

CHARACTERISTICS AND SKILLS OF SUSTAINED LEADERS  
OF SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

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## ABSTRACT

MARIA MARSELLA LEAHY. Characteristics and skills of sustained leaders of successful public charter school in North Carolina. (Under the direction of DR. REBECCA SHORE)

Effective school leadership is fundamental to a school's success and ultimately influences student achievement. Effective leadership may play an even more critical role in public charter school success because of the unique design and autonomy afforded to public charter schools as well as their unique relationship with the community. With the number of public charter schools rising and projections for continued growth, effective public charter school leadership needs to be explored in greater depth. Leadership of a broad range of organizations including traditional and non-traditional public schools has been studied by many researchers and theorists. Leadership theory suggests there are a number of leadership styles, behaviors, and processes such as Servant Leadership Theory and Transformation Leadership Theory. Combining salient findings, research related to school leadership presents several agreed upon essential leadership skills. The limited research related specifically to public charter school leadership supports the need for both instructional leadership skills and managerial leadership skills. This collective case study adds to this limited research by describing skills and characteristics of sustained leaders of successful charter schools in North Carolina. While supporting prior research, this dissertation found that successful leaders are able to understand the needs of their specific school and delegate responsibilities for meeting those needs based on the leaders' expertise and limitations. Previous literature and evidence from this dissertation present sustained, successful public charter leaders exemplifying individuals who: 1) lead, with

unwavering determination, to form a cohesive school culture shared in the greater community based on the school's unique mission and vision; 2) develop and lead a team consisting of leaders in a variety of areas, both instructional and managerial with the flexibility of sharing leadership roles; 3) build a strong relationship with the community; and 4) hold high expectations of self and others. They are described as 1) supportive and empowering; and 2) positive role models.

Possibly the most salient finding in this study is the leaders' unwavering focus on the schools' mission and vision while maintaining the flexibility to meet the changing leadership needs as the organizations evolved. Each leader, with his or her unique leadership style led with direction and conviction of mission and vision presented in the original charter, while he or she assured that the instructional and managerial needs of the organization were met. This finding has potential to affect not only public charter school leadership but merits additional research to understand the potential of these leadership skills and characteristics and their impacts on other educational settings.

This dissertation proposes additional research on the topic be conducted, and that implementation of programs providing professional development for current and future public charter school leadership be offered. School leadership influences the success of public charter schools which ultimately influences student success.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

Since the passage of the first public charter school bill in Minnesota in 1991, the number of public charter schools in the United States has steadily increased (Junge, 2012). In North Carolina alone, according to data taken in the first month of the 2016-2017 school year from Department of Public Instruction, the number of students in public charter schools has doubled in the past five years, with the number of students in traditional public schools decreasing (Helms, 2017). If the trend continues, the increase will lead to a greater need for highly qualified public charter school leaders. Over the past three decades, research has directly and indirectly linked the success of traditional public schools to the effectiveness of leadership (Edmonds, 1979; Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Lezotte, 1992; Robinson, Hohepa, Lloyd & New Zealand, 2009). Effective leadership may play an even more critical role in public charter school success because of the unique design and autonomy afforded to public charter schools.

Using a collective case study of three successful public charter school leaders, this study provides thick, rich description of the skills and characteristics of sustained public charter school leaders in North Carolina. The purpose of this research is to describe skills

and characteristics of sustained public charter school leaders serving in successful schools in North Carolina.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

In 1991, charter schools were introduced in the United States as a vehicle to drive innovation to enhance public education while being held accountable to meet goals of charter contracts (Fryer & Brookings, 2012). They are publicly funded and privately run not-for profit organizations. Public charter schools were created as an alternative to traditional public school education. They are allowed the autonomy to work free from some of the constraints of traditional public schools. This autonomy allows for schools to be innovative in an effort to develop projects and environments that effect change in a system that has remained relatively unchanged. Public charter schools are held highly accountable to their charters or contracts and state charter policies. In theory, public charter schools that do not meet the state's accountability measures as stated in the contracts and law are terminated.

In 2012, nearly twenty years after the first charter school law was first introduced, the number of children enrolled in public charter schools in the United States rose to over two million with 400,000 students on waiting lists (Junge, 2012). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the number of students attending public charter schools increased from 0.8 million in 2003-2004 to 2.5 million in 2013-2014 (NCES, 2015). National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) data indicate that in the 2014-2015 school year there were 6,633 charters in 42 states and the District of Columbia. These 42 states and the District of Columbia have laws allowing and guiding public charter school (NAPCS, 2017). Nationally, there has been a steady rise in the number of charter schools since the inception of the first charters in 1992. In

the past ten years, growth of charters has been between 6 percent and 9 percent per year (NAPCS, 2014). According the NAPCS (2017), there was a 100 percent increase in the number of charter schools between the 2007-2008 school year and 2013-2014 school year. Current trends indicate that the number of charters nationally will continue to grow.

In North Carolina, the history of public charter school growth is similar to the nation's public charter school growth. State data from the 2016-2017 school year indicate that since the cap on charter schools was lifted in 2011 the number of students attending public charter schools doubled (Helms, 2017). According to Helms (2017), no longer limited by the 100-school cap in 2011, the number of schools rose from 100 in 2011 to 168 in the first month of the 2016-2017 school year. Although the number of students in traditional public schools is decreasing in the state, numbers continue to rise for public charter schools and other non-traditional schools, such as independent schools (Helms, 2017). There is no reason to believe this trend will change.

With the increase in public charter schools, there is a need for highly qualified charter school leaders. Research indicates that effective leadership has a strong relationship to the success of schools. According to Leithwood and Wahlstrom (2008), "leadership matters" especially the effects of "local" leadership in the area of student learning (p. 455). This information is not new, and because of the importance of student learning, has been and continues to be a focus of research. Seminal research by Edmonds' (1979) "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor" and Lezotte's (1979) "A Policy Prospectus for Improving Urban Education" emphasized the essential correlates of effective schools. Edmonds found, "Urban schools that teach poor children successfully have strong leadership and a climate of expectation that students will learn" (1979, p. 15).



Lezotte (1979, 1992) outlined correlates for effective schools including: a clear mission; efficacy and high expectations; opportunities to learn; home-school support systems; and strong instructional leadership. Since that time, both Edmonds and Lezotte's research highlighting the importance of effective leadership has been supported and replicated (Kruger et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Robinson et al., 2009). The literature is clear—leadership plays a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of schools.

Leadership is a complex process including multiple behaviors and dimensions (Northouse, 2010). It is an interactive process whereby the leader influences others to accomplish a common goal (Northouse, 2010). Studies about leadership over time have resulted in the development of leadership theories. Some of the theoretical frameworks described by Northouse (2010) include: Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer, 1979); Contingency Theory (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987); Servant Leadership Theory (Spears, 2004); Transformational Theory (Burns, 1978); Transactional Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978); and Authentic Leadership Theory (Walumbwa, Peterson, Avolio, & Gardner, 2008). While leadership theories describe some common traits, they each have unique dimensions. Leaders' traits and characteristics are included in this dissertation and may be categorized in several theories.

In the past twenty years, advances in technology and society's adoption and implementation of changes have altered organization's operations, structure, and needs. With these developments, leadership needs have shifted. As a result, effective leadership skills and characteristics of strong leaders have been the focus of much research. In 2001, Jim Collins and colleagues studied successful companies to better understand their

evolution. In this work, he outlines characteristics of great leaders and introduces a concept he refers to as Level-5 leaders (Collins, 2001a). A Level-5 leader possesses the characteristics of good leaders including: skills of a highly competent individual; ability to be a team member; managerial skills; and skills of effective leadership (Collins, 2001b). Collins (2001a, 2001b) found that the characteristics that set Level-5 leaders apart from a good leader are a combination of humility and great willfulness. In addition to Collins's study, others have highlighted behaviors, characteristics, and skills of leaders in a variety of organizations and situations (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Stone-Johnson, 2014). Research indicates that characteristics and skills of leaders continue to be directly and indirectly correlated with the success of organizations. For the purpose of this dissertation, skills refer to abilities and knowledgeable action; whereas, characteristics or traits indicate qualities or behaviors. Table 1 shows some descriptors of leadership falling into the categories skills and characteristics.

Table 1

<i>Examples of Leadership Skills and Characteristics</i>	
Skills	Characteristics
Communication Skills	Empathetic
Decision Making Skills	Empowering
Finance Skills	Hard Working/Diligent
Marketing Skills	Honest/Transparent
Problem Solving Skills	Inspirational/Motivating
Strategic Planning Skills	Supportive
Time Management Skills	Visionary

As stated, there is an expansive literature base around the concept of leadership, yet there is minimal research focused specifically on charter school leadership. Because of the autonomy afforded to public charter schools, they may be affected by the leader's

ability to direct and manage to a greater degree than traditional public schools (Goff, Mavrogordato, & Goldring, 2012; Hays, 2013). A public charter school leader must be proficient in many areas. A public charter school is defined as “a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state or jurisdiction” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Charter schools are exempt from some state and local regulations. They must, however, adhere to the regulations of their charters or contracts and are held highly accountable. They are afforded greater flexibility and autonomy. Because of this flexibility and autonomy, public charter school leaders may need a different skill set than traditional public school leaders.

Since the inception of public charter schools, there has been the limited research design to compare similarities and differences in leadership of traditional public school principals and public charter school leaders. According to an executive summary based on research conducted over a three year time-span and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, there are five core content areas specific to charter school leaders: start-up logistics, curriculum and assessment, governance and management, community relations, and regulatory issues (Lane & Northwest Regional Educational Lab [NREL], 1998). Based on survey data, Campbell and Gross (2008) identify four challenges that face charter school leaders as compared to traditional public school leaders: creating and supporting a vision, developing and supporting human resources, delegating leadership, and using resources effectively. While some aspects of these challenges are important for traditional school leaders, such as supporting a vision, they are even more critical for public charter school leaders who are often called upon to create as well as support a

vision and mission, to a level or depth needed to attract and retain both teachers and students. According to these studies, charter school leaders may need both instructional and organizational leadership skills as well. Additional review of research will be included in the literature review of this dissertation.

Although there has been a great deal of research focused on leadership in various types of organizations, limited research has been conducted on public charter school leadership specifically. This study seeks to add to the limited research identifying characteristics and skills of successful public charter school leaders by establishing themes of characteristics and skills attributed to leaders of high performing well-established public charter schools in North Carolina.

### 1.3 Purpose of Research

In light of the history and growth of public charter schools and the importance of leadership, the purpose of this study is to provide rich, thick description of skills and characteristics of sustained leaders of three successful public charter schools (kindergarten through grade twelve) in North Carolina. The terms sustained and successful are defined in the Assumptions and Definitions section of this chapter. The success or failure of schools impacts student achievement and future success, the ultimate purpose of public education. Because of this, the success and failure of public charter schools has brought attention to the need for effective, yet specialized, leadership. Leadership is an important component affecting school success, and plays a key role in student learning. This study has the potential to be a starting point for dialogue about preparing strong, effective leaders with the skills and characteristic needed to lead non-traditional schools. In addition, the results support the limited prior research on the topic

of public charter school leadership and call for continued research in the area of public charter school leadership. This dissertation hopes to spark a greater research interest in the uniqueness of public charter school leadership and its role leading to increased school success and ultimately student achievement and success.

#### 1.4 Research Question

This qualitative research will utilize an interpretative collective case study design using rich, thick description to “develop conceptual categories...with the intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). Collective case study design allows for comparison within and between cases. It adds variation, making the interpretation more convincing (Merriam, 1998). To prepare rich, thick description of charter school leadership, the study will follow the guiding research question: What are skills and characteristics of sustained leaders serving in successful charter schools in North Carolina?

#### 1.5 Assumptions and Definitions

This dissertation will investigate skills and characteristics of sustained leaders serving in successful charter schools in North Carolina. Throughout this dissertation, the terms public charter school, sustained, and success will be used. This section defines these and other terms of importance.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), a public charter school is defined as:

...a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state or jurisdiction. The charter exempts the school from certain state or local rules and regulations. In return for flexibility and autonomy, the charter school must meet the accountability standards outlined in its charter (<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=30>).

To open a public charter school, a charter which is “an agreement between the state, the state authorizing agency, and the charter school founders” is written and must be approved by the state school authorizer which in North Carolina is the state board of education (Tryjankowski, 2012, p. 3). Objectives written into the charter include: mission and vision of the school, the types of instructional programs, student recruitment procedures, monitoring practices of finance, as well as other governance policies (Tryjankowski, 2012, p. 3). Public charter schools are created with unique missions and visions that drive the direction of the school. Each public charter school is held accountable by the state to meet the objectives of its charter.

Selection criteria for the sample in this study include schools that are labeled as successful, sustained or well-established, and diverse. For the purpose of this dissertation, success of a school is determined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) data. Using data for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, successful public charter schools received a grade of A or B as indicated on the North Carolina Report Card School Performance Grade. The School Performance Grade is based on student achievement (80%) and growth (20%). School Performance Grade data will be described in greater detail in the Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Sustained is defined as the school’s longevity. It is based on the number of years the school has been in operation. Participating schools have been operational for 18 or more years with the participating leader serving for at least 15 years. Table 3 provides an overview of this information in complete detail. The schools are located in both rural and urban areas. For the purpose of this study, diversity is defined using two indicators: race and English language learner data. To determine whether diversity criteria are met, the public charter schools will be

compared with local district data using these two indicators. The racial demographics of the charter school should approximate the demographics of the larger district with no more than a 10 percent difference. Initially, socio-economics was a potential indicator; however, because of different regulations concerning nutrition programs for public charter schools and issues with accuracy with this data due to its nature (self-reporting by parents), this factor was not be used. This will be discussed in greater detail in the methods section.

A limitation of the study is the selection of participants only within North Carolina; however, choosing participants from a single state allows the researcher to determine the quality of schools which must adhere to the same state regulations and accountability policies. Limiting schools to North Carolina may affect the ability to generalize to other states. Using a qualitative collective case study design, the study anticipates obtaining rich, thick descriptions from multiple leaders and their teachers. Data from both leaders and teachers of three public charter schools will provide multiple layers of description. Significance of the study and limitations will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

## 1.6 Summary and Introduction to Chapter 2

Chapter 1 includes the statement of the problem; the purpose for the research; the research question; and assumptions, limitations, and definitions. The statement of the problem highlights the importance of effective leadership in successful schools and the need for additional research specifically related to public charter school leadership. Because of the greater autonomy and accountability given to public charter schools, leadership may play a more significant role in the effectiveness of these schools than traditional public schools. With the number of public charter schools rising, the need for

well-prepared, highly-qualified leaders will increase. The purpose of the research is to identify skills and characteristics of successful sustained public charter school leaders in North Carolina. The chapter concludes with assumptions and definitions to help clarify the topic under investigation.

In Chapter 2, a literature review will summarize studies related to leadership, providing background and research relevant to the study. Two broad areas will be explored: (1) research supporting the influences of leadership on organizations and specifically K–12 educational institutions and (2) studies investigating characteristics of effective leaders utilizing leadership theories. The literature review will conclude with an examination of the limited research related specifically to public charter school leadership.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 presents a brief history of public charter schools in the United States with a focus on North Carolina and projections for the future of public charter schools. The section also highlights theoretical leadership frameworks, effective leadership qualities, and leadership attributes specifically related to public charter schools. The chapter will conclude with a synopsis defining the necessity for research concerning leadership skills and characteristics needed to lead successful public charter schools.

### 2.1 History of Public Charter Schools

Today the topic of charters often causes great debate with strong support and equally strong criticism. In an effort to better highlight the need for effective charter school leadership, development of charter schools, guidelines, funding, and topics of debate both in the United States and in North Carolina will be discussed in this section.

The first charter school law was passed in Minnesota in 1991; however, the concept of charter schools in the United States started much earlier (Junge, 2012). The inception and development of charter schools is nonlinear as is true of most educational reforms. School choice initiatives such as magnets, vouchers, and alternative schools were precursors to charters. Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), proposed the idea of the national charter school movement in the late 1980's (Junge, 2012). Shanker credits Ray Budde, an educator, for introducing the concept in the early 1970's (Junge, 2012). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published;

attention was focused on the inadequacies in public education system efficiency, especially among the poor and minorities. Fear was building that the United States was falling behind neighboring countries in terms of student achievement and educational inequities, especially related to underprivileged populations (Junge, 2012; Knaak & Knaak, 2013; NCEE, 1983).

Shanker speculated charter schooling could be an answer to issues in public education by giving teachers greater control in how school instructional programs run (Junge, 2012; Tryjankowski, 2012). He outlined key elements of public charter schools, many of which continue to be followed today: (a) an official governing body grants a charter, (b) teams of teachers with a vision to construct innovative educational programs are grantees, (c) charters are meant to take a risk on new ideologies that may benefit the education system but also may fail, (d) they imply competition, (e) charters run under their own per-pupil budget with the leeway to determine how funds are allocated, and (f) charters must follow a plan with a definite timeline to show progress (Junge, 2012). Although public charter school regulations vary from state to state, many states continue to adhere to Shanker's key elements (Knaak & Knaak, 2013). Each state has its own unique public charter school legislation and policy making comparison from state to state difficult.

While the charter school movement has been a topic of significant debate, according to Junge, it has also received great political support (2012). Political leaders such as Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have supported the charter school movement (Junge, 2012; NAPCS, 2014). It appears that this trend will continue with the election of President-elect Donald Trump and his choice of Education Secretary,

DeVos (Chunk, 2016). Despite the political support, there is ongoing debate and misunderstanding around the topic of public charter schools. Tryjankowski's book, *Charter School* (2012), highlights common views from proponents and opponents. These are summarized in *Table 2*. The concerns and counterpoints are intended to represent the debate and research around public charter schools which indicate some of the issues leaders face.

Table 2

*Debatable Topics Concerning Public Charter Schooling*

Concerns	Counterpoint
Public charter schools “cream,” or serve the brightest students with the most engaged families, leaving struggling students and families in traditional public schools.	Public charter school legislation exists to minimize “elitist” placement attempts. Public charter schools are often located in areas where traditional public schools are struggling.
Successful public charter schools do not have enough seats for all students who would like to attend them.	There has been an effort and funding allotted to replicate successful public charter schools. Caps have been lifted to allow for a greater number of charter schools in some states.
Public charter schools do not have to adhere to bureaucratic constraints and laws.	Public charter schools must adhere to the contract or “charter” approved by the state and state regulations mandated on charter schools.
Public charter schools take funds that should be used for education away from traditional public schools.	Funds move with the student based on ADM for educational purposes. In some states, charters receive only a portion of the funds for the student.
Public charter schools that fail cause bad situations for students who must find other placement.	Some public charter schools fail; however, traditional public schools may fail as well. In North Carolina in 2012, 55 charter schools opened with six closures; one was reportedly due to academic reasons and five reportedly due to financial, governance and other operational compliance issues (5) according to the NC Charter School Annual Report (NCDPI, 2015).
Because of high accountability measures, public charter schools focus on standardized test scores.	Research shows accountability is a concern of public charter schools; however, with federal legislation, it is a priority of traditional public schools as well. Measures of accountability allow for schools to use data to drive best practices.
Public charter schools do not provide transportation and/or free and reduced lunch programs for students in need.	According to the North Carolina charter application and state regulations, public charter schools must provide a written plan

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	to assure transportation and nutrition is provided for students in need of these services (NC Gen Stat § 115C-218.40; NCDPI, 2016).
English Language Learners (ELL) and Students with Disabilities are not served appropriately by public charter schools.	Although research is mixed, there is a smaller population of students with special needs attending charter schools; however, the reasons are varied and do not indicate students are “counseled out” of charter schools (Winters, 2015).
Charter schools are more racially segregated.	According to civil rights research, charter schools are more segregated despite the blind-lottery for attendance (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011). In North Carolina, the NCDPI charter school annual report noted issues with under-represented population; however, the report indicated efforts to address this issue are being investigated (Hinchcliffe, 2017).

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Tryjankowski, (2012)

Based on the tenets introduced by Budde and Shanker, Minnesota passed the first charter school legislation in 1991 (Junge, 2012; Tryjankowski, 2012). The first public charter schools opened in Minnesota. Quickly, other states followed, each passing state-based charter school laws. Monitored by state-approved agencies called charter authorizers, public charter schools are separate from the local school district but funded by federal, state, and local governments (Tryjankowski, 2012).

According to NCES as of the 2013-2014 school year, charter school legislation had been passed in 42 states and the District of Columbia (2016). The majority of states passed charter laws in the late 1990’s, and these state laws may be altered by each state’s legislation each year. Each state’s laws and policies are ranked according to the four basic elements that have been determined to positively affect development and creation

of charters: (a) independent and multiple authorizers, (b) number of schools allowed, (c) operations, and (d) quality (CER, 2015; NAPCS, 2016). North Carolina ratified charter school legislation in 1996 (NCDPI 2015). North Carolina is a single-authorizer state. A charter school authorizer is an “entity that is given the power and responsibility to issue charters to charter school founders” (Tryjankowski, 2012, p. 3). Initially, a 100-school cap was mandated in North Carolina. In 2011, the 100-school cap was lifted, and the number of charters rose sharply; however, according to Center of Educational Reform, the state continues have one of the lowest approval rates for charter approval (CER, 2015). Based on scoring of the four basic elements noted above, North Carolina received a ranking “C” in part “because the Charter Advisory Board, due to politics and infighting, have hindered the approval and opening of charter schools with the lowest approval rate in years” (CER, 2015 p. 65). The charter school movement has been controversial in North Carolina in part based on some of the misconceptions noted in Table 2. Despite these issues in North Carolina, the number of public charter schools rose from 75 to 168 from the school year 1999-2000 to the first month of the 2016-2017 school year (NCDPI, 2016).

Twenty-five years after the first charter school law was passed, public charter school presence is making its mark on the education system in North Carolina and the United States. The number of public charter schools continues to grow (Junge, 2012; NCES, 2015). National data indicates that from the 1999-2000 school year to the 2013-2014 school year the percentage of public charter schools increased from 0.7 to 6.6 percent (NCES, 2016). In the same time period the number of schools grew to 6,500 schools serving approximately 2.5 million students (NCES, 2016).

In North Carolina similar growth has occurred. In the time period beginning the 1997-1998 school year to the 2015-2016 school year, the number of public charter schools increased from 33 to 159 (NCDPI, 2016). In the same time period Average Daily Membership (ADM) of students enrolled in charters rose from 3.0 percent to 5.3 percent. ADM indicates the “the sum of the days in membership for all students in individual Local Education Agencies (LEAs), divided by the number of days in the school month” (NCDPI, 2017). A longitudinal comparison of charter school and traditional public school ADM from 1995 to 2016 is represented in *Figure 1*. *Figure 1* shows a decline in the ADM in traditional public school districts while ADM in public charter schools is on the rise (NCDPI, 2017). When comparing the 2015-2016 school year to the 2016-2017 school year in North Carolina, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased by 9,630 to 91,815 while the number students enrolled in district schools decreased 3,407 to 1.4 million (Helms, 2017). While traditional districts continue to have a far greater number of students, the increase in public charters is substantial.

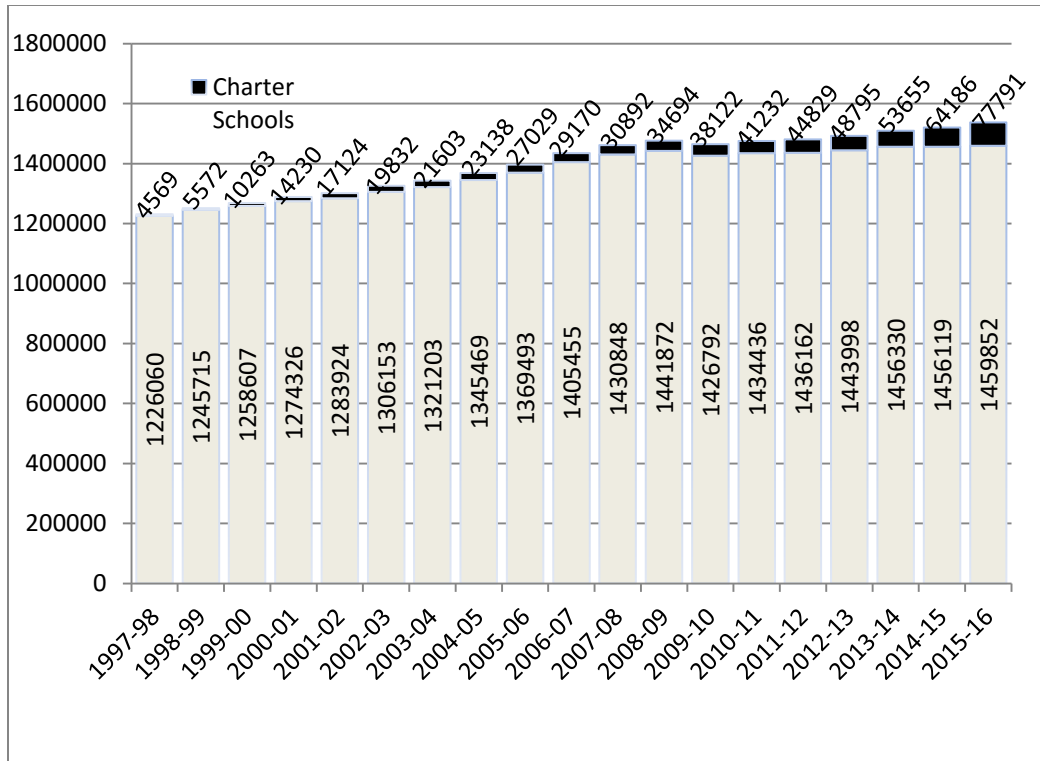


Figure 1. Allotted Average Daily Member By Year in North Carolina, 1997-2016 (NCDPI, 2015).

The majority of charter school funding comes from the state, supplemented with federal and local funds. Some charter schools also receive substantial private funding from grants and other philanthropic organizations. The amount offered is determined by charter legislation guidelines and awarded on a per pupil basis. Each state determines its own funding and regulations for charters based on state laws and policies. Funding for charters is typically less than traditional schools (Batdorff, Maloney, May, Speakman, Wolf & Cheng, 2014). This is true in part due to less local funding allotted to public charter schools (Batdorff et al., 2014). State and federal grants are available to fund the start-up of charters prior to their opening. Sufficient funding, both before the doors are open and as they operate, is essential to the success of public charter schools (Curtis, 2012).



In a study of charter schools in 30 states and the District of Columbia during the 2010-2011 school year, financial statements were systemically examined including both private and public funding (Batdorff et al., 2014). A 28.4 percent gap was found with the average public charter school student receiving \$3,814.00 less than the average traditional public school student. In North Carolina, charters are state and federally funded on a per-pupil basis; however, the public per-pupil funding base is lower for public charter schools than for traditional public schools (Batdorff et al., 2014). In the 2014 report, North Carolina public charter school students received 17.1% less funding than traditional public school students (Batdorff et al., 2014).

The same per pupil expenditure (PPE) funds that would be awarded to the traditional public school for each student are granted to the charter; however, capital funds for facilities are not awarded to the charter. Facilities and upkeep are taken from annual operating expenses. In addition, bus transportation and child nutrition programs are not required and not funded, although some charter schools elect to offer transportation and/or free/reduced breakfast and lunch. As a condition of each school's charter agreement, (Charter School Application, Section V); however, the public charter school must have a written plan ensuring all children have access to a transportation plan and a child nutrition plan (NCDPI, 2017). Federal funds for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) are awarded. North Carolina charters are allowed to seek private funding but are not allowed to charge tuition (NCDPI, 2016). Grants and donations are two types of additional funding public charter schools may seek. Disparity of funding is one of the issues public charter school leaders must be able to manage in addition to other issues unique to public charter schools.

Some public charter schools in North Carolina have closed based on issues with management of finance and other governance-related concerns. Seventy out of the 187 schools that have opened since the ratification of the North Carolina public charter school law in North Carolina opened in the past ten years (2005 – 2015). Twenty of the 187 schools that have opened since the ratification of the charter school law have closed in the past ten years (NCDPI, 2015). These schools have either relinquished their charter or the charter was revoked after opening their doors (NCDPI, 2015). According to the North Carolina NCDPI, reasons for closures include governance, finance, Exceptional Children non-compliance, programmatic non-compliance, and low-enrollment. Publicity about incidents such as these closures causes the public to question leadership and the system of oversight that monitors charters.

The political conflict, disparity of funding, mandated requirements, innovative programming, and accountability measures make high-quality leadership essential in public charter schools. Research about the efficacy of public charter schools is mixed. Some media reports highlight concerns about the success of North Carolina public charter schools (Helms, 2014). For example, StudentsFirst Academy, a Charlotte, North Carolina charter, promised a school for children from impoverished families with a focus on the arts, athletics, and a rigorous academic program. Four months after the school opened, two of the lead administrators were fired when allegations of mismanagement, nepotism, and financial irregularities surfaced (Helms, 2014).

Despite the problems, projection for growth of charters is evident in data (Junge, 2012; NCES, 2015). Further research is needed around the charter school movement. Strong leadership may be one indicator for the future successes of public charter schools.

## 2.2 Leadership Theory

Research clearly highlights the significance of leadership in the creation and development of effective schools (Kruger et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Robinson et al, 2009). Leadership is a complex multi-dimensional process (Northouse, 2010). It is not dependent solely on the leader's personal characteristics and behaviors but also on the environment and people around her/him (Northouse, 2010). Leadership theory has evolved as studies focus on leadership styles, behaviors, and processes. Some of the theoretical frameworks include: Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey et al., 1979); Contingency Theory (Hanson, 1979); Servant Leadership Theory (Spears, 2004); Transformational Theory (Burns, 1978); Transactional Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978); and Authentic Leadership Theory (Bass, 2000).

### 2.2.1 Situational Leadership Theory

Hersey et al. (1979) propose Situational Leadership Theory is both directive and supportive; the situational leader is able to adapt these dimensions to different situations based on the theory that different types of situations need differing leadership styles. This theory relates the leader's style to the subordinates' developmental level (Hersey et al., 1979). The leader determines the level and modifies his leadership style and behavior based on the needs of the situation. Based on the situation and need, there are four levels of supportive leadership styles: delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing (Hersey et al., 1979).

### 2.2.2 Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory is also situational; however, the leader's style is dependent upon the context of the situation (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987). According to a earlier study, Contingency Theory is related to school management as, "The recognition of shifting conditions, both in the external and the internal environment of an organization, establishes the condition that contingency theory of management be situational in character" (Hanson, 1979, p. 101). Certain styles of leadership are more favorable under different situations. Three conditions Northouse identifies are: "leader-follower relations," "defined tasks," and "leader-position power" (2010, p. 113). Contingency Theory is widely used in business organizations but has also been used in educational research (Hanson, 1979). Hanson (1979) describes characteristics of the contingent leadership styles as flexible and relationship-oriented to task-oriented depending upon the state of the environment and situation.

### 2.2.3 Servant Leadership Theory

Servant leadership theory, first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970's (Northouse, 2010; Spears, 2004), asserts that true leaders first desire is to help others by leading. Servant leadership is closely related to transformational leadership. Although there is limited empirical research on servant leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002), it has been widely used by leadership theorists. According to Spears (2004) servant leadership "is a long-term transformational approach to life and work...that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society" (p. 8). Attributes of the servant leader include: listening and reflecting, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight,

stewardship, commitment to growth of others, building culture and community (Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2004).

#### 2.2.4 Transactional Leadership Theory and Transformation Leadership Theory

Transactional Leadership Theory and Transformation Leadership Theory fall on a continuum and are often compared (Burns, 1978). Transactional Leadership Theory relies on compliance of followers to act under a rewards and punishment type of leadership (Burns, 1978). This type of leadership focuses on task completion. Transactional leaders may be described as directive, extrinsically motivating, and resistant to change (Burns, 1978). On the other hand, Transformational Leadership Theory “is a process that changes and transforms people. Transformational Leadership Theory is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals” (Northouse, 2010, p. 348). This type of leader makes a connection with his followers, is attentive to their motivation and needs, and seeks to help them reach their fullest potential (Burns, 1978). They raise awareness about what is best for the organization and encourage followers to be motivated and have high standards of achievement (Bass, 2000). Learning communities are encouraged and created. Transformational leaders may be described as trusting, motivating, collaborating, and visionary (Bass, 2000).

#### 2.2.5 Authentic Leadership Theory

Authentic Leadership Theory is a complex theory that draws from the tenets of Transformational Leadership Theory. A relatively recent theory, the definition of Authentic Leadership Theory has evolved. Walumbwa et al. (2008) defined Authentic Leadership Theory as,

a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-

awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (p. 94)

Authentic leaders may be described as self-aware, ethical, balanced decision makers and transparent (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Theories of leadership have evolved as organizational needs and conditions have changed. They provide a framework from which to view and analyze leadership. The process of leadership and characteristics of leaders are complex and varied. Although different theories may share similar characteristics and processes, they provide an evidence-based framework from which to study leadership skills and characteristics.

### 2.3 From Leadership to Educational Leadership

Organizational leadership has gained the attention of researchers worldwide. Jim Collins and colleagues studied over 1,400 good companies in a five-year timespan to determine what makes a good company make the leap to being a great company (2001a). Using historical data, the group studied each company's performance for the past 40 years and was able to identify factors that transform a "good" organization to a "great" organization. Leadership was described as one of the determinants of a "great" organization. Collins (2001a) describes an effective leader as one who has great professional will as well as great personal humility. This type of leader seeks success for the organization through building community vision. Leadership involves much more than mere management and can effectively stimulate change and growth. An ideal leader therefore, is a humble, yet a professionally strong-willed individual who can navigate and grow an ever-changing organization with a clearly articulated vision. Collins describes a successful leader as one who is a "workhorse," a diligent worker driven by results (2001a, p. 39). In an interview with Michael Brosan with the National Association of

Independent Schools, Collins expanded on the meaning of humility and willfulness as it relates to school leaders:

They have high levels of humility and will. All their ambition and drive are channeled outward into a cause or a company or school. It truly is not about them. It's not about how they look to the public. Not about their career. Not about the power or the money. It's about the cause or the mission. And they have the utterly stoic will to do whatever it takes to succeed for the sake of that cause... Level 4 leaders can be very effective in getting people to do things, but deep down it is about them. Deep down, their ambition is about themselves. Level 5's are much more selfless (Brosnan, 2015).

Bolman and Deal's work relies on framework, research, and practice to guide leaders and managers as organizations develop. Leading and managing, according to Bolman and Deal (2003), are very different, but equally important. Because organizations must consistently evolve and grow, they need the vision and motivation of a strong leader and the organization and direction of an effective manager. Communicating and leading with a vision is one of the most important aspects of leadership. An effective leader and manager uses these skills paired with diligence and willfulness because of his ambition to see results and success for the organization rather than his/her own personal success.

Collins (2001a) writes, "The good-to-great leaders never wanted to become larger-than-life heroes. They never aspired to be put on a pedestal or become unreachable icons. They were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results" (p. 28). The quality of humility is apparent in great leaders as well as other characteristics and skills. The ability to form and develop relationships, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and understanding followers are attributes of successful leaders (Collins, 2001a; Bolman & Deal, 2003). Leaders with these characteristics facilitate building a cohesive and self-disciplined organization.

Often times, studies from business models inform the field of education. This is true of leadership in schools. Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) examined the effectiveness of leadership in schools in a synthesis of research entitled, *How leadership influences student learning: Review of research*. Findings indicate effective school leadership is essential to the success of schools, especially schools serving at-risk populations (Leithwood et al., 2004). The study found the effective practices for school leaders include (a) identifying and developing a shared vision and goals that encompass high expectations, (b) developing people by providing individual support, (c) modeling best practices, and (d) leading collaborative organization redesign and efforts during the course of school reform (Leithwood et al., 2004). Other researchers have found similar results (Kruger et al., 2007; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2007).

Leading by example, modeling professional behavior, and setting measureable performance standards for staff are signs of effective school leaders. Successful leaders clearly define goals and have high expectations for staff. These leaders encourage leadership in the team and growth in the organization which in turn leads to continued and long-term success (Leithwood et al., 2004; Kruger et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2007). While research has been carried out concerning traditional public school leadership, there is still very little scientific understanding of public charter school leadership.

## 2.4 Charter School Leadership

The impact of leadership on public charter schools is understudied compared to traditional public school leadership, particularly to identify skills and characteristics of successful charter school leaders. Public charter schools and traditional public schools



share some of the same leadership needs; however, traditional public schools typically have systems in place and district-level administration upon which they can rely for support (Campbell, Gross, & Lake, 2008). In a recent dissertation, Miller (2011), based on a mixed study of five charter schools in North Carolina, reports best practices in managing effective charter schools. His research focuses on the characteristics of successful public charter schools. The results of Miller's dissertation support the understanding that public charter school leaders need different skill sets than traditional public school educators (2011). Public charter schools are given autonomy and charged with creating innovative learning environments, yet charter schools have added responsibilities such as adhering to a charter or contract, board governance, finances, curricula, instruction, student recruitment, teacher hiring, evaluation, and reporting. Public charter school leaders work with and report to the school's board of directors. They also have a unique relationship within the public education community. Leadership is a key element in forming relationships in the education community and within the school.

Several prior studies provide limited research regarding the skills and characteristic of successful charter school leaders (Blitz, 2011; Campbell et al., 2008; Carpenter & Peak, 2013). Much of the research highlights skills that are comparable to that of a superintendent rather than a traditional public school principal. These skills are reported and explored in this section.

In some states, however, school principals are prepared for their work differently than superintendents. In fact, some states have different licenses for each role. Leaders of public charter schools are not required to be licensed principals. In a 2008 report,

Campbell et al. conducted a large-scale survey of charter school leaders in six states to study the leader's responsibilities and challenges. The results indicated many of the same skills are required of both traditional public school leaders and public charter school leaders. In addition, specific challenges related to public charter school leadership include (a) "creating and supporting a vision," (b) "developing and supporting human resources," (c) "sharing leadership," and (d) "using resources effectively" (Campbell et al., 2008, p. 15).

Communicating the purpose and future of public charter schools requires a specific set of skills including an ability to attract, hire and maintain highly qualified teachers. Human resources management is an important function of charter school leaders. Research indicates teacher quality is "one of the best school-level predictors of student achievement" (Goff et al., 2012, p. 2). Consequently, it is important for public charter school leaders to be skillful in recruiting and hiring outstanding teaching personnel. In a study in North Carolina of public charter schools, Ndoye, Imig, and Parker (2010) noted that leadership is a strong predictor for teacher attrition. Public charter school leaders have a complex job of hiring and retaining staff for positions that may be challenging, at lower pay, and without the support of district personnel (Campbell et al., 2008). Once hired, teachers need to be placed in appropriate roles, provided with professional development, and be given opportunities to share in leadership roles. Since many tasks often handled by the traditional public school district office fall to personnel in the public charter school, the ability to delegate and share leadership roles was found to be a challenge required of public charter school leaders (Campbell et al., 2008).

Public charter school leaders have the freedom to allocate funds and resources with more discretion than traditional public school principals. Public charter schools also receive less per-pupil funds from government sources. Data from the 2010-2011 school year comparing traditional public school and public charter schools in the 30 states and the District of Columbia indicated a funding gap of 28.4 percent (Batdorff et al., 2014). Resource management is another challenge for public charter school leaders and consequently requires a deeper understanding of finance than required of a traditional public school principal (Campbell et al., 2008).

Some managerial leadership skills described by Campbell et al.'s report (2008) are similar to skills noted in research by Carpenter and Peak (2013) and Blitz (2011). Both studies highlight skills required of charter school principals that are not as essential to principals in traditional public schools. Blitz (2011) identified the skills needed to deal with the demand of accountability and to successfully work with a governing board of directors. Blitz's 2011 study was based on interviews of 18 charter school leaders and one member of each of the charter's board of governance in the state of Wisconsin. Carpenter and Peak surveyed 78 (50 percent) of principals from 155 charter school during the 2009-2010 school year in Colorado (2013). Both Blitz (2011) and Carpenter and Peak identified skills attributed specifically to charter school leaders. "Superintendent-type" skills (managerial leadership) and instructional leadership skills were found to be valuable skills for charter school leaders (Carpenter & Peak, 2013, p. 155). "Big picture skills" such as having an understanding of charter school laws, compliance-based accountability, authorization and assessment, and high stakes

accountability and standardized assessments are key elements of charter school leadership (Blitz, 2011, p. 390).

In public charter schools, the leadership role is pivotal because of each charter's unique design and focus. Charters are created with a distinctive vision and purpose in mind. Hays (2013) addresses three areas of leadership characterized in effective leaders of four public charter schools in high-poverty areas of Boston. In a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured, open-ended interviews with school leaders, Hays found that each school had a unique culture with each director having his or her own personality, experience, and vision. However, three common leadership themes emerged: (a) high expectations for student outcome as measured by college completion, (b) safe and orderly learning environment, and (c) an all-school adherence to leadership's vision in the context of the school's mission (Hays, 2013). These themes were viewed as essential to success in each school. This study highlights a more traditional understanding of school leadership characteristics as related to charter school leaders.

Instructional leadership qualities are different than the superintendent-type qualities discussed by Carpenter and Peak (2013). Both superintendent-type qualities and instructional leadership qualities are essential for highly qualified charter school leaders. The instructional leader sets the culture and direction of the educational community. The leader along with his governing body and the community sets the vision, clearly communicates that vision, and continues to bring it to the forefront of importance (Carpenter & Peak, 2013; Goff et al., 2012; Hays, 2013). Because charter schools are schools of choice, it is important to clearly communicate and build the culture around the mission.

In a pilot study, *Skills and Characteristics of Two Sustained Leaders of Successful Charter Schools*, results indicated long-term, successful charter school founders and leaders' skills and characteristics fell in the theoretical framework of Situational Leadership Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory (Leahy & Shore, unpublished). The unique structure and innovative design of public charter schools necessitates a leader who is able to adjust to the evolving leadership role while communicating the school's vision and motivating constituents. Some of the skills and characteristics gleaned from the data described a leader who is passionate, trusting, flexible, motivated, and willful (Leahy & Shore, unpublished).

A community of learners and leaders is built as the leader encourages teamwork, collegiality, risk-taking, and ultimately learning and growth. Leadership theory identifies traits of humility, transparency, and willfulness. A humble and professionally willful leader leads by example, modeling behaviors and skills and encouraging and supporting students, families, and staff to learn and grow. In addition to the superintendent-type managerial skills, charter school leaders need to develop skills to build and motivate the team. This is the other end of the spectrum for qualities and skills needed to lead in effective charter schools. In highly successful charter schools, leadership established the following criteria: (a) a clearly articulated mission and vision, (b) high standards of achievement, (c) clearly articulated curriculum and pedagogical methodology, (d) safe and orderly school environment, (e) collegiality among teachers, (f) a practice of analyzing data to inform instruction, and (g) engagement of parents and guardians in the school community (Hays, 2013, p. 42). Results from this research are supported by Bickmore and Dowell (2011) and Carpenter and Peak (2013) who found that while public

charter school leaders report the importance of these having the ability and time to address the above mentioned skills and abilities, their time is often limited by other responsibilities. These results suggest that additional research in the areas of charter schools leaders' attention to distributive leadership may provide insight into management of the complex needs of these leaders.

The criteria reported by Hays (2013) are closely related to Edmonds and Lezotte's correlates of effective schools as well as transformational leadership theory and authentic leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1979; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Transformational leadership theory is defined as a process that "changes and transforms people" (Northouse, 2010, p.171). The leader is able to engage with others to motivate followers to become part of the team to develop and implement a common vision and reach shared goals.

As this limited research indicates, leadership required of charter school leaders appears to be two-pronged. The first prong, the instructional leader, is similar to highly qualified leaders of the traditional public school, while the second prong is linked closely to the big picture managerial duties of a superintendent. Situational Leadership Theory, as defined by Northouse (2010), suggests that effective leaders are directive and supportive and can easily adapt to meet the situational needs (p. 89). Contingency Leadership Theory suggests leadership styles as flexible and relationship-oriented to task-oriented depending upon the state of the environment and situation (Hanson, 1979).

What type of leader is needed to guide successful, sustained public charter schools? Results from research data are varied; however, it is clear that multidimensional leadership plays an essential role in effective charter schools.

## 2.5 Summary of Chapter 2 and Introduction to Chapter 3

This review of literature includes a synopsis of Leadership Theory, research about leadership in general, and the limited research about charter school leadership in the United States and specifically in North Carolina. Overall, these results indicate that the skills needed to lead a public successful charter school fall into two categories: instructional leadership and managerial leadership. Traits and characteristics shape the leaders ability to lead. The literature highlights effective leadership in public charter schools and some of the consequences of ineffective leadership. This review suggests a need for additional research concerned with how public charter school leaders address distributive leadership to insure essential roles are met. Chapters 3 will discuss methods and research design and analysis used in this qualitative collective case study.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research follows the interpretivist tradition of seeking to “understand and describe social phenomena from the perspectives of the participants” (Glesne, 2011, p. 17). It provides a rich description as its purpose is to describe and clarify “direct experiences instead of abstracted generalizations” (Glesne, 2011, p 35.) Using an interpretive, holistic, and empirical approach, this researcher describes and clarifies specific common themes woven through lived experiences (Stake, 1995). In order to provide thick description, an intrinsic collective case study was used to find the common themes of skills and characteristics of three sustained public charter school leaders of successful schools in a specific southeastern state in the United States.

### 3.1 Research Design: Intrinsic Collective Case Study

The purpose of this qualitative research is to provide a rich, thick description of skills and characteristics of sustained leaders of successful public charter schools who navigate the unique and autonomous public charter school community in North Carolina. The focus is on understanding the process of leading in a “real-life context” as Merriam (1998) illustrates:

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (p. 19).



The outcome is a rich, thick description of skills and characteristics of sustained leaders from three successful public charter schools in this North Carolina have been and continue to be successfully leading their organizations. Merriam (1998) defines thick description as, “the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated (pp. 29-30). Descriptive designs “attempt to present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 36).

An intrinsic case study is designed to “to discern and pursue issues critical to the case” (Stake, 1998). The purpose is to better understand how the leader in each case successfully leads in the unique situation that a public charter school provides. Primarily through participant interviews and supplemented by participant observations and artifacts, the researcher gained an understanding of the skills and characteristics demonstrated by sustained successful public charter school leaders. This dissertation presents a complete description of leadership based on the data from these case studies with the intent of adding to the limited research of this increasingly important field.

The research design for this proposed study is collective case study using data from three separate cases (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). A collective case study design allows for enhancing the strength of the analytic findings; “the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial” (Yin, 2003, p. 53). It controls for the unique conditions of single-case design by looking for common themes throughout the cases and allowing for cross-analysis between the cases. This adds to the assertions about leadership characteristics and skills of sustained leaders of successful public charter schools. Merriam (1998) posits, “Inclusion of multiple cases is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings” (p. 40).

The primary data source is interviews; however, observations and artifact analysis were also used to clarify and triangulate data. In each case, the charter school leader and several staff members were interviewed. The leader of each charter school carried a unique title, (chief administrator, headmaster, and executive director); however, each leader participant was the topmost leadership for the school and reported to the board of directors. Staff interviews included teacher and school level administrators (dean of academics and middle school administrator). All participants were actively involved in the school through a variety of leadership roles such as athletic coaches, club leaders, mentors, and academics coaches. Each interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes to one hour and was conducted via telephone or face-to-face either prior to the site visit or during the site visit. Stake (1995) describes the power of interviews:

Much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is being observed by others. Two principle uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities (p. 64).

The interview process will be discussed in greater detail in the upcoming data collection section.

### 3.2 Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to identify three successful public charter schools located in North Carolina. One successful leader and two teacher leaders or assistant administrators were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews from each public charter school selected. Fieldwork consisting of a minimum of one school visit at each participating public charter school was conducted by the researcher. The criteria for purposeful sampling of sites include public charter schools that are successful, well-

established, K -12, diverse, and located in North Carolina. Cases were limited to a single state due to the state-level regulations and accountability given to charter schools.

Comparing public charter schools in a single state for participation in the study allows for fair and consistent criteria purposeful sampling. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator seeks to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61).

Participants were selected through a process of examining publicly available, open source data through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to determine public charter schools that could be described as sustained and successful with sustained leadership. This researcher first determined which of the state’s public charter schools could be considered “sustained” or well-established and were determined to be “successful” with leaders who could also be described as “sustained.” Because each state determines accountability measures for public charter schools and in an effort to minimize variability of performance assessment measures and policy and regulations, a single southeastern state, North Carolina, was chosen. The original criteria for “sustained” or well-established reflected a public charter school that has been operational for five or more years with the participating leader serving for at least five years. The public charter schools selected for this dissertation met and exceeded this criteria having been in operation for fifteen or more years with leaders in place for an equal number of years. Each leader served in a variety of roles during his or her involvement within his/her charter school such as teacher, board of directors member, and/or founder. The number of service years refers to the total self-reported years performing in any capacity

within the charter school. Each leader began his/her tenure in the public charter school in the founding or very early years of the school. More information about individual school histories and leaders is reported in each case study. For specific information related this criterion, see Table 3.

Student achievement indicates school success. Since the 2013-2014 year, North Carolina began the assignment of School Performance Grades to all LEAs. This performance grading system uses student achievement and Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAS) scores to determine an overall school performance grade. The accountability system is based on school performance (80%) and growth as compared to the previous school year (20%) as described in Chapter 3. The school's achievement score is "calculated using a composite method based on the sum of points earned by a school on all of the indicators measured for that school" (NCDPI, 2015). Growth status "compares the actual performance of the school's students to their expected performance based on their prior testing performance" (NCDPI, 2015). Each selected public charter received a grade of "A" or "B" and a growth status of "met" or "exceeded" in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years (NCDPI, 2015). Table 3 shows an overview of each participant's school's founding year, number of leader's service years, and school performance scores for two years.

Table 3

<i>Public Charter School Performance Scores and Longevity Measures</i>						
School Name	Founding Year of Charter Written	Number of Leader's Service Years	2013-2014		2014-2015	
			Grade	Growth Status	Grade	Growth Status
LCS	1997	18	B	Met	B	Met
RCS	1998	19	B	Exceeded	B	Exceeded
FCS	1997	15	B	Exceeded	B	Exceeded

Using the criteria for sustained and successful charter schools with a leader in place for five or more years, the researcher found a total of five K-12 public charter schools. The added criterion, diversity within the school was then considered. To meet the indicator for diversity, the public charter school's data must be similar or more diverse than the surrounding school district based on the state reported data reflecting race. A comparison of demographics between the public charter school and its local district is described as similar if the percentage is within 10 points. Initially, free and reduced lunch and English-language learners (ELL) were also criteria; however, free and reduced lunch data were not comparable due of the nature of charter school policy and issues with accuracy due to the nature of collection of data (self-reported).

School districts in North Carolina participate in the National School Lunch Program; however, charter schools are not mandated to participate. Both the State Law, NC G. S. 115C-218.40 and the Charter School Agreement, indicate charters must adhere to regulations in regards to school lunch programs. Public charter schools are required to supply a school lunch plan, either as part of the National School Lunch Program or in

some other manner, and to report any changes to school lunch plans. Because free and reduced lunch status is self-reported and linked to participation in the National School Lunch Program, data may be skewed. ELL data were gathered; however, none of the five schools that met criteria for sustained and successful public charter schools met the criteria for diversity in this area.

Criteria data were collected from school websites, the NCDPI website, and through individual school and district personnel and school records. Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 highlight charter school demographics as compared to each school's surrounding school district.

As discussed earlier, initially five schools met the criteria for successful and sustained K-12 public charter schools. When the criterion for diversity was added, three schools met the criteria. Two of those school leaders agreed to participate in the study. The third school did not agree to participate. In an effort to increase relevance and generalizability, a third school needed to be included. The participant selection included the fourth of the five schools that met criteria for sustained and successful public charter school. The leader of the fourth public charter school, which met all criteria with the exception of racial diversity criteria was contacted and agreed to participate. Following the selection of the three schools and their leaders, visitations and interviews were scheduled.

Following selections of public charter school sites, the researcher contacted the school leaders to discuss additional participants. Teacher/lower-level administrative participants were selected based on website information, observation, and discussion with the school leaders. These staff members were selected based on longevity of position

(three or more years serving as an educator in the school) and involvement in different types of leadership roles within the school such as school improvement team members, mentors, and/or committee members, and involvement in groups and committees within the school. Approval from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received before leaders of schools were contacted. All interview participants received, read, and signed an informed consent form prior to the interviews (See APPENDIX A and APPENDIX B).

### 3.3 Data Collection

Three types of data were collected for each case: interviews, archival data, and observations. Interviews with the school leader and at least two staff members from each public charter school were conducted. Other faculty and staff were spoken with during observations. Their informal comments have been included where appropriate as observation notes. In addition, artifacts or archival data such as newsletters, school data, websites, media articles and reports, brochures and other materials developed by the individual schools were collected. The researcher, in the role of participant-observer, shadowed each public charter school's leader to observe his/her interactions within the school and, in one case, in the larger community. Using an observation guide (APPENDIX C), the focus of the observation was on the leader's interaction with other members of the school such as teachers, staff, students, community members, and families. Based on Merriam (1998), analyzing multiple modes of data, artifact data or archival data, interviews with leader and teacher participants as well as observations, will allow for triangulation of data for each case. The data were collected and analyzed separately as individual case studies using with-in case study methods. Following the

individual case data collection, the cases were analyzed as a collective case study using cross-analysis between the cases. Analysis will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. Conducting a collective case study allows data to be collected from multiple school sites within the same southeastern state in the United States.

The primary source of data collection included conducting and recording face-to-face or telephone interviews using interview protocols. Three leaders and six teachers/assistant administrators participated in face-to-face interviews occurring during the site visits. One charter school leader asked to be interviewed via phone during the summer months prior to the site visit date. Two teachers also requested phone interviews. Each of the phone interviews occurred prior to the site visit. Two interview protocols, leader and teacher, were used. They are located in APPENDIX D and APPENDIX E. The duration of interviews was approximately between thirty to fifty minutes. The researcher audio recorded and transcribed the data. Data were securely stored on the researcher's personal laptop and an external storage device for back-up; both were stored in a locked location.

Fieldwork, including a day shadowing of the leader, was conducted with the purpose of data collection using an observation guide. A copy of the observation guide is located in APPENDIX C. The researcher acted in the "observer as participant" role. In this role the information gatherer is the most important position for the researcher; however, she may participate in activities (Merriam, 1998). Participants were aware of the researcher's motives. The observer focused attention on key features related to the research such as (a) physical setting and culture of the school, (b) participants actions and



interactions, (c) conversations, (d) subtle factors [non-verbal communication, symbolic and conative meanings of words] (Merriam, 1998, pp. 97-98).

Day-to-day operations, as well as unique situations such as an Individual Learning Plan meeting with parents, a community event at a local community college, a student athlete college signing, and field day activities, were observed. Often, the school leader introduced the researcher which led to greater conversation and interaction than was anticipated by this researcher. Often unsolicited comments were made about the leader's capabilities and the benefits of being a part of a charter school.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the processes of data collection, analysis and report writing (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). The process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are interrelated and occur simultaneously (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). In this collective case study, the researcher conducted each case independently with analysis occurring within each case. This process is called within-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). Following within-case analysis, cross-case analysis was conducted with a goal of "building abstractions across cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 195).

Data analysis is a complex process of "making sense out of the data" which occurs throughout data collection, analysis, and report writing (Merriam, 1998, p.178). "The process involves the simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document's content" (Merriam, 1998, p. 160). As the researcher accumulated data, she read and organized the information making initial notes and adding details and explanations. Data were reread

and additional information noted. In some cases, emails were sent asking for clarification of data.

The software program, Atlas.ti, was used in this process. In vivo and significant statements were used to code data. Next, the researcher coded common threads from the different data collection methods. With each step, the researcher revisited earlier data, rereading and recoding to make sense of the information. Through analysis and grouping of codes, common themes and sub-themes emerged. Themes were then combined and organized into categories to develop description of characteristics and skills of public charter school leaders.

Each case consisted of three transcribed interviews (leader and two staff members) rich with dialogue, one record of field notes, and artifact analysis. Different forms of data were analyzed separately and linked together to form meaningful interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998). The interview with the school leader is the primary source of data; however, additional staff interviews, fieldwork analysis, and artifact analysis allowed for triangulation of data within each individual case.

The researcher then identified processes and outcomes across cases using a cross-case process (Merriam, 1998). Once analysis within each case had been conducted, focus was placed on categorizes, processes, and outcomes that were evident across cases. “Only with such replications would the original finding be considered robust and worthy of continued investigation or interpretation” (Yin, 2003, p. 47). This written dissertation report includes both within-case analysis and collective case analysis.

### 3.5 Risks, Benefits, and Ethical/Political Considerations

Risks for participants in this study were minimal. An Institutional Research Board (IRB) Approval was obtained prior to the interviews and site visits. Signed Informed Consent Forms indicating permission were received from the participants (APPENDIX A). All data were de-identified following collection and prior to analysis. This researcher used pseudonyms for the charter schools, and the leaders and teachers were kept confidential to the best of this researcher's ability. Participants were informed of the possibility of deductive identification of schools based on descriptions.

Although names were not published within the study, names may be known to other participants as the researcher received the site leader's input when selecting staff participants, and some interviews occurred at the school site. The goal was to interview participants who were familiar with the organization and processes within the school. With the goal of describing characteristics and skills of sustained successful charter school leaders, risks to participants were minimal.

Charter schools within North Carolina may be recognizable based on the description of the school in the final written research report. Participants were informed of the possibility of deductive participant identification prior to interviews. Participation was voluntary.

### 3.6 Strategies for Quality

This researcher's subjectivity about the charter school movement (Glesne, 2011) has been noted. This research does not question the efficacy or purpose of public charter schools. These are other research topics for another time. The intent of this research is to provide rich, thick description of skills and characteristics of sustained leaders in

successful public charter schools. The researcher reflected on her own bias as she looked at characteristics and skills of successful charter school leaders with the focus, not on the success of charter schools but on the leader's specific skills and characteristics. The researcher used a reflective research journal to note her experiences during the study. As issues arose, such as difficulty identifying public charter school with similar demographics, this researcher sought to explore and document the matter while keeping the purpose of this research, identifying and describing skills and characteristics of sustained successful K-12 charter school leaders, as the main emphasis of this research.

A difficulty the researcher encountered was remaining unbiased when data revealed conflicts and difficulties with traditional districts and policy. Situations were described and discussed that could be considered "roadblocks" to the success of charter school implication and success. This researcher conscientiously focused on regarding the data with an unbiased agenda and without being overly sympathetic to the leaders of the charter schools.

The data analysis process allowed for themes to emerge from the interviews and observations. The within-case and cross-case analysis gave the researcher opportunity to interpret data separately and across cases. This analysis enhanced the opportunity for new information, new questions, and patterns to surface.

Triangulation of data assured that data analysis describes "a picture as clear and suitably meaningful as we can get it, relatively free of our own biases, and not likely to mislead the reader greatly" (Stake, 2006, p.77). Reflective journaling also positively influenced non-biased reporting.

### 3.7 Significance/Importance of the Study

The number of public charter schools continues to rise in North Carolina and across the United States (Chunk, 2016; Junge, 2012; NAPCS, 2014; NCDPI, 2016). With the differences in policy and organization of public charter schools, a different set of skills and characteristics may be needed to be a successful and sustained public charter school leader. The significance of this study is to advance the understanding of skills and characteristics of successful charter school leaders in an effort to benefit current and future charter leaders and thus the success of public charter schools. This work builds on the limited research about charter school leadership characteristics and skills. Researcher's assertions may lead to implications affecting the training of charter school leaders. Leadership directly influences student achievement and the success of schools (Edmonds, 1979; Kruger et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Lezotte, 1992; Robinson et al., 2009). Consequently, changes in training of charter leaders may better prepare them to lead and positively influence the success of charter schools and the students they serve.

### 3.8 Summary and Introduction to Chapter 4

In Chapter 3, methodology was highlighted. The proposed study is an intrinsic collective case study consisting of three sites using interviews, artifact analysis, and fieldwork. This qualitative method was particularly useful to provide a rich description of skills and characteristics of sustained charter school leaders in successful schools. Analysis of data used a constant comparative method and occurred throughout the process to develop themes and categories for leadership skills and characteristics based on cross-analysis of the three cases.

Chapter 4 will be comprised of analysis of each case study including: (a) background information for the school, (b) description of the site visit and interviews, (c) themes emerging from the data, and (d) a summary and reflection of the data.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDING

### 4.1 Introduction to Chapter 4

Chapter 4 presents individual case studies from three sustained, successful North Carolina K-12 charter school leaders: Daniel Marvin, Longwood Charter School (LCS); James Moore, Redwood Classical School (RCS); and Donna Keene, Fernwood Charter School (FCS). Pseudonyms for each school, each leader, and all participants are intended to provide anonymity. No connections between the pseudonyms and the true names of each charter school, location, and participant have been made. All informants signed informed consent forms approved by UNC Charlotte IRB (see APPENDIX A and APPENDIX B). These forms assure an effort to maintain confidentiality for all participants.

Each public charter school is located in a different county within North Carolina. This researcher describes each independent case using with-in case study methods and then as a collective case study using cross-analysis between the cases (Merriam, 1998). Each case study is included in the following sections of this chapter. Included in the report for each case are: (a) background information for the school, (b) description of the site visit and interviews, (c) themes emerging from the data, and (d) a summary and reflection of the data. The cross-analysis is included in Chapter 5.

## 4.2 Case 1, Daniel Marvin, Longwood Charter School

### 4.2.1 Background Information

As mentioned in the literature review, each public charter school is given the responsibility and the autonomy to develop and build its program around a mission and vision which is written in the original school application. Each charter's mission is unique and drives the school's program (Campbell and Gross, 2008). Published on the charter's website and other public materials and based on the original charter written in 1997, Longwood Charter School's mission is:

to facilitate the development of college ready individuals through emphasis on rigorous academics and our community expectations: honesty, respect, empathy, responsibility, service and preparedness (Website).

In addition to being included in the original charter application, the school's college preparatory mission statement is visible in the school lobby and on the website as well as other publications.

Longwood Charter School is located in a rural, yet fast-growing area on the fringe of a large metropolitan city in North Carolina. The K-12 public charter school is unique as the state's only charter with two distinct, separately-located K-12 campuses. The two separate K-12 school campuses could be considered separate public charter schools; however, they are directed under the same board of directors with one charter, thus they are functionally a single public charter school with two distinct K-12 campuses. State regulations were amended after the approval of the LCS no longer allowing this type of charter. At the time of study, the two campuses served approximately 1,900 students combined. Currently the largest public charter school in the state, the school's charter was written in 1997, one year after the state's first charter school bill was passed. The



doors opened in 1998. (NCDPI, 2015). The original charter application was written for a K-5 public charter school, and the school opened with one class at each grade level. The following year the second K-5 campus opened. The original charter application planned for two K-8 campuses with one campus on the eastern side of the county and a second on the western side of the county. The original charter was written with the intent to eventually build a high school for grades 9-12 in the center of the county. As the campuses steadily grew, it became apparent that each campus needed to serve all grades, K-12. Each campus has the same college-preparatory focus but is unique. As each campus grew and evolved, both campuses remained true to the college-preparatory mission of the original charter; however, one grew its athletics program while the other grew its emphasis on music. The campuses are approximately thirty minutes driving distance from each other in the county. The executive director leads both campuses and reports to a single board of directors. Each campus has division level directors and is equitably staffed.

At the time of the study, Mr. Marvin, executive director, was the chief administrator of both campuses. He spent his time equally on each campus. The elementary, middle, and high schools each have a head administrator who teams with the executive director and assistant administrators to lead the individual school levels. As is true of many public charter schools, personnel carry several job titles and responsibilities. For example, the elementary administrator holds additional titles of Exceptional Child (EC) director and is a site director.

This public charter school continues to grow, and according to Mr. Marvin, currently has a K-12 student body of over 1,900 and wait list of nearly 2,000. LCS

demographics are similar to the local school district's demographic makeup. Using NCDPI (2015) data and information from LCS, Table 4 compares LCS demographics with the district's demographics. LCS is slightly less racially diverse with 85% of the student population indicated as "white" while the district reports 78% of the population as "white." The school's Exceptional Child population is 12% as reported by Mr. Marvin. English Language Learners make up less than 1% of the student population. By law students do not need to reside in the county in which the charter school is located in order to attend the school. Mr. Marvin reported that at the time of the interview, the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 60% of the students resided in the county where the school is located and the remaining 40% live in surrounding counties.

Table 4

*LCS and County Demographics Percentages, 2015-2016*

	Total ADM <sup>1</sup>	English Language Learners	Other	Race		
				Black	Hispanic	White
Longwood Charter School	1,907	<1%	4%	4%	8%	85%
County School District	11,410	2.8%	5%	6%	11%	78%

<sup>1</sup>Average Daily Membership

#### 4.2.2 Site Visit and Interviews: The Campus

The campus visit occurred in late May of the 2015-2016 school year at the eastern campus in the newly built middle and high school building and the pristine elementary building surrounded with athletic fields. The elementary students were participating in field day. Some middle school students were in class; others were attending a field trip

off campus. High school students were either taking exams or assisting with field day. Parents were volunteering time for the special day. It was not a typical school day; however, the school was orderly and a level professionalism was maintained. The administrative staff including the administrative assistants who greeted visitors was friendly, helpful, and professional. All school personnel wore LCS polos or tee shirts. The school logo was visible in a number of prominent places around the school. Hallways and classrooms were bright, clean, and organized. Even though the atmosphere was that of a “fun field day” there was a strong scene of order and calm in the buildings. While the staff took the time to greet visitors, they remained focused on the students and the business of running a school. Mr. Marvin shared the same type of focus on his staff, parents, and students. He welcomed me as a researcher visiting his school; however, he was quick to stop our interview when a student, teacher, or another visitor needed his time. All interactions with this researcher and others were very personable, yet professional and businesslike. An excerpt from the interview is located in APPENDIX F. Each school level, elementary, middle, and high school, was unique and appropriate to the age level; however, all areas of the school conveyed an atmosphere of welcome, order, and professionalism.

#### 4.2.3 Site Visit and Interviews: The Interviewees

At the time of the site visit, I conducted Mr. Marvin’s approximately 50-minute recorded interview and two separate recorded teacher interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes each. The leader and teacher interview protocol are located in APPENDIX D AND APPENDIX E. The following provides background on the interviewees in an effort to provide context to the responses.

#### 4.2.3.1 The Leader

Mr. Marvin has been involved in LCS since the first year of operation. He was not involved with the school during the writing of the charter application or development of the mission statement. His initial involvement with the public charter began as that of the parent a fifth grade student. As a well-known business owner of a family-run business in the local community and eager to become involved in his daughter's school, he joined the board of directors for LCS and served as president for six years. After selling his business to retire and fulfilling his tenure on the board of directors, he left the board. At that time there was a need for an interim principal of the high school. The board of directors asked Mr. Marvin to step in as interim principal for the western campus for a year while they conducted a search of a permanent principal. As Mr. Marvin commented during the interview, "And I said, 'Yeah sure I'll do that.' And that was 15 years ago." The interim principal position morphed into Mr. Marvin's role as the executive director of LCS. During his 15 years as the school's executive director, the school has evolved to become the largest public charter school in the state. It has become well-known in the state's charter school community as a high-quality public charter school based on student achievement, school growth, and positive influence on the local community.

Mr. Marvin described himself as a businessman. He noted, "That is how I got involved in what I am doing right now. I do not have educational (leadership) education. I have a business degree." He continued to explain the value having a business background when running a public charter school; as well as the importance of having a team of strong knowledgeable educators. "I surrounded myself with good academia people to help us formulate some good education plans."

At the time of the case study, spring, 2016, Mr. Marvin was preparing to leave LCS and work as the state's charter school director. He is very knowledgeable about LCS and state charter school regulations and policy. He is active in the state's charter school advisory group.

#### 4.2.3.2 The Teachers

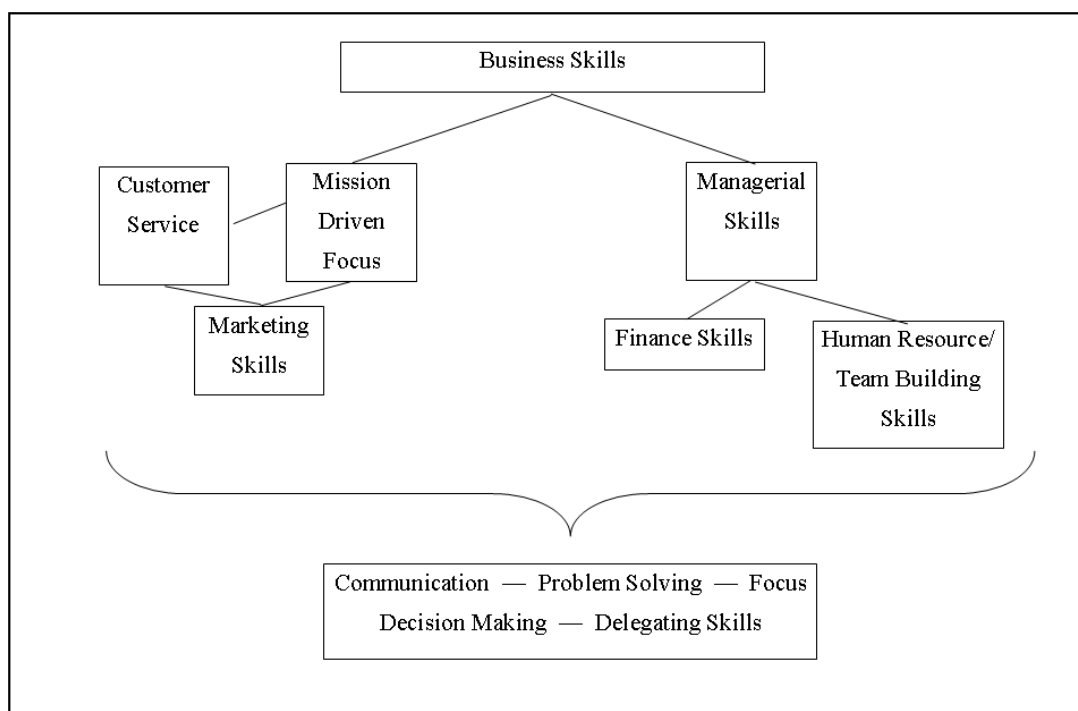
Teacher One's recorded interview was approximately 50 minutes in duration; Teacher Two's recorded interview was approximately 20 minutes. The two high school teachers participated in separate interviews. They were chosen based on availability. Teacher One, Ms. Fern is a veteran science teacher with a variety of professional experiences both in education and other sectors related to the field of science. Her undergraduate and master degrees are in the field of chemistry. Prior to joining LCS, she worked for a community college as a teacher and with businesses and a government agency as a chemist. After taking time off to raise her children, she began teaching high school at LCS in 2007. At the time of the interview she taught chemistry, physics, and AP chemistry. In her nine years of tenure at LCS, she taught a variety of high school science classes, was involved in clubs, and coached the swim team. She was an active member of the community and spoke very frankly about the community, her profession, her family, and the leadership of LCS. Teacher Two, Ms. House had been teaching for four years at LCS. She received her undergraduate degree in psychology from a local state university. After graduation she traveled and worked outside the United States for several years. Upon returning to the area, she earned her teaching certification and joined LCS as an English teacher. Her teaching experience included one year of middle school English and three years as the high school English and Yearbook teacher. As members of

the small-knit community, both teachers were familiar to LCS and the leadership prior to joining the staff. The teachers answered the interview protocol questions from their unique perspectives.

Upon completion of the interviews and observations, the data revealed definite leadership themes which will be discussed in the following section. Information from the leader's interview was supported by the teacher interviews and site observations. Two broad themes emerged from the analysis of interview responses and observations; moreover, within the two major skill areas additional skills and characteristics were evident.

#### 4.2.4 Leadership Themes, Skills of a Businessman

Mr. Marvin's leadership style is self-reported as that of a businessman. Two distinct leadership skill themes emerged: mission driven focus and managerial skills. A hierarchical representation of leadership themes and categories identified in the analysis are presented in *Figure 2*. Evidence of these skills as well as indication of characteristics such as empowering, supportive, and team builder will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.



*Figure 2.* Themes of leadership skills emerging from Case 1.

Mr. Marvin describes himself as a leader who has the skills to understand and operate a successful business: “I have a business degree. ... So there are a lot of non-educational decisions that have to be made. So I think that has come in very handy...” While Mr. Marvin acknowledges the importance for school leaders of having an understanding of education, he is able to delegate leadership in this area to members of his team, relying on the support of his staff to provide the background needed in academia. The teachers agree with his assessment, attributing success of the school to his background in business. Both teachers referred to Mr. Marvin’s ability to run a business throughout the interview; moreover, they correlated this leadership style as the reason for the school’s success. When asked about Mr. Marvin’s leadership style, Ms. House replied, “I know that his background is as a businessman and that does seem to play a

role in his leadership style. So he's...not that the school is run like a business totally but in a way it is."

Under the theme of business skills are two main categories: (a) mission driven focus and customer service including marketing skills and (b) managerial skills. Skills related to marketing fall neatly under the category of mission driven focus and customer service. Managerial skills include skills such as finance skills and human resource skills. Specific skills: communication skills, focus, decision making skills, and delegating skills are closely related to and woven throughout the two major categories. The relationship between communication, focus, decision making, and delegating are skills associated with the major skill categories. Mission driven focus and managerial are described more completely in the following sections.

#### 4.2.4.1 Mission Driven Focus

As presented in the literature review, successful organizations have a strong, well-communicated mission and vision which leads to the organization's culture. Mr. Marvin's passion for the school's mission which is written in the original school charter application was evident throughout the interview, apparent in artifacts, and witnessed during the site visit. LCS's mission was clearly displayed throughout the K-12 school. Teachers indicated the expectation of providing a rigorous, college-prep curriculum.

The focus on the mission was evident in observations and interactions throughout the case study. The mission statement was displayed in the school buildings and prominently on the website. Language referring to or directly from the mission was used during the school tour and interviews, and the focus on college prep and service was noted during observations and discussions. Several examples of the focus on college



readiness were noted during the campus tour. Artifacts found through media and the internet and at the school site were observed. First, proudly displayed and pointed out in the high school hallway were individual photographs of the seniors with a list of the student's college interests. The college acceptance was listed above the student's photograph. Another example of the college preparatory mission was highlighted in the lower school by the administrative assistant giving the tour. She pointed out a display near a kindergarten room and casually relayed that discussion about going to college starts in kindergarten. She commented, "The conversation is not whether or not a student is going to college, but where he/she is going to college."

This public charter school's mission of service was also evident during the tour. A service requirement exists for all seniors. Older students were volunteering their time to work with younger students. A group of 20 students had just returned from Colorado for the National Park Leadership Day, a service-related venture.

In response to an interview question, "Tell me an event or outcome that would reflect your leadership?" (APPENDIX D), Mr. Marvin spoke about a yearly tradition, a school-wide day of service on Veteran's Day. Instead of celebrating Veteran's Day with a day off of school, the students and staff serve breakfast and perform for local Veterans as a way of thanking them for their service. The mission's college preparatory curriculum and community service was communicated throughout the school forming the school culture.

An important element to leading with mission and vision is the ability to communicate it to all constituents. Mr. Marvin's response to the question, "Tell me a little about your school." began: "We charted (wrote the original charter application) as a

college prep school. Our whole focus, from Kindergarten through 12th grade, is college prep. We do a lot of activities during the year including kindergarten all the way up to 12th grade to emphasize college. That is what we were founded as.” During multiple occasions, his unwavering determination to maintain the rigorous college preparation and service-focused mission was communicated, “So you can’t water down...what you are doing because that’s not fair to anybody, and you are not doing what you are chartered to do.” Responses from teacher questions and observations of the site supported the school-wide attention to the mission and vision.

#### 4.2.4.2 Customer Service

While remaining true to the school’s mission, Mr. Marvin articulated a strong belief in offering and delivering strong customer service. He clearly communicated his belief in providing students and families with a high-quality education and appropriate responses to their wants and needs. Mr. Marvin discussed the school’s mission related to customer service:

I really believe that, number one, our college prep philosophy. I think the populations are wanting that, demanding that, requiring that. And I also believe that our whole admin team, teaching staff, everybody has bought into customer service. We realize, I think charter schools have to realize that our students aren’t here because they live next door or live in the neighborhood. We have to give them a reason every day to come to our school, stay in our school. And I think that we have been able to provide them ah, a great product and ah I feel like that is probably the biggest reason.

Public charter schools are schools of choice. It is the school’s job to entice families to choose to apply and attend. A strong vision and mission statement along with the focus on customer service are reflected in Mr. Marvin’s leadership. He attributes these skills to his professional experience and education in business. He clearly communicates this belief and expectation to teachers and staff.

During the interview when asked how staff and teachers would describe his leadership, Mr. Marvin responded with similar scenarios about excellent customer service. He believes he clearly communicates the importance of treating the parents like customers through the use of good customer service skills.

I think they all would say that, that they understand that I treat our students and families as customers, and I expect them to, umm, to do the same, and that's basically the philosophy in our school. They know that if a parent emails or calls, that they need to respond within 24 hours. You will probably see this all day. If somebody comes in, I want my staff to make themselves available and don't say, you need to make an appointment. I think that is me coming from the business world. I realize how important customers are... That is truly what our families are.

The teacher interview as well as observations and discussions with other staff echoed the expectation for staff and faculty to provide excellent customer service to students and families. While teachers believe that while Mr. Marvin expects teachers and staff to treat families respectfully, the mission is not compromised nor is the teachers' professional opinion. Ms. House shared a situation where parents were upset about a summer reading book they felt was controversial. While Mr. Marvin supported her decision, he asked her to communicate with the parents about the choice; furthermore, he encouraged her to think about whether it was essential to continue using the specific book in the future if another, less controversial book would meet the objective. She jokingly recalled his statement, "I'm not a book burner either, but we could also not shoot ourselves in the foot." Her description of Mr. Marvin's leadership was: "Supportive, reasonable, but also still being that person who is thinking, 'When you assign something, you are a representative of the school and ...if we can be accommodating, let's do it.'"

#### 4.2.4.3 Marketing Skills

A skill closely tied to mission driven focus and customer service is marketing skills. Through marketing, Mr. Marvin clearly articulated the mission and the school wide focus on student and family. Mr. Marvin credited the school's success especially in the formative stages to the marketing of the school: "And I think that has come in very handy in the formative stages when we were constantly trying to recruit and retain families." When asked a question about the important skills for new charter school leaders, he refers to marketing: "I think it's just so important that, that new leaders realize that you gotta sell your school, and especially as you're just first starting. You can have the passion, the idea. You can have the most successful education plan in the world, but...you gotta sell it. You gotta have your staff buy into it. And they go out and sell it."

Mr. Marvin believes in the importance of the school's mission, the quality of his faculty, and staff; however, those alone won't "fill the empty seats." The teachers interviewed understand and share Mr. Marvin's focus on marketing. Ms. Fern's response to factors related to the school's success reflect the importance of marketing: "The marketing, the quality of the material out there with our school logo on it. He saw the value in that. He knew not to, you know, go with the lowest bidder on some of that stuff." Later in the interview she noted, "He didn't hesitate to look at other schools. He didn't hesitate to invite people in. And you know, "Look at our school." And see what's what. ...I think ... very, very smart leadership."

Ms. House voiced a similar opinion, "It means about public perception, that sort of thing matters. It matters that our logo is on everything that goes out because it's branding..."

Closely aligned with customer service skills are communication skills, the ability to listen and communicate effectively with those around you. While Mr. Marvin maintained a strong commitment to driving the school mission and customer service, he stressed the importance of communication between administration, teachers, and school families. He led with the mission of the school; however, he also gave constituents a voice, listening and weighing the information to make the final decision. Moreover, he compared charter schools to businesses as indicated from his response to a question concerning the primary reason behind the school's success. According to this data, in LCS's case study, to be a successful and sustained charter leader, essential skills include business skills related to purposeful and targeted marketing skills that communicate a strong mission and customer service approach to education.

#### 4.2.4.4 Managerial Skills

Managerial skills are skills related to the “nuts and bolts” of running an organization e.g., finance, human resources, facilities. Two themes that fall under the category of managerial skills are human resources, the ability to hire and develop a team of professionals with expertise in a variety of areas and finance skills. Closely aligned with these themes are communication skills, delegating, decision making, and problem solving skills.

As discussed earlier, while Mr. Marvin sees himself as a very competent businessman; he understands the importance of hiring and developing a team of professionals who buy into the mission and vision of the school. He surrounds himself with experts in academia. When asked to describe attributes of his success as a leader, he

asserted, “the ability to surround myself with good competent people...giving them...authority and empowering them so they are not afraid to make decisions.”

Although Mr. Marvin did not specifically discuss skills related to recruiting and hiring, both teacher interviews referred to this leader’s human resource skills in the area of recruiting and hiring. As discussed earlier, charter schools in this state are able to look beyond licensure due to statewide charter school regulations. This allows a broader pool of candidates. Ms. Fern discussed several areas she felt Mr. Marvin was skillful: (a) “When (he) looks for people to hire, he doesn’t just look at them as a teacher. He looks at the whole person.” (b) “He knows my values are in line with him. He knows that I have other things to teach students besides just the academics... it’s just fascinating when you get all of us together. And our different experiences and how we blend together.” (c) he “does a really good job at selecting candidates that he feels will fit.” (d) “Yeah, so I think basically he surrounds himself with good people that are smart and then he lets them do their job.” Analysis of both Mr. Marvin and the teachers’ responses depict a leader who is skillful at recruiting and hiring individuals based on an understanding of the whole candidate and how that candidate “fits” with the team and the mission of the school.

Once hired, teachers have a clear understanding of the high expectations, support, and their value because of clear direct communication with Mr. Marvin. He spoke of his high expectations, the support, and autonomy he shares with his staff as well as the value he has for them. With clear expectations, Mr. Marvin hires and develops a team of unique professionals focused on the school mission. The teachers voiced their understanding and appreciation of Mr. Marvin’s communication:

...he definitely surrounds himself with smart people, finance, administrative, curriculum. He definitely is very visible. He takes part in a lot of activities. He

expects us to be at staff meetings. He expects us to do what we say we're gonna do. And he expects that we are going to be chastised if we don't do what we need to do. And I think that's valid. I wouldn't want it any other way. And so, it's very effective. I think he is a very good leader.

The second theme under the category of managerial skills is finance. Mr. Marvin discussed the importance of managing a budget. When asked about the biggest challenge for charter school leaders, he said: "I think budget... being able to fund a lot of the services that we feel are very important, both academic and extracurricular." He again referred to customer service and understanding what families want. He recognizes the need to focus on the mission and provide good customer service by including the services families want while maintaining a solid budget. Mr. Marvin's problem solving and decision making skills contributed to his ability to keep the school fiscally sound.

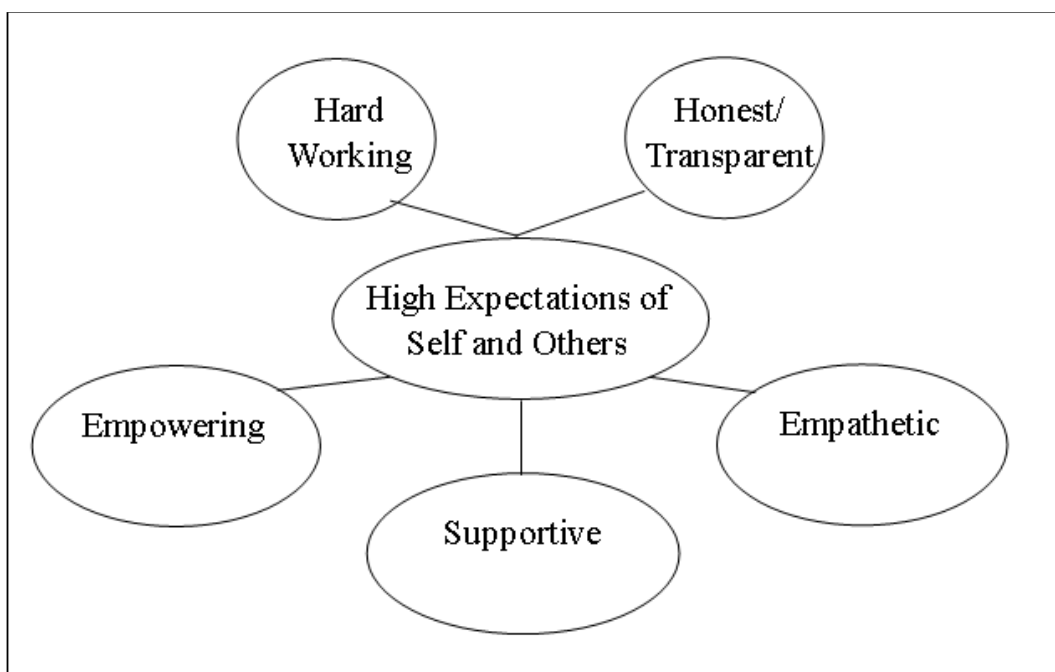
Both Ms. Fern and Ms. House recognize Mr. Marvin's skill in the area of finance as well. As Ms. House discussed customer service, she told of a situation where Mr. Marvin was able to network and negotiate with local food vendors to provide a lunch program that met the families' expectations at an affordable cost: "I've been impressed with even like the lunch program. They talk to local vendors, make a deal with them. The kids get a good deal on food they want to eat; we make a quarter per lunch so it's a source of revenue."

Ms. Fern discussed Mr. Marvin's background in business and, in her opinion, the unfounded concern some had with his lack of experience in academics:

He knew... he was very focused on finances, and that's a big part of our school. I know a lot of people kind of said, 'What is he thinking about, you know, with the signs and, you know, the fancy decorations when we had people coming in for Open House or the lobby's got the banner, whatever. What the heck is he thinking? Why is he spending money on that? Tee shirts, every year...' The marketing, the quality of the material out there with our school logo on it. He saw the value in that. He knew not to, you know, go with the lowest bidder on some of

that stuff. ...He connected with the finance people in town that were very, umm, well-founded and guided our resources so that we could invest in, you know, whatever and then have the money for buildings like this (referring to the new building).

To summarize, Mr. Marvin's leadership style is that of a business man. He leads by maintaining a clear mission and strong customer service policy. Mr. Marvin used his business skills to recruit, hire, and develop a team of educators to attract students, build programs, and grow a successful, sustained school. He successfully managed the schools human resource and finance needs with a clear focus on mission and customer service.



*Figure 3.* Leadership characteristics emerging from Case 1.

#### 4.2.4 Leadership Themes, Characteristics of a Businessman

*Figure 3*, above, depicts the leadership traits and characteristics described as a result of analysis of this case. Mr. Marvin's leadership was described as empowering and supportive. These characteristics emerged predominately in retelling of events and past experiences. When asked to describe his leadership style or philosophy, Mr. Marvin



described himself as empowering and supportive to others, "... I'm empowering them to be in leadership roles, I will allow them to make those decisions, and I will support those decisions so... I like to think that I am very inclusive." Data from the teacher interview support these same characteristics. When describing Mr. Marvin's leadership philosophy, Ms. Fern spoke about his high expectations of the school and faculty; however, she concluded with thoughts about his ability to empower and support:

And he does delegate, you know, like the discipline issues and the curriculum issues, he delegates it down, and he stands behind his teachers. In a parent meeting, I can expect that he'd have my back. So, um, it's not that I'm always right, but...he might say, "What happened here?" And, you know, he will stand behind us.

He sees strengths in others and empowers them to develop and use those strengths. While he consistently emphasized customer service and responding to families' needs and requests, he also referenced a strong sense of support for and empowerment of faculty and staff.

Honesty and transparency are also characteristics exemplified in the above quote. Students, families, constituents, and staff, through clear communication, knew where they stood with Mr. Marvin. While he listened to and supported these members of the school community, he also clearly communicated his high expectations. Mr. Marvin shared his expectations and was a strong role model by his own work ethic. Ms. Fern shared an example of a small daily act from her leader that, in her mind, created a school culture of a diligent team:

Oh yeah, he makes coffee, by the way. This is kind of interesting. As a leader, not many leaders I know get to work before we do and there cleaning coffee pots. At the beginning of the day, filling them up, making coffee. At the end of the day, maybe four o'clock, he is bringing them to the kitchen to get them washed.

His work ethic influenced the culture and focus of the community. This charter school is the largest in the state, has received above average school report card grades of the state for the past two years, and has a long wait list; however, Mr. Marvin is not complacent as a leader.

And um, being able to fund a lot of the services that we feel are very important, both academic and extracurricular. ...When, now that we are in existence, we don't face the same challenges of keeping our school full, those sorts of things, so now it's, obviously, not just maintaining, but continue to strive, to keep improving.

When asked about what makes the school successful, he refers to continuing to provide a great product. He conveyed an understanding of the diligence needed to attract and maintain clientele, the "business" of running a charter school where choice is involved. "We have to give them a reason every day to come to our school, stay in our school. And I think that we have been able to provide them ah, a great product and, ah, I feel like that is probably the biggest reason." Mr. Marvin seeks to understand the needs of the community and works hard to support and meet the high expectations he sets for himself and the school as a whole.

#### 4.2.6 Summary and Reflection for Case 1

Analysis of data from this intrinsic case study which includes data from interviews, observations, and archival data indicates a correlation between a successful, sustained school and its leader's skills and characteristics. Some very specific skills and characteristics emerged including: leading with clarity of mission, customer service, marketing, and managerial skills. While understanding his strengths, he was aware of his knowledge gaps and was able to delegate leadership responsibilities appropriately to assure strong instructional leadership as well.

This leader is described as one who leads with a focus on mission and customer service. As discussed in the literature review, prior research highlights the importance of leading with a mission and vision as an essential correlative to effective and successful schools (Lezotte, 1979; Leithwood, et al., 2008). Blitz (2011) introduces the tense between multiple accountability demands and market-based (customer service) accountability. Mr. Marvin seemed to lead with a good balance between these demands while successfully marketing the school.

Mr. Marvin displayed strong managerial skills as well as leadership characteristics that empower and support constituents of the charter school community. Mr. Marvin's assessment of his leadership skills and characteristics were supported and replicated throughout the case. His ability to recognize his strengths as a businessman and the need to delegate and depend on instructional leaders supports the relationship between instructional and managerial leadership needs of public charter schools identified by prior research (Blitz, 2011; Carpenter & Peak, 2013).

Public charter schools are driven by their charter agreement between the public charter school's board of directors and the state. A large part of this agreement is a clearly defined mission and a plan to achieve that mission. In summary these results indicate that Mr. Marvin sees his school's success driven by the ability to follow the standards of their college-preparatory mission through clear communication of the expectations to all constituents, students, families, and school personnel. However, to ensure actualization of mission, Mr. Marvin's managerial skills are paramount. Maintaining a strong financial base and building an effective supported team are

necessary for the success and survival of this public charter school. The results in this section describe a successful, sustained public charter school leader.

### 4.3 Case 2, James Moore, Redwood Classical School

#### 4.3.1 Background Information

The history behind Redwood Classical School is a family story. The Moore family originally moved to the area with the goal of homeschooling their children; however, they found other members of the local community, many of which were homeschooled families, voiced a need for a college preparatory school. This prompted Redwood Classic School's mission. The original charter for RCS was co-written by Mr. Moore and his wife in 1998 with the following mission: "...to achieve high academic results in secondary grade levels through the classical curriculum approach to academics. The primary goal is to give students the foundation necessary to improve and to expand learning opportunities" (Charter School Application, 1998). As will be discussed later in this section, the mission changed slightly as the charter school grew and added additional grade levels; however, the basic rigorous, classical philosophy remains consistent.

The original charter was written for grades 8 through 12. Mr. and Mrs. Moore wrote the charter based on the belief that a classical education with a rigorous curriculum was necessary for college preparation. A classical curriculum, originating from the ancient Greeks and Romans, continues to be the focus of academics in this public charter upper school (grades 9-12). "Employing the tools of grammar, logic and rhetoric, as developmentally appropriate" is the basis of academics in middle and high schools (North Carolina Education Alliance, 2016). The mission and vision which changed with the addition of lower grades will be revisited later in this section. The topic of the next

section describes the evolution of this public charter school as grade levels were added and the population grew.

RCS, a K-12 public charter school has two campuses, a K-5 campus (grammar school) and 6-12 campus (middle and high school), located approximately fifteen minutes apart in a rural county. The original charter application for grades 8 through 12 was written in 1998; however, due to community demand, middle grades were added to the application early in the process. The public charter school opened the following year for grades 7 through 9. The RCS added grades 6 and 10 in 2000; inclusion of grades 11 and 12 followed in the next two years with the first class of seniors graduating in 2003.

The campus opened in its first building, an older school building which belonged to the school district at the time. A state regulation mandates school districts lease, rent-free, unused district buildings to public charter schools (NC G. S. § 115C-218.35). According to Mr. Moore, the former district building was in great disrepair when they acquired it from the school district, and the acquisition of the property was not an easy one. Mr. Moore rallied a group of involved parents and community members to repair much of the building the summer prior to the school's opening in 1999. This building, along with several additions including seven modular buildings, continues to house the middle and high school students.

As the middle and high school grew to approximately 400 students, the academic community observed students who entered grade 6 were unevenly prepared for the rigorous middle school curriculum. After discussion, an extension of the charter to include grades kindergarten through 12 was written; in August 2007, the grammar school (K-5) opened a few miles away from the middle/high school campus. The grammar

school was designed and built under the guidance of the TEAM Challenge Foundation Academy (TeamCFA), a national network of public charter schools. RCS is a member a TeamCFA. The not-for-profit, philanthropic organization, TeamCFA, will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The grammar school filled quickly bringing the total number of students from 450 to 1,100 in the 2007-2008 school year.

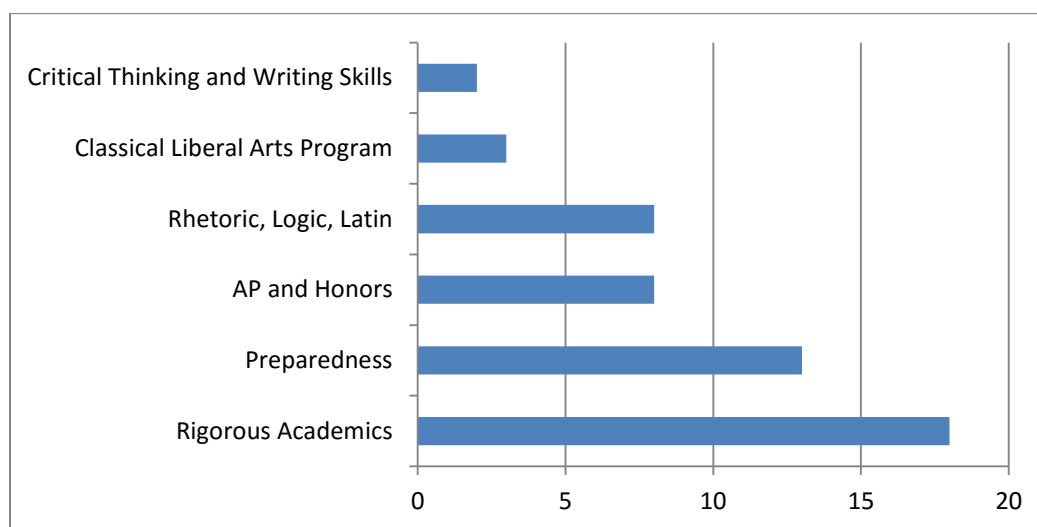
Because of the needs of the community, RCS grew rapidly; however, the focus on a rigorous, college-preparatory, classical curriculum remained integral to the community. Focus on that mission that continues today. After the original charter expansion was written requesting a K-5 school to be added, the expansion was approved from the original 6-12 written charter to K-12. Staying with the classical curriculum, the grammar school uses a similarly focused curriculum; the Core Knowledge Sequence by E.D. Hirsh is offered by the TEAM Challenge Foundation Academy (TeamCFA). With the schools growth to include grades kindergarten through 12, the mission has remained very similar:

Building upon the foundation of the Core Knowledge Sequence, Redwood Classical Academy (pseudonym): A Challenge Foundation Academy partners with families to educate students in grades K-12 in the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, thus graduating thoughtful, articulate young adults who are prepared for college and for a lifetime of citizenship and active intellectual inquiry (School Website).

The mission is apparent in the charter school's name, the classroom instruction, found in artifacts such as media reports and the website, and displayed throughout the school. The school's mascot, the gryphon, a classical mythical creature usually having a body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle, symbolizes the classical curriculum (Retrieved from Dictionary.com). Throughout interviews with leaders and teachers, the importance of adhering to the rigorous college preparation program and classical curriculum emerged. Mr. Lane, a high school Latin teacher and Dean of Students shared

that his interest in the school was sparked when he read the job description; the term “Classical” in the school’s name led him to apply for the teaching position. The college preparatory mission was displayed with equal importance. Prominently displayed outside the administrative offices were plaques entitled, the “700 Club.” Mr. Moore made a point to explain that the names of students who, beginning with the first graduating class, received math and verbal Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) scores of greater than 1,100 or American College Test (ACT) scores over 30.

The website testimonial page contains over thirty emails from former students and parents crediting the school for its classical curriculum and strong preparation for college (School Website, Testimonial, 2016). *Figure 4* highlights some of the statements and reference frequency gathered through analysis of the comments.



*Figure 4.* Occurrences of topics emerging from website testimonials, October, 2016.

Rigorous academics, preparedness, and Advanced Placement and Honor classes influence the quality of a college preparation program. The majority of testimonials were written by parents, grandparents, and former students. One testimonial was signed by members of a

visiting team of educators from New Jersey who, after visiting, planned to modify their school's current curriculum to include the classical liberal arts program. In addition to the testimonial page, lists of colleges attended by graduates of RCS, AP courses, and references to accolades given to the school for its high test scores and high school rankings are also highlighted artifacts on the charter's website. During interviews, school tours, and activities in the community, this same rigorous classical college preparatory mission was clearly evident. The mission shaped the culture and the community's relationship with the public charter school.

A discussion of the demographics and economic situation in the area explains the rapid growth at RCS while the population in county schools has decreased. There are currently 1,300 students in grades K-12. The student population in the region is declining according to Mr. Moore, and the economy has been on a downslide because of the fall of textiles production in the area. Shortly after the school's charter was granted in 1998, a number of local mills and factories closed. Many of the residents lost jobs; some having to relocate. The county is now known predominately for its small town, tourist attractions in the foothills of the state. The future for the majority for students is no longer to work in the textile industry but to continue their post-secondary education.

According to NCDPI(2015), the demographics of RCS are similar to the county as a whole. (See Table 5). RCS's ELL population is similar to the area; both are very low, 1% and 2%, respectively. The County School District is slightly more racially diverse with 74% reporting "white," while 82% of RCS student population identify as "white." The majority of students live in the local county and one adjoining county; however, students attend from a total of eight counties. There is currently a wait list. Mr. Moore



noted that while the population of RCS has grown steadily since its inception, the number of students in the traditional public district schools has dropped dramatically. During his interview Mr. Moore reported, “As we have grown in (County) from 120 students in 1999 to 1,300 students, the local school system’s population has gone from 11,500 to 8,500 students in the same period.” He continued to say, “...that still is about 20% of the school-aged population that have left because of economics.”

Table 5

*RCS and County Demographics Percentages, 2014-2015*

	Total ADM <sup>1</sup>	English Language Learners	Race			
			Other	Black	Hispanic	White
Redwood Classical School	1,278	1%	8%	7%	6%	82%
County School District	8,168	2%	7%	12%	7%	74%

<sup>1</sup>Average Daily Membership

According to Mr. Moore, the region’s traditional public schools, due to the economic conditions in the area, historically focused on educating the students who left formal education at a young age to work in the mills and furniture factories, rather than to attend college. He was quick to point out that this was not a fault of the traditional public school system. This mindset of the community had been the same for 60 years; however, the needs of the community changed. In the early to mid-1990’s, there was a growing population who showed a greater interest in college preparatory high schools. As the mills and furniture factories continued to close during the 1990’s, more families sought a college preparatory high school. Mr. Moore summarized the school’s growth and positive

impact on the community, “So, you know, our timing was very fortunate and filled a great niche and need for the community.”

#### 4.3.1.1 TeamCFA

TeamCFA is a philanthropic support organization originally founded in 1988 as a charitable trust to school choice initiatives. Since the inception of charter schools in 1991, TeamCFA turned its focus to support of charter schools, a focus on “charter schools that ensure high academic standards and championing free-market principles to create efficient, effective schools” (TeamCFA, 2016). According to the TeamCFA website, there are currently 15 public charter school members in Southeast, Southwest, and Midwest states in the United States.

TeamCFA seeks to promote best practices in education by providing curriculum (*Core Knowledge Sequence*), nationally normed testing (*Northwest Evaluation Association’s Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test*), and other supports to charter schools. The foundation provides oversight and guidance and financial support in the form of grants. Start up or conversion public charter schools can apply to become a member of TeamCFA.

#### 4.3.2 Site Visit and Interviews: The Campus and the Community

The second case study included a visit to Redwood Classical School which took place in late September, approximately one month after the start of the 2016-2017 school year. The researcher arrived at the middle and high school campus in the early morning to complete the site observations and teacher interviews. The school was located on a winding country road, and although very clean and orderly, it was older and well-used. A statue of the school mascot, a gryphon, was displayed in the front parking lot. Football

and baseball fields were visible beyond the bus parking lot. Students walked from building to building in their RCS uniforms. It was noted in the observation that the students were very friendly and orderly. The administrative staff was also friendly and seemed to know all the students well. The atmosphere was welcoming and family-like.

The site visit included a community ceremony at a local community college where state and local politicians met to disperse grants to local organizations. During the fifteen minute drive to the community college, Mr. Moore talked about the difficulties charter schools have due to negative media and public misconceptions. He went on to say how important it is to attend events and be involved in the community in an effort to build relationship. Although his first desire is to be on campus where he is consistently “on the go” working with students, teachers, and other administrators, he understands the importance of representing the school in the community and building bridges. While at the event Mr. Moore introduced me to a number of politicians and educators from the state. Mr. Moore appeared to be well-known, respected, and active in the community. In addition, he is a member of state-level charter school committees, such as the charter school advisory board. Through discussions, it was evident that while Mr. Moore understands the necessity of being involved in the “politics” of charter school education, his focus and passion is with RCS, his school community, and his students’ success and well-being.

### 4.3.3 Site Visit and Interviews: The Interviewees

As part of the visit, the researcher interviewed Mr. Lane, a male Latin Teacher and Dean of Academics for the high school and Mr. Smith, a veteran teacher who currently taught high school English. The teachers were selected based on availability and experience at the school and prior to joining RCS. On the day of the site visit, Mr. Lane utilized a relief day from classes to observe and meet with teachers as Dean of Academics which allowed him time to meet with me. Mr. Smith had a planning period at the time of the interview. Other teachers shared insights throughout the day. The staff was eager to meet and talk about the school, its mission, the students, Mr. Moore, and their roles in the school.

Data from three formal interviews (two teachers and Mr. Moore) using the interview protocol (APPENDIX D and APPENDIX E) are included in this case study. Mr. Moore's recorded telephone interview occurred in July of 2016 prior to the beginning of the academic school year and the fall site visit. Although the telephone interview was approximately 30 minutes in duration, the site visit allowed for greater probing of some of the topics covered in the interview. Mr. Moore was engaged and, although, very busy both during the site visit and during the interview, provided a passionate account of the history of the school and his school community, and his personal and professional involvement in the school and community. His demeanor was caring, kind, and compassionate, comparable to a father figure or coach.

#### 4.3.3.1 The Leader

When Mr. Moore and his family moved to the small town in the 1990's from the northeast in hopes of homeschooling their seven children, he had recently retired as a

bank vice-president. He graduated from a small northeastern college where he played college football and received his MBA from a well-known northeastern university then started to raise a family in a nearby state. When his children were school-aged, he retired, and the family moved to the rural southwestern county. Their homeschool plans morphed into the fulfillment of the county's desire for a college preparatory public charter school. The Moore's used their knowledge of business and homeschooling practices to write a charter school application, were approved, and started the school. Neither has a degree in education nor a teaching license; however, Mr. Moore credits Mrs. Moore with having a strong foundation in education due to her experience homeschooling and network building with other homeschool families.

Mr. Moore and other interviewees support that Mr. Moore's educational background in business and prior experience in banking influenced his expertise in his ability to manage the business aspects and finances at RCS. These key factors in the successful operation and growth at RCS were evident; however, these managerial areas of leadership received a lesser emphasis during the interviews than skills related to building a school culture and team building. Mr. Moore was quick to share credit with others throughout the interview and site visit. He was humble, consistently positive, and was described by one teacher as a "cheerleader and coach." Mr. Lane, the Latin teacher and academic dean, credited Mr. Moore's college athletic career and attendance to a rigorous graduate school as factors that shaped him as the leader he is.

As previously discussed, the original founders of RCS continue to play major roles in the school. Mr. Moore, who wrote the business-related sections of the charter application, is the original headmaster and continues in that role. Mrs. Moore, who wrote

much of the original charter application related to academics, continues to teach in the middle school. During the site visit, the researcher was able to meet and talk with both although the focus of this study is on the leadership of Mr. Moore.

#### 4.3.3.2 The Teachers

Two male high school teachers were interviewed during the site visit. Each interview was completed within 30 minutes. Mr. Moore selected the teachers based on availability and experience at the school. Each is unique in his background experiences in the professional world and in education. Mr. Lane began his career at RCS in 2003 as a Latin teacher and added the duties of Dean of Academics in 2007. He moved to the small town with his wife and, due to his interest in Latin, was attracted to RCS's classical academic focus. During the interview his answers, although brief, supported themes introduced in my earlier interview with Mr. Moore. Mr. Lane was very knowledgeable about not only the middle and high school curriculum but also the grammar school's classical focus. He discussed the K-12 school's affiliation with TeamCFA, the grammar school's curriculum, *Core Knowledge Sequence*, and its developer, E.D. Hirsch.

The second teacher to be interviewed, Mr. Smith, an English teacher with prior experience in traditional public middle and high schools, has taught at RCS for seventeen years. While Mr. Lane was quick and to the point with his answers, Mr. Smith was openly animated, often answering questions by reminiscing about the past through stories and anecdotes. His vast background included middle and high school education both in rural and urban areas over 28 years. He received a Bachelor's Degree in English and later earned his teaching certification. He was a licensed experienced teacher when he was

hired by RCS. The teachers answered the interview protocol questions from very different perspectives.

The following section highlights the leadership themes and categories that emerge from the analysis of data from Mr. Moore's interview and the site observation with support from the other interviews and informal discussions with other school faculty.

#### 4.3.4 Leadership Themes, a Father-figure and Coach

When asked about his leadership philosophy or style, Mr. Moore directly stated his "servant-leader philosophy;" however, deeper and broader leadership themes emerged from data collected through the interviews, observations, and archival data. Mr. Moore's leadership characteristics were the focal point of this case. He was able to develop a schoolwide community culture through clarity of mission and as a role model able to build a team of teacher leaders. Characteristics such as stewardship, supportive, hardworking, and empowering are underlying traits enabling success. *Figure 5* depicts a graphic showing the complexity of skills and characteristics attributed to Mr. Moore's leadership. Mr. Moore's character traits permeated throughout many aspects of his leadership and helped shape the school's mission and culture. In *Figure 5* characteristics are the focal point at the center of leadership skills.

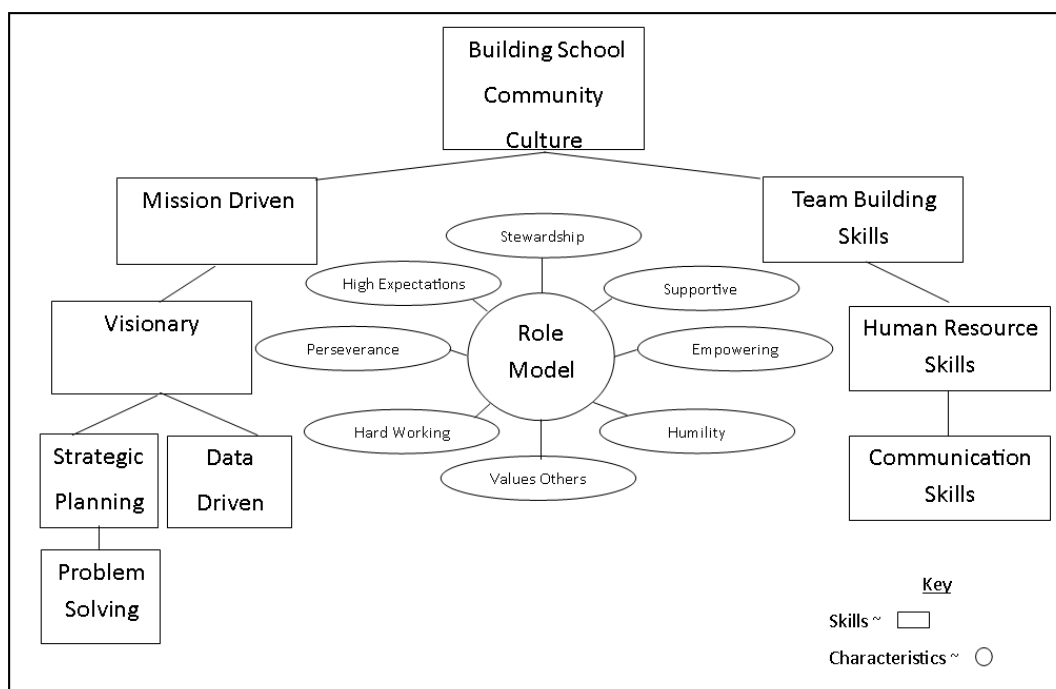


Figure 5. Case 2, Mr. Marvin's leadership skills and characteristics.

Evidence of a strong school community culture permeated throughout this case study. Mr. Moore's passion for the mission and his team including all the constituents of the school was apparent in his comments and from others affiliated with the school and community. As co-founder of the school, Mr. Moore developed a plan for a middle and high school with rigorous classical curriculum with the goal of students gaining the skills to be successful after graduation. Based on that mission, he developed a team of professionals and families who share that goal and are eager to work together.

Analysis of data from interviews with faculty and observations during the site visit supported the common view that Mr. Moore is a role model who built the school's culture through his own hard work, perseverance, and stewardship. While *Figure 5* depicts the hierarchy of skills, it also includes a group of characteristics that describe Mr. Moore's leadership traits. These characteristics are apparent throughout the results on



different levels. Following his lead, teachers feel like they are able to carry that into the classroom. The following quote speaks to Mr. Moore's traits and leadership style:

Like I say, his leadership style is the spearhead. We all deal with him personally and individually. We communicate directly with him. He is always accessible which I think is key. And as far as that goes on leadership, his leadership makes our leadership possible. He is the point of the spear, and we are driving it to the target by dint of our professional actions.

Two Major themes discussed in the following sections will better describe skills related to building school culture: mission driven focus and teambuilding. Vision, strategic planning, problem solving and data driven are skills supporting the category, mission driven. The category, teambuilding, is supported by human resource skills and communication skills. Under the theme, role model, fall characteristics: a high expectation of self and others, supportive, empowering, hard work, stewardship, perseverance, humility, and values others.

#### 4.3.4.1 Mission Driven Focus

When asked about the driving force behind the school's success, Mr. Lane attributed the success of RCS to clarity of mission: "And then with the clear mission—the classical curriculum in the high school. And so that clarity of mission brings the school great stability." Mr. Moore's passion for the mission and its ultimate influence on student success were illustrated in a number of interview responses and during informal discussions. As previously discussed, the mission and the results of adhering to the mission were evident throughout the school and publications including the website and news articles about the rigorous, classical, college-preparation curriculum. The culture of the school included the lived mission. When asked about his greatest reward as a public

charter school leader, Mr. Moore reflected on the fruition of the rigorous, classical, college-preparatory mission:

The students' success-- You know, knowing students, you know, when they were younger and how they struggled and fought through our program when they could have had easier options in other places graduated and went off to college, earned degrees um, and have done well. And, you know, again, you'll see a lot of that in the testimonial page if you want to follow up and look at some of those.

Redwood Classical School began with a mission and a small number of students housed in one building. Using skills of vision, strategic planning, problem solving, and data analysis, Mr. Moore and the charter school team has rapidly grown to include two campuses that serve 1,300 students. During our interview and informal discussions, Mr. Moore referenced “surveying the community” and “test results,” as he developed the vision of the school. He strategically planned to meet the needs of the community by focusing on the school’s mission, community needs, and academic rigor. When the community voiced a need for additional grade levels, Mr. Moore led the problem solving process to grow the school including an additional site. Even as we spoke, Mr. Moore shared his vision for a building a new high school building in the future.

#### 4.3.4.2 Team Building

In his accounts of events, Mr. Moore humbly acknowledged others such as Mrs. Moore, for their expertise in academic matters. During the interview and other conversations, Mr. Moore seldom took credit for the school’s success. He often used the word “we” instead of “I,” when asked about accomplishments and successes. It was evident that Mr. Moore was passionate about his team, the school, its mission, and the school community. At one point in the interview, Mr. Moore described himself, “I’m just a worker bee, and I just feel like I serve others.” He subtly credited his team for many of

the school's successes. Themes about skills were gathered from data often reported indirectly through stories and descriptions of events and school success.

Skills such as human resources and communication relate to the culture of a team working together to drive the mission of the school. An example of Mr. Moore's reference to human resource skills is evident in the following quote in response to a question about the factors contributing to the schools success:

I was very fortunate to hire and surround myself with very capable and competent people that married into the mission. And I, I think that's a crucial part of the success. We were able to hire folks who really believe that we were meeting a very important need in this community, not only for college-prep, but also for classical education.

Mr. Moore frequently referred to the importance of hiring the right people to build a culture focused on the mission and vision of the school. Moreover, he related the importance of hiring the right people, delegating responsibilities, communicating with the teachers as professionals, and supporting them to best meet the needs of the students. Each skills theme related to the ultimate goal of developing the best program for the students and community.

Directly related to the managerial aspect of human resource skills are hiring and developing staff. Mr. Moore discussed the importance of hiring and developing a well-qualified team that drives the school's mission. In this small rural community hiring teachers was a challenge because of the poor economic conditions in the area. At the time of the interview, Mr. Moore discussed how stressful the summer had been as he recruited teachers. Because of the economic conditions in the area, many people relocate to larger cities for employment.

#### 4.3.4.2 Human Resource Skills.

Results of from all areas of the case study revealed the emphasis needed for strong skills in the area of human resources, particularly hiring and placing and developing personnel. During the site visit Mr. Moore discussed an email he had just received. He was informed that a teacher would be leaving because her husband found a new job on the other side of the state. While teacher turnover due to economics was an issue, the teachers appeared to be passionate about their profession and the mission of the school. Charter school policy allows for flexibility in hiring teachers; not all hires are licensed certified teachers. Mr. Moore introduced me to a number of teachers and leaders in the school who joined the school from a variety of backgrounds such as a retired principal who was a dean of students and a football coach who also retired from a traditional public school before joining the RCS community. While not all teachers were licensed, they all shared the same college-preparatory classical mission and vision.

#### 4.3.4.4. Communication Skills

Mr. Moore, although consistently businesslike, was very open and communicative. Mr. Moore's enthusiasm for verbal communication and working with his faculty created a school culture where the faculty and staff valued working together, teamwork. The following quote summarized Mr. Marvin's thoughts on open and comfortable lines of communication: "Working with a great staff of professionals, I mean—I look forward to coming to work every day. We have great intellectual conversation about how to do things that we do, better. So we have a great camaraderie among staff." While being very approachable and open to dialogue, Mr. Moore was also able to communicate effectively in difficult situations: "I take a lot of pride in, in sitting

down and being able to talk through, in a very positive way, good, bad and ugly with staff and teachers;” and “I have an open-door policy that my staff members are very comfortable talking to me about any situation.” Faculty and staff appeared very comfortable and open during the site visit. Frequently, Mr. Moore would stop and chat with students. The atmosphere was open and family-like. Mr. Smith, the English teacher, shared similar thoughts on communication when asked about the teacher mentor program, “We like to communicate really comfortably and closely without being overburdened by formality.”

#### 4.3.5 Leadership Themes, Characteristics of a Leader and Coach

Throughout the discussion about Mr. Moore’s leadership skills, characteristics of a supportive, empowering steward emerged. Although the topic of this dissertation is on successful, sustained leaders, Mr. Moore spoke humbly of his skills, but consistently focused on the talents and capabilities of his team:

I don’t think about what I do in terms of my leadership style, in terms of how I’ve gotten to where I am. I’m just a worker bee, and I just feel like I serve others. My job is to help others. I believe very much in the servant-leader philosophy...

When faculty and staff addressed the same topic, they referred to Mr. Moore as a role model who supported and empowered them as leaders. As discussed in the literature review, characteristics of the servant leader include: listening and reflecting, empathy, stewardship, commitment to growth of others, building culture and community (Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2004). These characteristics are also closely linked to Transformative Leadership Theory (Spears, 2004). Mr. Smith, the English teacher, described Mr. Moore’s leadership: “his leadership makes our leadership possible.” He added, “You know, this is...I’m here for you. You see what the needs of these kids are.

You know what the data is. You handle things according to professional best practices, and we'll carry this thing forward and James (pseudonym) is the same way.”

Mr. Moore's leadership characteristics drive the skills he, as a skilled business leader, uses to build a team of professionals and families focused on growing a public charter school in difficult economic and political conditions. His motivation for being a school leader is based on the success of his teachers and ultimately the success of his students. He seeks to positively influence and change society through a transformational approach to leadership. Mr. Moore addressed his pride about the positive affect RCS has had on the community:

Sadly a lot of kids would be left to the wayside if we were not around. And ah, I have no doubt that the school systems would be doing things very differently if we weren't around. So I do believe that it's made a difference in this community, and it would have been sad if we weren't here.

Mr. Lane, the Latin teacher and academic dean, echoes a similar sentiment:

Both from Mr. (Moore's) point of view and my work as academic dean is to look at the teacher as the professional in the classroom. So while we have a very clear focus and mission, the curriculum as well as a preference for the Socratic Method in the classroom whenever possible, we recognize the teacher as the professional in the classroom. So there is a variety of, you know, teaching styles and so on at this school. So it's not a scripted, we want the teacher to do this and then this on a given day. Certainly not. We give the teacher a lot of freedom initiative and so on.

In addition to supporting and empowering teachers, he holds high expectations and values their professional leadership in the classroom. These characteristics help to build this public charter school's culture.

#### 4.3.6 Summary and Reflection for Case 2

This public charter school leader has built a culture that encourages a team of educators focused on a mission developed to help the students become successful. Mr. Moore leads the team using his business leadership skills and his sense of stewardship to

empower and support his team. While he humbly takes little credit for his leadership skills, his staff and community credit him with being a strong coach-like leader who is the “spearhead” of the organization. In an interview about school leadership, Jim Collins, author of the book, *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap--and others don't*, discusses the value of the school leader who is described as humble and willful as a leader considered to be the highest level of leadership, Level 5 (Brosnan, 2015). Mr. Moore’s humility and willfulness as well as his selfless focus on the mission and its ultimate impacts for the students and community help form the school’s culture. The excerpt from the teacher interview below exemplifies the culture:

Mr. Lane: I would say he is like a coach who is cheering you on to excellence. So, I, he reminds me of a great tennis coach I had in high school... So when he comes into the classroom you know he’s there looking out for the good of the school but also looking out for your own excellence as a teacher.

Researcher: And does he offer suggestions if teachers are in need of help?

Mr. Lane: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely... But they are always made in a way that respects the dignity of the teacher.

Researcher: And is it that the (school) culture...is that the way other leaders and teachers treat each other as well?

Mr. Lane: Absolutely, absolutely.

Analysis of data indicates that while focusing on the charter’s mission and vision and building a team of educators, Mr. Moore maintains the role of coach and mentor for his staff. Coaching leadership is closely linked to Transformational Leadership Theory and is the topic of more recent studies (Chagnon, 2013). His skills in the area of verbal communication, planning, and problem solving, along with his sense of stewardship and

work ethic positively affect the success of his charter school. His passion for the success of his students and faculty is evident in his reflections on the school and its history.

#### 4.4 Case 3, Donna Keene, Fernwood Charter School

##### 4.4.1 Background Information

This final case study includes two telephone interviews with teachers, a site visit and leader interview. The site visit and leader interview took place in September immediately following the visit to RCS. The teacher interviews occurred prior to the site visit. While this case, in many aspects such as geographical location and demographics, is a sharp contrast to the first two public charter schools in this collective case study, one commonality is the academic rigor highlighted in the school mission. This section underscores the mission and vision of the school, its history, and the demographic make-up of the school. Contextual information about the site visit and interviews is included following the background information.

Fernwood Charter School's mission statement according to their website and other publications is:

to provide an environment that fosters and encourages high standards of academic achievement, creativity, technological sophistication, the love of learning, accountability, self-esteem and the development of good citizens. Through exceptional instruction, by highly skilled and qualified teachers; the highest possible student outcomes will be achieved (School Website).

During the site visit and interviews, the mission statement which was displayed in the school and on the website was indirectly referred to; however, the three founding pillars introduced by the chair of the board of directors and the founder of FCS frequently referred to these as the core of the school's philosophy. Consistency of traditional rigorous academics including direct instruction and high academic achievement was a theme running through all aspect of the school. In all grades, the clear, consistent,



rigorous curriculum was viewed as very important. According to public materials distributed by the school, the curriculum follows the state standards expanded with basic skills, complex analytic strategies, and non-cognitive abilities. Ms. Keene shared that the school has used the same textbooks (updated versions) since the school opened. She felt the consistency of curriculum and materials was essential for several reasons: (a) the programs are proven to be successful (b) consistency allows teachers to “develop their craft” and (c) the curriculum allows for data collection to remediate and group students for success. Ms. Keene stated:

We are kind of old-school here. We don’t jump on every curriculum bandwagon that goes by. Since our charter is written that K-5, we are going to be a primarily direct instruction curriculum, and direct instruction type of school - beyond updating editions we use the same reading book and the same math book we used since 1998.

The direct instruction method, as described by Mr. Keene, is a very structured, data-driven, teacher-directed form of instruction. Curriculum, instruction, and school beliefs are clearly described to families, teachers, and staff in school handbooks and other publications. The original charter was written for K-5; however, later, when middle and high schools were added the focus on rigorous, college-preparatory academics remained the same. Although in middle and high school direct instruction is not technically used, the focus remains.

Fernwood Charter School is located in the eastern part of North Carolina. The surrounding district is the largest in the state, and the school is located in a much more urban setting than the two other case studies. This public charter school is a year-around school that runs in tri-semester with blocks of nine weeks in class and three weeks off. Fernwood’s leader, Ms. Keene who worked for several years as a classroom teacher at

FCS prior to becoming the school's director, has a background in education, not business as do the other two participants in this study. Ms. Keene reported that she works very closely with the board of directors. One commonality in the three cases is that Ms. Keene has also been involved with her school since its early days. She joined the school as a teacher in the in 2001, three years after the opening of the school. After gaining two years of experience in the classroom at FCS, she was appointed director.

Ms. Keene is the director of the entire K-12 public charter school; however, her involvement with the 9 through 12 is mostly through oversight such as state compliance and services. Ms. Keene reported that there is another administrator that oversees the day-to-day operations of the high school. Ms. Keene divides most of her time between the K-2 campus and 3-8 campus but visits the 9-12 weekly. She is in regular communication and works closely with all administrators and the board of directors. Another difference in this case compared to the others is that the board of directors has a much stronger influence on the operations of the school. Three of the five original board of directors members who wrote the original charter application for the original grades in 1997 continue to serve on the board. Ms. Keene referred to the board chair as "her boss" on several occasions.

Fernwood Charter School opened its first school in July of 1998 with 160 kindergarten and first grade students. Within the year due to the number of applications and interest in the mission of the school, a second building on the same campus was built, and the school was expanded to a K-5. In 2002 a middle school was built, and in 2004 the high school building in another nearby location was constructed and opened to accommodate the classes moving up. In 2013, the school reached full capacity with

approximately 1,585 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. There are approximately 3,000 students on the wait list.

While the demographics of the school indicate a less diverse population when compared to the district as a whole, Ms. Keene noted that the demographics may be more similar to schools in the locality. In other words, because of the size of the district, the largest district in the state, which served 153,488 students in a massive geographic area at the time of data collection, it would be difficult to achieve the same level of diversity (NCDPI, 2016). Ms. Keene commented that FCS's demographics may be more comparable to the neighboring schools. Table 6 provides the demographic data for FCS the local district for the 2014-2015 school year based on NCDPI (2016) and NCES (2016). This table reflects research discussed in the literature review indicating the lack of diversity found in North Carolina public charter schools (Bifulco & Ladd, 2008).

Table 6

*FCS and County Demographics Percentages, 2014-2015*

	Total ADM <sup>1</sup>	English Language Learners*	Other	Race		
				Black	Hispanic	White
Fernwood Charter School	1,614	<1%	7%	5%	5%	83%
County School District	166,612	7%	12%	24%	17%	48%

*Note.* \*2013-2014 School Year; <sup>1</sup>Average Daily Membership

#### 4.4.2 Site Visit and Interviews: The Campus

At the time of the site visit, each of the three campuses, K-2 campus, 3-8 campus, and 9-12 campus reflected the highly structured and academic focus of the school's mission. First, this researcher met Ms. Keene at the 3-8 campus, later drove to toured the 9-12 building, and ended the day in the oldest and public charter school's first and oldest building which houses kindergarten through grade 2. The site visit occurred in mid-September; however, school had been in session since the third week of July, the start of FCS's school year. FCS is a yearlong school with school in session for nine weeks and break or "track out" for three weeks. The day of the site visit was the day before track-out. Early in the morning at the middle school which houses grades 3 through 8, the well-maintained areas in the parking area and around the school stood out. There was a group of students running (and walking) laps around the parking lot and school for physical education class. The students were polite and helpful. The school building was very secure, yet the openness of the students and teachers was evident.

Ms. Keene met the researcher in the front lobby and moved directly to her office for the leader interview. The site visit began with a nearly hour-long interview. Although Ms. Keene was obviously busy, she took time to share information and tell stories about her life, the students, staff, and the schools.

The site visit included the interview with Ms. Keene and a tour of the middle school followed by a visit to the high school, and ending with a visit to the lower school. During the lower school visit, a meeting to set up speech services for a kindergarten student was observed. Throughout the day, interactions between Ms. Keene and the staff, students, and teachers were observed. Two faculty interviews, a fourth grade teacher and

lower school administrator were conducted via the telephone prior to the visit in mid- and late- August. Both faculty members were forthcoming and thoughtful with their responses to the interview protocol questions. The following sections include contextual information about the interview participants.

#### 4.4.3 Site Visit and Interviews: The Interviewees

Ms. Keene's interview took place during the site visit while the supporting interviews were conducted by telephone prior to the site visit. Both supporting interviewees were selected by Ms. Keene based on longevity with the school and involvement in school activities.

##### 4.4.3.1 The Leader

Ms. Keene was very direct, self-assured, and confident when discussing her abilities, her beliefs, and the successes of the school. She described herself as a "hard-ass" who might be "blunt and sometimes a little crass;" however, throughout the interview and school site visit her passion for the students, staff, and overall success of the school was evident. Ms. Keene made a point to note her son attends the middle school. Data analysis is based on her answers to the interview question which focused on anecdotes she recalled about students and successes of graduates and current students. She was described by others as supportive, child-centered, and direct.

As all administrators in the school, Ms. Keene joined the school as a teacher. Prior to her tenure at FCS, her experience included three years teaching in a Title I school in a nearby county. She was hired by the chairman of the board of directors and worked as a fifth grade teacher for two years before becoming director of the school. The school was in its infancy when Ms. Keene joined the staff. Although Ms. Keene did not discuss

the leadership at FCS prior to her tenure as director, a teacher who has been at the school since its opening noted there was no real leadership, other than the board of directors, prior to Ms. Keene's appointment as director. "You know before she became an administrator, we didn't have an administrator at (FCS). I believe we went two, two years without an administrator, possibly three..."

Ms. Keene was not involved in the writing of the original application or the opening of the school; however, she joined early in the life of this public charter. During her first year of employment, the school consisted of two classrooms for each of the grades, kindergarten through seventh grade. Ms. Keene has been a member of the school community for over fifteen years and plays a major leadership role as executive director for grades kindergarten through twelve. As noted during the interview, Ms. Keene takes great pride and ownership in the growth and success of the school which grew from two classes in grades kindergarten through seven to its current enrollment of nearly 1,600 students.

Ms. Keene earned her Master's degree and principal's licensure followed by earning a special education certification. Ms. Keene's influence on the school is mostly in the areas of academics and instruction including human resources and teacher development. As with the other cases, Ms. Keene works directly with the administrators of the individual schools. She also works directly with the board of directors and relies on them for financial expertise and capital improvements and development. The influence of the chairman of the board of directors and the board itself is strong.

#### 4.4.3.2 The Teachers

The first supporting interview was with a former teacher and current assistant administrator in middle school, Ms. Stevens. She has been with FCS for eleven years, in the field of education for twelve years. She described her job as “kind of a jack of all trades.” She taught in FCS, became an administrator, and then received her license in school administration. All school administrators were experienced classroom teachers at FCS prior to moving into the role of administrator. During the interview Ms. Keene described Ms. Stevens’s induction into administration. Ms. Keene shares an office with each newly appointed administrator for the first year, modeling for and guiding them in this new role. Experience in a FCS classroom and intensive induction insure each administrator’s ability to perform his or her duties with consistency and professionalism outlined in the school’s philosophy according to Ms. Keene.

The second supporting interviewee, Ms. Michaels, has been a member of the faculty for 16 years, one year longer than Ms. Keene. Prior to her tenure at FCS, she taught for three years elsewhere. She is a regular education classroom teacher, teaching all subjects in fourth grade at FCS. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she coaches sports teams, as needed, leads yearbook club and mentors and coaches other teachers in both reading and math. When asked about her additional responsibilities Ms. Michaels laughingly said, “I am a mentor, a reading coach, a math coach—ah, I’m trying to think of what else. What they ask me to do, I say ‘Yes!’” Earlier in the interview, she mentioned that because of the 1-year contract, it is important to take on extra duties. Ms. Michael feels a strong sense of commitment and community in the school; she supports the mission, curriculum, and direct instruction method of instruction.

#### 4.4.4 Leadership Themes, Skills of a Teacher at Heart

While analysis of data illustrated a leadership style that is very different than the other two leaders, results consistently supported Ms. Keene's ability to lead by building a school culture based on the school mission (the three pillars) and vision. Her knowledge as an experienced educator enables her to work very closely with the board of directors to clearly and consistently build a community of educators who believe in and support the school's original charter. Ability to build and maintain a school culture and community focused on the school's mission and vision emerged as the over-riding theme of this case study and seemed to be consistent with the other cases. Ms. Stevens, former teacher and current middle school assistant administrator explained:

I think when you see—there's just a lot of consistency and movement towards the same goal. Getting everybody moving in the same direction. Um, and really keeping focused on growth and working with individual students and using best practices and fidelity to our curriculum and fidelity to our methods here. And really I think the biggest is the fact of that keeping touch with your roots—you know understanding where you come from as a school system—what our foundations are and holding true to those core values and those foundations.

Consistent with data obtained, *Figure 6* shows the categories of skills falling under three main leadership skill themes: a) human resource skills; b) knowledgeable, c) experienced educator with strong communication skills; and d) ability to work with the board of directors. Human resources include a variety of skills such as recruiting and teambuilding. *Figure 7* highlights characteristics that shape Ms. Keene's leadership style. Observations and interviews indicate that characteristics highlighted by clear, consistent, direct, and supportive leadership play a significant role in Ms. Keene's leadership style.



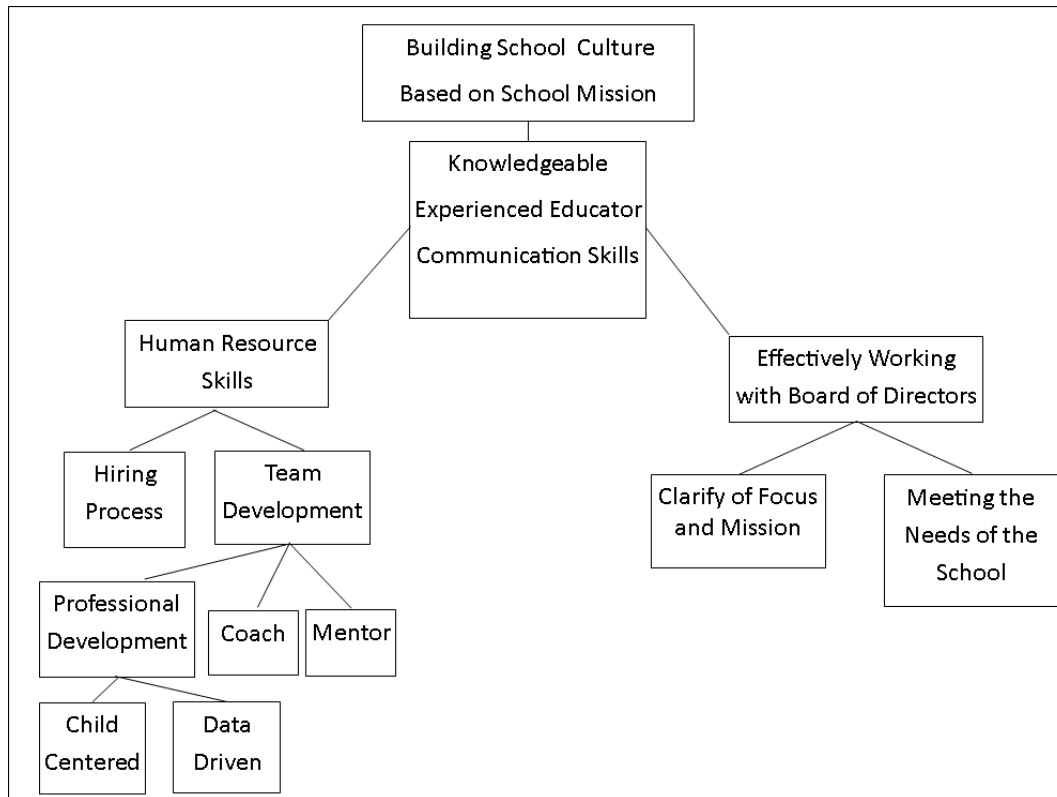


Figure 6. Ms. Keene's leadership themes emerging from Case 3.

Two key themes supported Ms. Keene's leadership as she built a school culture around the mission and vision of the original charter: a) her knowledge of education and academics, including understanding curriculum and its implementation and charter school policies and regulations as well as b) her ability to communicate with the board and to develop a team of professionals.

#### 4.4.4.1 Knowledgeable, Experienced Educator with Strong Communication Skills

During the interview, Ms. Keene highlighted her background. Prior to joining the faculty at FCS, she taught in a Title 1 school and had a variety of educational experiences that, as she states, helps her to better understand and lead her staff:

I've had some great experiences... But throughout my life, I have not lived a sheltered life. I've had some good experiences. I think allows me, I think, to lend sympathy and empathy to people in situations. It may not be that I am not going

to run down the hall and give you a hug, but I can understand your perspective. And I understand your perception is your reality.

She was originally hired by the chairman of the board of FCS as a fifth grade teacher.

After she was asked to become the director of the school, she earned her principal license and a certificate in special education. Ms. Keene believes that being knowledgeable or being able to “figure out where to get the information” is an asset to her leadership. In addition to knowing the curriculum, policies, and regulations, she also understands and appreciates the importance of having classroom experience and continues to spend time in classrooms and sharing some of the duties in the classroom. She reflects, “It keeps me in touch with the school.”

Ms. Keene, through her background knowledge and experience and her strong communication skills, is able to work effectively with the board of directors. The board plays a large role in the school’s direction. Ms. Keene speaks to her respectful relationship with the board of directors:

We have an excellent board. They’re very supportive, very supportive. But at the same time, they question a lot of stuff...and don’t always assume. So, I think if you come prepared, and having worked with them for so many years, I have an idea of what some of their questions may be or where their concerns may be. Um, and I can kind of cater my information to their needs. I think they have every right to be difficult. I think that’s their job.

Ms. Keene is well-known as a direct, clear, and consistent communicator by her faculty as well. She prides herself on using strong communication skills to work with her team, from the initial recruiting process to professional development. This clarity and consistency of mission is reflected throughout. When asked about reasons behind the school’s success, Ms. Keene’s illustrated her direct, consistent, and clear communication skills:

Couple of things, consistency, definitely consistency. We are kind of old-school here. We don't jump on every curriculum bandwagon that goes by. Since our charter is written that K-5 we are going to be a primarily direct instruction curriculum...and direct instruction type of school beyond updating editions we use the same reading book and the same math book we used since 1998...I think that allows teachers to develop their craft and be confident and feel like they know what they are doing. Along with that we recognize that teachers need a whole lot more than an observation or a walk-through. We have a cadre of coaches at our school that, um, including administrators. They go in and it's primarily just to help the teacher develop their craft. Someone told me years ago, 'There's two kinds of teachers...the can-do and the won't-do.' And um, I truly believe that. Those that can't do, you surely, you can get them there. Those that won't do—that's why we have annual contracts.

Interview data supports that the faculty appreciates her direct, no-nonsense approach to leadership and the support she provides her faculty, "Standards are set, and you either reach the standards and try to make the school a better place, or you leave the place."

Teacher turnover is low which, in part may reflect the intense recruitment and hiring process and induction and retention practices. Ms. Keene outlined these processes and practices in detail during the interview.

#### 4.4.4.2 Human Resources Skills

Ms. Keene's attributes much of the school's success to "consistency of staff." Ms. Michaels, the veteran fourth grade teacher echoes the importance of the quality of staff, "I have a lot of respect for her (Ms. Keene) and Mr. L. (BOD chair) and the process they have gone through to get us the strong teachers and actually kind of make sure that this school does sustain. It is a good place to work." The recruitment and hiring process as well as induction and retention practices include thorough presentation of the school's mission and culture with support for learning and developing the "craft of teaching" using the school's traditional direct instruction approach.

Ms. Keene described the recruitment and hiring process in detail during the interview. School administrators and a member of the board of directors who is head of human resources at a large local agency set up a two-part interview with each applicant who has previously had a face-to-face discussion with an internal recruiter. After the interviews are complete, the team gathers to discuss results of the interview process. All qualifying candidates are asked to do a day visit to the school in an effort to clearly present the culture of the school as Ms. Keene describes:

(We) just want to make sure, especially K-5 that you want to do direct instruction. You want to do explicit teaching. You know that because this is totally different than what a lot of schools are teaching...and you know, understand that, and realize that, and see what it looks like and what it manifests into. So we'll invite them to come out and spend some time.

A mix of seasoned teachers and recent graduates is selected. Teaching certification is not a necessity; however, according to Ms. Keene, about 80% to 90% of the teachers are certified. Ms. Keene also included: "We have seven or eight of our teachers here who are actually former students went to school here who have graduated. I think it's a little bit more of a testament of what we can do."

Focus on human resources skills does not end with the recruitment and hiring process. Ms. Keene understands the importance of professional development. During the interview, the topic of professional development was addressed by Ms. Keene:

So we offer a considerable amount of professional development figuring we are a smaller school. But those are going to be more group professional development... So we're very data driven K-8. And we just really look at what our needs are as a school and then provide that professional development. But at the same time we realize that we're a small school, we're not offering everything everybody needs. So if there are opportunities outside of school a teacher wants to attend, they're more than welcome. A teacher can submit, the school will, you know, provide for that.

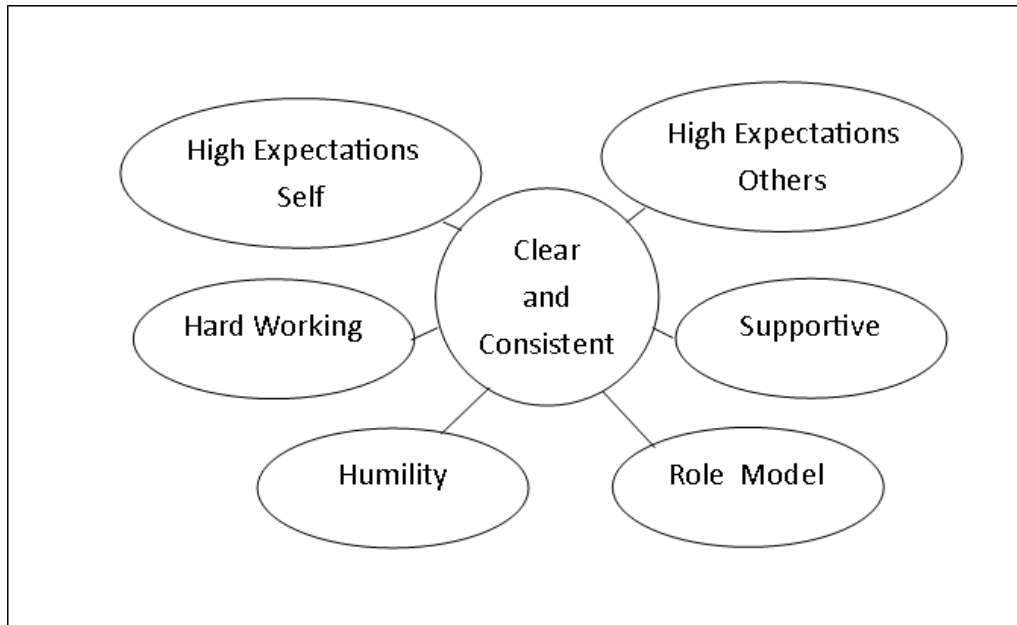
In addition to professional development, coaching and mentoring programs play a major role in developing the culture of the school. Coaching and mentoring by administration and fellow teachers allows for teachers and administrators to consistently provide the school's mission. Ms. Keene describes the coaching program which is geared toward curriculum, "We have a cadre of coaches at our school that, um, including administrators. They go in and it's primarily just to help the teacher develop their craft." Earlier in the interview as we discussed leadership, Ms. Keene discussed the importance of her guidance as a teacher transitioned to an administrative role:

So (as) with all of our administrators...I moved her in my office. So when she became an administrator, we worked in the same office together...but I think that these teachers who transition to administrators need that day-in day-out training. You know, like (Ms. Stevens) has her license in school administration right now, but when she took the job she didn't. She needed that day-in, day-out training. I needed to make sure that I could guarantee that the efficiency and effectiveness that I had run the school with was going to be carried on with the next person. And the only way to do that is to be right there with them.

Professional development including coaching and mentoring focuses on the data-driven child-centered focus of the school. It is clear, based on discussion with all participants and observations, the focus is on the child-centered rigorous traditional curriculum which is well-supported by the leadership. When asked to describe Ms. Keene's leadership style, Ms. Michaels, the fourth grade teacher described:

She's very direct, very child-centered. It, a lot of times, has to do with the needs of the child, not necessarily the wants of the teachers or parents. Its focus is child-center. It's refreshing. It's also, you know, it's the reason we're there. It matches very well with my philosophy of education. You know, we're trying to meet the needs of the child even when it's not convenient to us. Or, you know, the situation may be difficult some times to deal with. But, you know, she is very much direct, very... You always know exactly where you stand. You always know exactly what she is looking for. There's no gray area to interpret on your own. You are very clear on what the standard is and what you need to do to meet that standard.

Through recruitment and professional development, Ms. Keene supports the original mission of the board of directors to build a culture which is child-centered.



*Figure 7.* Ms. Keene's leadership characteristics emerging from Case 2.

#### 4.4.5 Leadership Themes, Characteristics of a Teacher at Heart

During the interview, I learned much about Ms. Keene's leadership traits and characteristics as she retold stories, voiced her passion about providing children with the skills they need to be successful, and spoke about her insistence that educating children is hard work that requires skill and knowledge. Jokingly, Ms. Keene said, "I am definitely known as a hard-ass. I completely understand that. I have some names that some people have likened me to like the Queen from the Game of Thrones. (laughs) White Witch of Narnia." Her faculty agree that she is direct, has high expectations of faculty and staff, and believes the team needs to put children and the school mission, first; however, they also are quick to add that she has high expectation of herself, supports the faculty and

staff, and assumes responsibility of any duty that she expects her team to take on. The team knows her expectations because of leadership's direct, clear, and consistent style. The team also knows the support they will receive if they communicate a need.

Ms. Michaels, the veteran fourth grade teacher discussed how the leadership and the child-centered, data-driven curriculum developed her as a professional. When asked to tell an event or outcome that would reflect Ms. Keene's leadership, Ms. Michaels spoke about how Ms. Keene's leadership affected her professionally. She reported that Ms. Keene helped her become a "more responsible teacher." She continued to address the influence Ms. Keene had on her and others on the team:

She knows the teachers, and she knows the parents and their needs so to speak. An uh, she knows the program. She's a coach. She's a mentor. All of these things that she expects everyone else to do she's done, ...it makes life easier because you can talk to her and she understands. She will definitely sit down, if I need to go in and talk with her, whether it be a professional or a personal issue, she will help you work through it so that you will be able to continue to do the best you can for these kids. It's just a very understanding, professional, just respectful relationship. I've never been in a situation, positive or negative, where I felt threatened. It was always, I felt supported and being given options that I can choose from as far as what's expected.

Ms. Keene, as a former teacher with a true understanding and passion for the school's mission, is a role model who expects great things from herself and her team. Those who buy into the mission and vision and the importance of a strong work ethic make up a team focused on the success of the students.

#### 4.4.6 Summary and Reflection for Case 3

This case, unlike the other two cases, highlights skills of a successful leader whose background is as an educator. Instructional leadership has been linked to school success (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Ms. Keene joined FCS as a teacher who believed in the mission and vision the board of directors wrote in the original charter. Her direct, clear,

and consistent approach to leadership has allowed her to build a team of educators who also believe in the mission and vision. This clarity of mission and focus on consistency of direction correlates with successful schools (Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Lezotte, 1979, 1992). Her knowledge and skills in the area of human resources enable her and the team to hire and train quality faculty and staff who often remain as professionals at FCS improving their “craft” and positively affecting the achievement of their students. Training in data-analysis and traditional curriculum are keys in the success of the instruction. Organizational skills, communication skills, and the ability to create a consistent and supportive culture focused on the board driven mission positively influenced the success of this sustained leader.

#### 4.5 Summary of Chapter 4 and Introduction to Chapter 5

Chapter 4 includes individual case study reports for Mr. Marvin, the business man; Mr. Moore, the coach; and Ms. Keene, the teacher at heart. The context and background of each case and analysis of data were reported. Leadership skills and characteristics were reported based on analysis of data from the leaders’ interviews, supporting faculty interviews, observations, and archival data.

Major themes describing skills and characteristics emerged for each leader. Mr. Marvin’s skills were directly related to his leadership style of a business man. Two major skill themes emerged: mission driven focus and managerial skills. Leadership characteristics include high expectations of self and other, hardworking, honest/transparent, empathetic, supportive, and empowering.

Mr. Moore’s leadership style could be compared to that of a coach. The description of his leadership skills includes two major themes: mission driven and team



building skills. Results also indicate that Mr. Moore's leadership characteristics play a major role in his leadership abilities: stewardship, high expectations, supportive, empowering, humility, hardworking, perseverance, and values others.

Results from the three cases provided a different point of view from a leader whose background was in education. Leadership skill themes from the study of Ms. Keene, the teacher at heart, drew heavily on her ability to build a school culture based on the school mission. The skill themes describe a knowledgeable experienced educator with strong communication skills with abilities in human resources skills and working with the board of directors. Leadership characteristics evident in the case are: clear and consistent, high expectation of self and others, hardworking, supportive, role model and humility.

In Chapter 5, limitations of the study, major themes and categories based on the cross-analysis, and implications for future leaders and possible areas for further research will be discussed. Chapter 5 will complete the conclusions for this research.

## CHAPTER 5: COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Introduction to Chapter 5

The number of charter schools is on the rise in North Carolina and across the nation. When public charter schools are successful, student achievement is positively affected (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Hays, 2013; Miller, 2011). When charter schools fail, student achievement is negatively affected (Helms, 2014). Leadership plays an essential role in the success of all schools (Edmonds, 1979; Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Lezotte, 1992; Robinson et al., 2009). Charter schools are unique public schools with a need for leaders who have specific skills and characteristics that impact the success and sustainability of the organization (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Hays, 2013; Miller, 2011). The purpose of this research is to describe skills and characteristics of sustained leaders in successful schools by providing a rich, thick description of lived experiences of three charter school leaders in North Carolina.

In this final chapter, limitations of the study, major themes discovered through cross-analysis of the cases, implications for charter school leaders, and potential future research are discussed. Based on a cross-analysis of the three case studies reported in Chapter 4, the research question is answered: What are skills and characteristics of sustained leaders serving in successful charter schools in North Carolina?

## 5.2 Limitations of the Study

The goal of this dissertation research is to address the audience of current and future leaders by providing a rich, thick description of the skills and characteristics of successful, sustained leaders. The themes introduced and discussed here may influence the pedagogical practices of current and future leaders who hope to achieve success as school leaders in this unique and autonomous role in charter schools.

This description is written in hopes of positively influencing leadership and ultimately student success. It is important to qualify the limitations of this study. This study "deals with a full variety of evidence--documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations" (Yin, 2003, p. 8). By collecting and analyzing multiple sources, triangulation allows for "establishing the construct validity and reliability" of the evidence (Yin, 2003, p. 97). Understanding the purpose and using data triangulation are efforts to limit researcher bias which is a potential issue for case study researchers (Yin, 2003). However, as with all qualitative research, bias is a potential limitation. This researcher used a reflective journal to help limit bias.

By providing data from three cases, this collective case study is better able to generalize themes across public charter schools in North Carolina. This study does not attempt to generalize to all populations; however, the goal is to "generalize to theoretical propositions," to "expand and generalize theories" (Yin, 2003, p. 10). As Merriam (1998) states, collective case studies exemplify "a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings" (p. 400). By discussing the broader themes that emerge through cross-analysis of case data, the aim is to expand and generalize

leadership theories unique to public charter school leadership and, possibly, other non-traditional school settings.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, due to the geographical limitation of the study, findings may reflect leadership only in North Carolina. While this is valid, results from this study support findings in previous studies in other states regarding charter school leadership. In a qualitative study for four schools conducted in a northeastern state of the United States with schools serving students who are at-risk for academic failure, some similar results were noted. Due to different state-level regulations and accountability measures, comparing public charter schools across states can present a challenge. Further analytic review of this and other studies may present more generalizable results.

Another issue limiting this study is lack of diversity of student population in one of the three charter schools. Only two of the three schools in the study had similar demographics for race that closely resembled those of the surrounding public school district. As discussed earlier, a lack of diversity in charter schools has been researched and is a topic of interest in North Carolina. The state's annual charter schools report to the State Board of Education discusses the need to increase racial diversity in North Carolina (Hinchcliffe, 2017).

A third possible limitation is the difficulty determining demographic data including an accurate measure of socio-economic standing of students in the schools due to the differences in regulations on nutrition programs in charter schools as compared to traditional public schools. It is difficult to assert that the skills and characteristics described here would benefit leaders of public charter schools with an at-risk population.

As discussed earlier in this report, a qualitative research study conducted by Hays (2013) found some similarities in leadership in successful urban charter schools with an at-risk population. While there are a limited number of studies identifying the effectiveness of leadership in public charter school, this study is the only study involving long-term leaders of well-established and successful public charter schools. It is clear that more research is needed in the area of public charter school leadership.

### 5.3 Cross-Case Analysis

Conducting cross-case analysis leads to greater “generalizations about what constitutes” skills and characteristics of sustained leaders in successful charter schools (Merriam, 1998, p.194.) By analyzing the data for “a unified description across cases” the hope is to develop themes and categories that “conceptualize data from all the cases” (Merriam, 1998, p.195). This cross-case analysis shows that three major themes for leadership are relevant to the three cases: a) developing culture driven by the original charter’s mission and vision; b) developing a team and c) maintaining a balance of effective instructional and managerial responsibilities. In each of these areas, many leadership traits were identified with several observed consistently in the cases of all three leaders; supportive, high expectations of self and others, empowering, hardworking, positive role model, and honest/transparent. These traits relate to several leadership theories relevant today particularly transformational and servant leadership (Burns, 1978; Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2004); however, they do not fall neatly into only one or two theoretical frameworks.

While each leader’s leadership style was unique: the businessman; the coach; the teacher; the skills and characteristics listed above are found across all cases. Leadership

styles seemed to match the mission and culture of each school. Style, in these cases, seemed less important than skills and traits that will be elaborated on in the following sections. These results of this study support, in part, results of previous limited research on charter school leadership (Blitz, 2011; Campbell et al., 2008; Carpenter & Peak, 2013; Goff et al., 2012; Hays, 2013). While this study supports previous research, the results of this dissertation indicate that in all cases, each leader led with an unwavering adherence to the mission and vision of the school's charter while building a collaborative team to meet the diverse and unique needs of an evolving public charter school. The following sections highlight the major themes from each leader's unique skill set.

#### 5.3.1.1 Focus on Building a Culture Driven by the Mission and Vision

Leadership's vision and focus on a clear mission has been the topic of research since the Edmunds and Lezzote's (1979, 1992) research which established the correlates of effective schools beginning in the 1970's in a response to concerns about public school education in the United States. More recently in an extensive international literature review of successful school leadership, Leithwood and colleagues (2008) suggest successful leaders build vision and set direction for the school community. Bolman and Deal (2008) posit that leading with mission and vision is one of the most important aspects of leadership.

The leader's ability to build and lead with a mission and vision may be more meaningful to charter schools. The original premise in the development of public charter schools included forming school based innovative ideas and clear direction for which the school was held accountable (Junge, 2012; Tryjankowski, 2012). Public charter schools' focus on innovative programs with clear mission lends itself to a greater emphasis on

establishing and maintaining a well-defined mission. Because each charter school's original application clearly defines its mission, its success and sustainability are dependent on how well that mission is implemented, developed, and sustained. As these charters grew and evolved, the leaders, with unwavering determination, effectively communicated the importance of and expectations for adhering to the mission and vision to all constituents of the school and community: administration, academic and custodial personnel, families, and local community. Despite obstacles, such as financial limitations, demands from constituents, accountability requirements, human resource issues, growth in population, and addition of grade levels, each of these leaders continued to drive the direction of school with its original mission and vision. This whole-community focus on mission develops a culture based on a common belief in the mission which was clearly indicated in the data.

Results of this collective case study support Carpenter and Peak's (2013) findings indicating charter principals see one of the primary functions of their leadership to be "building and moving the internal school community in a common direction" (p. 150). Each charter school in this case study had a unique mission. This research has been able to describe the leaders' ability to consistently communicate and lead guided by the school's mission and vision. The consistency of the focus on mission allows for faculty, families, and constituents to have a clear understanding of the purpose of the organization. This is much like the role of a superintendent of school districts; however, the leaders' focus on mission and vision is specific to a smaller population who has also chosen to become members of the school community and follow the same mission and direction. Because public charter schools are schools of choice, clearly communicating

and adhering to the mission is essential. The premise of public charter school development is that families choose a public charter school based on its mission and expect the mission to be carried out. Each leader communicated the school mission using his or her unique style with the salient aspect that mission and vision was clearly and consistently the driving element of the school community.

#### 5.3.1.1 The Businessman

Mr. Marvin's background in business led him to remain true to the school's original mission. While maintaining that the families are also customers who through marketing and good customer service skills must, without ever "watering down" the mission, be treated as customers. Faculty understood the importance of presenting a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum for students. They also knew that Mr. Marvin would support them in their efforts to develop the curriculum and strive to do what is best for students. However, when possible, families and students requests were honored. One teacher noted, "Supportive, reasonable, but also still being that person who is thinking, 'When you assign something, you are a representative of the school and let's not---if we can be accommodating, let's do it.'"

The school organization was run as a business with a focus on putting the families first; a culture of professionalism with high standards was built. Mr. Marvin used his straightforward business skills to attract the needed support from the community to create a well-maintained academic school environment that translated to all aspects for the school from the dress code, to the grounds, to service and the high academic achievement of the students.



#### 5.3.2.2 The Coach

Mr. Moore communicated his passion for the rigorous, classical mission through his role model approach to leadership. Teachers and constituents understood the mission which Mr. and Mrs. Moore wrote in the original charter and rewrote as the school expanded to include a grammar school. The classical curriculum is evident even in the school name, Redwood Classical School and artifacts such as the school mascot, the gryphon. Communicating the belief in the mission, the vision, and expectation that all educators share in the implementation of these was not as much of a mandate but the lived culture of the school. This leader was a visionary who lived the mission, and because of their respect for his example, others followed. There was a strong belief in serving the students and community by providing them the opportunity to succeed. Mr. Moore believed he served and supported his faculty and staff. The faculty believed they were able to lead in the classroom because he enabled them to lead. This created a team-like culture where each member of the team shared his or her talents with the community.

This leader, however, did not solely rely on his passion for the mission. His leadership also relied on problem solving and strategic planning based on analysis of data. He often spoke of surveying parents to determine the needs and wants of the community. The school held itself accountable to the school's rigorous classical academic curriculum, tracking student achievement based on standardized academic testing and other state measures.

### 5.3.1.3 The Teacher

Ms. Keene used her experience and academic and professional knowledge to teach her faculty the expectations of the school outlined by the public charter school's board of directors. Leading with the mission (three pillars) as a focus, her approach was to mentor and directly teach the methodology and pedagogy determined by the original board of directors. The teachers and administrators had an understanding of the mission, the direct teaching approach, and the general expectations upon which the school's culture was based. The sentiment was that through support and professional development the faculty and staff would cultivate the skills needed to carry out the rigorous direct instruction college-preparatory curriculum of the school. Those who did not buy into the high expectations the school culture demanded were expendable. This leadership style was direct and clear to the families and staff. Ms. Keene was respected for her direct, clear style of leadership, "She is very well respected within our walls. And I would even say in the community as well. She is very well known and respected."

The leader's style, however, was not solely authoritative. She was aware of the needs of her staff. She supported staff, both personally and professionally, in relationship to the school's mission, used data to assure student progress and success, and communicated directly with all constituents including the board of directors. Her leadership style held high expectations for others but even higher expectations of herself. She frequently discussed that she never would ask a faculty member to do something she would not do herself. A culture of professionalism and respect was developed in the school.

#### 5.3.1.4 Three Leadership Styles, One Focus

Relying on their strengths and unique styles, each leader successfully focused on building a culture based on his or her unwavering focus on the mission and vision written in the original charter. All aspects of the school and community focus on the mission and vision of the school. These leaders did not just talk about or display the mission but formed the culture and expectation of the team's schoolwide adherence to the mission throughout the history of the school's existence. The staff and faculty bought into the mission and developed it within each area of expertise. With this clarity, families and community members had an understanding and expectation when they were making a choice to become a member of the community. Because of the consistency throughout the school's evolution, those who supported the mission and vision become long-term members. Low teacher turnover, long student waitlists, and growth of these schools are evidence that supports the effects of the leaders' steadfast adherence to mission.

As discussed earlier, while these sustained public charter schools grew and evolved their missions remained consistent. Leithwood and colleagues (2008) report the importance of the leader's responsibility in a summary of international literature of school leadership. As each public charter school develops and grows into established and well-known entities, the leader's responsibility regarding the mission and vision needs to change (Leithwood et al., 2008). During the start-up years of a public charter school, developing and maintaining the clear focus for clarity and determining priorities and directing practices is an important practice. As the charter grows, due to outside influences, pressures to waiver from the mission can occur. Influences such as parental pressure, finances, political influence, and others may threaten the mission. Assuring that

ownership of the mission becomes widespread is the responsibility of the school leadership (Leithwood, et al., 2008).

According to results from Campbell and Gross (2008) comparing leadership needs of traditional principals versus public charter school, principals indicated greater challenges for charter school leaders including creating and supporting a mission and vision. Hays (2013), in a similar study of four schools in Boston, noted that all four schools were able to assure an “all-school adherence to leadership’s vision in the context of the school’s mission” (p. 37). This collective case study highlights the importance of the leaders’ roles in orchestrating this adherence despite the obstacles that may be faced. The excerpt below exemplifies one of the leader’s team leadership with the unwavering focus on mission and vision despite changes as the school grew:

I think when you see—there’s just a lot of consistency and movement toward the same goal. Getting everybody moving in the same direction...and really keeping focused on growth and working with individual students and using best practices and fidelity to our curriculum and fidelity to our methods here. And really I think the biggest is the fact of that keeping touch with your roots—you know understanding where you come from as a school system—what our foundations are and holding true to those core values and those foundations. I mean that’s something that a lotta times in education we are so quick to try to move away and move into something new and try something new and do something different. We have held true to who we are as a charter school and the foundation of our original charter, and she is a very, very large component of that and really staying the course and keeping pace with growing and shifting and changing while also rooting to what is foundationally what we are centered on.

In Chapter 2 issues influencing the sustainability of public charter schools are outlined in Table 2. Because of the many obstacles influencing public charter school success, responsiveness of leaders is essential to maintain a clear direction based on the mission. Table 7 highlights this responsiveness to contextualizing the mission from the three cases.

Table 7

<i>Examples of Leadership Responsiveness to Contextualizing Mission and Vision</i>	
Cases	Importance Maintaining Direction of Mission and Vision
Mr. Marvin, LCS	“And you need to stick to your mission...So you can’t water down what you are doing because that’s not fair to anybody and you are not doing what you are charted to do.”
Mr. Moore, RCS	“We held true to the mission of challenging students. We haven’t watered down our curriculum, and the results speak for themselves. The test scores, our SAT scores are near the top in the state in a very rural area that traditionally way underperforms in state.”
Ms. Keene, FCS	“We have held true to who we are as a charter school, and the foundation of our original charter and she is a very, very large component of that and really staying the course and keeping pace with growing and shifting and changing while also rooting to what is foundationally what we are centered on.”

Closely related to the ability to develop the school culture based on the school’s mission is the ability to develop a team. Team development involves human resource skills such as hiring and professional development as well as leadership traits such as being supportive, holding high expectations, and empowering others. The next section highlights skills and traits related to team development.

### 5.3.2 Focus On Team Building And Professional Development

School leaders influence school success as determined by student achievement in part due to their ability to build and develop a team of faculty and staff that is well-rounded and believes in the mission and vision of the school (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008). This study as well as prior research indicates that charter school leaders’ skills may have a greater impact in this area due to the differences in charter school policy, the complexity of governance, and unique missions of each charter school (Bickmore & Dowell, 2011; Campbell & Gross, 2008; Hays, 2013). Each leader

discussed their perception of the importance of building a team of educators who are aligned with the mission of the school.

Each leader recognized his or her strengths and limitations and the need to build a team with capabilities to fill the needs of the school. Each indicated the importance of building a well-rounded team through efforts in recruiting, hiring, and developing individuals who are a good fit and will best meet the needs of the school. Bolman and Deal (2003) explain the benefits of finding a "good fit" for both the organization and the individual: "individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy needed to succeed" (p. 137). While Mr. Marvin considers himself a skilled businessman, he points out the importance of "surround(ing) myself with good competent people and...use their expertise and advice." Ms. Keene, whose background is as an educator, discussed sharing leadership responsibilities with the head administrator of the high school:

(Leader's name) and I have long enough worked together; he takes care of all our sports. I couldn't tell you a thing about sports...So like there are definitely things I've stepped away from. And I know that he is handling it, and he is handling it well, and he is responsible for it, and if I have any questions or concerns, he can answer it.

The evidence of leaders' ability to delegate or distribute leadership reported in this research supports Campbell and Gross's (2008) study of charter school leaders.

Interestingly, these leaders, while having a steadfast focus on the school's mission and vision, were able to adjust their roles as leaders, understanding their strengths and limitations to fulfill the needs of the charter schools. Each leader discussed the importance of establishing both strong instructional leadership and managerial leadership. As these charter schools evolved from smaller start-ups to large, multi-grade level

schools, needs and roles changed. These leaders were flexible in their roles as they each built cohesive well-rounded teams. The three leaders featured in this collective case study managed human resources using their unique styles and school missions.

#### 5.3.2.1 The Businessman

Mr. Marvin's skill set includes the ability to look at the whole person when hiring--the ability to distinguish a "good fit" based on not only the candidate's knowledge of subject matter, but values, work ethic, and community involvement. One teacher described his philosophy, "He knows my values are in line with him. He knows that I have other things to teach students besides just the academics. And I can tell you five other teachers that have other interests outside of teaching." This charter school's team consists of professionals who are considered to be experts in their fields with other interests that can be shared with the school and community. Because his strength is in business, Mr. Marvin delegates and listens to the experts on the team especially in the area of academics; however, he is quick to note that he is able to make tough decisions when needed. He is ultimately responsible for the decisions made and their consequences on the organization and its constituents.

#### 5.3.2.2 The Coach

The area of human resources is a challenge for this leader due to the economic conditions in the area; however, Mr. Moore spends the extra time and effort to hire candidates who buy into the school's rigorous classical academic mission. He does not limit the candidate pool to licensed teachers but includes a variety of community members. Policy allows charter schools to have greater leeway in hiring e.g., licensure requirements for faculty. Mr. Moore hires individuals with a variety of experiences

including former traditional public school employees who have retired and professionals who are experts in their field of study.

Once faculty and staff are hired, Mr. Moore guides them with a network of support systems including professional development and faculty mentors. He is visible in the school and prides himself on being available work through issues with teachers. However, he is also able to follow through on difficult management decisions when the best interest of the students is not being met:

That doesn't mean I haven't had to make very difficult decisions about staff members who were maybe at some point not helping children the way children need to be helped, and you have to say, 'We're not renewing your contract next year.' I've had those tough decisions, but not before putting a lot of time and energy into trying to help them be the kind of teacher we needed them to be.

While the curriculum is set, teachers are supported to make decisions about the delivery of curriculum and leadership in the classroom. One teacher commented that Mr. Moore's leadership made his leadership in the classroom possible.

#### 5.3.2.3 The Teacher

This case highlights a very detailed recruiting and hiring process, a very structured induction and professional development plan, and very limited teacher turnover. Ms. Keene's direct and clear communication of mission and vision of the school is equally evident in the hiring process. She values strong professionals and their effect on the overall success of the school:

...we hire stellar teachers...we recruit the best and want to retain the best, and we make sure we monetarily reward them. I think that...having that consistency of a staff is just as important...(Teacher name) has been here as long as I have...you know...And we have quite a few teachers like that...we have some new ones too...but I think that gives us a nice mix.



Ms. Keene continued to tell of the number of teachers who returned after graduating from FCS. She points out that FCS recruits from colleges that are in line with the school's more conservative philosophy. There is a clear and consistent focus on recruiting and hiring professionals who are aligned with the mission and vision of the charter.

The members of the board of directors as well as a team of administrators are involved in a lengthy and thorough interview and visitation process once potential candidates are vetted through an initial meeting. Ms. Keene spoke about the process as one that clearly communicates the school's culture, clearly highlights the responsibilities, expectations, and support. Candidates who are believed to be a good fit for the school are asked to spend the day visiting the school because of the unique direct instruction design.

Once faculty is hired, coaching and mentoring programs as well as opportunities for professional development are provided. Ms. Keene's belief is that with training, teachers are able to perfect their craft and that those who choose not to do this are expendable:

We have a cadre of coaches at our school that...includes administrators. They go in, and it's primarily just to help the teacher develop their craft. Um, someone told me years ago. There's two kinds of teachers...the 'can-do' and the 'won't-do'. And um, I truly believe that. Those that can't do, you surely, you can get them there. Those that won't do--that's why we have annual contracts.

Teachers who remain with the school understand, respect, and believe in the direction of the charter and its data-driven mission. Some move into administrative positions with guidance from Ms. Keene. Again, professional development in the form of coaching and mentoring are a big part of the transition process. Like other charter schools, licensure is not an essential requirement in the hiring process; however, teachers and administrators are licensed when hired or often earn a license after they are hired. The basis for human

resources in this case is a commitment to the mission and vision of the school and appropriate professional development to equip faculty with the skills needed to carry out the mission successfully.

#### 5.3.2.4 Three Leadership Styles, One Focus

Again, each leader has his or her approach to human resources and team building; however, the focus for each successful leader includes hiring professionals, both licensed and unlicensed, who, with appropriate guidance, modeling and training, acclimate into the school culture and mission of the charter school. Human resource management supports and develops employees as they grow with the organization. As organizations grow, “the value of people’s specialized knowledge and skills increase...costs of training are immediate and easy to measure; benefits are elusive and long-term” ( Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.148). These leaders understood the benefits of recruiting and developing professionals who fill the changing needs of the school and support the consistent mission and culture of the school.

This study supports previous research (Bolman & Deal; 2003; Goff et al., 2012; Leithwood et al., 2008) indicating the importance of the leader’s skill in management of human resources. These leaders understood their areas of expertise and understood the needs of their ever-changing charter schools. Through development of the team and teacher leadership in the classroom, these charter school leaders positively influence student achievement. High student achievement indicates school success.

The ability to manage human resources requires subskills such as: communication, problem solving including data analysis, and motivational skills as well as being a role model. During the recruiting and hiring process, the ability to clearly

communicate the school's culture and mission is essential. Moreover, charter school leaders need to be able to communicate expectations and guide professionals to grow and develop their leadership and professional skills. Each leader indicated the importance of problem solving skills, including analysis of data, throughout the recruiting, hiring, and development processes. Each understood and provided the appropriate support for professionals; moreover, each was able to focus on the best interest of the school in relationship to dismissing an employee or altering the responsibilities of individual faculty members. While each leader held very high expectations for the professionals and students, each also was a positive role model who was viewed by the staff as a motivational leader.

The importance of hiring and maintaining highly qualified professional teachers in classrooms cannot be disputed (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Goff et al., 2012; Leithwood et al., 2008). The current study describes the complex leadership skills involved in this process. While each leader's style is unique, common essential elements related to human resources and team building were found. These explain the process which impacts teacher quality and ultimately influence student success in the classroom.

### 5.3.3 Focus On Changing Balances of Instructional and Managerial Responsibilities

This study is consistent with previous research indicating superintendent-type skills (managerial leadership) and instructional leadership skills are both valuable skills for charter school leaders (Blitz, 2011; Carpenter & Peak, 2013). However several results described in this study have not been addressed in prior research. In the study, each of the leaders recognized his or her limitations and the need to depend on others who are experts in complementary areas; and as this study analyzes sustained leadership, the

results show the need for changes of roles as the charter school grew. These leaders while remaining steadfast on the mission and vision of the school were flexible in their roles as leaders.

Leaders explained the importance of delegating to build and depend on a well-qualified team with expertise in both managerial and instructional areas. While each leader identified himself or herself as knowledgeable and skilled in specific areas, each was quick to recognize the significance of other trusted professionals who provide their expertise in complementary areas. In addition, they discussed the importance of communication, problem solving, and decision making together. They also voiced the understanding that as the leader of the charter school, they were ultimately responsible for the final decision and its consequences.

While remaining steadfast in the mission, these leaders were flexible in their leadership. They were able to delegate responsibilities and build a team they depended on and trusted to maintain the mission and vision of the school.

Public charter schools do not have a central office to provide support in areas related to operations (e.g., accountability, finance, human resources, law and governance, policy, facilities). Knowledge about overall operations is essential to effectively manage an organization. These results are consistent with Cravens, Goldring, Penaloza (2012) findings which indicate the division of the leader's time which can be consumed by managerial or bureaucratic tasks. Each leader in this study noted the time focused on paperwork, human resources, accountability measures, and other managerial duties. One difference from the results of the Craven et al. study (2012), however, is that each leader

also was quick to add that people and systems are in place to ensure instructional leadership is addressed.

It is important to note that while each leader delegated responsibilities to other team members, he or she understood and supported their decisions. Communication and problem solving are skills described as a part of this process. In each case, the leader discussed his or her ultimate responsibility for consequences of each decision. In other words, although leadership was shared, each leader believed the ultimate responsibility of the organization fell in their hands as Collins (2001a) described in a level 5 leader.

#### 5.3.3.1 The Businessman

In response to the final of question of the interview, Mr. Marvin reflected on his charter school leadership journey:

My personal philosophy when I took this job, because I didn't have any education background, I was never going to fake what I didn't know. And you gotta, no matter what leader it is, you gotta know what you don't know. I think it's important to be a little vulnerable, and let your leadership team and your school help you make good decisions. I think that is probably one of the biggest reflections I've had.

Mr. Marvin was very well respected as a strong leader in his public charter school and in the community; however, he was humble as he discussed his role in the school. He understood the importance of distributing leadership and relying on his team to collaboratively make decisions. This did not mean he removed himself from the process but was a part of the process and ultimately responsible for the consequences.

#### 5.3.3.2 The Coach

While describing himself as a servant leader, Mr. Moore also discussed the “burden” placed on charter school leaders with the added policy and regulations from the state level:

I find I spend a lion’s share of my time now dealing with higher level bureaucratic, you know, Raleigh to the school level versus school to my parents and kids. And, you know, that to me is a little demoralizing because part of the joys of this job is really getting to know the kids and the families that you are having an impact on.

Although Mr. Moore indicated he missed involvement directly with students and families in the school, it was evident, from the site visit observation, he knew many of the students personally and was well-respected by the teachers and staff. Data from the site observation and interviews suggest he was able to manage the bureaucracy and continue to be a part of the day-to-day organization as well.

Mr. Moore, like Mr. Marvin, had a business background but was able to effectively delegate and share decision making with his team of experts. This leader was described as having the ability to “set the stage” and allowing the professionals to do their job.

#### 5.3.3.3 The Teacher

Ms. Keene, with her background in education, had a greater focus on instructional leadership. She was very involved in the curriculum and methods of instructions. Because of her background in special education, she was involved in the EC program as well. She also dealt with the policy and paperwork required for the K-12 public charter school. Ms. Keene’s leadership delegated responsibilities to other leaders while focusing on a clear

understanding of the method and purpose of the school. She delegated responsibilities in the area of finance and some programming.

Ms. Keene relied on the expertise of board members and other staff when needed, although her leadership style was more direct and explicit than the other two cases. Her belief was that: “You cannot delegate everything. I may have been accused of being a micro manager, just a smidge. (Laughs)...but there’s a point to that... When you delegate everything, you lose control. You lose focus.”

#### 5.3.3.4 Three Leadership Styles, One Focus

While public charter schools often evolve from small start-up organizations with unique needs such as building student enrollment and facilities to large, often multi-campus organizations, leadership needs to transform with the organization. These sustained leaders of successful schools were able to transition to different roles and delegate responsibilities while maintaining a school culture with a consistent mission and vision.

Public charter schools need leadership that is strong in both areas of management and instruction due to the unique regulations, governance, and accountability afforded to charter schools (Bickmore & Dowell, 2011; Carpenter & Peak, 2013; Hays, 2013); however, these results indicate that these skills need not occur in the skillset of one leader. Each leader in this study had the ability to understand the school’s needs and his or her limitations and effectively delegate roles to others as the organization evolved. The results indicate these leaders were able to develop and share leadership throughout the school while maintaining clarity of direction and focus on mission and vision of the school.

Leaders must be aware of and understand the needs and transitions necessary as the organization evolves (Leithwood et al., 2008). While human resource skills are essential skills needed by public charter school leaders, the focus within this area changes as the schools evolves. First, in the start-up phase, curriculum, mission and culture of the school is becoming solidified. As the school grows, leaders need to plan for growth, while continuing to insure the mission and school culture remains true to its origin. Clarity of mission affects the recruitment, hiring, and development of the team. Mission must be communicated to consistently find a team that is a good fit for the school.

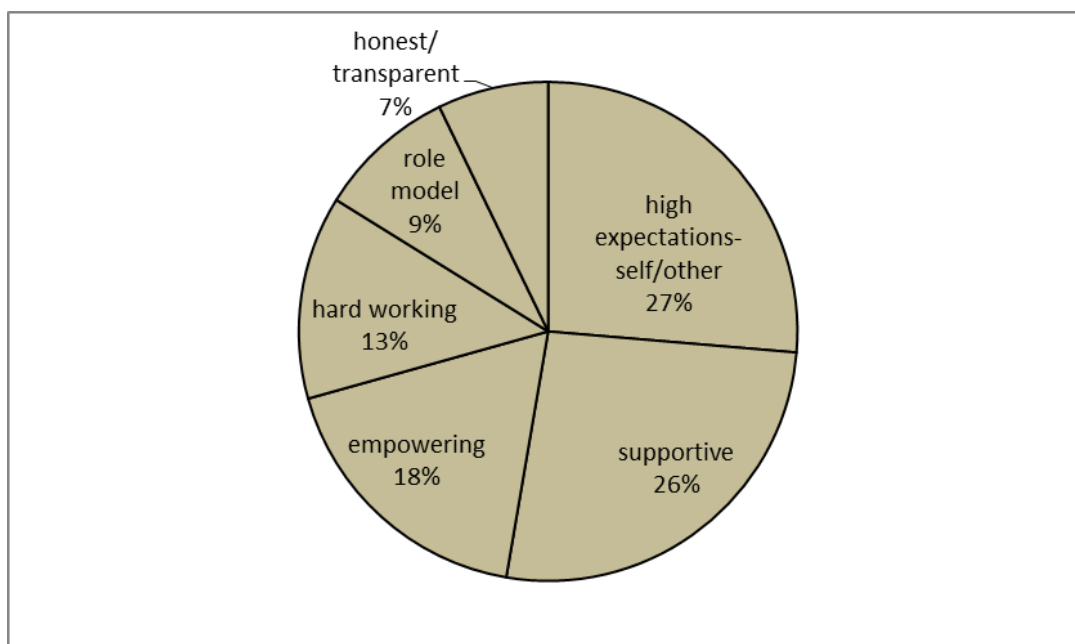
Secondly, when a charter school is in the start-up phase, the number of students is often low which affects staffing needs. Leaders must be innovative during recruiting and developing teacher leaders. Often, administrators share teaching responsibilities as part of their workload in smaller schools. When describing her past charter school leadership experience, Ms. Keene said, "...some of those years that I have been administrator, I have taught classes also, like a small group, whatever, I needed to." As the school grows, responsibilities change.

Along with the flexibility of hiring teachers who are not licensed, is the need to hire faculty who are able to take on other leadership responsibilities. A leader's time management and focus must change. A leader must be willing to delegate responsibilities that he or she may have previously had direct control over. The ability to transition is essential in emergent and developing organizations. Prior research lends support to this finding as well (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2008). The results from this study suggest the importance of a leaders' flexibility as needs change in the organization within the context of their inflexibility driving the mission and vision.



### 5.3.4 Focus on Characteristics and Traits of Sustained Leaders of Successful Charter Schools

While each case presented very different leadership styles, the businessman, the coach, and the teacher, results indicated several similar traits. *Figure 7* highlights these traits indicating sustained leaders of these successful charter schools hold high expectations of self and others and support and empower their teams as hard working transparent role models. These results are likely to be related to the complex and personal aspects of leading charter schools.



*Figure 8.* Public charter school leadership traits.

As previously described in research by Bolman and Deal (2003) strong leaders both lead and manage organizations. Public charter schools are unique organizations that are constantly evolving. The three charter schools in this study began as small institutions that throughout the years grew and evolved while maintaining their mission and vision.

These leaders led by example. Each is a diligent leader with high expectations and strong support of faculty. The high expectations and support systems have become part of the school culture which is modeled by leaders, teachers, and shared with the students. All three cases included rigorous academic standards with high expectations and support of students.

Empowerment and honesty/transparency of leadership also filtered throughout the culture. Each leader empowered his or her team to different degrees and all were described as honest and transparent. These results echo earlier research describing effective leadership in education (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; Kruger et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2007).

These strong leadership traits may be the essential aspects of public charter school leadership due to the nature of the public charter schools movement and its history. As discussed in Chapter 2 for a number of reasons: public charter schools have been, at times, controversial; funding is not equal to traditional public schools; the political climate is often shaky; and public charter schools are held to high standards of accountability and public scrutiny. The leadership traits described in this study may be key to identifying effective leaders who are able to develop sustained successful organizations that navigate the effects of a turbulent charter school history and an evolving future.

### 5.3.5 Summary of Cross-analysis

One of the most salient points in the collective case study is the leader's unwavering clear focus on driving the direction of his or her public charter school based on the original mission and vision while maintaining the flexibility of a leader who builds

a team of instructional and managerial leaders driven by the goal of success of the organization and ultimately student success. In summary, three overarching themes stand out through cross-analysis of the cases: a) developing culture with a steadfast focus on the original charter's mission and vision; b) developing a strong cohesive team and c) maintaining a balance of and being flexible to adjust to the evolving instructional and managerial responsibilities of a changing organization. Each leader, using his or her leadership style effectively leads successful, sustained public charter schools exhibiting strengths in these three themes, albeit through a variety of traits. Evidence of leadership traits: supportive, high expectations of self and others, empowering, hardworking, positive role model, and honest/transparent. These skills and characteristics are in line with mission and vision of each school and build a culture which is communicated to all constituents of the public charter school. In non-traditional schools, schools of choice, this is an important element as members of the community make educational decisions. These skills and characteristics describe sustained charter school leaders of successful schools in North Carolina. The results suggest implications for future charter school leadership.

#### 5.4 Implications for Future Charter School Leadership

While the findings of this collective case study of three sustained leaders of successful public charter schools have limited generalizability, the results for future charter school leaders are good starting points for discussion and future research. The description of skills and characteristics may help guide preparation for current and future public charter school leaders to better prepare them for this complex role. Understanding the complexity of the needs of effective charter school leaders is an important aspect for

charter school boards as well as founders of start-up charter schools. Statewide and national research specifically on charter school leadership is quite limited; this study suggests areas of possible future research. Each of these is discussed in this section.

#### 5.4.1 Preparation for Public Charter School Leaders

The purpose of this study was to describe skills and characteristics of sustained leaders in successful public charter schools in an effort to guide leadership toward ultimately positively influencing student achievement. As the number of public charter schools and other non-traditional schools continues to grow in North Carolina and across the United States, the need for well-qualified leaders will multiply (Junge, 2012). Preparation programs designed using research-based theoretical and pedagogical practices can better prepare leaders to meet the managerial and leadership needs in public charter schools and other non-traditional schools.

Using the limited prior research along with findings from this study, it is clear that successful public charter schools need leadership skills that are founded in both areas of instruction and management with a wider breadth than traditional school leaders. Public charter school leaders must have the “big picture” viewpoint (Blitz, 2011, p. 390). In addition, leaders must build and lead teams with an unwavering clarity of direction based on the original mission and vision. While it may be impossible for one leader to be an expert in all areas, leaders may delegate leadership responsibilities using distributive leadership. This is a significant finding in the current research with implications for current and future leaders. Coursework and professional development for public charter school leaders can lay the groundwork for greater understanding of finance, human resources, policy, and governance in greater depth than traditional programs may involve.

The vast research, both past and current, guiding leadership theory allows for leaders to develop their unique style and traits for effective leadership. As long as that style is clearly communicated and expectations are set, leadership styles can be the same. Developing an understanding of the political nature and history of public charter schools can guide leaders as they build community relations and navigate the sometimes controversial nature of public education and charter schools.

#### 5.4.2 Finding a Good Leadership “Fit” In a Turbulent Public Charter School World

In North Carolina the cap on the number of public charter schools was lifted in 2011. The consequences of school choice is often studied and debated; however, school choice is undeniably on the increase. Both positive and negative discussion surrounding public charter schools and schools of choice is plentiful. As new schools emerge, finding a “good fit” in leadership can ultimately lead to the school’s success or failure. What skills and characteristics should be looked for in a well-qualified leader? The most profound evidence of leadership skills and characteristics discussed in past research and described in this study are:

1. Leads driven by the school’s unique mission and vision to form a cohesive school culture shared in the greater community as the organization evolves
2. Develops and leads a team consisting of leaders in a variety of areas, both instructional and managerial with a sense of flexibility as the organization’s needs change
3. Builds a strong relationship within the school community and larger community
4. Holds high expectations of self and others

5. Supports and empowers
6. Serves as a positive role model.

Leaders who exemplify these skills and traits may be a “good fit” for a public charter school.

Bolman and Deal (2003) summarize the leadership framework for evolving organizations such as non-traditional, innovative, and autonomous public charter schools:

Though leadership is universally accepted as the cure of all organizational ills, it is also widely misunderstood...Wise leaders understand their own strengths, work to expand them, and build diverse teams that can offer organizational leadership in all four modes: structural, political, human resources, and symbolic. (p. 372)

#### 5.4.3 Areas for Future Research

This collective case of three sustained leaders of successful public charter schools in North Carolina lays the groundwork for future discussion and research about sustained, successful leadership. This research may lead to future research in several areas. The most salient implication is the unwavering focus on driving the direction of the organization based on the mission and vision while having the flexibility to build a cohesive team to address the institutional and managerial needs of the organization as it evolves. This appears to be essential to the success of all three of these public charter schools. Future research focusing on these skills related, not solely to public charter schools, but other schools of choice and traditional public schools merits study. The original purpose of public charter school included a focus on the school’s innovative and unique program purpose and design. It appears that maintaining the program’s purpose and design, its mission and vision, are an essential responsibility of leadership; moreover, with that mission in mind, a leader must build and develop a team around that mission. A more in-depth look into these areas may provide insight into school leadership.

Another possible area of research would be similar with a focus on public charter schools with high-poverty, high risk student populations. Previous research in Massachusetts highlighted skills of leaders in high-poverty public charters in that state. Additional studies may better describe, compare, and contrast the leadership of these schools that have an impact on at-risk populations. Increases in research may help to generalize findings as well.

The purpose of this study was to describe skills and characteristic of sustained leaders of successful schools. A follow-up study focused on comparison of leadership skills for successful and unsuccessful schools is another possible area for future research. Using public record data from the NCDPI, school survey data can be analyzed to compare successful public charter leaders with public charter school leaders of schools that are recognized as less successful or have more frequent leadership turnover to determine differences in skills and characteristics. While this study focused on description of skills and characteristics of only successful public charter school, an important issue for future studies is what skills and characteristics are lacking for less successful schools. This could shed greater light on ways to improve failing organizations.

Future research can improve this established charter school movement that was developed to enhance public schools by driving innovation and the role of leadership therein. As the number of charter schools and other untraditional schools continues to grow, continued research on effective leadership may positively present opportunities for improving student outcomes.

## 5.5 Conclusion

When I began the process of dissertation writing, I saw the importance of public charter schools in public education. When Shanker introduced the concept of charter schools, he communicated the vision of schools for the 20 percent of the population that needed something other than a traditional public school (Junge, 2012; Tryjankowski, 2012). I believed that charters could be that choice.

My interest in public charter schools grew as I read media reports that highlighted failures of public charter schools due to mismanagement. As an educator, I know the negative effect school closures could have on students' academic success. The goal of this dissertation was to and continues to focus on improving the potential for student success by providing a starting point for discussion about the type of leadership needed to manage and lead successful, sustained schools.

In addition to the skills and characteristics, I was consistently reminded that the leader's style, as long as it is a "good fit," is not as important as the leader's ability to build a culture with the school's mission and vision for all constituents, administration, academic, custodial, and community despite the evolution of the organization and outside influences. While understanding the needs of the changing organization, having the flexibility to build a well-qualified and cohesive team and delegating responsibilities to assure organizational needs are met is of the utmost importance.

The three leaders of these successful public charter schools never claimed to have all the skills needed to lead a successful school. They each, with their unique styles, understood the complexity of the organization, its mission and direction, and its place in the community. They each communicated the importance of relying on a trusted team,



both to support and to gain support with the ultimate goal of improving the school community and ultimately positively effecting student academic and personal outcomes.

The important results of this dissertation describing the leadership skills and characteristics of sustained and successful public charter schools are two-fold: first, the leader's unwavering focus driving the direction of the school based on the school's original mission and vision; and second, the leader's flexibility in building a cohesive team that meets both the instructional and managerial needs of the school. These results merit further study for, not only public charter school leadership, but school leadership in general.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FOR CHARTER SCHOOL LEADER



## Informed Consent for Charter School Leader

*Characteristics and Skills of Sustained Successful Charter School Leader**in North Carolina*

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a qualitative research study for a dissertation entitled, *Sustained Successful North Carolina Charter School Leader Characteristics and Skills*, being conducted by Maria M. Leahy and Dr. Rebecca Shore at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. You have been contacted to participate in this study because you have been a leader at your sustained successful North Carolina Public Charter School. In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or for more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researchers at [mleahy3@uncc.edu](mailto:mleahy3@uncc.edu) or [rshore6@uncc.edu](mailto:rshore6@uncc.edu).

The purpose of the study is to identify and categorize characteristics and skills that contribute to successful charter school leadership. Questions will include examples of your experiences such as, "Tell me a story about an event or situation that would reflect your leadership." Also included will be questions about your thoughts on skills and characteristics you and your colleagues believe to be important such as, "What contributes or contributed your success as a charter school leader? What distracted from your success?" and "How do you think your staff/teachers would describe your leadership?"

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed and audio recorded in either a face-to-face or telephone interview. The interview will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes of your time. You may skip questions that you do not wish to answer and stop the interview at any time. Pseudonyms for individuals and the school names will be used in reporting. Raw data will be kept confidential and private.

Prior to the interview, the researcher will conduct a full-day school visit. During the observation, you will be shadowed throughout the day by the researcher in the role of participant observer. Observations will be recorded using an Observation Guide. There will be no need to make changes or alter your plans for the day.

There are no known risks involved in participating in this study.

During data collection and analysis, the information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in the researchers' computers and flash drive until the completion of the dissertation defense, approximately May, 2017. Technology will be kept securely with the researcher or in a secure location such as a locked cabinet.

It is anticipated that the data collected from the survey will add to the scant research about effective charter school leaders and their characteristics and skills. It is anticipated that the results will be compiled, analyzed, and disseminated through professional presentations and publications so others may better prepare future charter school leaders for their profession.

If you have questions about the survey, feel free to contact Maria M. Leahy at [mleahy3@uncc.edu](mailto:mleahy3@uncc.edu) or Dr. Rebecca Shore at [rshore6@uncc.edu](mailto:rshore6@uncc.edu) (704) 687-8976 for more information. If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of North Carolina Charlotte Office of Research Compliance, Cat Runden at 704-687-1871 or [crunden@uncc.edu](mailto:crunden@uncc.edu).

By signing below and returning this document to the researcher, you have agreed to the above "Consent to Participate" statement. Once signed, please return the form to Maria M. Leahy at [mleahy3@uncc.edu](mailto:mleahy3@uncc.edu) or to 9248 Cameron Wood Drive, Charlotte, NC 28210. At the time of the interview, your verbal agreement will be audio recorded prior to answering interview questions as a secondary consent.

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Participant Name (print)

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Participant Signature and Date

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Investigator Signature and Date

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FOR CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHER



## Informed Consent for Charter School Teacher

*Characteristics and Skills of Sustained Successful Charter School Leader**in North Carolina*

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a qualitative research study for a dissertation entitled, *Sustained Successful North Carolina Charter School Leader Characteristics and Skills*, being conducted by Maria M. Leahy and Dr. Rebecca Shore at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. You have been contacted to participate in this study because you have been a teacher at a sustained successful North Carolina Public Charter School. In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or for more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researchers at [mleahy3@uncc.edu](mailto:mleahy3@uncc.edu) or [rshore6@uncc.edu](mailto:rshore6@uncc.edu).

The purpose of the study is to identify and categorize characteristics and skills that contribute to successful charter school leadership. Questions will include examples of your experiences with leadership such as, “Tell me a story about an event or situation that would reflect leadership in your school.” Also included will be questions about your thoughts on skills and characteristics you and your colleagues believe to be important such as, “What contributes or contributed success as a charter school leader? What distracted from success

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed and audio recorded in either a face-to-face or telephone interview. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. You may skip questions that you do not wish to answer and stop the interview at any time. Pseudonyms for individuals and the school names will be used in reporting. Raw data will be kept confidential and private.

Prior to the interview, the researcher will conduct a full-day school visit. Observations will be recorded using an Observation Guide.

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. Your principal provided input for selection of teacher-participants. Therefore, your principal may be

aware that you are being interviewed. Your interview responses will not be shared directly with school leadership nor will you be directly quoted in reports/publications. However, due to the nature of the selection of teacher participants your identity may be deduced.

During data collection and analysis, the information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in the researchers' computers and flash drive until the completion of the dissertation defense, approximately May, 2017. Technology will be kept securely with the researcher or in a secure location such as a locked cabinet.

It is anticipated that the data collected from the survey will add to the scant research about effective charter school leaders and their characteristics and skills. It is anticipated that the results will be compiled, analyzed, and disseminated through professional presentations and publications so others may better prepare future charter school leaders for their profession.

If you have questions about the survey, feel free to contact Maria M. Leahy at [mleahy3@uncc.edu](mailto:mleahy3@uncc.edu) or Dr. Rebecca Shore at [rshore6@uncc.edu](mailto:rshore6@uncc.edu) (704) 687-8976 for more information. If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of North Carolina Charlotte Office of Research Compliance, Cat Runden at 704-687-1871 or [crunden@uncc.edu](mailto:crunden@uncc.edu).

By printing this document, signing below, and returning it to the researcher, you have agreed to the above "Consent to Participate" statement. Once signed, email the form to Maria M. Leahy at [mleahy3@uncc.edu](mailto:mleahy3@uncc.edu) or mail it to 9248 Cameron Wood Drive, Charlotte, NC 28210. At the time of the interview, your verbal agreement will be audio recorded prior to answering interview questions as a secondary consent.

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Participant Name (print)

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Participant Signature and Date

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Investigator Signature and Date

## APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION GUIDE

Observation Guide	
Observer	Time
Location	Day
Descriptive Observations	Reflective Observations



## APPENDIX D: CHARTER SCHOOL LEADER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### **Charter School Leader Interview Protocol**

#### **Building Rapport:**

#### **Building Rapport:**

1. Tell me a little about your school.
2. What do you think the primary reasons behind your school's success?

#### **Characteristics and Skills of Charter School Leadership:**

1. How would you describe your leadership style or philosophy?
2. What characteristics and skills do you attribute to your success as a charter school leader?
3. What characteristics/skills do you think your staff/teachers would use when describing your leadership?
4. Tell me about an event or outcome that would reflect your leadership.
5. From your point of view, how have demands on charter school leaders changed?
6. Do these changes suggest that, in the future, the idea of founding a charter school is becoming more or less attractive than it was in the past?
7. What are your biggest challenges as a charter school leader?
8. What are your greatest rewards as a charter school leader?
9. If you were designing professional development or coursework for future charter school leaders, what lessons would you share?

#### **Wrap Up:**

1. Are there any reflections you have of your charter school leadership journey that we did not already discuss that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX E: CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### **Charter School Teacher Interview Protocol**

#### **Building Rapport:**

1. Please tell me your name, position, and the number of years you have been teaching.
2. How would you describe your current work in education?
3. How long have you been teaching in your current school under the leadership of <Name>?

#### **Characteristics and Skills of Charter School Leadership:**

1. What do you think is the driving force that contributes to your school's success?
2. How would you describe <Name's> leadership style or philosophy?
3. In what way does your leader's leadership style shape what you and your colleagues do on a daily basis?

Can you give me an example of such a case?

4. Tell me about an event or outcome that would reflect <Name's> leadership.
5. What characteristics and skills do you attribute to <Name's> success as a charter school leader?

#### **Wrap Up:**

1. Are there any reflections you have of your charter school leader's leadership journey that we did not already discuss that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX F: EXCERPT FROM LCS LEADER INTERVIEW

### **Excerpt from Interview with Mr. Marvin at Longwood Charter School**

Prior to this section of the interview, the athletic director entered the office to inform Mr. Marvin of event. A senior volleyball player was signing with a college.

Interview: P=Mr. Marvin; I=Interviewer

P: We've got a kid signing a a college thing. You are welcome to come back there..

I: Ok—(paused recorder).

### **Returned from Signing**

I: Ah, so we just talked about the characteristics and skills that you attribute to your success as a charter school leader. We talked about surrounding yourself with good competent people and empowering them.

So, the next questions is....What characteristics/skills do you think your staff/teachers would use when describing your leadership?

P: I would say that they would, umm, that, some of the same. I do empower them to make decisions.

I think they all would say that, that they understand that I treat our students and families as customers, and I expect them to, umm, to do the same, and that's basically the philosophy in our school. They know that if a parent emails or calls, that they need to respond within 24 hours.

You will probably see this all day. If somebody comes in, I want my staff to make themselves available and don't say, you need to make an appointment. I think that is me coming from the business world. I realize how important customers are.

I: Right, right

P: That is truly what are families are.

I: Can you tell me about an event or outcome that would reflect your leadership?

(Pause)

P: I would say an event would be our graduation. Um, that is kinda the accumulation of

13 years. We make, I always want to make sure that that is always dignified, professional and enjoyable to our students and parents. I'd say that.

Um, I think another one would be our Veterans' Day celebration. We choose not to be off on Veterans' Day. And we have a breakfast for all veterans, and it's free. And our students, our student leadership group which is a high school group of student put on a great program, very patriotic. Ah, and at the end of that, all our students are lined up. We call it the parade of honors. And all they all walk through, and they are all clapping, and the veterans are crying. That is another thing that we organized that I would say, that I'm very proud of, and I'd think, my staff is always looking to do things like that that reach into the community. I'm a big believer in reaching into the community.