those sacrifices are at odds with long term sustainability in the role. Tellingly, none of the participants spoke of others in the organization (whether it be other school leaders, school staff or the school board) questioning whether the sacrifices being made by the participants were

reasonable or fair. Participants ultimately made the choice or felt that they had no choice but to make certain sacrifices.

There were elements of sacrifice that were clearly not sustainable over the long term, such as not receiving a salary, or not taking a vacation, or not starting a family. Those elements of sacrifice should be considered components of the principal position that are not working, and there should be clear plans to rectify the sacrificial elements that are diametrically opposed to long-term sustainability.

Value of Mentorship, Networks and Continuing Education

Part of navigating the neutral zone for the new charter school principal participants was determining what supports were necessary for themselves in their new role. The participants spoke about the importance of mentorship, networking opportunities with other principals, and opportunities for coaching, professional development, and education. In order to feel supported in a role that can often be difficult and isolating, the participants needed to have their own systems of guidance, moral support, and ways to develop and grow their emerging leadership skills and practices.

Mentorship. All of the new charter school principal participants had some level of experiences with a mentor, and all of the participants felt that there was value in mentorship. Mentorship was considered a source of support, networking, and advice (Woodley, 2018), and heightened the sense of self efficacy and support that the principals experienced (Fox, 2018). The forms of mentorship differed, some participants had mentors within their network, others had mentors outside of their network. The participants who belonged to standalone charter schools sought out their own mentors, and those that belonged to larger charter management

organizations were provided with mentors. Some participants had formal structures for mentorship and others had informal mentors. The greatest benefits were expressed by participants who had mentors who regularly checked in with the participants, and who had experiences within charter school leadership, but who were not necessarily part of the same organization.

Mentorship can open the window to collaboration, coaching, and networking (Woodley, 2018). The role of mentorship for the position of new charter school principal cannot be understated. Mentorship was the most valuable support for new charter school principals in the study, and allowed the new charter school participants to feel less isolated, and to recognize successes and achievements on a regular basis, which can be very hard to do in the new charter school principal role.

Networking. One key aspect of the neutral zone that the new charter school principal participants shared was the importance of networking, whether it be building a network, or connecting to an existing network. All of the participants spoke of the value of their networks. Some of the participants had experiences with formal networks, through administration programs and principal cohorts. Others had created networks through their many charter school experiences at different charter schools. Some of the participants spoke about the networks that their charter management organization offered, or that the Executive Director or Charter School Board were able to provide. Some participants expressed regret that they did not reach out more to their networks, whilst others were proud of their ability to network and maintain ties to others.

New charter school principals might not initially seek out their own networks, as participants shared the difficulties of drowning in the work and feeling unable to reach out for

support from the larger charter community. Networks provide the ability to share resources and tools, and can help mitigate the feeling of isolation and having to 'recreate the wheel,' particularly for standalone charter school operators and for new charter school principals. Networks can also allow for collaboration to occur across schools, and increase the capacity of schools and their ability to actualize school reform (Wohlstetter, Malloy, Chau, & Polhemus, 2003). For new charter school principals, networks can increase efficiency and ensure that they don't waste time recreating systems and resources that have been created successfully by others, elsewhere.

Support from the school board. The experiences that the new charter school principal participants had with the support and resources provided by the board of their charter school organization varied considerably, despite the importance of the role of the charter school board in providing accountability, guidance, and resources to charter schools. One participant had a very positive relationship and experience with her school board. Her school board had been actively established and curated by the Executive Director at her organization and she spoke positively about the connections, feedback, and accountability she was provided by her school board. However, the other participants had different experiences and spoke with a bit more ambivalence in the role of the school board in their leadership practices and support network. Two of the participants shared that their board was willing to support when asked, but did not necessarily have expertise in charter schools or experience. The participant at a large school network did not have experiences with her school board at all, which might be more similar to the experiences of district principals at larger school districts. However, the lack of experience with the school board was not necessarily unique to the principal at the larger school network,

and there was a degree of uncertainty in the role and importance of the charter school board in supporting the new charter school principal participants, that was evidenced by the minimal amount of discussion that occurred around the role of the school board, and school board support.

Continued professional development and educational opportunities. A transformative leader needs to provide opportunities for individualized support, high accountability, and leadership, but they must also have access to resources that develop their own leadership practices and skills. The need to develop leadership practices and skills is particularly important for new charter school principals, and is a key aspect of the neutral zone. The participants all spoke about the value of their credentialing, administration, and leadership programs. Opportunities for professional development differed, some participants had resources within their organization, and others utilized partnerships with leadership organizations or had educational opportunities at universities or district programs. Opportunities for professional development have been linked to principal retention (Furgeson et al., 2011), and all of the participants spoke about their abilities in leadership being closely linked to their educational experiences and qualifications, both prior to the role, and during their time as principal.

External Systems of Support

The new charter school principal participants also spoke about the challenges of the neutral zone through determining how to navigate and build external systems within their school, and in order to navigate the challenges of operating a charter school in Los Angeles. The participants spoke about having to work within the system of LAUSD, the systems needed for

effectively hiring, sustaining, and managing others, and the systems needed to navigate the challenges inherent in Title I schools.

Navigating LAUSD and the current political climate. All of the new charter school principal participants in the study grappled with some aspect of their relationship to the Los Angeles Unified School District, and their perception of LAUSD's role in approving charter schools for renewal and oversight. The current political climate of Los Angeles, and the perception that charter schools were being held to increased scrutiny and criticism by both the United Teachers of Los Angeles teachers' union and by members of the LAUSD school board, was shared by all participants to some degree. Actions on the state and district level, such as fines against co-located Prop-39 charter schools due to under enrollment, *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019), and the financial impact of charter schools being used as a determining factor of charter school renewals, and the LAUSD oversight process, were all considered obstacles to the sustainability of charter schools and the charter school principalship.

The actions of LAUSD have directly impacted charter school leaders' trust and relationship with the school district and their ability to lead effectively. There is a perception that shifting opinions on the value of charter schools are leading to punitive or unfair treatment. The new charter school principal participants spoke to increased scrutiny and thus finding it difficult to speak openly about their struggles due to fears of negative coverage and heightened criticism, difficulties with strategically planning for the future due to uncertainty, and constraints to providing innovative educational experiences due to accountability measures and the uncertainty of future renewals. The participants spoke of not realizing key strategies that other more veteran principals used with LAUSD during the oversight or renewal process. New charter school

principals do not have the prerequisite knowledge and prior experiences necessary to navigate the changing agenda of LAUSD successfully without the support of others, whether it be the support of a network or mentor.

Building systems for hiring. One element of the neutral zone shared by all of the new charter school principal participants, were the challenges surrounding building systems and practices for human resources and management. One key area of need and improvement, were the struggles inherent in effectively recruiting and hiring teachers. New charter school principals spoke of being unsure of how to hire teachers who truly shared the same belief systems, such as the value of restorative justice practices, or the need to continuously learn and improve. One participant spoke about needing to refine the hiring process and make it more rigorous in order to ensure that the right fit for the organization was found. Several participants shared that the benefits and financial packages that could be offered might not draw the best candidates. Other participants shared the struggles of being a small charter organization, and having a difficult time attracting strong candidates due to lack of name recognition or reputation. Participants also shared the amount of time and resources that had to be dedicated to the hiring process could be prohibitive, and take valuable time away from other aspects of leading the school. The teacher shortage impacted all participants in various degrees, and there was a sense that strong teacher candidates who were qualified were hard to find. The challenges that the new charter school principals shared in regards to interviewing and hiring practices were similar enough to make it evident that there are common human resources practices that could be shared that would benefit all new charter school principals, despite their very different contexts.

Building systems for sustainability, collaboration, coaching and evaluation.

Structures for providing accountability through evaluation, providing professional development, and staff evaluation, were also expressed as areas that the new charter school participants wanted to improve whilst in the neutral zone phase of creating and improving systems and practices. There was a perception by some of the participants of having to 'reinvent the wheel' when creating evaluation or coaching tools, or the sense that there were limitations that came from being a small organization with fewer resources to draw from. The participant from a larger charter management network shared the challenges of being unable to deviate from the salary scale, and being unable to offer compensation and benefits that were lucrative enough to lead to teacher retention. One particularly interesting finding from the study was that it was the charter school principal from the larger charter management organization who struggled the most with teacher retention, it was not an expressed area of need by the other participants in the study.

The participants shared that hiring and keeping effective teachers who shared the vision was crucial, but that it was difficult to create a culture of high accountability that fostered shared leadership and collaboration. It is clear that human resources and management is an area of need that has the ability to impact or hinder transformative leadership practices (Shields, 2017a). New charter school principals need to have access to human resource strategies and systems that support transformational leadership (Bodla & Ningyu, 2017). Transformative leadership is predicated on creating structures for individualized support, increased accountability, and leadership opportunities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The new charter school principals in the study shared that they did not always have adequate access to human resource management strategies that were rooted in transformative leadership practices.

Title I leadership. The ability to lead in Title I schools is another area that new charter school principals grappled with while in the neutral zone of their leadership journey. Principals that work in Title I schools have challenges that principals in wealthier schools might not experience, or at the very least, heightened needs that might be magnified. The challenges faced by principals in Title I schools is particularly significant for new principals, as new principals are more likely to be principals of Title I schools (Wilson, 2017) compared to their more veteran counterparts. However, Title I principals also have opportunities that principals in wealthier schools do not have, such as the ability to dismantle oppressive practices and celebrate students' identities and strengths through culturally relevant practices (Edwards et al., 2007). New charter school principals are working towards building systems and practices, and the additional demands of Title I leadership adds an additional load to the responsibilities of the new charter school principal.

The new charter school participants shared that they all actively chose to work in Title I schools, and had taught in Title I schools before, which is not always reflected in the literature surrounding Title I school leadership (Fuller & Young, 2008; Gates et al., 2006; Papa, 2007). Despite the challenges of leading in Title I schools, participants spoke about the many strengths. One participant spoke movingly about the ability to draw from the community and families for support and feedback. Participants spoke about the importance of restorative justice practices, and the opportunity of using practices in education that acknowledged the needs of each child and that created a sense of community.

Title I school leadership was difficult because there were not enough resources to meet the higher needs of students. Participants spoke of a need for additional counselors to meet the

socio-emotional needs of students. Participants also spoke about the difficulty of making requests of parents, and feeling that parents were unable to make the same monetary and voluntary service contributions that wealthier parents at more affluent schools could make. Some of the participants spoke about needing to change the mindset of staff, families, and the community, and shifting from a compliance based and punitive educational model to one that was predicated on student choice and restorative justice practices. A few of the participants spoke about the traumatic impact on staff members, and the difficulties of holding teachers accountable for academic outcomes when they were struggling with ensuring that their students had their physical and emotional needs met.

None of the new charter school principal participants referred to the guidance of mentors, or their networks, or their professional development, or the benefit of their educational degrees in helping to support their day to day practices as Title I leaders. The participants spoke of their practices with a degree of uncertainty, and were unsure if the strategies that they were using to address the heightened needs were adequate or appropriate. The participants also spoke of not having fully considered the implications of working at Title I schools, as it was all they had known. Title I leadership support is a key area that new charter school principals could benefit from. The complexities in working with children who might be struggling with poverty related trauma, or increased academic need, or with parents who might have less resources and time, are varied, and need culturally sensitive and relevant practices and a degree of conscious social justice awareness, practices that can be difficult to cultivate for new charter school principals, who are often juggling multiple tasks and putting out fires.

New Beginnings

The third phase of transitions is "New Beginnings", which is the final stage in the transition journey of leadership (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). In the new beginnings phase, the process of letting go has occurred, and grief has been processed and assumptions have been reconciled with the new realities of the position and task at hand. The entire scope of leadership practices cannot be reduced to the methodical movement from one phase of transition to another, and the entirety of the participants' leadership practices did not all arrive at the phase of new beginnings. There were initiatives that the participants were still assessing, or grappling with, and there were failures along the way. However, the practices and systems that are built in the neutral zone have been successfully developed and implemented, and the leader has assessed what is working and what needs to be changed. In the study, the new charter school principal participants entered the stage of new beginnings with initiatives once they were able to create a shared vision, and when they were able to utilize all aspects of transformational leadership in conjunction.

Aspects of transformational leadership were evident throughout all phases of transitions, as were other leadership practices, sometimes with varying degrees of efficacy. However, it was only when changes had been adequately processed by both the new charter school principal and others in the organization, and when systems had been successfully built, that the vision of the new charter school principal could be actualized and shared fully with others. Therefore, the culmination of transformational leadership practices is evident once the initial phases of transition have been navigated. In order for others in the organization to share the vision and to take on the mantle of leadership roles, there needs to be the systems and supports in place, to

guide collaborative leadership and the development of organizational practices that are aligned to the vision.

Vision Building

It is possible to utilize transformative leadership practices while tackling the pragmatic roles and responsibilities of the charter school principalship (Shields, 2017a), but in order to do so, the new charter school participants in the study corroborated the need to create an authentic vision that is shared with others in the organization, and the importance of creating structures for collaboration (Demir, 2008). New charter school participants spoke about the challenges of creating a vision that was authentic to their sense of leadership and their goals for the organization. Success was experienced when others in the organization embraced the vision and when there was a sense that everyone was on the same page and fighting for the same goals together.

Transformative Leadership Practices

All of the new charter school principal participants shared that their leadership styles were based on collaboration and working with others. Charter school principals can exhibit success when they take on characteristics of transformative leaders, and transformative leaders are collaborative leaders that trust in the leadership abilities of others in the organization (Ghamrawi, 2011). The participants in the study all utilized transformative leadership practices, sometimes with varying degrees of success, and their struggles centered on increasing their efficacy as transformational leaders, through creating a shared vision, creating structures for individualized support and accountability, and creating systems for shared leadership and collaboration (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Participants spoke about sharing leadership roles with

others in the organization, utilizing the strengths of others, creating systems for teamwork and collaborative planning, and about meeting the needs of each individual and creating structures for accountability. The participants were able to enter the final stage of new beginnings with initiatives or systems once they were able to utilize all aspects of transformational leadership in conjunction.

New charter school principals might often be tempted to bear the brunt of leadership responsibilities and duties individually. Transformational leadership is both a journey and an end result, and the stages to becoming a transformational leader are not always straightforward or successful. It is possible for charter school principals to get stuck in the phases of letting go and the neutral zone, and in fact much of the beginning years of leadership are centered around navigating those phases and measuring success that is tempered by realistic expectations and a progression and evolution in leadership efficacy. However, utilizing transformational leadership practices is integral in the phase of new beginnings. It is important for new charter school principals to remember that the phase of new beginnings (Bridges & Bridges, 2016), will only be entered once others share the vision and the responsibilities of leadership.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of this research study. Limitations included the number of participants, the allocation of participants from different sized charter school management organizations, the method of interviewing participants, the number of participants who chose to participate in the focus group, and the positionality of myself, as researcher.

The research study was composed of only six new charter school principals. According to the Charter Schools Division of Los Angeles Unified School District, there are 224 independent

charter schools in Los Angeles (Charter School Division, 2019) and many of those charter schools are Title I schools (Zinshteyn, 2017). This research study could have been strengthened by interviewing more participants. While the perspectives and voices of six charter school principals is valuable, and helps to deepen the understanding of the experiences of new charter school principals, their voices are not representative of all new charter school principals in Los Angeles.

The research study was originally designed to further explore the differences in experiences between new charter school principals at small charter management organizations or standalone charter schools, mid-sized charter management organizations, and larger charter management organizations. Two of the six participants worked at standalone charter schools. Three of the participants worked at small management organizations consisting of two to three schools. Only one of the participants worked at a larger charter management organization. Originally, the intent was to select two participants from small charter management organizations or standalone charter schools, two participants from mid-sized charter management organizations and two from larger charter management organizations. An even allocation of participants from different sized charter management organizations was not possible due to the principals who chose to participate in the study.

Another limitation of the study was the method of interviewing participants and facilitating the focus group. Participants were provided the opportunity of participating in the interviews and focus group in person, or via phone call or facetime. Five of the six participants chose to participate in the interviews via phone call. One chose to participate via facetime. The reflective field notes were designed to also collect observational data from the interviews and the

focus group. While the tone of voice, choice of words, and content of the conversations could be analyzed, facial expression and the nuances of body language could not be observed and reflected on. During the focus group, participants could not note each other's body language and facial expressions, as all participants chose to participate via phone call.

The positionality of myself as the researcher was another limitation to the study. I was a new charter school principal at a Title I school in Los Angeles during the course of the study. While in many ways, my experience brought additional contextual understanding that the participants could relate to, participants might have also felt hampered in sharing their challenges and experiences completely honestly, as I could in some ways be considered as a competing charter school leader. Lastly, the participants were all women, and the majority were women of color. Deeper contextual understanding could have been elicited if questions that asked participants to speak to how their experiences might have been shaped and impacted by gender and race were asked.

Recommendations for the CCSA

The California Charter Schools Association represents two thirds of California's charter schools. According to conversations I have had in the 2019-2020 school year with the local Los Angeles CCSA representatives, CCSA had recently shifted gears yet again, from providing comprehensive informational resources for charter schools to focusing more heavily on charter school advocacy in the political realm. The CCSA had been conducting advocacy work at the state level and at the local level in Los Angeles. This strategic shift was largely due to the increasingly negative rhetoric about charter schools from factions such as the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) teachers' union, as well as the inception of *Assembly Bill 1505* (Cal. 2019).

However, CCSA has historically had the difficult task of balancing advocacy work that still fits within the confines of what they are able to do as a non-profit entity.

In Los Angeles, CCSA has been focusing on keeping existing charter schools open, and helping those charter schools navigate the renewal process. In the past, CCSA also called for the closure of charter schools that did not meet the criteria for advocacy support. Through the research conducted, it was clear that new charter school principals would benefit from additional support from CCSA that CCSA might offer, but that might not be known to new charter school principals. CCSA has the ability to play an integral part in supporting new charter school principals, because CCSA ties many charter schools together, and can easily connect charter school leaders for the purposes of shared resources and mutual support. However, currently, the research yielded that the most meaningful experiences that new charter school principal participants had with CCSA was through the annual CCSA conference. While a once a year networking and resource opportunity was valuable, it did not replace the day-to-day networking and resourcing opportunities that could be made available or that might be available to charter school principals who have more veteran support who can help showcase what the CCSA can offer. For new charter school principals, most particularly those at new standalone charter schools, there was a limited understanding of the supports that CCSA had available or could provide.

Therefore, the additional supports that CCSA can provide include first and foremost creating opportunities for new charter school principals to better understand the supports and resources that exist within the CCSA network. In addition, CCSA can increase support during the renewal and oversight process, increased networking opportunities, in particular through

connecting more veteran charter school principals and leaders with newer charter school leaders, and for CCSA to continue the intensified advocacy that they have conducted in recent months for charter schools in the political realm both at the local and state level, which has been extremely helpful.

It is important to note that the circumstances in tail end of the 2019-2020 school year and the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year make this time period a very unique one for CCSA. In light of COVID-19, the most recent CCSA conference was canceled. At the Los Angeles charter school leadership level, CCSA had been holding daily informational phone briefings with charter school leaders. However, in those phone calls, CCSA was still resorting to the role of being the font of knowledge, instead of the facilitator of knowledge, despite the fact that the charter school leaders on the call might have had more experience in charter school leadership than the CCSA representatives at the local level. Opportunities for charter school leaders to speak and share resources directly with each other would be more powerful and helpful, particularly for new charter school principals, who might need additional support and guidance during this time. Building relationships and collaborative structures between charter school leaders provides value far beyond phone call briefings and sharing updates.

Navigating Renewals and Oversight Visits

Participants, particularly from standalone charter schools, expressed frustration with the annual oversight visits from LAUSD. Frustrations stemmed from feeling that LAUSD Charter School Division auditors did not have the contextual understanding to accurate assess the strengths and needs of the schools, that there was sometimes favoritism or lack of consistency in what was cited or commended, and a feeling that there was a lack of necessary differentiation for

the different strengths and needs of charter schools that are inherently all unique. While it has been shared that CCSA has provided advocacy in the process, particularly on a higher level when oversight practices might be antithetical to needs and benefits of charter schools, CCSA should make that advocacy work more known, and more readily available.

CCSA should provide advocacy during the process, through ensuring that there are CCSA personnel who could become familiar with the oversight process and help support charter school principals with navigating the increasing bureaucracy and intricacies of LAUSD's requirements. Support could be as simple as a check-in process prior to the annual oversight visit, but it could also be tailored to the different needs of charter school leaders and could include support in connecting charter school leaders with charter schools that have had oversight visits recently, and who might be able to share feedback and advice. CCSA has the ability to help norm the oversight process, as the perceived capriciousness of one Charter Schools Division district lead over another can be curtailed through the advocacy of a CCSA representative who is familiar with the process and who has the contextual understanding to speak up if recommendations or citations are being applied unfairly or inconsistently.

The outcomes of oversight visits are utilized for renewals, and ensuring that charter schools are fairly assessed and supported by the LAUSD Charter School Division would be worthwhile work for the CCSA that would yield positive outcomes for charter schools, and provide necessary support, particularly for new or standalone charter school principals that might not be adept at navigating the process.

Networking Opportunities

CCSA should consider building cohorts of charter school leaders who are able to meet regularly to share ideas, resources and support. If charter school leaders feel like they are operating in a silo, then powerful opportunities for solidarity are lost. Creating cohort models that allow for collective learning and collaboration will strengthen charter management organizations and standalone charter schools. Transformative leadership in schools cannot occur without structures for collaboration and a shared vision. Transformative leadership that leads to educational reform on a larger level will only occur if charter school principals can collaborate and share a mutual vision for education. While most of the principals interviewed attend the annual CCSA conference, creating consistent opportunities for networking and collaboration throughout the year would be beneficial and could lead to increased charter school principal retention, increased sense of self efficacy and solidarity for Los Angeles charter schools.

Advocacy for Charter Schools

In the past, CCSA has provided advocacy for charter schools during the renewal process, but has also recommended the closure of some charter schools. CCSA should focus its efforts solely on advocacy, instead of charter school censure (unless circumstances are extreme), as there are already plenty of charter school detractors. CCSA has already provided advocacy through supporting charter schools through the renewal process. In mid 2020, CCSA had expanded the political arm of their work, and had created opportunities for charter schools to be part of the political process for providing input for *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019) for the district. CCSA should continue the process of providing political advocacy and lobbying at the local and state level, and ensure that charter school leaders are part of this process. This type of advocacy work

should continue, as in recent years charter schools have been targeted by politicians, the United Teachers of Los Angeles Teachers' Union, and subsequently the media. CCSA should also search for opportunities for charter schools to receive positive media attention, by spotlighting unique programming and the innovative services that charter schools provide.

Creating a Safety Net for Charter Schools

During the research study, it became apparent that a high level of sacrifice was considered a necessary prerequisite for the role of charter school principal. The participants who were interviewed, who were all women, had narratives that involved forestalling having children, working nights and weekends, not taking vacations, and juggling work and life. CCSA should create a safety net for more extreme cases, it is not ok that there are charter school principals who are giving up salaries in order to make their charter school economically viable. While CCSA cannot provide monetary resources, providing frameworks for what charter school principal support could look like, and providing networks and mentorship would all go a long way in ensuring that new charter school principals better understood what sacrifices might not be sustainable for longevity and long term success in the principal role. This would ensure that even small standalone charter schools have a chance to grow and to thrive in their beginning years.

Recommendations for Charter School Principals

Los Angeles charter school principals at Title I schools had an incredibly difficult job. Their job could be isolating, they worked long hours, and they were fighting against systemic educational injustices in an environment that was increasingly anti-charter. The increasing bureaucratic requirements of LAUSD, and the potentially damaging impact of Prop-39 fees and *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019) can make the job seem hopeless and unsustainable.

While supports need to be made available to new charter school principals, new charter school principals need to advocate for themselves, and ensure that they are actively requesting the support necessary for their own development and support through mentorship, coaching and networking opportunities. While in a perfect world a robust school board or Executive Director in the organization might ensure that such mentorship and coaching opportunities exist, this is often not the reality. It might feel unfair to put the onus on finding opportunities for support directly on new charter school principals, but this is often the reality and necessary prerogative of the charter school principal.

In addition, charter school principals at Title I schools should remember the strength and resources of parents and families. Charter school principals should ensure that they are finding ways to connect with each other, the work cannot be completed alone. Lastly, charter school principals should take time to reflect and celebrate the successes along the way.

Seeking Mentorship and Networking Opportunities

Charter school principals should advocate within their charter management organizations and with CCSA, and make it clear that developing their leadership skills and creating systems to support principals will reduce attrition and increase efficacy and sustainability. Strengthening individual new charter school principals strengthens the mission of charter schools as a whole.

New charter school principals should all insist on having mentors who are familiar with charter school leadership and their struggles and responsibilities, as the value of a mentor was shared by all of the participants in the study and was corroborated by other research studies (Lyons, 2019). New charter school principals should also advocate for themselves, and ensure that part of their support system includes tuition reimbursement and professional development

opportunities. Networking is integral to the position (Quick, 2018), and new charter school principals should reach out to CCSA for networking opportunities and should also work towards building a school board that consists of leaders in the community who can help share resources and connections.

Lastly, new charter school principals should remember that, when they advocate for themselves, they advocate for each other, and are helping to ensure that future new charter school principals receive the support necessary to thrive in the principalship.

Utilizing the Strengths of Parents in Title I Schools

The struggles of working in Title I schools and the need for socio-emotional supports and restorative justice practices has been documented (Gardner, 2016), and new charter school principals should ensure that their budget and staffing structures are reflective of the need to provide socio-emotional and restorative justice supports to students. However, the perception of school leaders on the value and ability of parents to engage and contribute in Title I schools is a big factor in determining the level of parent engagement (Spence, 2018) and success in Title I schools has been linked to asset based thinking through cultural competency and utilizing the strengths and identities of students and families (Edwards et al., 2007).

New charter school principals can reach out to other leaders at Title I schools to learn strategies that honor the identities and strengths of the students and families, and that ensure parent and community engagement. Schools that have linked learning back to supporting the needs and wants of the community have shown success in student outcomes (Keehne et al., 2018). As charter school principals navigate how to support the needs of students, ensuring that

there are opportunities for parents and the community to also support the needs of students is critical (Edwards et al., 2007).

New charter school principals should prioritize creating systems for parent engagement, and ensure that there are opportunities for parents to collaborate in the educational process in a variety of ways. New charter school principals should think about equity and the ability of parents to participate meaningfully in volunteer opportunities, the sharing of expertise and resources, and the strategic planning of the school's academic programs and goals. The needs of students in Title I schools cannot be met without utilizing the support of parents, and new charter school principals should approach parents as partners in the educational process.

Connecting to Each Other and Building the Capacity for Scrappiness

During the study, the new charter school principal participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to talk to and connect with each other, and the most valuable moments were when participants were able to share knowledge with each other, and also empathize with the shared experiences and struggles that are inherent to being new to the charter school principal role. New charter school principals should build collaborative relationships with each other, while charter schools might sometimes be competing for the same pool of students, new charter school principals should consider their fellow charter school principals as partners in the journey towards educational reform.

New charter school principals should also embrace the need to be scrappy, a definition of leadership that resonated with the participants in the focus group and a description of leadership which has been attributed to leaders in entrepreneurial roles (Voltan, 2019). Being a charter school principal means being a fighter and a hustler. It is not easy work, and charter school

leaders need to be able to do a lot with a little, and push against structural injustice in every facet of their work. New charter school principals should not fear standing up for themselves and their schools, whether it be during the oversight process, the renewal process, or involvement in local educational politics.

Importance of Reflection

New charter school principals are busy, and are often moving from one task to another with a degree of urgency and momentum that can make it difficult to pause and reflect. The participants all spoke of a desire to continuously improve and develop their practices, but there should also be moments to celebrate and acknowledge the work that has been done. In the quest for educational reform, landmarks need to be noted and celebrated along the way, or the work will feel hopeless. Reflection allows for new charter school principals to gain a deeper awareness of their own strengths and needs, which is integral in knowing how to support and lead others (Lyons, 2019).

Recommendations for LAUSD

In the 2019-2020 school year, LAUSD had enacted measures that detrimentally impact many co-located independent charter schools through enforcing financial penalties for charter schools that utilized Prop-39 space but failed to use as many classrooms as originally requested (Spurrier, 2019; Stokes, 2019). These unexpected financial fines have crippled the fiscal viability of several charter schools. On the state level, *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019) has allowed school districts to consider the financial impact of charter schools when determining charter school renewals and approvals (Primer, 2019). *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019) allowed a level of discretion that could be interpreted by school districts in a variety of ways, many of which could hamper the renewal and

growth of charter schools. The teachers' union strikes of 2019 (Sheppard, 2019) attributed many of the district's financial struggles to charter schools (Bruno, 2019), despite ample research that showed that declining enrollment (Spurrier, 2019) and increasing encroachment costs (Aldeman, 2019) were more to blame.

Taking Back the Responsibility of Supporting Charter Schools

Instead of pitting independent charter schools against district schools, LAUSD should recognize a responsibility towards all public schools in Los Angeles. Independent charter schools were approved by LAUSD, and are public schools that serve the same student populations as district schools, in fact, independent charter schools in Los Angeles serve a higher percentage of low socioeconomic students than district schools (Zinshteyn, 2017). If independent charter schools were to close down, thousands of students would be forced to change schools, and would lose opportunities for innovative educational experiences. The high level of charter school accountability in LAUSD ensures that charter schools provide a rigorous education, and the educational benefit of charter schools and the value of school choice should not be so easily dismissed.

As of 2020, targeting charter schools was impacting the most marginalized students, and was not creating solutions. Charter schools were borne out of necessity, and were designed to reach students who were not having their needs met in the school district. Due to the current political climate and the actions and rhetoric of LAUSD and the United Teachers Los Angeles Teachers' Union (Symon, 2020), charter school leaders have been living in a culture of fear and uncertainty, and have been navigating the hurdles of being accountable to an approver that appeared to be working against them, instead of with them.

Lobbying at the State and Federal Level

Instead of working against charter school interests, LAUSD and Superintendent Beutner should look for ways to collectively work together with charter schools for educational reform at the state level. Charter schools exist in Los Angeles due to the deficits of the current educational system. Lobbying for increased per pupil funding in California, and enacting financial reform (Allbright et al., 2019), would benefit all public school students. In addition, LAUSD has great political power as the second largest school district in the nation. LAUSD can be part of the national discourse on educational reform and the need for increased educational funding at the federal level.

Collaboration with Charter School Leaders for Oversight, Prop-39 and AB 1505.

LAUSD should invite charter school leaders into the oversight process. The LAUSD oversight team should be comprised of charter school leaders, who have the contextual understanding and expertise necessary to assess the strengths and needs of other charter schools. In addition, inviting charter school leaders to the table might help mitigate a sense of unfairness and reduce the perception that the oversight process is punitive. LAUSD should also reassess the Prop-39 program, and create structures for ensuring that the co-located district school is able to work in tandem with the co-located charter school. District staff who harass or target charter school employees or students should be penalized. Finally, *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019) is a new bill that has the potential to significantly impact the charter school landscape of Los Angeles. Unfettered charter school growth might be detrimental to Los Angeles, but unfettered charter school closures would negatively impact thousands of students in Los Angeles. LAUSD should actively

invite charter school families, students, and educators into the discourse on *AB 1505* (Cal. 2019) and ensure that their voices are heard.

Future Research Recommendations

This research study concentrated on the experiences of new charter school principals at Title I schools in Los Angeles. Los Angeles is home to many charter schools. One potential area of research is expanding the research, and interviewing a larger number of charter school principals in Los Angeles, perhaps through expanding the scope to charter school principals with more years of experience. The research could continue to focus on exploring the experiences of a larger pool of charter school principals in the current political climate and could concentrate on the application of transformative leadership practices in Title I schools.

This research study did not focus on the intersectionality of charter school leadership, race, and gender. There has been recent research on the experiences of female novice principals (McManus, 2018), but this continued to be an area that deserves additional focus and additional research.

It is important to note that in this research study, four out of the six participants were people of color, and all of the participants were women. Additional research could focus specifically on the experiences of charter school principals of color in Los Angeles, and could deepen contextual understanding of how racial inequity shapes the journeys of charter school leaders.

The struggles with human resource practices that allowed for transformational leadership was a prevalent theme amongst the participants. Further research that studies the role of transformational leadership in human resources management should be explored, and expanding

the field to other industries could be beneficial to leaders in those industries who aspire to transformational leadership practices.

Personal Reflection

This research study occurred at the same time that I navigated and struggled in the role of new charter school principal at two Title I charter schools in Los Angeles. I have experienced firsthand some of the struggles that the new charter school principals in this study have shared. Initially, I had a cynical approach to this research, and had been increasingly wary of the efficacy and role of charter schools due to my own experiences, and perceived deficits as a new charter school leader. It can be difficult to measure success and to see immediate measurable outcomes in the charter school principal role. Managing and leading others is tough, working at a charter school in Los Angeles in this current political climate is tough, working at Title I schools is tough, being a principal is tough, in short, being a new charter school principal at Title I schools in Los Angeles is incredibly hard work.

Through this research I have met six transformative charter school leaders who have reinvigorated my own perception of charter schools and what charter school leadership can look like. Each charter school leader in this study expressed a deep passion for transforming the educational opportunities in Los Angeles for our most marginalized students. All of the participants spoke about elements of social justice and their desire to be transformative leaders who are actively working towards educational reform. Some of the participants hadn't taken a vacation in a long time; one of the participants was not receiving a salary during a portion of this study. All of the participants spoke of long hours- 60 hours-plus work weeks, working evenings, and weekends, and putting their needs last. These sacrifices are not unique for charter school

principals and is also evident in the research (Rudo & Partridge, 2016). It would be reasonable to think that these new charter school principals would be disillusioned, or resentful, or feel that the work that they did was hopeless. But— they did not. All of the charter school principals planned to stay at their schools for the foreseeable future; all of the charter school principals were able to celebrate successes while still being reflective and expressing a desire to continuously grow and improve.

If other schools are led by principals with the same level of grit, tenacity, caring, and passion, then educational reform for social justice is not just a pipe dream, or remote possibility, it is inevitable.

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

1. What has been your educational leadership journey thus far? What brought you to your current role?
2. When you first started your role as principal at your organization, what were the steps you took to learn about the structures, systems and expected ways of working that were already in place?
3. What have you learned about hiring practices?
4. Were there systems that you changed that were met with staff resistance or pushback? Can you give an example and share why staff struggled with the change?
5. What do you wish you were told before starting the role of principal at your school?
6. What are your experiences as principal day to day? Have your experiences/ roles/ responsibilities changed over the years, if so, how?
7. From your perspective, what components/experiences/or struggles of leadership do you think are unique to being new to the position of principal? Do you think there are some aspects that change over time?
8. Do you feel that the experience you have had as a principal of a Title 1 school differs from the experiences of principals at wealthier schools? If so, how?
9. Do you feel that Title 1 charter schools in Los Angeles have the necessary support and funding? If so, why? If not, why?
10. What components of leadership do you think differ in charter schools that do not belong to larger charter management organizations?
11. What supports have been available to you as a new charter school principal? How have these supports influenced and impacted your work?
12. What or who helped you the most during your initial implementation of new systems or strategies?
13. Did you adapt your leadership style based on the needs/personalities of those in the organization? Why/Why not? Was this successful?
14. What is one of your biggest celebrations in your leadership as school principal?

15. What is one decision/action/experience in your role of principal that you would do over if you could?
16. Do you feel like your vision of leadership has come to fruition? If not, why not? If so, why so?
17. Do you feel like others in your organization share your vision? If so, how long did it take (from you starting your role as principal) for them to share your vision?
18. What makes your position sustainable? What makes it unsustainable?
19. Has the current political climate towards charter schools impacted your work? How so?
20. How long do you plan to stay in the role of charter school principal at a title 1 charter school?
21. Have you had formal preparation for the role of principal? If so, was it helpful? If not, do you believe it would have been helpful?
22. Are there recommendations you would have to supporting new charter school principals? What are they?
23. Is there anything else that you would like to share or speak to?

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Protocol

1. Each of you participated in an interview before the focus group. Let's take a moment to introduce ourselves. Can everyone share names, positions?
2. If you had to describe your leadership style in just three words, what three words would you use?
3. What comes to mind when you think of the characteristics of a typical charter school leader?
4. What are some of the strengths and challenges of working with the school board of your charter school?
5. What are skills that exist on your board, what do you wish there was more of?
6. How much of your work is tied to working with the school board?
7. Do you feel like there is sufficient training and resources for your school board to be successful?
8. What school staff usually attends school board meetings? Do parents attend?
9. Do you find LAUSD oversight visits to be more of a help or a hindrance?
10. If applicable/you can speak to it, has the tone of oversight visits changed over the years?
11. Do you have suggestions for the LAUSD oversight process?
12. Do you find the LCAP a meaningful way to strategically plan or reflect? Why/why not?
13. Do you believe that the LAUSD Charter Division is helpful for charter school leaders? What would make their support more beneficial?
14. What supports have you received from CCSA?
15. What are ways that you build rapport with staff members? (check-ins, team building, etc.)
16. Do you feel that building relationships with staff are a strength or growth?
17. Do you find that building relationships and getting to know staff has impacted your ability to provide individualized support? If so, how so?
18. Are there any potential benefits or pitfalls that you have experienced through trying to build strong relationships with staff?
19. What are ways that staff have to give you feedback?

20. Is it difficult to hold school staff to high expectations? How do you evaluate staff on the expectations that you hold for them? Are those systems effective?
21. Are you in charge of creating job offers for staff? Are you able to determine the compensation to offer new teachers? Is there a scale that you have to work off of for different staff? Do you feel that your pay/benefits/etc., are beneficial enough to recruit and keep strong teachers and school leaders?
22. Sustainability: If you had to guess the percentage of teachers at your school who feel that the work that they do is sustainable, what percentage would you say feel that it is sustainable?
23. What are some factors that would help teachers feel that their work is more sustainable?
24. Does teacher retention impact how sustainable you feel your work to be?
25. What percentage of teachers do you think are going to come back next year?
26. How often do you speak or lead professional development around your vision?
27. How do you create goals around your vision? Who do you create those goals with? Do you have enough time to do this strategic planning?
28. If you had to choose one over the other when thinking about school staff, would you choose loyalty (commitment to work for many more years, etc.) over a willingness to try innovative practices?
29. How common are innovative practices in Title 1 charter schools? What are obstacles to innovative practices?
30. Do you feel like you are able to be an innovative leader in your current context? Do you think that you have enough support that you are able to take risks, make mistakes? Does charter school renewal impact your desire to want to try innovative leadership or teaching practices?
31. Do you feel that five years is too short, just right, or too long in between charter school renewals?
32. Do you feel like there are certain requisites that should be required for charter school principals? (such as prior teaching experience)

33. If CCSA or LAUSD offered charter school principal professional development and networking, is this something that you feel like you would utilize?
34. Are there any final thoughts/questions/comments:
35. Hiring/Compensation/Training/Networking/Hours/Bureaucracy/Politics
36. How often do you get to connect to other principals? In what format?
37. How common do you think innovative practices are in the charter school principal role? What makes innovative leadership possible/or difficult?
38. What does your support network look like?
39. How do you feel that charter school principalship differs from district school principals? Do these differences matter?
40. Do you think that formal administrator preparation programs are helpful for charter school principals? Do you feel that formal preparation should be a prerequisite to the charter school principalship? Why or why not?
41. Does anyone have a mentor that has been helpful in their career? What makes the mentor so helpful?
42. Do you feel that the size of the charter management organization matters in regards to the supports available to the charter school principal?
43. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX C

Reflective Field Notes Template

Interview Questions	Key Highlights from Answer	Body Language or other Observations	Researcher Initial Reactions/Connections
Researcher Reflection:			

APPENDIX D

IRB Informed Consent Form

Loyola Marymount University
Informed Consent Form

TITLE: Being New: Charter School Principals and the Transition to Leadership at Title I Schools

INVESTIGATOR: Kalin Balcomb, School of Education, Loyola Marymount University, Cell #808-987-4708

ADVISOR: Dr. Jill Bickett, School of Education, Loyola Marymount University, Work #: 818-370-5522, Cell# 310-338-3777

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the experiences of new charter school principals as they transition into the role of principal at Title I charter schools in Los Angeles. The research focuses on the different stages to transitions and the experiences and perspectives of charter school principals as they transition to leadership. The research will be conducted during the months of November, December and January.

You will be asked to complete a one on one semi-structured interview with the investigator that will be 1-2 hours in duration. The interview will be audio recorded (with your permission), and the investigator will be taking field notes. The interview can be conducted in person at a location of your choosing or on the phone. The time and date will be determined through scheduling a time/date that is convenient to you.

You will be asked to participate in a follow up focus group with the other participants who participated in the one on one semi-structured interviews. The focus group will be comprised of 4-6 participants and will be arranged at a date, time, and location that is amenable to the participants in the focus group. The focus group will be audio recorded and the investigator will be taking field notes. During the focus group the participants will be interviewed as a group and will have the choice to call in to the focus group if

they prefer to participate via phone instead of in person. The focus group is expected to last 1-2 hours.

The data collected from the one on one interview with the investigator will be shared through the transcript from the interview. The transcript will be shared with the participant in order to conduct a member check. The participant will have an opportunity to review the transcript and give feedback on if the transcript and subsequent analysis reflects their perspectives and experiences accurately. The data from the focus group will also be shared with participants via transcript for a member check. The focus group transcript and analysis will be shared utilizing pseudonyms to replace participants' names and pseudonyms to replace any identifying information.

RISKS:

Risks associated with this study include: A potential risk is that the participants could be identified through deductive disclosure. In this study, deductive disclosure might occur if those who are familiar with a charter school or charter network are able to deduce the identity of a participant despite the use of a pseudonym. This risk will be mitigated by creating a pseudonym for the charter network, charter school, and the participant involved in the study. In addition, the risk will be mitigated by giving participants the choice of being recorded during the one on one semi-structured interview. If participants decline audio recording, the researcher will utilize fast notes instead.

The focus group carries the risk of the participant being identified by other participants during the focus group. In order to mitigate this risk, all participants will be asked to keep the focus group discussion confidential, and each participant will have the option to participate via phone (and not disclose their name/identity to other members in the group) or in person.

There is also the risk of trauma. Asking participants to reflect on previous work experiences might bring up potentially negative memories. In order to mitigate this risk, participants will be reminded that responding to questions is optional. In addition, counseling is also available through Kristin Dust, MSW, ph#: 716-432-4799. Participants can reach out to the counselor during the course of the study and afterwards in order to receive free counseling and referrals to other support services if needed.

BENEFITS: This research will help share the experiences of new charter school principals during their transition to leadership at Title I charter schools. This research aims to deepen contextual understanding of the experiences that new Title I charter school principals go through at various sized charter management organizations and will explore commonalities and potential findings that might help inform leadership supports, strategies and practices at Title I charter schools.

INCENTIVES: Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. A $25 amazon gift card will be given to each participant no more than four weeks after the conclusion of the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: I will collect subjects' names, age, demographic information, and educational work history. Names of participants will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). All physical research materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet. Electronic research materials will be stored on a password protected Google drive. The advisor and investigator will be the only people to have access to the data. For the one on one semi-structured interviews: when the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential. For the Focus Group: While confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting; however, we ask all participants to respect other participant's privacy and keep all information shared confidential. Transcripts of the focus group will also use pseudonyms, and identifying information will be destroyed at the completion of the research study.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. If you would like a copy of the results, you will receive the published dissertation no later than December 2020. In order to request a copy of the results, please contact Kalin Balcomb at: 808-987-4708 or kbalcomb@lion.lmu.edu

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any

reason, without penalty. If the study design or use of the information is changed I will be informed and my consent reobtained. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any further questions, comments or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Dr. David Moffet, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659 or by email at David.Moffet@lmu.edu.

A copy of this consent form and the Bill of Rights for Human participants will be provided to you.

Participant's Signature Date

APPENDIX E
Experimental Subjects' Bill of Rights

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.
2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.
3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.
4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.
5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.
6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.
7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.
8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.
9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.
10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence in my decision.

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