

CHALLENGES OF STARTING AND OPERATING CHARTER SCHOOLS: A MULTICASE STUDY

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Note to Readers

Our fieldwork for this study was completed in the autumn of 2003. The final report was prepared in late 2003 and finalized in the summer of 2004, after we received comments from participating schools and members of the study's review panel. The report was not immediately released, however, because of concerns that the identity of the schools should be masked.

While not all the participating schools cared whether or not we used pseudonyms, all agreed that our rich and detailed descriptions of practices or particular events might be used in the wrong way by oversight agencies or by the local media. One option for us was to use general or generic references to the schools. However, the study builds on in-depth case studies and we wanted readers to be able to distinguish the schools and interpret findings and new information in light of what they increasingly know about the unique case schools. For this reason, it was decided to go through the text of the report and insert pseudonyms for the schools and for the management company of one of the schools.

While there were concerns about how information from these rich case studies might be used, these concerns were outweighed by the belief that the lessons learned from these schools could benefit other charter schools and charter school authorizers.

Gary Miron
Project Director

Challenges of Starting and Operating Charter Schools: A Multicase Study

Executive Summary

Introduction and Background to the Study

While charter schools¹ can work as intended, this 3 year–largely qualitative–study of four Cleveland charter schools sheds light on the barriers that charter schools face during their establishment and development. Before outlining our study’s findings, portraying the schools’ obstacles, and the describing safeguards that should be considered, we depict the context of the reform and provide an overview of the methods used in this study.

In 1998 The Cleveland Foundation developed a strategy to support select Cleveland area charter schools as part of its commitment to local school reform. The Cleveland Foundation provided start-up funding to four charter schools it deemed both promising and viable. In 2000, The Cleveland Foundation contracted with The Evaluation Center to provide technical assistance to these schools and to evaluate the four schools in terms of how they were developed and implemented. The study also examined the impact of these schools on the students they enroll as well as the communities in which they are located. This report focuses on the evaluation components of the project, addressing the following questions:

1. What has been the process of developing and implementing these schools?
2. What factors influenced the effectiveness of their development and implementation?
3. How are the charter schools utilizing the opportunity space they have been provided by the charter school law, and to what extent are they implementing the ideas contained in charter school theory as far as autonomous and site-level governance, professional opportunities for teachers, parental participation, innovative curriculum and instruction, and cohesion around mission?
4. Are charter schools able to promote academic growth in students?
5. Are charter schools accountable to the market?
6. Have the schools fulfilled the expectations of fiscal and regulatory accountability?
7. How do the charter schools affect Cleveland public schools and the district as a whole?
8. How have these charter schools provided an incentive for other public schools to reform?
9. To what extent are charter schools using evaluation?

In addition to addressing these questions, the full technical report also describes the national, state, and local contexts regarding charter schools and draws lessons from these schools that can apply to charter schools and traditional public schools alike.

¹ In Ohio, charter schools are officially referred to as community schools, although few use this label in practice. In the text of this report, we have used community schools and charter schools interchangeably.

Methods. The study was largely qualitative in nature. Interviews were conducted with various school level stakeholders, as well as representatives from local traditional public schools, local district officials, state education officials, policymakers, and representatives from advocacy and support groups. Field notes were prepared based on personal observations in the charter schools. Further, extensive documentation collected from schools as well as relevant literature were reviewed for the study. In terms of quantitative data, surveys were administered to parents, students, and staff, and test data and demographic data were collected from participating schools and from the state.

Despite the extensive data collected, there were substantial limitations in the study that need to be highlighted. The most critical limitations include the following: limited access to one of the four participating schools, suboptimal sample of parents at one school, and availability and consistency of test data. Because the schools are still in their "start-up" phase, it is too early to draw conclusions regarding the success of the participating schools or the potential impact they can have on the public school system as a whole.

Charter schools in Ohio. Ohio's charter school legislation was passed in 1997. Fifteen charter schools were approved to start in 1998; by March 2003, this number grew to 135. Most of the schools were sponsored by the Ohio State Board of Education (OSBE). As of Spring 2003, there were 17 charter schools in the Cleveland area, 4 of which received financial support from The Cleveland Foundation and were also sponsored by OSBE. Two critical legal issues impacted the growth and direction of the charter school movement in Ohio: (i) The Ohio Congress of Parents and Teachers' lawsuit (OCPT v. OSBE)² against charter schools in May 2001, and (ii) Am. Sub. H.B. 364³, which was passed in December of 2002.

The lawsuit primarily focused on charter schools that utilize for-profit management organizations, but threatened all of Ohio's charter schools. After consuming the attention and substantial resources of schools, the lawsuit was thrown out in April 2003.

Am. Sub. H.B. 364, among other matters, restricts the OSBE from sponsoring charter schools. Later in this executive summary we describe the main impetus for this revision in the charter school law, and how it relates to the case schools in our study. But first, we describe the origins of the case schools and their facilitators and barriers to implementation.

Case Schools and Their Unique Missions and Innovative Educational Approaches

Each of the four participating charter schools in this study have envisioned unique and innovative schools that will open new opportunities from which parents can choose. The charter school law grants these new schools greater autonomy in designing their programs in exchange for greater demands for accountability. In theory, a decentralized governance structure, coupled with a unifying mission, promotes innovation since ideas can be rapidly developed, approved, and implemented.

² Ohio Congress of Parents and Teachers v. State of Ohio Board of Education (Case # 01 CVH 05 04457). *Third amended complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief*. Retrieved May 1, 2002, at <http://www.oft-aft.org/complaint.3.7.02.htm>

³ Ohio Legislative Service Commission. (2002). Am. Sub. H.B. 364: 124th General Assembly (as passed by the House). Available at <http://198.234.151.5/analyses/anh124.nsf>.

All four schools in our study had missions that emphasized both academic and character education, yet each mission had its own distinct elements. To approach its respective mission, each school had what appeared to be educational innovations unique to the district. However, staff were far more concerned about the propriety and effectiveness of their practices rather than the novelty of them. Some of the noteworthy innovative aspects of these schools include the following:

- ❑ Partnering with outside organizations to promote intergenerational and lifelong learning experiences
- ❑ An extensive after school enrichment program as well as several programs that addressed students' emotional well-being
- ❑ A hybrid Montessori-traditional educational approach
- ❑ Afrocentric elements in the curriculum and school design

The largest obstacle the charter schools faced in implementing their unique missions was the demand to fulfill state requirements and standards for academic achievement. One school had to compromise its Montessori-based approach in order to implement curricula aimed at the state standards. Another school had to discontinue its yoga program in order to focus more on improving standardized test scores. One other noteworthy obstacle to implementing the school missions was the fact that some of the schools attracted a student body that was different than originally envisioned. There were various other challenges to fulfilling a school's mission, beginning with a school's start-up.

Charter schools are expected to implement their unique missions while fulfilling state standards for academic achievement.

Challenges of Start-Up

Each of the four schools in our study began with a group of founders who shared an educational vision and hoped to create an alternative school by which to fulfill it. The autonomy afforded by charter school law provided opportunities to develop these unique schools. However, there were numerous barriers to start-up. Founders had an extensive list of regulations to follow. Most saliently, lack of resources proved to be one of the trade-offs for increased autonomy. Limitations in funding and especially lack of optimal facilities hampered start-up at the participating schools. Other factors that influenced start-up included governance and management, the rate of growth, and the partnerships with community organizations.

Obtaining facilities. In each of the 4 schools in our study, securing adequate facilities was particularly problematic, especially as the schools grew. Each of the 4 schools, at least initially, had to share building space with another organization (e.g., house of worship, office building, senior citizen center). During their brief history, all 4 schools had to either move locations or spend considerable funds updating and expanding their original

Each school initially shared building space with another organization and had to move locations or spend considerable funds updating their original facilities. One school changed buildings 3 times in 18 months and is planning yet another move.

facilities. Securing a facility was particularly problematic for one school, which changed buildings 3 times in 18 months and is planning yet another move.

Governance and management. Decentralized, site-based management is a cornerstone of charter school philosophy. Charter schools have extensive flexibility in governance structure. Boards are appointed, not elected, and can include parents and staff. This flexibility can help boards find the varied expertise needed to initiate and manage a school and also promote a common mission. However, steps have to be taken to avoid nepotism or a monopoly of power.

Educational management organizations (EMOs) can offer small charter schools some of the same benefits as large districts. On the other hand, they can lead to “re-centralized” governance and diminished autonomy. One school in our study that utilized an EMO found that it provided many needed human and material resources, but at the price of the school’s independence.

Speed and pattern of growth. Each school in our study started relatively small and added additional classrooms and grades over time. Various factors helped influence the speed and pattern of growth of the schools. The school with the most rapid growth experienced some problems with teacher-administration relations over time. One school opted to stop growing much sooner than originally planned, in order to focus on quality rather than quantity. A third school that stayed relatively small struggled financially. Finally, one school, although struggling financially and enrollment-wise, opted to grow at the fastest rate of all.

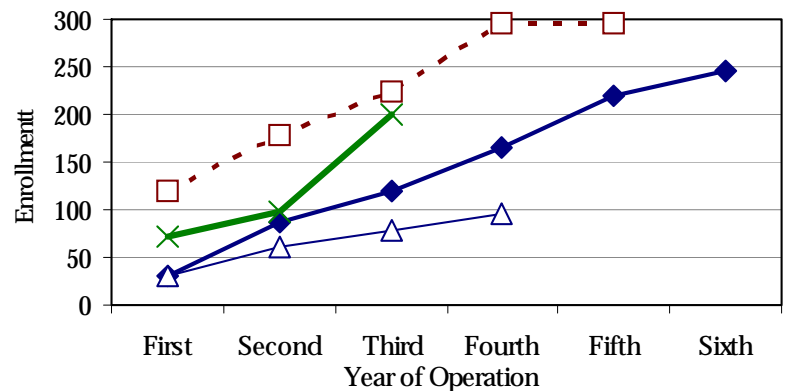


Figure 1. Growth Rates of the Four Case Schools

Forming partnerships. Partnerships with community organizations are helpful in gaining human and material resources. One school was particularly effective in building partnerships and obtaining outside funding while another had few partnerships which might have been one source of its difficulties. On the other hand, one of the schools was concerned that too many partnerships could compromise its autonomy and thus was quite selective. Via partnerships or other arrangements, charter schools could solicit additional human and financial resources.

Who Chooses Charter Schools and Why?

Charter schools are schools of choice for parents and staff. Both parents and staff reported choosing their school largely because of its mission and educational approach.

Among staff at all four schools, the top-ranked reasons for choosing employment were *Opportunity to work with like-minded educators*, *My interest in being involved in an educational reform effort* and *Safety at school*. *Difficulty finding other positions* was by far the lowest-ranked reason. Despite common reasons for choosing employment, there were numerous differences among the staff. Within all of the four schools, staff varied considerably in the number of years of teaching experience. Most teachers were fully certified; only one school had trouble recruiting fully certified

teachers. Staff at three of the four schools varied considerably in ethnicity, much more so than their homogeneous surrounding communities.

The student bodies at each of the four charter schools reflected the demographic compositions of their surrounding communities. Three schools serve predominately African-American students, and one schools serves a majority of European-American students. At each of the three schools that had students in grades 5 and above, the top reason given by 5th-8th grade students for selecting their charter schools was *My parents thought this school was better for me*. The top three reasons that parents chose the charter schools were *Safety for my child*, *Good teachers and high-quality instruction*, and *I prefer the emphasis and educational philosophy of this school*.

Professional Opportunities for Teachers

Because of their autonomy and small size, charter schools are expected to be able to promote both professional development and the building of a cohesive school culture. Staff at each school often described their school's working environment as more "family-like" than bureaucratized. The localized governance allowed increased autonomy and more flexible roles for staff. However, flexibility and autonomy, at times, led to excess work and unclear expectations for staff.

As a rule, the schools in our study have had high staff turnover rates at some point in their short history. Charter school staff usually lack the security of tenure and the benefits of a union. The salary scales at the charter schools were also lower than in surrounding district schools. Each school had instances in which contracts were not renewed because of unsatisfactory job performance and/or because a particular staff member was deemed to be a poor fit with the school's philosophy and environment; this was considered "functional turnover" by school administrators. At one school most of the turnover was due to personal reasons; but at another school the high rate of turnover—which at one time was as high as 86 percent—appeared to be related to its financial instability.

Staff satisfaction was generally high. Working environments were often described as more "family-like" than bureaucratized. Nevertheless, turnover was often high.

Contrary to the implications of the high turnover rates, most staff were generally satisfied with their leadership and with school climate. At one school about half the staff were highly satisfied, while the others appeared rather dissatisfied with their working conditions. Positive, open relationships with the administration was a crucial factor in staff satisfaction. Good working relationships with parents was important as well.

Parental and Community Involvement

A successful charter school should consider creative ways to involve parents and community members, as this helps build school cohesion and can result in additional human resources. Parental and community participation in the schools was actively encouraged by each of the four schools in this study. Flexibility and consideration of family situations (e.g., work schedules) enabled this. Types of parental participation ranged from involvement in founding the school to simply being actively involved in their children's education. School staff considered parental involvement in their children's education to be most vital in their students' success.

Although the amount of parental volunteer time varied from school to school, parents at the four charter schools seemed generally satisfied with the opportunities for involvement and influence at their respective schools. Staff and parents at one school were especially enthusiastic about the quality and quantity of parental participation. However, this participation was enabled by a relatively large proportion of stay-at-home mothers, a phenomenon that the other three schools did not experience. Another school had ample opportunities for parents to get involved, from serving on the board to attending various workshops for parents. While the participating parents expressed considerable satisfaction, some staff were disappointed that parental participation wasn't higher. A third school had few regular parent volunteers, but had an abundance of community volunteers that helped fulfill its educational and value-driven goals. The fourth school experienced considerable problems with its parent-staff council, which eventually disbanded. All four schools hoped to maximize parent participation and developed unique methods for improving parent-staff relations.

The Dilemmas of Special Education in Charter Schools

Educating students with special needs involves heavy financial and administrative challenges in most public schools, but these challenges are intensified in charter schools. In addition to limitations in resources, charter schools face the dilemma of adhering to their unique mission and educational approaches

Charter schools struggle to adhere to their unique mission and educational approaches while accommodating the needs of virtually every student.

while attempting to accommodate the needs of virtually every potential student. However, some charter schools are especially effective in serving children's particular special needs, thanks to their unique pedagogy and high staff-to-student ratio. The four schools in our study had varying proportions of students with special needs and differing approaches to address their needs. There were some commonalities in their approaches; each of the four schools used some level of multi-age classrooms and individualized instruction to accommodate children at various levels. Beyond these similarities, the approaches differed substantially from one another. One school had individualized education plans for all students. Their general curriculum was able to accommodate students who would have required separate special education services elsewhere. An EMO was efficient for obtaining special education resources in another school. One school had an unusually large proportion of students with special needs, especially students with behavioral problems. Over time, the school developed a number of interventions to support and serve these students. At times the human resources had difficulty keeping up with the increasing demand, and staff sometimes disagreed upon the best approaches for addressing the students' needs. Finally, one school that was labeled an "at risk" school, counseled out students with severe behavior problems. The director indicated that this was permissible. However, officials at the Ohio Department of Education stated that even though an "at risk" school can define a target population it cannot discriminate. The practical and legal issues related to the provision of special education in charter school are very complicated and will likely remain an intensely discussed and debated topic.

Accountability

Accountability is the price that charter schools pay for their autonomy. Charter schools need to demonstrate accountability as far as consumer satisfaction (market), adherence to rules and accurate reporting of finances and other matters (regulatory), and student achievement (performance). However, Ohio has been experiencing considerable limitations with its accountability system regarding regulations as well as outcomes.

Market accountability is a central component of the charter school movement; students and parents should show satisfaction with their schools of choice. Students' opinions of their respective schools varied considerably. Among the 3 schools with students in grades 5 and above, student satisfaction at one particular school was quite high while at the other two schools it was significantly lower. However, as parents are generally responsible for deciding where to enroll their children, parental satisfaction is at least as important as student satisfaction. According to our surveys, parents generally were satisfied with the curriculum and instruction as well as the school climate at 3 of the 4 schools. At the fourth school, parent satisfaction was rather low.

Enrollment may be the ultimate indicator of consumer satisfaction; at the three schools where parent satisfaction was high, enrollment was fairly stable and there were waiting lists for prospective new students. In the fourth school student attrition was high, and enrollment was below capacity at times. In addition, it often reported inaccurate enrollment and experienced financial problems as a result. Indeed, many charter schools throughout Ohio have had problems reporting accurate enrollment, resulting in financial problems for themselves as well as their districts⁴. This has been but one of the problems concerning regulatory accountability.

Regulatory accountability involves a school's responsibility with the taxpayers' monies that fund it, and compliance with the rules and regulations that protect students and staff. According to the Auditor of State reports, three schools in our study have generally demonstrated regulatory accountability. The other school's records were deemed "inauditable," and several agencies reported that they had not been providing enrollment, fiscal, and regulatory records in a timely nor accurate manner. At one time, this school was fined substantially for this shortcoming.

One dilemma is that charter schools that fail to turn in their fiscal and regulatory records in time are not publicized as being delinquent in this respect. Also, schools cannot be penalized for excessive debt. A school that is experiencing financial or regulatory problems thus has little incentive to turn in such records. Further changes in charter school policies could address this. Policies regarding performance accountability are flawed as well.

Performance accountability is arguably the most important phenomenon for a school to demonstrate. In Ohio, Local Report Cards are the required format for all public schools, including charter schools, to publish their student performance outcomes. These report the results of standardized tests, such as the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT) in 2002-03, as well as other criteria such as attendance and graduation rates. However, Local Report Cards are an ineffective accountability tool for many charter schools, because many do not have

A school with high attrition, low parent satisfaction, delinquent records, and no clear evidence of student achievement was rated as "Excellent" on its Local Report Card.

⁴ Legislative Office of Education Oversight. (2003). *Community Schools in Ohio: Final Report on Student Performance, Parent Satisfaction, and Accountability*. Columbus, OH: Author

enough eligible students in the grades that are tested. Further, the categories of “Excellent” through “Academic Emergency” are given inconsistently and often inappropriately. For example, one school in our study was given a rating of “excellent” because it met the singular criterion of attendance; the other criteria did not apply to it because of its small size. Ironically, this was the school with high attrition, low parent satisfaction, and delinquent records. Charter schools often need different methods for assessing and reporting student performance .

The charter school law provides schools the opportunity to develop their own additional goals, objectives, benchmarks, and methods by which to assess progress on them. Ohio has stricter performance accountability requirements than many other states, mandating that charter schools be held accountable to the specific objectives in their contracts and report on them in their annual reports. However, thus far charter schools have not been sanctioned based on their performance on these self-stated goals, nor even for reporting on them inadequately. While schools should not be sanctioned for failing to meet unreasonably lofty goals, there should be more help in defining sensible goals as well as stricter expectations for schools to report on them. Authorizers should emphasize that schools have the opportunity to revise these objectives and modify the contracts.

Academic performance, and the reporting thereof, varied considerably among the four schools. One school in our study never provided us a completed annual report for either 2001-02 or 2002-03. Of those who completed annual reports, one school outperformed the district much of the time on the OPT. However, its neighboring schools were also relatively high performing. One school had relatively low scores on the OPT, even compared with its neighboring schools.

Charter school law provides schools the opportunity to develop their own objectives. ...However, they have not been sanctioned based on their performance on these self-stated goals, nor even for reporting on them inadequately.

Nevertheless, it did show substantial year-to-year improvement in some areas. Although both of the aforementioned schools had mission-related objectives that went beyond the results of standardized tests, neither provided adequate information regarding measurement of or progress toward them. On the other hand, one school did an exceptional job of defining, assessing, and reporting on its unique objectives for both academic and value-oriented goals. It usually met the objectives it set for itself, and it thoroughly described their successes, as well as their shortcomings and intended remedies, in its annual reports. This school’s annual report has been heralded as a role model for other Ohio community schools. However, missing and suboptimum annual reports, as well as numerous other indicators of accountability, have been problematic not just in our study but throughout Ohio’s charter schools⁵.

According to the Auditor of State ⁶, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has not been holding the schools accountable to their contracts. Further, the Ohio State Board of Education (OSBE), which until 2003 had sponsored the vast majority of Ohio’s charter schools, had not been providing adequate assistance for charter schools’ accountability plans. These findings resulted

⁵ Legislative Office of Education Oversight. (2003). *Community schools in Ohio: Final report on student performance, parent satisfaction, and accountability*. Columbus, OH: Author

⁶ Petro, J. (2002). *Ohio Department of Education community schools operational review*. Columbus, OH: Office of the Auditor.

in substantial changes to the charter school law, Am.Sub. H.B. 364. This new bill delegates both assistance and oversight to local entities (e.g., districts, universities, nonprofit agencies), and defines OSBE's new role as to oversee as well as assist these local groups.

With enough assistance to develop measurable goals and objectives, and enough motivation to report on them accurately, charter schools can demonstrate true performance accountability. This in turn could affect market accountability, as schools that effectively demonstrate high performance attract more families while poor-performing schools lose customers. Theoretically this competition, both amongst other charter schools and with the school districts, would lead to better performing schools all around.

Impact on the Cleveland Public Schools and Community

Thus far the largest impact the charter schools have made on the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD) has been financial. In 2002-03, at least 22 million dollars was diverted from the CMSD to the area's 17 charter schools plus on-line charter schools. However, the 17 charter schools in Cleveland, including the 4 small schools in our study, are insufficient to make a significant and recognizable *educational* impact upon a large urban district with a long history of challenges. Although the CMSD has made considerable progress, the progress is attributed to reforms from within rather than competition with or influence from the charter schools.

Charter school opponents, including the plaintiffs in the OCPT v. OSBE lawsuit, often decry that district schools have lost an unjustifiable amount of resources to the charter schools. Articles and brochures vehemently criticizing charter schools have been published in various media all over Ohio. Such hostile reactions have not promoted diffusion of innovation, either in the form of emulating the charter schools' innovations or actively competing with them. Despite this animosity, some collaborations have occurred between the charter schools in our study and their neighboring noncharter schools. The end of the lawsuit, the legislation permitting more charter schools statewide, and the spread of charter/noncharter collaborations may foster diffusion of innovation among the school systems. Nevertheless, the staff and board of the charter schools in our study were less focused on reforming the CMSD at large than on effectively operating their own schools.

Although the CMSD has made considerable progress, the progress is attributed to reforms from within rather than competition with or influence from charter schools.

Building and Maintaining Cohesion

In general, effectively running a charter school requires a series of balancing acts: managerial autonomy vs. obtaining resources; administrative flexibility vs. organization; innovative educational approaches vs. striving toward state standards; mission coherence vs. equity in enrollment; and accountability vs. unique measures of success. These balancing acts help a school strive toward its mission.

Cohesion of mission is both the result of and a facilitator for other goals such as parental participation, professional opportunities for instruction, and innovative educational approaches. Both staff and parents appear to choose the schools largely based on agreement with its mission. One dilemma is that not every student can be educated effectively under strict implementations of a school's mission, but schools legally cannot select whom they enroll.

The decentralized governance and management of a charter school appears to promote cohesion of mission. Because members are appointed rather than elected, there is less chance of political gridlock. In addition to a shared vision, a charter school's governing board should include a broad array of expertise and connections with the larger community. However, safeguards for conflicts of interest should be put in place.

Parental and community involvement, on a wide range of levels, also supports charter school cohesion. This involvement can enhance a school's human resources as well as its climate. In order to encourage involvement, charter schools should take the needs and limitations of parents into consideration. Further, in some instances community involvement may be more attainable and at least as beneficial as parental involvement.

Professional opportunities for teachers also appear related to cohesion of mission. Because charter schools often lack the salaries and job security of district public schools, professional opportunities must outweigh these disadvantages in order to attract and retain quality staff. Autonomy and a positive, "family-like" work environment are especially appreciated by charter school teachers; many teachers reported these benefits to be more important than a higher salary. Relevant professional development activities and a flexible, yet organized staffing structure promote autonomy and a positive school climate.

Professional autonomy, coupled with an expedient decentralized governing board, can promote innovative educational approaches. These innovations can facilitate progress toward a school's unique mission. However, curriculum and instruction must take state standards into account, as well as the unpredictable needs of students.

A small school size often facilitates autonomy and cohesion of mission. On the other hand, smaller schools may have difficulty obtaining needed resources. Larger community schools, or schools who are governed by an EMO, may have greater access to human and material resources. However, they may have difficulties obtaining efficiency, consensus, or positive relations between the board and the school staff.

Ohio's charter school laws allow a broad spectrum of opportunities concerning mission; governance, administrative and staffing policies; and pedagogy, curricula, and instruction. The four charter schools in this study were somewhat homogeneous in that they were in the same city, had the same sponsor, and received some of their start-up funds from The Cleveland Foundation based

A charter school requires a series of balancing acts: managerial autonomy vs. obtaining resources; administrative flexibility vs. organization; innovative educational approaches vs. striving toward state standards...

The four charter schools in this study started out somewhat homogeneous... However, there were vast differences as far as their use of their opportunities, staff and parent satisfaction, and abilities to demonstrate student achievement.

on its criteria for promising new charter schools. However, there were vast differences during their start-up years as far as successful maximization of their opportunities. These differences ultimately led to differences in staff and parent satisfaction, as well as their abilities to demonstrate student achievement. However, the particular structural limitations within a state (e.g., funding mechanisms, regulations, accountability measures) limit a school's opportunities, as well as the opportunities for the charter school movement as a whole.

Recommendations: Promote Viability and Enforce Accountability

Our study of four Cleveland schools illustrated some of the facilitators of and obstacles to successful implementation of Ohio's charter school law. Generally, the two most salient barriers were insufficient resources and lack of accountability. With enough resources to keep schools afloat and enough incentives to demonstrate accountability, Ohio's charter school movement can provide informed choice to families and effective education to students.

Ohio charter schools need assistance in obtaining essential resources. Charter school founders spend considerable time and effort securing the basic material needs of the school, leaving less time for developing the mission or curriculum. Further, the lack of resources can directly impede the fulfillment of the mission, if needed space or instructional materials are lacking and if salaries are too low to attract

With enough resources and enough incentive to demonstrate accountability, Ohio's charter school movement can provide choice to families and effective education.

and keep quality staff. More assistance in securing facilities and other resources would help schools focus less on survival and more on education. Assistance with real estate savvy, fund-raising techniques, and budgeting can help. Human resources are essential as well. Schools may need assistance in developing effective governance and administrative leadership, as well as finding and nurturing mutually beneficial partnerships.

Ohio charter schools need to truly be held accountable to market, fiscal, regulatory, and performance expectations. In order to ensure that only successful charter schools remain in operation, charter school law in Ohio should include more stringent demands for accountability. There should be publicized consequences for failing to turn in enrollment records, financial statements, or annual reports. Annual reports should reflect progress on measurable educational and other goals that charter schools set for themselves. These measures would help provide prospective parents accurate information about the quality of the schools of choice.

Most Ohio charter schools have a pressing need for more technical assistance in demonstrating various types of accountability, particularly performance accountability. Since they are founded as an alternative to traditional public schools and their definitions of student achievement, charter schools should develop specialized measures of progress related to their unique missions. Charter school authorizers can provide this assistance or the means to obtain it. This can take substantial time and resources, but ultimately it can help charter schools demonstrate their true levels of success regarding matters that pertain to their missions.

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Table of Contents	xii
List of Tables, Figures, Exhibits, and Appendices	xv
List of Acronyms	xviii
Acknowledgments	xix
1. Introduction and Background to the Evaluation	1
1.1 What Are Charter Schools?	1
1.2 Background of the Evaluation	2
1.3 The Four Charter Schools in the Study	3
1.4 Purposes of the Evaluation	4
1.5 Organization of the Report	6
2. Methodology of the Study	7
2.1 Approach and Strategies for Data Collection	8
2.2 Comparison Groups	9
2.3 Limitations to the Evaluation	10
3. Charter Schools in Ohio: Setting the Context	12
3.1 How Ohio Charter Law Compares With Other States' Laws	12
3.2 Location and Number of Charter Schools and Students	13
3.3 Descriptive Overview of Ohio Charter Schools	15
3.4 Amended Substitute House Bill 364	17
3.5 Ohio Congress of Parents and Teachers v. State of Ohio Board of Education	17
3.6 Summary	18
4. Case Schools and Their Unique Missions and Innovative Educational Approaches	20
4.1 MSM: "Children Discover Their Natural Potential"	21
4.2 Riverview Scholars : Learners Who are Good Citizens	27
4.3 Lifelong Learners & Leaders: Fostering a Love of Lifelong Learning	33
4.4 Essentials Academy: Lifelong Learning and Leadership	38
4.5 Conclusion	41
5. From Conception to Maturity: Challenges of Start-Up	43
5.1 The Genesis of the Four Cleveland Charter Schools	43
5.2 Application and Sponsorship of the Charter Schools	45
5.3 Securing Financial and Structural Resources	46
5.4 Managing the Size and Growth Rate of Schools	51
5.5 Summary	55

6. Governance and Management of Charter Schools	56
6.1 Ohio Community School Law Governance Requirements	56
6.2 Origins and Evolution of the Four Charter School Boards	57
6.3 Education Management Organizations	62
6.4 Satisfaction with School Governance	64
6.5 Summary	65
7. Who Chooses Community Schools and Why?	66
7.1 Who Are the Teachers and Staff?	66
7.2 Characteristics of Students Enrolled in the Charter Schools	73
7.3 Characteristics of the Parents	75
7.4 Conclusion	76
8. Professional Opportunities for Teachers	78
8.1 School Climate	78
8.2 Relations Between Teachers and Administration	81
8.3 Opportunities for Professional Development	88
8.4 Personnel Evaluation	92
8.5 Salary and Benefits	94
8.6 Turnover and Job Security	95
8.7 Conclusion	98
9. Parent and Community Involvement	100
9.1 Types of Opportunities for Participation	100
9.2 Time Spent in Schools	102
9.3 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at MSM	104
9.4 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at Riverview Scholars	106
9.5 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at LLL	109
9.6 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at Essentials Academy ...	110
9.7 Conclusion	112
10. The Dilemmas of Special Education in Charter Schools	113
10.1 Charter Schools: Equity vs. Mission Coherence?	113
10.2 Prevalence of Students with Special Needs	114
10.3 How Each School Addresses Special Education Issues	116
10.4 Satisfaction with Special Education Services	121
10.5 Summary	121

11. Market Accountability: Consumer Satisfaction with the Charter Schools ..	123
11.1 Consumer Demand: Student Retention	123
11.2 Parental Satisfaction with the Charter Schools	126
11.3 School Climate	127
11.4 Student Satisfaction	130
11.5 Conclusion	132
12. Fiscal and Regulatory Accountability	134
12.1 Fiscal and Regulatory Compliance	134
12.2 Revenues and Expenditures of Charter Schools	136
12.3 Recent Statewide Legislation to Improve Fiscal and Regulatory Accountability ..	137
12.4 Conclusion	138
13. Performance Accountability	140
13.1 Charter Schools and Standardized Accountability Measures	141
13.2 Student Achievement at Riverview Scholars	145
13.3 Student Achievement at Main Street Montessori	151
13.4 Student Achievement at Lifelong Learners & Leaders	155
13.5 Student Achievement at Essentials Academy	158
13.6 Charter School Goals and Objectives as Reported in Annual Reports	160
13.7 Summary and Recommendations	163
14. Impact on the Cleveland Public Schools and Community	165
14.1 A Recent History of the Cleveland Municipal School District	165
14.2 Community Relations and Diffusion of Innovation	168
14.3 Financial and Administrative Impacts on District Schools	172
14.4 Impact of Legal Actions on Charter Schools	173
14.5 Collaborations with Noncharter Schools	174
14.6 Summary	175
15. Charter Schools Can Work: A Summary of Lessons Learned	177
15.1 Implementation	178
15.2 Charter Schools' Performance and Market Accountability	187
15.3 Public Education Reform	189
15.4 Accountability and Self-Evaluation	190
15.5 Conclusions	195
Appendices	196
References	224

List of Tables, Figures, Exhibits, and Appendices

Tables

Table 2:1	List of Participating Charter Schools and Matching CMSD Schools	10
Table 2:2	Composite Comparison Group	10
Table 3:1	Growth and Proportion of Charter Schools According to Relative Size	14
Table 5:1	Staff Satisfaction with Buildings and Facilities	49
Table 6:1	MSM Staff responses to “Teachers are able to influence the steering and direction of the school”	64
Table 6:2	Staff Satisfaction with Governance	65
Table 7:1	Staff Roles Across the Four Case Schools	67
Table 7:2	Reasons for Seeking Employment at This School	68
Table 7:3	Race/Ethnicity of Staff at Four Cleveland Charter Schools	71
Table 7:4	Certification of Classroom Teachers in Four Cleveland Charter Schools	72
Table 7:5	School Type Previously Attended by Students As Reported by Parents	74
Table 7:6	Parents’ Reasons for Choosing Their Charter School	76
Table 8:1	Descriptions of Subscales on the School Climate Survey	79
Table 8:2	Teacher/Staff Satisfaction With Administrative Leadership of School	81
Table 8:3	Responses to the Item “Teachers Have Many Noninstructional Duties”	83
Table 8:4	Responses to “Teachers Will Be/Are Autonomous and Creative in the Classrooms”	85
Table 8:5	Staff Responses to the Item “There Are New Professional Opportunities for Teachers”	90
Table 8:6	Assessment of Performance	92
Table 8:7	Salaries at Community Schools and Matched CMSD Schools	94
Table 8:8	Satisfaction with Salaries and Benefits	95
Table 8:9	Estimated Rates of Staff Attrition	96
Table 8:10	Staff Responses to the Item “Teachers Are Insecure About Their Future”	98
Table 9:1	Number of Hours of Volunteer Work at School Per Month	103
Table 9:2	MSM Staff Responses to Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction and School Activities	105
Table 9:3	MSM Parents’ Responses to the Item “Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School”	106
Table 9:4	Riverview Scholars Staff Responses to Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction & School Activities	107
Table 9:5	Riverview Scholars Parents’ Responses to the Item: “Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School”	108
Table 9:6	LLL’s Staff Responses to Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction and School Activities	110
Table 9:7	LLL Parents’ Responses to the Item: “Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School”	110

Table 9:8	Essentials Academy's Parents' Responses to the Item "Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School"	111
Table 9:9	Essentials Academy's Staff Responses to Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction and School Activities	111
Table 10:1	Prevalence of Students with Special Needs, 2002-03	114
Table 10:2	Classroom Teachers' Responses to the Item "Do You Have Special Education Students in Your Classroom?"	115
Table 10:3	Responses from Classroom Teachers Regarding the Extent to Which They Are Responsible for Implementing the IEPs for Students with Disabilities	116
Table 10:4	Responses from Teachers and Staff Regarding the School's Ability to Provide Appropriate Special Education Services for Students Who Require Them	121
Table 11:1	Items on the Satisfaction with Instruction Index	126
Table 11:2	Mean Scores for Parent Satisfaction with Curriculum and Instruction	127
Table 11:3	Expectations and Current Experiences for the Item, My Child Will Receive/is Receiving Sufficient Individual Attention	129
Table 11:4	Parent Responses to the Item, This School Reflects a Community Atmosphere ..	130
Table 11:5	Do You Have Concerns About Your Child's Safety at School?	130
Table 11:6	Student's Perceptions of Their Schools	131
Table 12:1	Per-Pupil Revenues Based on Figures Reported in Audits for 2001-02	136
Table 13:1	Passing Rates: Fourth Grade Ohio Proficiency Test, 2002-03	142
Table 13:2	Passing Rates: Sixth Grade Ohio Proficiency Test, 2002-03	142
Table 13:3	Gains in Passing Rates from 2001-02 to 2002-03 (in percentage points) on the Fourth Grade Ohio Proficiency Test	143
Table 13:4	Indicators and Performance Ratings for Cleveland Schools	144
Table 13:5	Standardized Tests Administered at Riverview Scholars	146
Table 13:6	Off-Grade Proficiency Test Results for Riverview Scholars and CMSD	150
Table 13:7	Standardized Tests Administered at MSM from 1999-00 to 2001-02	151
Table 13:8	MSM Passing Rates on 4th Grade Ohio Proficiency Tests	152
Table 13:9	MSM Passing Rates on 6th Grade Ohio Proficiency Tests	152
Table 13:10	MSM Passing Rates: Within Cohort Comparison	152
Table 13:11	Developmental Stages Used by Lifelong Learners & Leaders for Placement and Assessment	155
Table 13:12	Percentage of Students who Progressed from One Level to the Next During One School Year	156
Table 13:13	Students At Age/Grade Appropriate Developmental Level	156
Table 13:14	Progress within Emergent Level: Letter Recognition	156
Table 15:1	Charter Schools' Strengths and Weaknesses Regarding Implementation	179
Table 15:2	Charter Schools' Strengths and Weaknesses Regarding Performance and Market Accountability	188
Table 15:4	Charter Schools' Strengths and Weaknesses Regarding Accountability and Self-Evaluation	192

Figures

Figure 3:1 Growth in the Number of Ohio Charter Schools 14

Figure 3:2 Proportion of Charter Schools Serving Specific Grade Levels 15

Figure 5:1 Growth Patterns of the Four Participating Charter Schools 52

Figure 8:1 School Climate Survey: Teachers & Staff Results from 2001-02 80

Figure 11:1 School Climate Survey: Parents and Guardians Results 128

Figure 13:1 Riverview Scholars Performance on the Ohio Proficiency Test and
Off-Grade Proficiency Tests in Spring 2003 147

Figure 13:2 Grade 4 Ohio Proficiency Test Results for 2002, Percentage of Riverview
Scholars Students At or Above State Standards 148

Figure 13:3 Riverview Scholars’ Performance on Off-Grade Proficiency Test 149

Figure 13:4 Riverview Scholars’ Results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills 150

Figure 13:5 Results for Main Street Montessori on the Iowa Test of
Basic Skills Test 154

Figure 13:6 Lifelong Learners & Leaders’ Community Values 158

Figure 13:7 Essentials Academy: Performance on the Ohio Proficiency Test and the
Off-Grade Proficiency Test 159

Figure 15:1 Logic Model and Illustration of the Charter School Concept 178

Appendices

Appendix A Detailed Description of Methods for Collecting And Analyzing Data . . 196

Appendix B Details on the Comparison Schools in Terms of Location and
Demographics 206

Appendix C Survey Results Regarding Charter School Missions 207

Appendix D List of Each Charter School’s Partnerships and Funding Sources 213

Appendix E Supplemental Results Regarding Academic Performance 219

List of Acronyms

CCG	Composite comparison group
CCS	Cleveland Community schools
CMSD	Cleveland Municipal School District
CRT	Criterion-Referenced Test
CTBS	Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills
EC	The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EMO	Educational management organization
ESL	English as a second language
IEP	Individualized education plans
ITBS	Iowa Test of Basic Skills
LEA	Local education agencies
LEP	Limited English proficiency
LLL	Lifelong Learners & Leaders
LOEO	Legislative Office of Education Oversight
MAT-7	Metropolitan Achievement Test, 7 th Edition
MSM	Main Street Montessori
NCE	Normal curve equivalent
NCES	National Center for Educational Statistics
NCTE	National Council of Teachers of English
NCTM	National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
NPR	National Percentile Rank
NRT	Norm-Referenced Test
ODE	Ohio State Department of Education
OPT	Ohio Proficiency Test
OGPT	Off-Grade Proficiency Test
RFP	Request for proposal
RS	Riverview Scholars
SAT-9	Stanford Achievement Test, Version 9
SES	Socioeconomic status
WMU	Western Michigan University
WRAT	Wide Range Achievement Test

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An evaluation study presents a variety of challenges. Data must be collected so that a clear description of the evaluation context can be developed and a baseline of information related to the evaluation questions can be established. In addition, trusting and valued relationships between stakeholders must be developed. These challenges would be daunting without the hard work, cooperation, and commitment of a number of individuals. First and most importantly, we wish to thank the administrators and staff at the community schools who took time from their busy schedules to complete surveys and to meet with us during site visits. They were also very generous in responding to our many requests for documentation. We also want to express our gratitude to the students and parents who shared their experiences with us by completing the surveys. Secondly, we want to express appreciation to members of the project's Review Panel who offered support and guidance regarding the design and conduct of the study, and comments and feedback regarding the reports. Finally, a litany of scholars as well as representatives from community and state level organizations have shared valuable insights, documentation, and data with us.

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Carolyn Sullins and Gary Miron
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 2004

It is too soon to assess the success of the charter school reform movement. But success or failure now rests with the schools themselves: It's up to them to produce (Education Week, 2002).

Introduction and Background to the Evaluation

1.1 What Are Charter Schools?

The General Assembly finds that the establishment of independent community schools throughout the state has potential desirable effects, including providing parents a choice of academic environments for their children and providing the education community with the opportunity to establish limited experimental educational programs in a deregulated setting. Ohio Revised Code, Chapter § 3314.01, Section 50.52., Subsection 2.(B)

Charter schools, known as “community schools”⁷ in Ohio, are independent public schools that operate under a contractual arrangement with an authorizing entity, such as a county education service center, a university, a school district, or a state board. The contract between the school and its sponsor frees the school from many traditional public school system rules and regulations in exchange for increased accountability—ultimately, high student academic achievement. These lessened regulations are intended to provide the opportunity for innovations in governance, curricula, and instruction. These innovations create more school choices for educators and for parents. In addition, charter schools are intended to improve traditional public schools by providing an impetus for change as they compete with traditional public schools for students and the money that follows enrolled students.

Charter schools can be formed by a variety of individuals or groups, including educators, parents, community members, for-profit and nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education. A contract, which is signed by its founding members and a sponsoring agency, details what the school expects to accomplish with respect to student achievement and other outcomes. Unlike traditional public schools, a charter school may be closed by its sponsoring entity if it fails to meet the standards set forth in the contract. The rules that govern how a charter school can be started, who can sponsor a school, and how much leeway exists in implementation vary from state to state.

Minnesota was the first state in the country to pass a charter school law in 1991. Each subsequent year, several additional states passed charter school laws. As of September 2003, 40 states plus the District of Columbia had enacted charter school laws; Maryland’s was the most recent addition. Thirty-six of these states and the District of Columbia had charter schools opened during the 2002-03 school year. As of the 2002-03 school year, 2,695 charter schools—a 14 percent

⁷ In Ohio, charter schools are officially referred to as community schools, although few use this label in practice. In the text of this report, we have used community schools and charter schools interchangeably.

increase from 2001-02—were in operation across the nation, serving around 684,495 students (Center for Education Reform [CER], 2003). Nationwide, charter schools may gain additional momentum, having recently gained federal support—including a 220 million dollar grant through President Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* act (Boehner, 2003).

Ohio’s charter school movement, despite numerous obstacles, has been gaining momentum since charter school legislation was passed in 1997. Fifteen charter schools were approved to operate starting in 1998; the total number of charter schools grew to 135 by March 2003 (ODE Office of Community Schools, 2003). Originally limited to Lucas County and the “Big 8” urban districts, charter schools may now be initiated in Lucas County, the largest “Urban 21” school district, and any school district designated to be an “academic emergency” or “academic watch.”

Cleveland Municipal School District [CMSD] is an Urban 21 district and is currently considered to be in academic watch. In the 2002-03 school year, 17 charter schools were operating in the CMSD area (Ohio Department of Education, 2002). All of these charter schools were sponsored by the State Board of Education.⁸ Four of the Cleveland charter schools are financially supported by The Cleveland Foundation. These 4 schools are also the focus of this study.

1.2 Background of the Evaluation

In 1998, The Cleveland Foundation developed a strategy to support charter schools as part of its larger focus on supporting public schools in Cleveland and the surrounding districts. The Foundation’s support of charter schools focused on start-up funding to four schools, support to the Ohio Community School Center, and evaluation. In total, the four schools and the Ohio Community School Center have received approximately \$1,213,921 between Fall 1998 and Spring 2003. An RFP for an evaluation of the sponsored schools was prepared and announced in December 1999. This project, which covered both technical assistance and evaluation activities was awarded to The Evaluation Center at WMU. Work commenced on the project in August 2000.

The contract with The Evaluation Center called for a flexible three-year project that has two separate but linked components. The first component deals with strengthening the accountability plans of the participating charter schools as well as developing their capacity to use evaluation to improve their programs and instruction. The second project component is an evaluation of the participating schools, addressing a variety of predetermined and emergent issues.

This evaluation has produced three annual reports, with different aspects of the charter school highlighted during each of the three years. The first year provided the statewide context for the evaluation, along with some baseline satisfaction data from each of the—then three—participating schools. The second year’s report focused in depth on the start-up and implementation at each of the four participating schools and included some exploration of achievement data. It also involved a preliminary generation of theories regarding factors that contributed to successful implementation of charter schools ideals. This year 3 report delves further into various implementation issues, with a additional emphasis on the impact of charter schools. In addition, it includes longitudinal analyses of both stakeholder satisfaction data and academic test scores. More importantly, it synthesizes findings from the three years of data and tests the preliminary theories that were generated earlier.

⁸ In September 2003, the Cleveland Municipal School District sponsored its first charter school, Johnnie E. Wilson Military Academy.

It is our hope that this report will provide insights and lessons that will prove helpful for both charter schools and traditional public schools. Ultimately, this report should help inform decisions made by The Cleveland Foundation regarding their policy and approaches for supporting education in and around Cleveland.

We now present an introduction to the four Cleveland charter schools that are the focus of this study. We then detail the purposes of this evaluation and the specific questions that the evaluation is intended to answer.

1.3 The Four Charter Schools in the Study

The four Cleveland charter schools that have received start-up grants from The Cleveland Foundation are Main Street Montessori, Riverview Scholars, Lifelong Learners & Leaders, and Essentials Academy.⁹ The Cleveland Foundation chose these four schools to fund because their initial proposals demonstrated their capacity for financial responsibility, efficient and inclusive governance, and effective curricular and instructional innovation. Because of the criteria used by the Foundation to select these schools, they are not necessarily representative of other charter schools in Cleveland or elsewhere in Ohio. In fact, they are likely to be more successful than other charter schools. These four schools are briefly introduced below. Further details about these distinct case schools are shared throughout the report.

Main Street Montessori (MSM) was among the original 15 Ohio charter schools established in 1998, starting as a single classroom of 30 students in grades 1-3. It was created in part to provide a Montessori education to families that could not afford a private Montessori school. It has been adding a grade every year since its inception, and during the 2002-03 school year, it served a total of 220 students in grades K-7. Its student body is predominately white, as is the local community, although each year it enrolls a slightly higher proportion of minority students. The school has had to move twice as its enrollment increased, and currently occupies a former parochial school building. One of its ongoing challenges has been meeting both state education standards and Montessori standards; cooperation between and among staff and parents has helped the school strive toward these goals. It has also faced challenges due to its rapid growth and its substantial changes in governance.

Riverview Scholars (RS) was opened in 1999. It started as a kindergarten through second grade school, but also has added a grade per year until it reached the fifth grade in 2002-03. It is the largest of the 4 schools in our study, with an enrollment of 295 students in grades K-5 as of the 2002-03 year. It is located in a former parochial school building and serves a predominately African-American student body. Its focus is on developing citizenship in its students as well as improving literacy. Responding to an unanticipated need, it now includes numerous programs for students with behavioral and emotional health needs, several of which were designed and created by the school itself.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders (LLL) opened its doors in 2000. It started as a one room K-2 school and has added a grade per year for the past two years. It serves grades K-4, but groups students by developmental level rather than traditional grades. Its student body of 78 is predominately African American, and a number of its students are being raised by their grandparents. Its founders have increasingly incorporated multiple generations in learning together. Its focus is on

⁹ Note that these are synonyms and not the actual names of the charter schools.

creating “lifelong learners” and incorporates numerous reading mentors, many of whom are local center’s senior citizens.

Essentials Academy was opened in September 2001, serving grades K-1 and 5-7, with plans to add two or three grades per year until it includes grades K-12. It was originally located in a central city location, due to unanticipated problems with its building, it relocated to a location that is more residential. The school later relocated to another suburban location for 2003-04 school year and plans to move to a permanent site by 2005-06. It is designed to meet the particular needs of underachievers and is inspired by the philosophies of essential schools and reflects African-American culture and values. For example, family-like interpersonal relations are promoted through ritualized daily meetings among teachers and students. Its student body of 97 is predominately African American, reflecting its original neighborhood. This school has faced formidable obstacles, especially in securing a safe, stable facility and in maintaining financial viability.

Although each school has a different focus, all four have a strong emphasis on developing positive interpersonal relations among students, between students and staff, and –to varying extents–between staff and parents. Stakeholders at all four schools have emphasized their common mission, or “being on the same page,” as essential to creating and maintaining a unique community. All have faced challenges of limited resources and other growing pains. These challenges and opportunities are detailed throughout this evaluation.

1.4 Purposes of the Evaluation

The Cleveland Municipal School District’s manual on program evaluation states, “The main purpose of evaluation is to ask ourselves, ‘What have we accomplished and how well did the process work?’ We undertake evaluation, NOT to critique *past* performance, but to improve *future* performance” (Cleveland Municipal School District, 2000, p. 5, emphases in original). Our evaluation of the four charter schools funded by The Cleveland Foundation is based on a similar perspective of evaluation. At the request of The Cleveland Foundation and several review panel members, this evaluation focuses on assessing issues regarding the development, implementation, and preliminary outcomes of the schools. Ultimately, this should provide information to improve charter schools in Cleveland and elsewhere. This reflects Nee and Mojica’s perspective (1999, p. 40), “We believe that more foundations will wish to engage in a mutual process of discovery or learning. Such language and practice are more appropriate to community work than the connotation of judgment that evaluation has in the past often carried.”

The more explicit purposes of the evaluation include the following:

- To provide the national, state, and local contexts of the development of the four Cleveland charter schools in this study
- To provide a detailed background regarding the history and functioning of each of the four Cleveland charter schools in the study
- To explore in depth various issues and obstacles that affect charter schools, using the four Cleveland charter schools as examples (albeit not necessarily representative ones)
- To explore the impacts that Cleveland charter schools can have on their communities, host districts, and surrounding districts, as well as factors that promote or impede these impacts

To explore differences among the four participating charter schools as well as between the four participating schools and other local public schools, whether they be charter schools or traditional public schools.

To enhance participating charter schools' capacity to use evaluation to improve their operation and instruction

To achieve these goals, we examined four areas that are covered by the RFP: (1) implementation, (2) student learning, (3) public education reform, and (4) evaluation. Specifically, the following evaluation questions are addressed in this study.

What have been the processes of developing and implementing these schools?

What factors influenced the effectiveness of their development and implementation?

How are the charter schools in our study utilizing the opportunity space they have been provided by the charter school law, and to what extent are they implementing the ideas contained in charter school theory? Specifically, these opportunities and ideas concern: (a) governance, (b) parental participation, (c) professional opportunities for teachers, (d) innovative curriculum and instruction, and (e) cohesion around mission.

Are schools able to promote academic growth in students?

Are schools accountable to the market?

Have the schools fulfilled the expectations of fiscal and regulatory accountability?

What conditions improve (or do not improve) student learning?

How do the charter schools affect other Cleveland public schools and the district as a whole?

How have these schools served as models for other public schools?

How have they provided an incentive for other public schools to reform?

To what extent are charter schools using program and personnel evaluation?

Since the schools in our study have only been open for two to five years, and since the charter school initiative itself is quite new to Ohio, our study has largely focused on formative evaluation. This approach is more appropriate than one with a heavy emphasis on summative evaluation.

Formative evaluation is for the purposes of assessing and improving a program. Ideally, it should be initiated at the same time as a new school begins and conducted continuously throughout the duration of a school's existence. The technical assistance component of this project, which is not covered in detail in this report, involves support and guidance to the charter schools as they conduct this continuous formative evaluation.

By contrast, summative evaluation focuses more on the impact or outcomes of a given program. Typical questions might include the following: Did the school meet its goals and the goals of the initiative? Have the needs of the students and community been met? Were there unintended or unanticipated outcomes as a result of these schools? What are their value and merit? Because of the newness of the four charter schools, it would be premature to provide definitive answers to most of these questions, particularly to the newest schools in our study. However, exploring the preliminary outcomes of the charter schools, including the unintended outcomes, can provide a baseline from which current performance can be assessed and future outcomes can be compared.

1.5 Organization of the Report

Having introduced the purpose of the evaluation in this initial chapter, we follow with a chapter describing the various methods and instruments used for this evaluation. In Chapter 3, we then provide a brief background of charter schools in Ohio, including the pending legislation that may affect them. Chapter 4 provides rich descriptions of the charter schools, including their particular missions and educational approaches. Start-up issues and obstacles are the focus of Chapter 5, and governance and management of the schools is the focus of Chapter 6. Chapter 7 describes the various stakeholders involved in the schools as well as the reason for why they were attracted to the charter schools. Chapters 8 and 9 cover teacher's professional opportunities and parental and community involvement. The tenth chapter is devoted to special education and issues related to the instruction of at-risk students. Next are three chapters covering three different types of accountability: market, fiscal and regulatory, and performance. Following this, we then explore the impact of the charter schools on the Cleveland Municipal School District and surrounding districts in Chapter 14. Finally, the report ends with a concluding chapter that suggests the overarching contributors to charter school success and includes areas for further study.

Methodology of the Study

As noted in the introductory chapter, the focus of each of our three yearly evaluation reports is somewhat unique. The first year report provided extensive baseline data and information regarding the context of the study. The second year focused on the school level dynamics at each of the four charter schools in our study. This year's report synthesizes both school-level and larger contextual data. We have used a multiple case study approach, conducting a detailed, holistic description of each of the four community schools and describing how local and statewide circumstances shape each school's development. Throughout the report the evolving picture of each school is elaborated and becomes more detailed.

One purpose of this study was to detail the potential applications of Ohio charter school law and the barriers to its implementation. The specific ways in which charter school laws and opportunities are implemented—the interactive web of phenomena regarding governance, staff, parents, and students—influence the climate and culture of the school and, ultimately, the students' learning. This detailed account of the charter school phenomena provides more information than simple statistics regarding standardized test scores or satisfaction survey data.

The four charter schools in this study, selected for funding (and subsequent participation in this evaluation) by The Cleveland Foundation based on their potential to implement the ideals encompassed in the charter school law, provided exemplary, information-rich cases. Information-rich cases are defined as “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry . . . Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Indeed, this evaluation is not intended to provide specific findings that can be generalized to other charter schools in Cleveland or elsewhere. Instead, we have sought naturalistic generalization or “conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs, or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the [reader] feels as if it happened to themselves” (Stake, 1995, p. 85). Thorough descriptions of each school and direct quotes from the staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders are incorporated throughout this report to help create this vicarious experience of the schools in this study.

However, our approach was not limited to qualitative descriptions. The array of questions addressed in this study required multiple approaches for collecting and verifying information and for capturing the various perceptions that exist. The various types of data collected allowed us to provide information to individual schools to help them make improvements as well as to address the specified evaluation questions.

2.1 Approach and Strategies for Data Collection

We used the following methods for collecting information:

1. Individual *interviews* with charter school directors and principals, teachers, other staff, board members, parents, students, state-level policymakers, and other stakeholders. Experts in education and school reform were also interviewed, as were various representatives of the Cleveland Municipal School District.
2. *Direct observation*—including some instances of participant observation—of classroom lessons, board meetings, professional development activities, and various other day-to-day activities at the schools
3. *Focus groups* of particular stakeholders: teachers and staff, parents, and students
4. *Surveys* of staff, students, and parents. This included charter school surveys developed by The Evaluation Center and nationally normed school climate surveys. Both surveys included closed- and open-ended questions.
5. *Reviews of student work samples*, when available
6. *Review of documentation* from the schools, the district, state-level organizations, the media, and the larger body of literature and research on charter schools
7. *Analysis of test scores and available demographic and financial data* for the four participating schools as well as other Cleveland charter schools and matched districts schools.

Appendix A contains a detailed description of the methods for data collection and analysis of the data. This appendix also contains tables that provide a matrix of the evaluation questions and sources of data and information for each question. As one can see, we sought a variety of data sources for each evaluation question we address in the study.

We are aware that charter schools are of considerable public interest and that they are bombarded with requests for information and to serve as subjects for a variety of studies. While this attention may be initially well received, it becomes a considerable drain on the resources of the relatively small staffs of charter schools; therefore, we made efforts to use existing data that may be required for other reports. We also focused on only those issues that are important and necessary for this study and selected respondents who were considered to be knowledgeable about the issue(s) being addressed and who could contribute to the quality of the information/ data that we collected. We hope the process for obtaining information was viewed as time well spent by the informants and useful by stakeholders.

Most of the data we focused on this year were qualitative in nature, but some were quantitative. Information for answering the key evaluation questions often included a variety of sources and a combination of qualitative and quantitative data/information. For example, we examined the level of satisfaction with the schools from the vantage point of students, teachers, administrators, and parents. We also used a combination of qualitative (e.g., interviews) and quantitative (e.g., surveys) data to look at particular issues. We considered evidence of academic achievement from test scores as well as self-rated performance by students and changes in student performance observed by parents and teachers. Additionally, we asked stakeholders at each school about their school's success in fulfilling its mission and meeting its set goals.

2.2 Comparison Groups

The collected data yielded information to help us make preliminary inferences about the individual charter schools, groups of charter schools, and the charter school initiative as a whole. For example, analysis was conducted with the following comparisons in mind:

- Comparison of charter schools over time. Retroactive data, when available, helped us expand this longitudinal comparison.
- Comparison of each charter school in our study with Cleveland Municipal School District in terms of demographics, test scores, teacher salaries, revenues and expenditures, etc.
- Comparison of each charter school with 2 district schools that served the same grade levels and were geographically and demographically similar.
- Comparison of each charter school in our study with other Cleveland area charter schools in terms of demographics, test scores, teacher salaries, revenues and expenditures, etc.
- Comparison of each charter school and groups of charter schools with national norms for the school climate survey.
- Comparison of each charter school, and groups of Ohio charter schools with a multistate composite comparison group of charter schools in terms of stakeholder demographics and levels of satisfaction.
- Survey participants' perceptions of previous experiences in noncharter schools to experiences in charter schools.

Although the four charter schools funded by The Cleveland Foundation were the focus of this study, at times it was desirable to compare these schools with other schools. There were four major sources of comparison: (1) other charter schools in the Cleveland area; (2) the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD) as a whole; (3) a total of eight CMSD schools that serve the same grade levels and are geographically and demographically similar the four participating charter schools; and (4) a Composite Comparison Group of 112 schools built from The Evaluation Center' earlier statewide studies of charter schools in Michigan, Illinois, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. Each of these comparison groups is further described below.

Other Charter Schools in the Cleveland Area

As of the 2002-03 school year, 17 charter schools were in the CMSD area. These do not include on-line cyberschools, which may enroll children from the Cleveland area although the schools themselves are not physically located there (see chapters 3 and 14 re cyberschools). Unfortunately, data were only available for the schools that have been open for at least 2 years.

Comparisons between The Cleveland Foundation-supported schools and the other Cleveland charter schools may reflect the effects of the support; the choices that the foundation made in selecting promising schools to support; an interaction of both factors; or additional, spurious factors.

Matched Schools from the Cleveland Municipal School District

While some comparisons in the report refer to district wide figures, we use data from eight matched schools whenever possible and appropriate. At the request of the project's review panel, we conducted some analyses on the schools that were comparable to at least one of the four schools in our study in terms of the grades they serve, location, and demographics. The CMSD Research and Evaluation Division chose these schools as part of our request to study these schools as part

of our overall study. The schools are as listed in Table 2:1. More details on the comparisons schools in terms of location and demographics are found in Appendix B.

Table 2:1 List of Participating Charter Schools and Matching CMSD Schools

<i>Participating Charter Schools</i>	<i>Similar CSMD Schools</i>
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	Public Elementary School A Public Elementary School B
Main Street Montessori	Public Elementary School C Public Middle School D
Riverview Scholars	Public Elementary School E Public Elementary School F
Essentials Academy	Public Elementary School G Public Elementary School H

Composite Comparison Group

At times, it is helpful to compare the results of our study to similar but larger scale charter school evaluations in other states. Since the late 1990's The Evaluation Center has conducted several charter school evaluations which explore staff and parental satisfaction using virtually identical surveys (Miron & Nelson, 2002; Miron, Nelson, Risley, & Sullins, 2002). We created composite comparison groups of both staff and parent survey data from a total of 112 charter schools in 4 different states: Michigan, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Illinois. The data was weighted so that regardless of the number of schools or individuals in each state, each state contributed 25 percent to the total composite. Table 2:2 provides additional information regarding the composite comparison group.

Table 2:2 Composite Comparison Group

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Schools</i>	<i>Year of Data Collection</i>
Michigan	51	1997-1998
Pennsylvania	31	1999-2000
Connecticut	16	1999-2000
Illinois	14	1999-2000

2.3 Limitations to the Evaluation

A number of limitations to this study need to be weighed and considered. Below we describe the major limitations and –where appropriate –we have discussed how we have addressed or compensated for the limitations.

Lack of time on site. Ideally, a qualitative case study would involve dozens of hours at each site for an extended period of time. The distance between Cleveland and The Evaluation Center prohibited visits more frequent than six visits per year. In addition, it was difficult to schedule visits to coincide with all activities for all schools; for example, we were not able to attend parent meetings at every school due to both scheduling conflicts and changes in the schools' schedules.

Sampling. Compared with other similar studies, the survey response rate was exceptionally good for all three stakeholder groups all three years (see Table A:3 in Appendix A). However, there was considerable variance among the response rates for the parent surveys from the four different schools. During the third year of the study, response rates on parent surveys ranged from 52 percent to 83 percent. We decided that any efforts beyond the four mailings would be irritating to the families as well as unlikely to yield additional responses.

Informant bias. Because of the vested interests, there is obviously the possibility of misleading information being provided by those we interviewed. Wherever possible, we tried to double-check information; or when references to financial issues or testing results were made, we attempted to confirm such information using the databases we obtained from ODE.

Timing. The fact that the charter schools have only been in operation for one to five years and the evaluation is in its third year presents a limitation to the study. Because these schools have been in operation for a short period of time, we have insufficient data to do an in-depth examination of their impact and effectiveness. However, each additional year of data helps us further complete the picture of these schools in terms of their success in establishing their schools and producing outcomes according the goals they have set.

Availability of data. The study focuses on only four charter schools. Comparisons are made with other groups, however, and the context of the study is also laid out by tracing trends for other charter schools in Cleveland and across the state. Unfortunately, the Ohio Department of Education makes available only the data for schools that are in operation for more than two years. Since many charter schools are not that old, no data are publicly available for a large portion of the charter schools. Further, there have been some obvious errors in the EMIS data that were reported back to us. According to ODE representatives, there has been confusion at many of the charter schools regarding the reporting and verification of data to ODE. Other limitations of data availability were covered earlier in this chapter.

Start-up phase of schools. During the last year of this study, the schools were in their second through fifth year of operation. We have become increasingly aware of the growing pains associated with opening a new school and the heavy demands on the personnel who run it. We know that new schools require a few years in which to implement their plans. A few years is often required to even secure or renovate a permanent facility. We recognize that the schools have been in various stages of their start-up phase and that any fair summative evaluation will need to wait a few more years. For these reasons the evaluation is largely formative in nature; when we describe outcomes, we qualify them and remind the reader of the specific limitations that apply.

Charter Schools in Ohio: Setting the Context

In this chapter we provide a brief history as well as a current snapshot of Ohio charter schools. This background information helps to set the context for the four schools in our study, which are detailed in subsequent chapters. In particular, we address the following questions in this chapter:

1. What is in Ohio's charter law, and how does it compare with those of other states?
2. How many charter schools are there, and where are they?
3. Who do the Ohio charter schools serve?
4. What recent legal matters may affect the Ohio charter schools?

3.1 How Ohio Charter Law Compares With Other States' Laws

Each of the 40 states and regions that have charter school laws has different sets of restrictions regarding the number of charter schools that may exist, the organizations that may sponsor a charter school, the funds they may obtain, and the district regulations from which they are exempt. There are also varying restrictions over whether charter schools may be brand new schools or may be converted from existing public and/or private schools.

The Center for Education Reform CER ranks the charter school laws of the 40 states and regions (District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) according to their strength; each state or region receives a grade of A through F. "Strength" of a charter school law is defined by how restrictive the law is based on 10 different factors such as number of schools allowed, waivers from laws, legal and fiscal autonomy, and guaranteed per-pupil funding. On each of these factors, the state's charter law is graded on a scale of 1 through 5; a maximum of 50 points may be earned.

According to CER, Ohio's charter school law has grown stronger each year. Its initial grade was a C, in part because it originally restricted charter schools to 9 school districts. By 2001 the grade raised to a B with a ranking of 14 out of 38 from the previous year. As of January 2003 Ohio's charter school law received 37.5 points, earning a grade of B and ranking 11 out of the 40 states and regions (Center for Education Reform, 2003). Ohio received top ratings (5 of 5) for "eligible charter applicants" and "schools may be started without evidence of local support." However, CER rated Ohio only 3 out of 5 on the five different measures of autonomy, including legal/operational autonomy and waivers from state laws. The CER's 2003 rankings took Am. Sub. H.B.-364 into consideration. This new bill broadened the scope of districts in which charter schools could

commence and increased the number of potential sponsors of charter schools. This bill and its implications are discussed later in this chapter.

Although the CER's rankings imply that "strength" in a state's charter school law is an inherently positive quality, other researchers in the field disagree. For example, it has been argued that excessive permissiveness in charter school laws can lead to lack of accountability, potential for discrimination and/or re-segregation, unrestrained corporate control of schools, and proliferation of poorly performing charter schools (Miron & Nelson, 2002). The relative permissiveness of Ohio's law has been criticized by charter school opponents, who claim that all of the above have been problematic in Ohio. Conversely, charter school advocates often complain that Ohio's law is not strong enough, creating barriers to realizing the charter schools' full potential. Throughout this report, we will explore how the freedoms and restrictions affect the implementation of the charter schools in Ohio, particularly in the four schools in our study. We also explore how changes in these restrictions have affected the prevalence and impact of charter schools in Ohio.

3.2 Location and Number of Charter Schools and Students

Public school conversions can be created in any Ohio school district; however, only one of Ohio's 135 charter schools had been converted from a public school as of June 2003. Private schools in Ohio may not be converted to charter schools. However, some schools, such as the HOPE schools in Cleveland, were initiated as private schools, but then closed down and reopened as new charter schools.

New start-up schools are permitted in limited districts, although the limitations on these districts have become more inclusive over time. Originally, new start-ups were limited to the "Big Eight" school districts plus a "pilot" charter school program in Lucas County. In 1999 this was expanded to the largest 21 urban school districts (referred to as the Urban 21¹) and any school district designated as "academic emergency." Additionally, Lucas County's pilot program attained permanent status. In December 2002, districts designated as "academic watch" were also included. The academic emergency and academic watch school districts are announced each January when the district report cards are released.

The greater inclusion of districts that may host charter schools has led to a rapid growth in Ohio's charter schools. As Figure 3:1 shows, there were 15 schools in the first year of the reform and 135 schools 4 years later. This number accounts for the closure of 12 schools. While the overall number of charter schools has increased from year to year, the rate at which new schools appeared has been less constant. Throughout Ohio, 30 schools opened in 2001. Four of these were in Cleveland, including 1 in our study (EA). An additional 45 schools, including 1 in Cleveland, opened during the 2002-03 school year. Figure 3:1 also illustrates the somewhat irregular pattern of the additions of new charter schools. This growth pattern contrasts with the more common growth pattern seen in many other states where a large number of charter schools are approved in the earlier years followed by a slowing rate in the creation of new schools (RPP, 1998).

Not surprisingly, the number of students in charter schools has grown dramatically since the enactment of the charter school law. ODE records show that 2,332 students were enrolled in Ohio charter schools during 1998-99. Within 5 years, that number increased to more than 33,000 during

¹ The Urban 21 school districts are Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Cleveland Heights-University Heights, Columbus, Dayton, East Cleveland, Elyria, Euclid, Hamilton, Lima, Lorain, Mansfield, Middletown, Parma, South-Western, Springfield, Toledo, Warren, and Youngstown City.

the 2002-03 academic year (LOEO, 2003a, b).

In October 1998, the first year of the charter school initiative, charter school students made up less than 1.2 percent of public school enrollment in the corresponding school districts that had charter schools. By the following year, 3 percent of the public school students in these districts were attending charter schools. More than 1,900 of Cleveland's approximately 75,000 children (about 2.5 percent) were enrolled in its 10 charter schools by 1999 (Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, 536 U.S. 5, 2002). By 2002, Ohio charter schools enrolled about 1.3 percent of the state's *entire* public school population, not just the districts that include charter schools (124th General Assembly of Ohio, 2002). By 2003, 5.2 percent of Cleveland's students were enrolled in charter schools (LOEO, 2003a). Currently, Dayton has by far the highest percentage of Ohio charter school students, with 15.5 percent of its students attending charter schools.

As of 2001, the size of Ohio charter schools, in terms of average enrollment per school, were slightly smaller than other charter schools in the nation. During the 2000-01 school year, the average charter school in the U.S. enrolled 251 students (Petro, 2002), while the median number of students in Ohio charter schools was 147 students and the mean number was 228. There was wide variation around these values, as one might imagine. Most charter schools were small, with enrollments ranging from 20 to 300 students. Some, however, enrolled more than 2,000 students.

The size of the charter school enrollments increased between the first and second year of the Ohio's charter school movement, but since then it has remained fairly stable. This may reflect the tendency for new schools to start small and add more grades and/or classes each year; the growth of older schools may be offset by the addition of smaller new schools each year. Table 3:1 displays the growth trends.

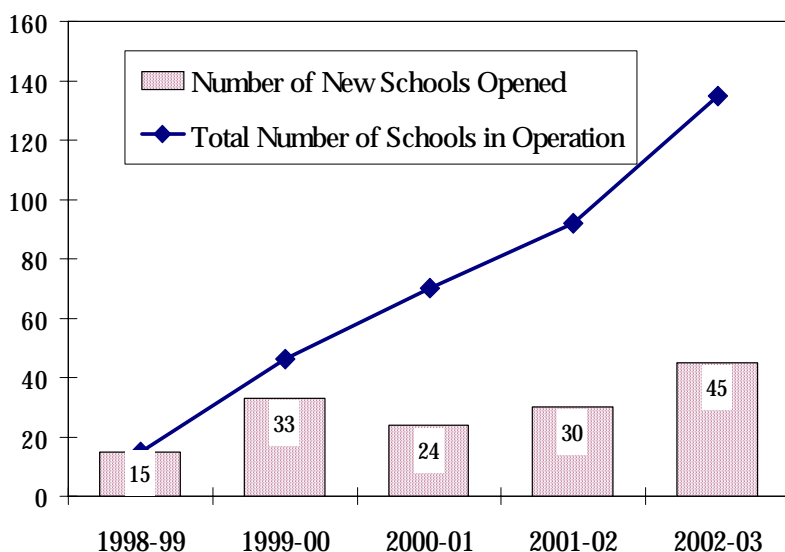


Figure 3:1 Growth in the Number of Ohio Charter Schools

Table 3:1 Growth and Proportion of Charter Schools According to Relative Size

Year	Total Number of Schools	Percentage of Schools With Fewer than 100 students	Percentage of Schools With More Than 300 Students
1998-99	15	50%	13%
1999-00	46	26%	24%
2000-01	65	no data	22%
2001-02	92	37%	23% above 350

Having explored the growth rates of the charter school movement in Ohio and of the charter schools themselves, we now turn our attention to the types of schools provided by Ohio’s charter school movement.

3.3 Descriptive Overview of Ohio Charter Schools

In this section we briefly assess the range of services offered by Ohio’s charter schools. Subsequent chapters provide extensive details on the four Cleveland charter schools’ missions, curricula, instruction, and operations. For now, we focus on Ohio charter schools’ target populations and the student groups they seek to serve.

Grade Levels Served

A wide variety of clusters of grade levels are served by charter schools. In addition to the more typical patterns of K-5, K-8, and 9-12, there are schools that serve grades 2-8, 6-7, 1-11, as well as other groupings of grades. Charter schools, including all four in our study, often start with younger grades and then add one or more grades each subsequent year for several years. This may account for some of the unusual groupings of grade levels in some charter schools.

During the 2001-02 school year, 75 percent of the 92 schools served only elementary students (S. Ramsey, personal communication, February 2002). The following year, only 29 out of 135 schools limited their enrollment to grades K-5 or lower (ODE, 2003). Figure 3:2 displays the distribution of grades that were served by charter schools in Ohio in 2000-01 and 2002-03. This figure mainly indicates a trend of charter schools growth in terms of the range of grades they serve; there were some increases in the proportion of charter schools which served higher grade levels. In 2000-01, nearly 3 times as many schools served kindergarten through third grades as twelfth grades. There was some evening out of grade levels by 2002-03, but nearly twice as many schools served lower elementary students as those that served high school students. However, this skewed distribution may continue to even out over time as schools add older grades each year.

On the other hand, this trend may not continue rapidly. Some schools, including two of the four in our study, opted to stop growing at the elementary school level for a variety of reasons. As our study details, a school’s excessive growth can adversely impact resource acquisition and management, governance issues, staff working conditions, and coherence around its unifying mission. In addition, students in middle school and high school are more expensive to educate. Our own analysis of district

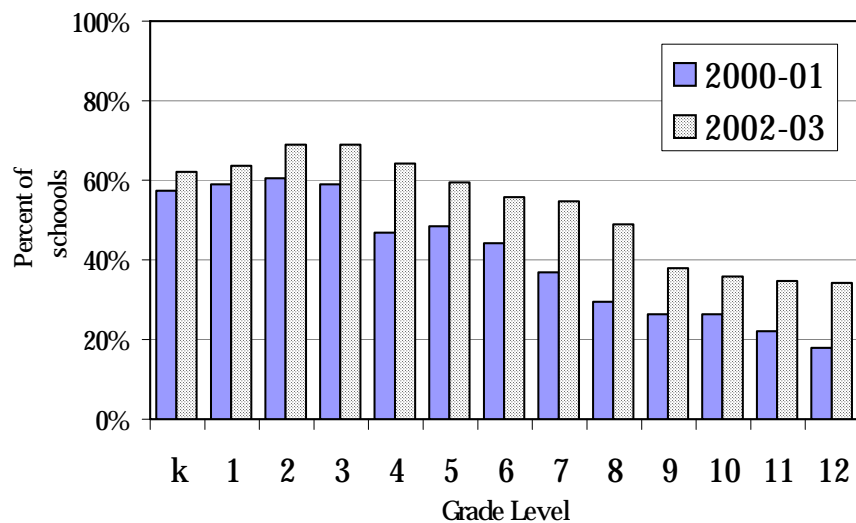


Figure 3:2 Proportion of Charter Schools Serving Specific Grade Levels

data² revealed that middle schools spend an average of \$300 more per pupil than did elementary schools, and high schools spend \$600 more per pupil than elementary schools. Further, several stakeholders in our study noted that older students come with more “baggage” from previous schools. By starting with entry-level grades, charter schools are accountable for their own work and not prior mistakes elsewhere in the educational system (McDermott, Rothenberg, & Baker, 2003; S. Ramsey, personal communication, February 2002).

Educational Approaches

An important aspect of the charter schools, a matter that may distinguish them from their surrounding district schools, is their unique or innovative educational approach. Some schools’ educational approaches focus on particular philosophies or pedagogical techniques, such as Montessori. Numerous charter schools in Ohio put a particularly strong emphasis on character development. Although federal charter school law forbids the discrimination of students based on religion or ethnicity, some charter schools infuse a particular cultural focus which makes the school more attractive to particular ethnic groups. Others focus on special populations, such as at-risk students or students with autism or attention-deficit disorder. The educational approaches of the four Cleveland Foundation-sponsored charter schools was found to vary considerably, suggesting that these charter schools provide a reasonably wide variety of educational choices in the area. However, as the next section details, critics of charter schools believe that expanded choice in public education is coming at the expense of accountability.

There is evidence that many of Ohio’s charter schools, including those that are not specifically targeted toward “at-risk” students, attract a large proportion of at-risk students. This may be due to charter schools location in urban areas and schools designated as academic emergency and academic watch. While only one of the schools in our study, Essentials Academy, specifically targeted at-risk students, the location of Riverview Scholars and Lifelong Learners & Leaders attracted a great number of them as well. More details on the educational approaches of the four schools, including how they dealt with at-risk students, are covered in Chapters 4 and 10.

One particularly controversial new format of charter schools has been online charter schools. These “cyberschools” are distance learning programs in which students attend class at home via the Internet, with instructors available online and, with less frequency, face-to-face. These schools are an innovative option for students who are not well suited for traditional classroom instruction, such as children with chronic health conditions or behavioral issues. However, cyberschools are often viewed as taxpayer-funded home schooling with inadequate controls. At the same time, proponents of traditional home schooling see them as a governmental encroachment into family-based education (Else & Purdey, 2002). have caused considerable controversy in other states as well, particularly Pennsylvania (Miron, Nelson, Risley, & Sullins, 2002).

The oldest and largest of Ohio’s cyberschools is the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) school, a distance learning school based in Toledo. This school opened in 2000 and enrolled approximately 780 students across grades K-12; by April 2002, it had around 3,000 students (Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow, 2002). There are now an additional 10 cyberschools throughout Ohio, 9 of which are sponsored by the districts in which they reside. Chapter 14 provides more details regarding the prevalence and impact of cyberschools in Ohio.

² This was based on data available from the Cleveland Municipal School District (available at <http://www.cmsdnet.net/OREA/reports/interactive/IDS/>).

The passing of the Amended Substitute House Bill 364, allowed the initiation of charter schools designated for gifted students and for single sex schools. This will allow additional options for families. Previously, such schools were considered exclusive and were not permitted by Ohio's charter school law. Provisions were made to prevent these schools from discriminating: (1) schools designated for "gifted" students must accept any student who enrolls, although they need not provide a regular, general curriculum; (2) schools designated as "single sex schools" must offer an alternate, partner school for the other sex as well (S. Burigana, personal communication, June 17, 2003).

House Bill 364 also created far more dramatic changes in Ohio's charter school law, particularly regarding sponsorship. We now turn our attention to this bill and the impact it may have on Ohio's charter school movement.

3.4 Amended Substitute House Bill 364

After a variety of revisions, Amended Substitute House Bill 364 (Am. Sub. H.B. 364) was passed by the senate in December 2002. Although it places some additional restrictions on charter schools, this bill has the potential to increase the number of charter schools throughout the state. Further, it caps the number of charter schools at 225. This limit is substantially higher than the original cap of 125, which was lifted in July 2001. Since the current number of charter schools is 136, the cap provides substantial room for continued growth.

The original H.B. 364 would have permitted start-up charter schools in all Ohio districts, but the bill was eventually amended to be less expansive. Instead, the Amended Substitute H.B. 364 added districts designated as "academic watch" to the list of districts that could include charter schools. Lucas County, the Urban 21 districts, and any districts designated as "academic emergency" were still included on the list.

Perhaps the most significant feature of Amended Substitute H.B. 364 is that it forbids the Ohio State Board of Education (OSBE) from sponsoring charter schools. This arose out of concerns that the OSBE we're unable to provide either adequate support or appropriate oversight to the 79 charter schools (including 4 that closed by that time) that it had sponsored (Petro, 2002). Instead, local agencies will sponsor the charter schools, and ODE will oversee and provide assistance to these local sponsors. OSBE can take over the sponsorship of a school if a sponsor fails to live up to its responsibilities. OSBE will continue to sponsor its original 79 schools, plus an additional 26 schools that it agreed to sponsor after Petro's report, throughout each of their 5-year contracts. However, more than 20 schools, including a number of them in the Cleveland area, were unable to open or renew their contracts in 2002-03 because they had planned to have OSBE as a sponsor but lost this possibility after Amended Substitute HB 364 passed. Schools that were up for renewal were given extensions on their contracts. Throughout this report we describe potential effects of this new legislation on the growth of charter schools and the relations between them and their respective host districts.

3.5 Ohio Congress of Parents and Teachers v. State of Ohio Board of Education

A far more threatening matter arose out of concerns that charter schools were not being held sufficiently accountable by their sponsors. On May 14, 2001, a lawsuit was filed against numerous representatives of charter schools in Ohio (Ohio Congress of Parents and Teachers v. State of Ohio Board of Education [OCPT v. OSBE], 2002). This lawsuit was dismissed in April 2003, but the plaintiffs have indicated that they plan to appeal.

There were 24 plaintiffs in this lawsuit, including the Ohio School Boards Association, the Ohio Association of Public School Employees AFSCME Local 4, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators, the Ohio AFL-CIO, the Ohio Association of School Business Officials, the League of Women Voters of Ohio, the Ohio Congress of Parents and Teachers, 3 local boards of education, and 6 local teacher unions.³ Defendants specifically named in the lawsuit include Ohio State Board of Education (OSBE), the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), the University of Toledo, and the Lucas County Educational Services Center (LCESL), all of whom are involved in sponsoring charter schools. Other defendants include the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2 management companies, an online charter school, and other specific charter schools. The case ultimately affected all charter schools in Ohio and even jeopardized their existence.

Essentially, the lawsuit charged that the charter schools violated the Ohio state constitutional “system of common schools” on a number of grounds. First, the lawsuit claimed that the charter school law “broadly exempts community schools from a variety of state laws applicable to public schools operating within the constitutionally established common system of public schools” (OCPT v. OSBE, p. 17). They cited examples of how accountability for performance was not enforced in exchange for these exemptions. For example, many charter schools’ standardized test results did not meet state requirements, yet these schools were not penalized. The plaintiffs also opposed the charter school boards being appointed rather than elected. In addition, the suit claims that the charter schools reappropriate a disproportionate amount of money from the district schools. Finally, the lawsuit stated that the involvement of for-profit education management organizations (EMOs) was in violation of the promise that charter schools would be nonprofit entities. (See Chapter 6 for more information on EMOs).

The lawsuit had considerable impact on all of the charter schools in our study, even though none of them were sponsored by for-profit EMOs, the primary targets of the lawsuit. In addition to the anxiety over their schools’ futures, the staff in our study knew that they could be subpoenaed without notice for virtually any documentation that the plaintiffs requested. The staff appeared resentful of the fact that time that could have been spent on instruction was spent attending to the lawsuit. Naturally, they were quite relieved after the lawsuit was dismissed, but were still painfully aware of widespread opposition to charter schools.

In all likelihood, the lawsuit had some impact on our work as well. Already burdened from paperwork with the lawsuit as well as other agencies, the evaluation related activities may have seemed to be yet another time-consuming administrative task. Further, there were concerns about who could have access to the evaluation data and how they could be used for or against the schools. While the stakeholders understood the importance of accountability and integrity, there were also concerns that any negative information about any of the schools could be misrepresented by the lawsuit’s plaintiffs to further their own case against charter schools.

3.6 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the state of the charter school movement in Ohio and some of the important factors that significantly influenced it. Currently, 136 charter schools are in

³ Involved boards of education include those of Akron, Middletown, and Springfield. The teachers unions include the Akron Education Association, Cincinnati Federation of Teachers, Cleveland Teachers Union, Columbus Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, and the Toledo Federation of Teachers.

operation in Ohio. Taken as a whole, these schools enroll over 33,000 students. Since the implementation of the charter school law, there has been relatively steady growth both in the number of charter schools and charter school students.

Charter schools appear to target students at a reasonably wide variety of grade levels. Charter schools tend to seek students in the elementary grades. Many of these schools are planning to “grow from the bottom,” which might well even out the distribution of grade levels covered. Similarly, charter schools’ mission statements indicate that they intend to serve a wide variety of education interests and goals. Whether intended or not, many of the charter schools serve a high proportion of at-risk students.

Two important legal matters impacted the growth of the charter school movement in Ohio. One is Amended Substitute H.B. 364, which allows start-up charter schools in more of Ohio’s districts, but also forbids OSBE from sponsoring any new or preexisting charter schools. The other matter was a lawsuit filed against all Ohio charter schools in May 2001, which had the potential of ultimately eliminating all of them. The lawsuit was dismissed in April 2003, but consumed considerable time, energy, and resources for charter schools and their supporters during its nearly two-year course.

Both these legal matters had the potential to profoundly affect the implementation of each new charter school in Ohio, taking time and energy away from their original missions. In the next chapter, we provide a detailed description of each of the four case schools’ missions and educational approaches as well as the factors that inhibited or enabled them.

Case Schools and Their Unique Missions and Innovative Educational Approaches

Ohio charter school legislation was designed “to stimulate school choice and add innovative and experimental options to meet the education needs of all children” (Office of School Options, 2000). Beyond providing alternatives to district schools, charter schools may be seen as “research and development laboratories” for innovations which, if successful, can be adopted by traditional public schools. This chapter addresses how well charter schools are taking advantage of the opportunities to implement innovative curriculum and instruction.

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (www.m-w.com) defines innovation as “1. the introduction of something new; 2. a new idea, method, or device.” However, there are different conceptualizations regarding what components of an idea, method, or other contrivance must be new to be considered innovative. For example, must an “innovative” curriculum be comprised exclusively of new elements, or can it be composed of old elements combined in new ways? Contexts of comparisons are also an issue. Is an innovative teaching method new when compared with the national or just the local market of education? Is a “back-to-basics” curriculum, which by definition is a revival of an old model, considered innovative if it is the only such curriculum in the local school district?

For the purposes of providing educational alternatives to Cleveland’s children, “unique to the district” is probably the most relevant definition of innovation. However, ultimately the vagaries of the definition may lack importance. In each of the four charter schools, administrators were often unsure if particular elements of their programs were unique to the realm of education or even to Cleveland. They were clearly more concerned about the appropriateness and effectiveness of their ideas rather than the novelty.

At each school, the motivations for their particular educational approaches and instructional methods had two themes: (1) choosing or developing methods that were congruent with and could help fulfill their missions; and (2) responding to emergent needs in their school, in line with their original mission. Mission-based charter schools are developed around a unifying theme, including the appointment of board members, the hiring of administrators and teachers, and the recruitment of families. Therefore, there should be more agreement among stakeholders regarding what the mission is and what the subsequent educational approaches should be (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Lacking the encumbrances of a centralized governance, charter schools generally have more freedom to experiment with new educational approaches and teaching methods with which to fulfill them. Accordingly, innovations regarding instruction and special programs can be approved

with less bureaucratic red tape or political gridlock. With all these new opportunities afforded to them, how are charter schools impacting teaching and learning?

Because the missions are central to the educational approaches and innovations in these four schools, we start the next four sections of this chapter with each school's overall mission. We then outline the various innovations created to fulfill each mission, either upon the original development of the school or in response to unanticipated needs. Richly detailed in-class examples of innovative curriculum and instruction are set off in italics in the text. Next, we describe how charter school regulations enhance or impede the fulfillment of the mission and related educational approaches of each of these four schools in our study. Finally, we discuss how satisfied the staff and the parents are with the fulfillment of each school's mission.

4.1 MSM: "Children Discover Their Natural Potential"

Main Street Montessori is committed to providing the children of Greater Cleveland an education based on the principles, philosophy and techniques of Maria Montessori and the Montessori Method, in a non-denominational environment, enriched by the values of love, respect and justice. We are dedicated to providing Montessori education in a creative, nurturing learning environment that will allow children to discover their natural potential.

Mission statement for Main Street Montessori

Montessori schools, which have existed primarily in private school form for almost a century, are quite different from traditional schools in philosophy, educational approaches, and basic structure. In this section, we describe Montessori's pedagogy, implementation, assessment philosophy and practices, and socialization. We then provide an extended example of how an MSM middle school class puts these ideas into practice. Next, we discuss the impact of Ohio's charter school law on the implementation of the Montessori mission. This section ends with a discussion on how satisfied Montessori's stakeholders are with the mission and how they help carry it out.

Pedagogy

MSM' director provided this brief synopsis of Montessori pedagogy: Children learn at their own rate, based on their natural interests, choosing activities from the Montessori lessons. Hands-on, child-directed discovery rather than didactic instruction is the primary method. The teacher acts as a guide or facilitator, while the children's natural curiosity drives them to work on activities of their choice, alone or in groups. Younger children learn by experimenting with specially designed "manipulables" while older students learn from extensive group projects. As one upper-elementary student described the instruction, "I like it. We can move around and work on what we like to work on. And activities—they're like assignments, only they're fun." One mother agreed about the importance of the "fun" factor and laughed about how her son was now more proficient in some of the math activities than she was. "It's toys⁴—that's why they're eager to learn." Structurally, Montessori schools are different as well. Classrooms are multigrade, which facilitates the older students helping the younger ones learn. Ideally, each student stays with the same

⁴ The purposively designed manipulables and learning materials used in Montessori education are not toys. However, children often find them entertaining and thus are motivated to work with and learn from them.

teacher for three years in a row, as she and her classmates progress together from the youngest to the oldest cohort in each class. This promotes bonding among teachers and classmates as well.

Implementation. A common misperception among those unfamiliar with Montessori schools is that given so much freedom, most children would choose to play chaotically rather than work seriously, becoming self-centered and undisciplined (Seldin, 2000). Contrary to this assumption, elementary-aged MSM children began working independently on their assignments as soon as they walked in the door each morning, rather than playing or socializing until the teacher called the classroom to order. Students as young as six were not only working diligently on a series of projects, but were also recording in their journals how much time was spent on each. A teacher explained how Montessori teachers spent a lot of time and effort teaching the students how to discipline themselves during the earliest years. There was great emphasis on respecting one another and the materials used for lessons. “We teach them not to hit Johnny over the head with them or pretend to shoot each other with them.” After the first year or so in a Montessori school, students developed the self-discipline to work independently at their own rate. Children were given assignments at their individual level so that with enough self-discipline they could complete them in a given time frame.

Despite the freedom, there were reasonable consequences to not living up to expectations. While there was substantial flexibility as far as which projects a child could work on and when, eventually work had to be completed in all designated areas. If a child decided to spend all her time on only one project and ignore the others, she would be told that she couldn’t work on her favorite project until her other assignments had been completed. If a child did not complete a project as expected, he would have to complete it during another activity. For example, in one classroom we observed two kindergartners sitting outside their peer group during story time; they were finishing an assignment that had not been completed earlier. Students who consistently had difficulty staying on task or completing assignments were given a formalized work plan.

Assessment. Montessori philosophy does not involve comparing children with one another, but to themselves. Portfolios are used to demonstrate progress, but there are no standardized rubrics with which to assess them. According to one teacher, “We have individual assessments in gain ‘scores’ for teachers, but we don’t present this to the kids. Instead, we work with them to give them the skills to correct their deficits.” This process-oriented approach contrasts sharply with the achievement-oriented philosophy of standardized tests. A lower elementary teacher provided this example.

During a writing assignment, one boy was having trouble putting ideas on paper in complete sentences. I sat down with him and said, ‘What would you like to write about?’ When he explained this, I said, ‘How do you say this as a sentence? Say it in your head as a sentence before you put it on the paper.’ I gave him a lesson on fixing his mistakes instead of just correcting him. Throughout the entire curriculum we RETEACH correctly what is right instead of pointing out what was wrong. If you see a child doing something wrong, reteach it right. Standardized tests just say, ‘This is wrong. This is wrong.’ It’s so much more of a whole process for them.

MSM’s process-based philosophy involved teaching children self-discipline, teamwork, and natural consequences at an early age, rather than the more traditional obedience to authority. This applied to helping students with their social relations as well. Working in groups facilitated the development of social skills while students mastered various academic concepts. This contrasted with the typical public schools where, according to several MSM teachers, children were simply

told to sit down and be quiet. “The structure of a traditional school doesn’t allow for intervention. Just spew back information, work alone at your desks; there’s no time to intervene with kids.”

Socialization. At MSM, teachers not only intervened, but helped students learn how to solve problems themselves instead of relying solely on the teachers to fix their problems. “Go talk to Johnny if he made you mad.” Actively listening to children was important in teaching them social skills. “We ask, ‘How does that make you feel?’ . . . We listen to them and actively help them. We ask them to probe deeper. We help them help themselves.” Results of the 2001-02 teacher school climate survey supported the success of this emphasis, where student-peer relations and student-teacher relations (standard scores of 68th and 70th percentile, respectively) were dramatically higher than the national norms (50th percentile for each). The classroom structure facilitated these real-time lessons on interpersonal skills. Because there was team-teaching at MSM, one teacher could intervene with a social conflict, and the other could keep teaching the rest of the class. As a teacher described, “Its so nice to see issues dealt with and resolved . . . not just sending kids to the principals’ office to be punished. They don’t learn from that.”

Social interactions were an integral part of the middle school curriculum as well, an essential focus for an age group usually marked by exclusive cliques, social insecurities, and antagonistic relations among groups of peers. Various assignments put students in positions that required mature leadership and organizational skills, as well as basic skills such as math and language. Students worked in groups, alternating leadership positions, on various cross-topical, project-oriented assignments. These groups were assigned, rather than chosen by the students themselves, to discourage the proliferation of cliques and to teach students to cooperate with everyone with whom they had to work. Every morning started off with a community meeting that was facilitated and evaluated primarily by fellow students. Various subcommittees, such as business and finance committees, reported to this group. Guests were included in these meetings as well; the following is the evaluator’s experience participating in such a meeting.

I participated in the community meeting group, joining them in their circle and introducing myself during the “sharing” portion of the meeting. This is what is normally done with guests during the community meeting.

The group started with the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a Pledge to the Earth. One student called the community meeting to order, while another took attendance. Throughout the meeting, the teacher did very little of the facilitating and let the students take the leadership roles. They started off with acknowledgments.

A lot of students acknowledged other students for babysitting the night before at a meeting. This led to a discussion about a five-year-old who threatened to “moon” everyone at the meeting the day before; many students laughed out loud during the discussion. The teacher explained to the class about how the older students took him aside and told him about appropriate behavior, as sixth and seventh graders should model appropriate behavior for younger children. The teacher also described how we should understand that this child was only five years old and his misbehavior should not be interpreted through middle school lenses. Likewise, adults shouldn't interpret middle school behavior through adult lenses although they often do—including teachers. She gave an example of how she had misinterpreted her daughter’s reasons for wanting to leave school early.

Next, the business committee made their announcement: they wanted to start a school store. There was a side conversation among some students regarding their previous school’s store. The group discussed how they would buy pencils at one cent each and sell them at ten cents each. Two boys excitedly asked, “How do we know how much we will sell, and are you sure that we should

only sell them for ten cents each?” The teacher explained that was what business is all about—trying to estimate these things. The business committee checked their figures again.

Next came the discussion of world events. Each day, a news article would be read, and an icon depicting the situation would be placed on a world map hanging on the wall. A girl read a clip from a paper regarding the India/Pakistan conflict. There was considerable discussion on this issue. One student asked if that was terrorism, an issue they had discussed in detail earlier and depicted with an icon depicting an airplane crashing into a building. “No, it was a conflict,” the teacher explained. They were to put an icon on a map but they could not decide what icon to put on there; they had already designed icons for terrorism and war, but not for conflict. There was a discussion regarding what icon they should use to depict a conflict. One person suggested two men with argue bubbles, holding bombs in each of their hands. Some people did not think this was strong enough. One boy said, “A car bomb is different than threatening to blow another country of the continent.” Someone else remarked, “You can’t hold the bomb.” Another student explained that the image of holding a bomb was symbolic. A girl with a small whiteboard drew some icons for the students to look at. She drew two men with bombs in each of their hands looking angrily at each other. There was a vote on whether there should be a mushroom shaped cloud in the picture, since students felt that the small bombs looked inappropriate to a situation in which nuclear war was threatened. There was an oral vote on this symbol: six in favor of the mushroom shaped cloud and six against it. The rest abstained; I, as a member of today’s group, also abstained. But one boy again was very adamant about having a strong symbol depict the conflict, impulsively interrupting because he was so excited. “It’s not as if you’re saying, ‘I’m going to blow up your building . . .’ ‘Well, then I’ll blow up your car.’ They’re talking about wiping each other’s country off the face off the earth!” There was more discussion on what type of symbol they should have; almost all the students had strong opinions on how to best depict such a profound situation. Another vote was taken; the group was told that no one could abstain this time (given my role as an outside evaluator, I abstained anyway). After there was finally agreement upon the symbol, a student drew it and placed it on the world map.

After this lengthy discussion there was, as there was after every meeting, the process of acknowledgment of the students’ behaviors. “I’d like to acknowledge the following people for behaving during the meeting” . . . the student read off the list. The boy who had been repeatedly interrupting the class was not included on the list; others were also excluded for side conversations. Occasionally a student would say, “I want to challenge him,” regarding a student whom they felt he had erroneously included or excluded as having appropriate behavior. At one point the student who was in charge of the list said, “I challenge myself for not noticing that.” Everyone laughed. One person remarked that a certain boy should be kept off the “good behavior” list for laughing at another student’s off-topic remarks. There was some debate among the students concerning whether laughing at other people’s inappropriate remarks was acceptable; the students managed to focus on the behavior itself, not the personalities of the individual. It was resolved as a ruling against laughing at off topic comments.

The “values of love, respect and justice” that were central to the Montessori mission seemed to be played out in this meeting. Although the discussions ranged from nervous laughter about a kindergartner’s embarrassing misbehavior to passionate debates on how to depict the threat of nuclear war, the students were respectful of one another and conflicts were dealt with calmly. Real-time lessons on interpersonal communication, leadership, democratic decision making, and conflict resolution were woven into lessons on economics, mathematics, and social studies of current events. Such processes were typical of a Montessori education.

However, numerous educational processes were initiated in response to emergent needs that were somewhat unique to MSM's status as a public charter Montessori school. For example, it was quite difficult to meet the literacy needs of all the students in the context of a Montessori education, so the teachers initiated a Before & After School Reading program to assist students with their reading. Most of MSM's innovations concerned adaptations to make the Montessori curriculum feasible in a school that was required to meet the standards of its EMO and the state.

Impact of Charter School Regulations on the Implementation of the Montessori Mission

Although the original American Montessori schools were private schools, as a public school MSM has restrictions that alter its implementation. These restrictions led MSM to alter everything from its structure to its instructional and assessment practices.

Structure. Although the typical Montessori grade groupings are preschool, grades 1-3, and grades 3-6, MSM used a different scheme to meet the needs of the students and the limits of their resources, both of which changed dramatically over the course of 5 years. They started as a single classroom of 30 first through third graders. The following year, they added a kindergarten and a fourth grade. By the 2002-03 year, the school included two kindergarten classes, three lower elementary classes (grades 1-3), one upper elementary class (grades 4-5), and a middle school (grades 6-7). For the 2003-04 year and beyond, MSM planned to make the upper elementary classes grades 4-6 and middle school grades 7-8.

Instruction. Some private Montessori elementary schools limit their enrollment to students who previously have attended a Montessori preschool. This regulation ensures that their incoming students will have been "normalized" into incorporating the expectations and discipline for self-directed learning. MSM, on the other hand, must be open to all students who enroll. This creates classrooms full of children who are not familiar with the Montessori expectations, and much work must go into helping the children become normalized. As one teacher explained, the Montessori practice of one teacher and one aide per classroom may work in a private school with selective enrollment, but it is not enough in a public school where so many students are unfamiliar with or unable to live up to Montessori expectations. Some teachers had to adapt their lesson plans substantially to meet the needs of their students. For example, in one class every student had a formalized work plan, rather than the fully child-directed approach typical of Montessori schools.

However, because MSM was a small charter school with team teachers and fewer regulations, a large portion of the Montessori philosophy could be implemented more readily than it could be in a noncharter public school. During the 2001-02 year, teachers who had formerly taught at public, noncharter Montessori schools described a dramatic difference; they saw the noncharter public Montessori schools as much more traditional, with just a few Montessori-like elements. For example, "The handling of interpersonal problems is better here at MSM than at the other public Montessori schools. There, they give the kids just five minutes to solve their own problems, then they send them to the principal's office."

MSM has fewer regulations than traditional public schools, Montessori and otherwise. However, because MSM is a public school, it still has to adhere to ODE's traditional standards as well as those of Montessori schools. The contract with OSBE states that 75 percent of its fourth graders must pass each area of the proficiency tests. Although MSM has outperformed CMSD, it is still far from meeting these standards. Both staff and parents were concerned that the hands-on, child-directed Montessori approach did not adequately prepare students for these standardized, pencil-and-paper tests. Therefore, changes had to be made to the curricula and instruction in order

to prepare the students for these standardized tests. Substantial professional development has focused on correlating Montessori lessons with the state certified standards.

According to the director, most of the Montessori teachers were initially resistant to adapting their instruction to these new standards, but they have worked through their doubts. Nevertheless, one teacher who had taught and worked as an administrator at private Montessori schools for decades expressed, "State standards are what we're judged on [by authorizers]. Montessori standards are used more for parents and kids." In 2001-02, some parents were displeased with the compromise of pure Montessori pedagogy and increased emphasis of standardized testing. One parent stated,

To force Montessori teachers to 'teach' material specific to the proficiency exam and have Montessori students feel forced to 'learn' material the children may or may not be ready to absorb is ludicrous. This 'teaching and so-called learning' process is in direct conflict with the pure purpose of classroom presence of the Montessori director or directress which is to 'direct' – 'guide' the child to immersing him or herself in the environment to obtain the knowledge.

By the 2002-03 year, there appeared to be further departure from the original Montessori mission. The No Child Left Behind Act on the federal level, coupled with the influence of schools' EMO (EdUnited) on the localized level, led to a greater emphasis on standardized testing. Despite the attempts to plan Montessori-based lessons that covered the material necessary for satisfactory test performance, there seemed to be an increasing polarization of the two sets of standards and increased difficulty in trying to stay true to the Montessori mission and philosophy. Often, there wasn't the time to adequately cover Montessori-style lesson plans, which tend to be hands-on and time intensive, and cover all the subject areas needed to be mastered for the tests. Therefore, Montessori elements of the curriculum sometimes had to be compromised. While numerous teachers and parents saw this as incorporating "the best of both worlds," others were displeased by the increasing departure from a purer Montessori mission and approach. As one teacher explained, "We feel we don't have much of a choice . . . We want it truer to Montessori than paper and pencil. Finding a happy medium is difficult."

Stakeholder Agreement and Satisfaction Regarding the Mission

In spite of these seemingly conflicting standards and goals, as well as the staff's differing perspectives on the Montessori-traditional hybrid, MSM staff reported high satisfaction with the school's ability to fulfill its mission. As shown in Table C:1 (see Appendix C), the survey item *Ability of the school to fulfill its stated mission* yielded a mean of 4.4 (SD = 0.7) out of a possible range of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Both staff and parents were also satisfied with the extent to which MSM was following its mission, as shown in Table C:2. All but one of the surveyed parents marked that the mission of the school was being followed "well" or "very well."

Stakeholder involvement to help the school fulfill its mission. To help meet both sets of standards while fulfilling the school's mission, each classroom has two instructors: one with a traditional teaching background and certification and one with a Montessori background. On average, there are 30 students in each classroom. Even before the formal adoption of these standards, MSM had paired Montessori teachers with state certified teachers, in part because of the difficulty staffing their public school exclusively with Montessori teachers. During the 2000-01 school year, these teacher match-ups had caused some personality clashes. The following year there were fewer conflicts, in part because there was more screening of potential teachers and teachers' aides.

“Merging the two worlds can be hard,” the director explained, “but the teachers are professional and can work it out. I’ve had to intervene only once . . . Its like a mom and dad: they can’t disagree in front of their kids. They have to support each other.” In the future, each kindergarten classroom will have only 25 students per class but, due to budgetary constraints, only one state-certified teacher and one aide.

As active stakeholders in their school, parents helped MSM meet its two sets of standards. One parent explained, “The students need help with the proficiency tests . . . Why do they test poorly? They aren’t used to tests.” She and other parents took this matter into their own hands. In 2001-02, they compiled worksheets from books for parents to take home and help their kids practice for pencil-and-paper tests. By 2002-03, this was evidently not as necessary, because more test preparation was being incorporated into the general curriculum. As one teacher explained, “I hate to say ‘teach to the test,’ but in some ways you do . . . work on what they’ll be tested on.”

4.2 Riverview Scholars: Learners Who are Good Citizens

The mission of Riverview Scholars is to produce learners who exemplify academic excellence and responsible citizenship. Mission statement for Riverview Scholars, Annual Report 2002-03.

One Riverview Scholars staff described a uniqueness of the school as “The focus is not only on academics, but also on appropriate behavior, character development, and being a responsible/productive person.” The principal explained, “Literacy and citizenship go hand in hand. You can’t teach one without the other.” In this section, we describe how various stakeholders helped Riverview Scholars strive towards its missions via innovative instructional techniques and multigrade classrooms.

Innovative structures and programs to help meet the mission. As part of its dedication to academic excellence, Riverview Scholars emphasized literacy as one of its primary goals during the 2001-02 year. “We have to be mission driven about literacy,” the executive director stated. “If we don’t excel in literacy, all the character education in the world won’t work.” The staff of Riverview Scholars hoped to “integrate literacy into everything we do.” Various committees and programs, many of which included parents, were introduced in order to help Riverview Scholars meet its mission of promoting literacy as well as citizenship. Several staff explained how charter schools, free of extensive bureaucracy, expedited the development and implementation of these committees and programs, several which are described below:

Character committee. A character committee, composed of the principal and some teachers, met twice a month to decide how to incorporate the mission into various aspects of teaching and learning. They created collaborative, ongoing, quality improvement efforts to address some of the barriers to implementing and fulfilling the mission. For example, one professional development lesson, which was part of a larger process, involved developing a coherent curriculum based on the state standards to help all the staff get on the same page regarding educational approaches. To incorporate character-focused aspects of their mission into these lesson plans, in some of the writing classes the students were asked to write about a virtue, such as “perseverance.”

Character assemblies. Schoolwide character assemblies, each organized and presented by a different class, were held twice a month. Parents were encouraged to attend these assemblies as well. Each assembly involved one of “the seven virtues: respect, generosity, responsibility, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and courage” (White, March 15, 2003). For example, a kindergarten

class demonstrated generosity by forgoing their usual Friday snacks so they could pass out candy to the rest of the school. During another assembly, a first grade class created a puppet show illustrating the value of honesty.

Literacy blocks and math blocks. In November 2001, “literacy blocks” were created for first through fourth graders: these blocks were smaller, multigrade groups of students. The students are grouped by ability rather than grade level. To increase the ratio of teachers to students, four extra teachers were pulled in for these literacy blocks: a literacy coordinator, a cross-categorical teacher, an LD/enrichment teacher, and a class-size reduction teacher. These literacy blocks convened every Tuesday through Friday morning. *Project Read/Language Circle* was used as the curriculum, which included the topics of phonics through grammar. A similarly structured “math block” was implemented the following year. These blocks were not limited to exclusively academic foci; matters of citizenship were also integrated.

Before/After School Enrichment Program. One program of which the school staff were quite proud was the Before and After School Enrichment Program. This program, which was initiated in part from a need for childcare beyond school hours, provides extra opportunities for academic, physical, and social development. A literacy specialist worked with first graders in the Before and After School Enrichment Program, while tutors worked in small groups with other students in the program. By March 2003, a total of 60 students attended this program, with an average of 50 in the Before School program and 40 attended the After School program.

Summer scholar program. Riverview Scholars held a five-week summer school program that focused on both academic and character development. This program, which aimed to serve 80 students, was staffed by Riverview Scholars staff and interns and supported by several local partnerships. It included literacy blocks and math blocks similar to those during the regular school year, as well as weekly visits to the local library. In addition, there were daily activities concerning diversity, cooperation, and mediation. Twice-weekly parent and student workshops were included in the program as well, with activities ranging from cooking to music writing to student-led diversity activities.

Proficiency club. This program was started “. . . to give our students the skills they need to do well on the Ohio Proficiency Test without forcing our regular classroom teachers to teach to the test” (White, March 15, 2003). The program included three 6-8 week sessions of each of the following: after school interventions to develop and monitor student progress; parent workshops for helping parents implement strategies at home to develop their children’s reading skills; and a weekly book club where students discussed books with volunteers, teachers, staff, parents, and peers. It also involved a field trip incentive program, whereby participants in the other components of the club could attend recreational events such as roller skating, movies, or the YMCA. In conjunction with in-class activities such as math and literacy blocks, the proficiency club was one approach to improving student achievement.

The following section describes one morning of literacy blocks, illustrating how it was implemented in various sections according to the students' needs. We see examples of how matters of citizenship were incorporated into the curricula—on the classroom level, such as encouraging courtesy, and on the societal level, such as fostering pride in one's cultural heritage.

In one corner of the large hallway, far from the other classrooms, a group of 12 students were playing a game called “Literacy Block Olympics.” A strip of red paper, with marks numbered

from 0-270, was taped on the wall. Each child's crayoned self-portrait was placed on a particular point on this red strip, indicating how many points he or she had earned from reading and writing assignments. One teacher taught aloud to the class, while another worked one-on-one with a student at a desk. One boy sat on the floor away from the others, silently reading a science book. After the presentation had ended and time was devoted to completing the writing assignments, the class seemed remarkably quiet, with conversations in subdued whispers.

After a period of independent writing, the teacher rang the bell to get the students attention. "I see Keisha's⁵ attention . . . I see Tyler's attention," she announced, making a point of praising the children's behavior in front of the others. "Please bring your papers and come to the circle . . . Josh knows how to listen and follow instructions" The teacher then started an "award ceremony" for those who had earned enough points to gain a bronze, silver, or gold medal. She encouraged those who had not yet earned a gold medal not to give up.

After the awards ceremony, a boy read a poem that he had written to the class. The theme of the poem was how all the kids in the class were his friends and so were the teachers.

Down the hall, in a large, open area, sat students from other literacy blocks. Today was special because two of the blocks were combined for one event presented by the young students. Such joint ventures took place about once a month, as the two teachers had been team teachers the previous year. The second class arrived late; their teacher apologized and explained to the other block's teachers why. Two of the kids were having behavior problems, and since the teacher's aide in that block had left for another activity, the teacher had to attend to their problems alone before bringing their block to the joint event. Apparently referring to the multiple roles, she sighed and stated that this was the way things were at charter schools.

Each student had a turn presenting a poster of written instructions for a particular project, coupled with a demonstration. A few parents who had brought in their children's materials stayed to watch. The first demonstration involved baking a cake. After the girl had read the recipe step-by-step to the class and demonstrated each step with some assistance from the teacher, one of the teachers helped put the cake in an oven in the adjoining instructional kitchen. Other demonstrations followed: planting a flower, stringing beads, making a sandwich.

Above these classrooms on the second floor, a tearful voice shrieked, "I DIDN'T DO NOTHIN'! I DIDN'T DO NOTHIN'!" over and over again. A man calmly walked a screaming boy down the hall into another room. The other classrooms appeared unfazed by this outburst.

In one of the classrooms on the third floor, the fourth graders were seated in chairs in a circle, listening to an elderly woman read to them. This woman was an ardent civil rights activist as well as a the grandmother of two of the students at Riverview Scholars. The children sat with rapt attention; one asked her if she had known slaves in her lifetime. She explained the difference between the slavery issue and the related—but more recent—civil rights issue, of which she had played a strong role. She was planning to take a 400 mile freedom walk across Ohio to commemorate the underground railroad. A shorter walk was planned for the Riverview Scholars students, assisted by students at a local public high school.

The children appeared very attentive and engaged in their literacy blocks, particularly the fourth graders who were listening to the story about enslaved youth. The teachers seemed relaxed and engaged as well, problems with juggling multiple roles and discipline issues notwithstanding. One parent who was quite pleased with the literacy program remarked, "This is my daughter's first year of school, and she is very interested in reading and writing. At age 5 she can read books with

⁵ Students' names have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

30 or more pages. I feel it has a lot to do with the teachers and administrators.” Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was used to determine which literacy block was the best fit for each child; DRA was also used to assess progress 3 times per year. During a focus group, the teachers stated that they preferred the literacy blocks to their previous arrangement of small groups within the same class. They created less work for each teacher and more time with each child.

Impact of the Charter School Law on the Implementation of the School's Mission

The executive director explained how the autonomy of being a charter school had facilitated the implementation of new educational innovations such as the literacy and math blocks. Once the decisions were made to adopt the literacy blocks, they were implemented within only three weeks. In large part, this was because there was no district bureaucracy or teachers' union with which to contend. The executive director contrasted this with the traditional public schools, where innovative ideas often never came to fruition. He believed the teachers' union often impeded new curricular ideas in public schools due to the extra work they would create for the teachers. Some staff agreed; in fact, one teacher had intentionally selected employment there due to its “non-union environment.”

A Riverview Scholars staff member enthusiastically described, “Because it is a charter school, there are less politics. It quickens the process. For example, when I got the idea for a yoga class, I presented it to the board and they accepted it the next day. It got started the next week! In a regular public school, there would've been a lot of red tape to get the idea approved.” The school's principal explained, “[The director] is the superintendent. We don't have another layer of administration. We don't have to report to the [local] board of education. There's not as many hoops to jump through.” A number of other staff expressed that the biggest difference between Riverview Scholars and the schools in which they had previously taught was the rate at which new ideas could be implemented. Given the unanticipated, ever-changing needs of the students, such flexibility and expediency were quite necessary.

Obstacles to Fulfilling the Mission and Innovations Created to Address These Obstacles

From the beginning, Riverview Scholars had more students with behavioral problems than originally anticipated, and each year more such students enrolled. More than 15 percent of the students had Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) for disabilities; many of these disabilities were related to their behavior problems. In addition, more than 13 percent of the students had emotional issues that one time or another required the intervention of a social worker. Many other students had behavioral issues that made teaching and learning quite challenging but did not meet the criteria for an IEP.

Fulfilling the school's mission with such a large number of children with behavior problems was quite a challenge. While the executive director had indicated that teaching character development was useless without adequate literacy, many teachers thought that teaching literacy and other academic topics was nearly impossible without proper discipline. “You can be a genius; but if you have no discipline, you can't learn,” one teacher lamented. Many expressed that “dealing with behaviors that don't allow you to teach what you need to teach” was a major barrier to learning. Our survey data confirmed this concern. In 2001-02, 89 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “*Lack of student discipline hinders my ability to teach and the opportunity for other students to learn.*” As one teacher explained, “We need to work on ways in which to help children so they are more receptive to instruction.” Some of the parents were also

concerned about the impact of other children's behavior problems on student learning. One stated, "I feel misbehavement [sic] of some kids in the school interferes with the daily activities and learning of the rest of the classmates. . . ." When asked how to promote both literacy and citizenship to a child who has neither, the principal acknowledged the difficulty of the task. She then replied, "Individualized instruction."

In response to these needs, each year new staff and new programs were put in place to help students develop better self-discipline; many of these used individualized instruction as their basis. A half-time social worker was provided through a no-cost partnership with a child services agency who worked with students with Medicaid, and the school contracted with another part-time social worker who worked with several students with insurance. The school also had a part-time school psychologist on staff in 2001-02, who was replaced by a full-time psychologist in 2002-03. In addition, by 2001-02 the school employed several interns in social work and special education and a physical education teacher who was also trained in anger management. In terms of new programs to deal with discipline and behavioral issues, an Intervention Assistance Team was created. It is composed of the various behavioral specialists and meets every Friday morning to discuss the students who need their help. Descriptions of some of the interventions or programs designed to address the behavioral problems are included below.

Kidspace. One interesting innovation that Riverview Scholars used to help children manage their behavior was Kidspace. This is a place where children are sent when they have difficulty behaving and need some "time out." The staff were emphatic that Kidspace was to be therapeutic, not punitive. The children who utilized Kidspace were tracked to see how many times they came there and what their needs were; essentially, a case study was conducted on each child. Those who utilized it repeatedly were referred to the intervention assistance team, which made recommendations for individualized interventions and/or evaluations. Some students who used Kidspace frequently were assessed for eligibility for other special services as well. However, some teachers complained that the time lag for meeting the criteria to be assessed for special services was too long. Another concern was the stigma associated with Kidspace. Staff tried to make Kidspace a positive center by making it available for projects such as music practice. However, it was rarely used for such purposes. For the 2002-03 year, Kidspace was decreased to only half of each day as numerous other psychosocial services were implemented.

Social skill groups. Twice a week, targeted children attended a session on how to make friends and how to be a friend. In 2002, the school psychologist explained that many of the students did not come to the school with normal social skills. "Skills streaming" was the method used to address this; it involves modeling, practicing, and implementing skills in real life and then receiving feedback. Throughout the 2002-03 year, social skills classes were "still a big part of our program... taught by our special education teacher, social worker and social work interns."

Yoga. A yoga program was another innovation developed to help the children develop self-discipline. This was started during the Before and After School Program in 2001-02. The literacy specialist who worked with the Before and After School Program found that her children's attention spans were longer when they sat in the bell pose: "up to 15 minutes longer!" With this initial indicator of effectiveness, yoga was introduced in some of the regular classrooms. During a professional development meeting several months after the program's introduction, the principal asked about the effectiveness of this yoga program. The teachers agreed it helped the kids relax after recess and helped them release tension. It took self-control to learn yoga poses, but the

children were improving. The principal said that if the “pilot ” yoga program helped the children learn self-control throughout the day, it should be implemented in all the classes. The staff and principal discussed the most effective way to incorporate this into their class schedules.

However, the principal stated that for the 2003-04 year, “Yoga will be in the before school program and will not continue during school on a formal basis.” She remarked that it is expensive and requires staff who are willing to train and carry it out on a regular basis. “With NCLB and the demands on time, this is tough.” This conflict between meeting the student’s unique needs with an innovative approach and meeting the demands of federal and state regulations for increasing standardized test scores echoes the dilemma that MSM faced.

Reduced class sizes. In 2001-02, a number of the staff complained that the class sizes were too large to meet the individual students’ needs. The survey results showed that 54.2 percent of the staff agreed or strongly agreed with this item. By 2002-03, the class sizes were reduced to 16 students per kindergarten class and 18 in the older students’ classrooms. Staff were quite pleased with this change; only 23.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed that class sizes were too large in 2002-03. Teachers described how “more could be done” this year with the smaller classes, as they now could provide more space in each room, more small group activities, and more one-on-one attention for the students.

Standard disciplinary procedures. By the 2002-03 school year, uniform discipline procedures were enacted throughout the school. The staff had identified a lack of such standards as a major weakness in 2001-02, and most of the staff were grateful for these new protocols. One commented, “The kids seem more engaged in classroom activities. Less time is spent on discipline and more on learning. . . I was struck by how much calmer everything was. Last year a couple teachers screamed a lot. We don’t hear that this year.” One staff compared Riverview Scholars to the previous school in which he taught stating, “We have more behavior issues, but this is a stronger, more dedicated staff.” At a board meeting, the principal reported how specific and consistent consequences for infractions, such as detentions for incomplete homework assignments, had led to increased homework completion. Students were also rewarded for positive behavior, such as membership in an “AAA Club” for achievement in attendance, academics, and attitude. However, a number of other teachers found the new disciplinary procedures too lenient to be as effective as they could be.

In addition to the interventions listed below, a number of approaches, such as special education classes, were created exclusively for students with designated special needs. Students with relatively severe disabilities were placed in a separate classroom. Students who did not require a separate classroom but were quite behind academically and maturity-wise were placed in multigrade classes. These interventions and the controversies surrounding them are covered in the next chapter.

Despite all the specialized staff, policies, and programs, according to the principal, “There are so many kids falling through the cracks. We’re always in crisis mode. There’s not time to address them all, especially with the kids coming in midyear” According to several staff and board members, Riverview Scholars had been so successful in addressing the needs of students with behavioral issues that students all over the area were being referred to them. The staff worked hard to keep up with the continually increasing demand, and were sometimes frustrated that more could not be done. However, the staff did notice improvement in discipline as a result of the various interventions. By 2002-03, only 59 percent of the staff agreed or strongly agreed with the

statement, “*Lack of student discipline hinders my ability to teach and the opportunity for other students to learn.*” This was still fairly high, but dramatically less than 89 percent from the previous year.

Stakeholder Agreement and Satisfaction Regarding the Mission

In 2002 a City Year volunteer at Riverview Scholars commented, “There are a lot of ideals here. It could lead to a bunch of burned out people, or a lot of innovative ideas. Probably both.” The surveys and interviews in our study seemed to confirm his observations and predictions.

In general, parents seemed satisfied with the extent to which the school's mission was being followed. In contrast, the staff at Riverview Scholars were more divided and were less satisfied overall. Tables D:3 and D:4 compare the levels of satisfaction between these two stakeholder groups.

Despite its wide array of innovative programs, among the four schools Riverview Scholars' staff had the lowest mean satisfaction scores for the item *Ability of the school to fulfill its stated mission*: $M = 3.0$ ($SD = 1.0$) out of a possible range of 1 to 5. Nevertheless, this was an improvement over the previous year. One teacher said there was agreement about what the mission was, but there was “stumbling” as far as finding the best way to implement it. For example, the teachers all agreed on the importance of developing citizenship, a central tenant of their mission. However, they disagreed on such matters as what was the best way to reach the whole student body regarding character, how often citizenship meetings should be held, and how to bring citizenship to class consistently. There were also concerns that communication problems between staff and administration impeded fulfillment of the mission. However, the most oft-cited barrier to fulfilling the school's mission, especially in 2001-02, was discipline. As described in the previous section, much was done to address this problem during the 2002-03 year, with resulting success, not only in improved discipline, but also in subsequent perceptions of fulfillment of mission.

Riverview Scholars is the largest school in the study, and this also may have contributed to the lack of agreement regarding the implementation and fulfillment of the mission. A board member who had been with the school since its inception thought that the school would have run with more cohesion and consensus if it had started as a much smaller school. While shrinking the size of the school was not feasible or desirable, steps were taken to increase the staff-to-student ratio, such as hiring more teaching assistants, implementing the literacy and math blocks, and reducing class sizes. Most importantly, the school came to consensus that it would remain a K-5 school instead of expanding to include other grades (see chapter 4). This way, the school could focus on increasing the “quality rather than the quantity” of the school.

4.3 Lifelong Learners & Leaders: Fostering a Love of Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learners & Leaders fosters an educational community of excellence that provides experiences and skills for lifelong learning and spirited Citizenship for learners of all ages.

Mission statement for Lifelong Learners & Leaders

Lifelong Learners & Leaders' director emphasized that she always used the above mission statement to make decisions regarding curricula, instruction, and overarching policies. For example, lesson plans had to be geared toward lifelong learning instead of simply school-related phenomena such as testing. According to this director, the most important things for students to learn were (i) how to be a learner (this was process rather than content oriented, and reading and writing are crucial components of this) and (ii) how to solve problems and make decisions.

To fulfill these goals, Lifelong Learners & Leaders (LLL) was set up quite differently than traditional public schools. Students were grouped in four classes, based not on chronological age, but on developmental stage according to authentic assessments. These stages were described as emerging, beginning, transitional, and independent. According to the 2000-01 annual report, these stages “do not have a one-to-one grade level correspondence. It is not expected for all entering kindergartners to complete the emerging stage of development in one school year.” The school’s philosophy reflects that children reach developmental milestones at different ages and need instruction that fits their developmental stage, rather than chronological age. This provided some challenges for instruction; for example, the available math texts were geared toward a more traditional grade system and had to be adapted.

As part of its mission, the children were encouraged to develop a love of learning, especially reading. This was often challenging, considering that many children started kindergarten at Lifelong Learners & Leaders having had virtually no experience with books. Some had no idea what to do with a book, not even the simple concepts of turning the pages and pointing to pictures. They had no concept of words or that printed matter represented words. By the end of the school year, these children were learning the fundamentals of reading. While changes such as these could not be captured in the state accountability policy, they served as indicators that the school was fulfilling its mission. The following example displays how the students’ love of learning, particularly literacy, permeated their activities and aspirations.

Just prior to this classroom observation, I was warned that this afternoon was not an ideal time to visit. The principal and several teachers were out sick, a problematic situation in a school where qualified substitutes were particularly difficult to come by. The teacher in the classroom I observed was feeling ill this day also, although her cheerful, patient demeanor belied this. In fact, I had no idea that she was not feeling well until some concerned students told her that they hoped she felt better and should consider a sick day. I was also told that the last period of the day was the worst time to conduct classroom observations. The students, some of whom had been on the go since early morning day care prior to school, were often overtired and distractible by the end of the day. However, the only distractibility I noticed concerned their enthusiasm over reading books.

The students’ assignment was to pick up the books and toys that were scattered about the room and prepare to leave for the day. A group of students helped clean up the books, but seemed distracted by each one as they picked it up. Temporarily forgetting their clean-up assignment, they perused each book, reading the titles out loud and commenting on their favorites. One boy enthusiastically shoved a book report he’d written into the teachers face, eager for approval. Despite the distractions, the students eventually completed the clean-up task and returned to sit in a circle on the floor for their next activity.

The next activity involved a large, colorful calendar on the wall, with a numbered pouch representing each day of the month. The teacher asked a boy to take a paper heart with “today” written on it and put it in the pouch with the current date. She asked him to read aloud, “Today is February 25, 2003.”

“How many more days of February?” the teacher asked. She asked a girl to count the remaining days on the calendar by 5s, then by 1s. The girl had a great difficulty with this task, but the teacher was quite patient, as were the other students.

After the calendar activities, the teacher told the class, “If you can get your stuff quietly, you get treats.” The students eagerly gathered their coats, boots, and take home folders, which included homework and checklists for parents. All the students got pretzel sticks as a reward.

One student, who realized that her teacher wasn't feeling well, said, "Ms. X, you should stay home tomorrow." She smiled and replied, "I'd miss you too much. I want to stay here with you."

As the students lined up to leave for the day, one boy boasted to his classmates, "I'm gonna read 171 books!" The students kept logs of their reading, and the most prolific reader had read a total of 170 books; this boy was eager to break the current record.

According to the principal, unlike other schools, children at LLL started the new school year having maintained their reading levels from the previous year. This, she believed, was due to the children's love of reading, which carried over during the year and throughout the summer. Parents reported that they had taken their children to the library over the summer, and children had recognized their favorite books and had reacted enthusiastically. Again, these were seen as indicators that the school was fulfilling its mission.

Love of literacy. Visits to the school demonstrated numerous elements that led to the students' love of literacy as well as "spirited citizenship." One of these was the regular participation of reading mentors, many of whom were Local center's senior citizens. These mentors worked with children one-on-one in the library and in a living room-styled "intergenerational room." As a staff member explained, "The reading mentor program is a wonderful experience for the students. Even though we have small class sizes, the students still crave one-on-one attention. When the reading mentors are visiting, it gives each child a chance to choose a story they would like to hear again and converse with a new person." The enthusiasm in the children was quite apparent as their mentors arrived to take them to their respective reading areas.

Children were encouraged to write both by hand and by typing on the numerous computers available to them. The walls were filled with the children's original writings, complete with misspellings, an example of the "developmental spelling" teaching method. While correct spelling was the final goal, initially it was more important that the children were developing a love of creative writing and a rudimentary understanding of applied phonics than learning to replicate perfectly spelled but less meaningful words off the blackboard.

Several anecdotes point to the school's success in helping children develop skills for reading as well as an appreciation for reading. One staff member, whose own children attended the school, had a child who had been frustrated with learning to read at his last public school. "Here there were different teaching strategies for reading, and now he loves reading! He would give up recess to read. He would ask all his relatives, 'Can I read to you?' This boy was not able to read well at his previous school!" Another parent reported a similar experience with her child, who had disliked reading until he came to Lifelong Learners & Leaders and now enjoyed reading to his grandmother and her friends.

Assessment. Lifelong Learners & Leaders measured student achievement in literacy using "authentic assessments" rather than a heavy emphasis on standardized tests. Such performance-based assessments directly measure a student's progress in particular areas, rather than a proxy such as a standardized test. They measure how well students apply knowledge and skills in the same way they are used in the "real world" through a product, performance, or exhibition that is scored using a rubric (Lake, Harnes, Guill, & Crist, 1998). The director stated that almost all the students at the first grade equivalent level can read at the second grade level, according to these authentic assessments. Standardized tests were used as well, to diagnose particular strengths and limitations. For example, the teachers noticed that some students who read fairly well according to the authentic assessments did poorly on standardized tests because they didn't utilize the

strategy of re-reading a passage before answering questions. Such specific skills would then be targeted in class. On the other hand, the director remarked that some students who passed the standardized tests did not meet the authentic assessment standards, which in some ways were a bit stricter. By 2002-03, a summer enrichment program was started to help students catch up on literacy and related skills.

Lifelong learning. Beyond literacy, one of Lifelong Learners & Leaders' main goals was teaching children how to solve problems and make decisions; these are essential skills for the lifelong learner. Children were taught how to make choices in academic areas: how to choose books and how to write on topics of their choice. A teacher described one of the uniquenesses of their school as "The individual choice the student has in learning. Our students choose their own writing projects. The process is extremely important in teaching children how to do something, so the next time they can do it themselves or teach someone else." This philosophy was similar to that of MSM and other Montessori-based schools. Good choices also concerned self-discipline. Indeed, the teachers frequently asked the students pointedly, "Are you making a good choice about that?" in regard to their behavior. Students were held accountable for their unwise choices and rewarded for their positive ones, and parents were encouraged to practice such discipline at home as well.

To help children become lifelong learners, Lifelong Learners & Leaders provided them with various opportunities to model adult-like behavior and responsibilities. For example, there was a "job board" on the wall, where a series of jobs, such as custodian, census taker, and so on, were listed, along with detailed descriptions of each job's responsibility. A teacher had created this innovative idea. Students were to apply for and interview for the various jobs with the teacher and tell her why they thought they were qualified for the job.

By the 2002-03 year, each classroom was partnered with a different nursing home or other senior citizen organization. Students visited these facilities once a month, chaperoned by teachers and parents, interacting with the residents and learning from one another. This fostered the "intergenerational" theme while providing children the opportunity to use the interpersonal skills they had learned in an authentic setting.

Impact of the Charter School Law on the Implementation of the School's Mission

Lifelong Learners & Leaders' original mission had to be revised for the 2001-02 school year. This was not due to a change in mission or philosophy but to a need for simplification. In their work contract with ODE, the schools were told that their mission statements either had to thoroughly explicate certain concepts that they contained or not mention them at all. For example, if a school mission mentioned "values," each value had to be listed. It was decided that the mission statement should be simplified rather than expanded. Board members, staff members, and parent advisory board members worked together to revise the mission statement by reflecting upon the core elements of the original statement.

The simplified mission was also more accessible and useful to the students. Teachers showed the more advanced students the mission statement and asked them thought-provoking discussion questions such as, What does citizenship mean? This increased the students' awareness and understanding of the mission, perhaps ultimately leading to the fulfillment of it.

How charter school law promotes innovative ideas. The flexibility afforded to Lifelong Learners & Leaders allowed for the implementation of an educational philosophy and pedagogy that were

quite different from those of the public schools. It also promoted activities that built unique relationships between the students and the senior citizens utilizing the Local center as well as other organizations such as nursing homes.

The autonomy afforded to charter schools offered the opportunity to create unique learning experiences for students as well as others in the community. For example, at the Local center, “reminiscence therapy” was conducted with early-stage Alzheimer’s patients. Family members gathered artifacts that were compiled into DVDs to help people recollect people and events. The director hoped to apply this more generally to families with children in Lifelong Learners & Leaders, in order to create intergenerationally shared memories. LLL also engaged in a project with nursing students at Case Western Reserve University to create a model for how health and wellness can be integrated in a school. This innovative program paired each child and her/his family with a nursing student for a long-term exploration of child development. The nursing student would stay with their paired child from kindergarten through third grade. Conditions such as asthma, prematurity, and others would be studied in terms of their effects upon the wellness of the child and family.

Limitations of charter school laws. Despite the opportunities for new innovations, the director was concerned about the increasing use of standardized tests in the traditional public schools and how these might someday be required in lower elementary grades in both traditional public schools and charter schools. She was thankful that thus far their school’s youngest children had not been required to take state tests, but was concerned that regulations could change in the future. She described how standardized testing of young children was contrary to the mission and educational approaches of Lifelong Learners & Leaders. They put inordinate stress on young children, teaching them to fear rather than love the learning processes. “They would cry, regress, wet their pants . . .” Furthermore, she thought they were inaccurate as well as anxiety-provoking and provided this analogy: “Let’s say you had a ‘walking test’ for eleven-month-olds, and then you labeled babies as slow, normal, or advanced based on these tests. Six months later the differences would average out anyway, and these kids would have inaccurate labels. It’s like studies that show that children who learn to read at age four usually don’t stay way ahead of their peers—eventually it evens out. Many kids just develop certain capacities at a later age.” This belief is what led her to have classes based on developmental level, rather than age. Her disagreement with uniform expectations for young children extended to instruction as well as assessment. “The day they tell us we have to teach Direct Instruction is the day I pack my bags. I could never do anything I don’t think is in the best interest of the kids.”

Implementing the educational approach vs. equity. Because LLL grouped its students by developmental rather than traditional grade level, enrolling new students midyear was a challenge. An incoming student would have to be evaluated to determine in which classroom he or she belonged; that class may or may not have space for him or her. Often students at lower developmental levels were promoted to higher levels midyear, so there were rarely slots available for students except at the lowest levels. To test students regarding their abilities and then determine whether or not they were eligible to enroll appeared, on the surface, to be a form of discrimination—at least this is how some ODE staff saw how the practice could be interpreted. However, the director explained this was the only way that students’ needs could be met in their appropriate classes. The staff at ODE accepted this explanation.

Stakeholder Agreement and Satisfaction Regarding the Mission

Among the staff, Lifelong Learners & Leaders' satisfaction scores for the item *Ability of the school to fulfill its stated mission* were the highest, a mean of 4.8 (SD = 0.4) out of a possible 5 (see Table D.5). Scores on these items were consistently high all 3 years, despite the growth of the school from 30 to 78 students and the high turnover between 2001-02 and 2002-03. The director said the staff and board were of like mind regarding the mission as well. Interviews with the teachers confirmed their agreement with the mission and its implementation.

Parents were satisfied with how well the mission was being followed, with all surveyed parents stating it was being followed “well” or “very well” (see Table D:5). According to the director, the parents had a choice as to where to send their children and had chosen LLL based on the knowledge of its mission. The school's responsibility was to communicate the mission, goals, and processes to parents. Only a few parents indicated dissatisfaction, including a couple who were unhappy with the lack of standard grade levels and traditional assessment systems. Some had children who had been in several different schools and who seemed impossible to please anywhere. The director believed that despite these few instances of dissatisfaction, it was important to maintain a focus on the mission. The school was developed based on its particular mission, and this was the foundation that held it together.

4.4 Essentials Academy: Lifelong Learning and Leadership

To provide an excellent education to urban youth, who will graduate with life-long learning and leadership skills, and have the character and commitment necessary to effectively bring about positive social change through their professions, in their families, and in their communities.

Mission statement for Essentials Academy

According to Essentials Academy's director, one of the most important things for its students to learn is to become more socially conscious as citizens of school, city, and world. They need to learn that they can make a difference. Becoming lifelong learners was another essential goal, just as it was for Lifelong Learners & Leaders. For example, students need to learn how to get information for various projects. A major part of Essentials Academy's leadership development and citizenship-building involved daily meetings among staff and students to discuss pertinent issues. These meetings included schoolwide town meetings and small advisory committees for the older students.

Town Meetings. Essentials Academy started every day with a town meeting of all the students and staff in the cafeteria. An African-style drumming called this meeting to order. All staff and students would stand in a circle to hear announcements and occasional special, short presentations from a teacher, student, or guest. This was followed by advisory committee meetings for the fifth through seventh graders.

Service Learning. In all of the grades, service learning was a method for character development as well as preparation for real world leadership experiences. In 2002-03, at the kindergarten through second grade levels, the focus was on “philanthropic behavior.” Lessons revolved around six themes concerning group behavior and acts of kindness: (1) class rules and consequences, (2) cooperation, (3) sharing, (4) competition, (5) environment, and (6) gift-giving. In the older grades, service learning projects involved off-campus volunteer and even paid work. Partnerships with local organizations that promoted youth employment helped facilitate this program.

Advisory Committees. Advisory committees consist of small groups of students with a teacher as an advisor or mentor. These groups are intended to stay together for several years in order to build a sense of community and continuity, a practice similar to that of Montessori. Their purpose was to provide students with a sense of belonging, positive role models, and opportunities for leadership and lifelong learning, factors often lacking in impoverished urban areas such as downtown Cleveland. Specific books such as *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, were assigned and discussed. As indicated via observations of advisory meetings, some students appeared particularly inspired by these readings and were able to give examples of how they and others applied their lessons to their daily life. However, as one teacher explained, “We’re not teaching from textbooks. Textbooks are a tool to help us follow the curriculum, to help them connect to the themes.” Indeed, lessons were often based around out-of-class projects, such as out-of-state field trips and fund-raisers to support them.

The director explained that this advisory system, which was adopted from the Coalition for Essential Schools' model, is unique to the Cleveland area. One parent commented, “I am pleased with the way the school has an advisory meeting every morning which allows the children to have an opinion and input as to how the curriculum is addressed.” Below is an example of how an advisory committee taught *in vivo* lessons in organization and business management, as well as the lifelong learning skills such as adaptability and taking responsibility.

At this particular morning's town meeting, it was brought up that students from one of the advisory committees were not holding up their responsibilities for organizing their fund-raising luncheon. The committee needed the earnings from this planned fund-raiser to finance a trip to visit Michigan State University. The students had agreed to prepare soul food to sell for that day's lunch, but a substantial number of students had not brought in what they had promised. During this committee's advisory meeting, which met immediately afterward, the advisor, who was also a physical education teacher, discussed this issue with his seventh graders. The idea was not to chastise the students who had not brought their food, but for the class to come up with a solution. He suggested, “If people didn't do it [bring food], we didn't do it. Adjust . . . That's the way the real world works.” Several students who had held up their end of the bargain folded their arms and looked annoyed. A boy suggested that they postpone the luncheon for another date. Several students responded irritably that the food they had prepared would go to waste. Ultimately, they decided that the luncheon would be postponed. The advisor offered to reimburse the students for the food they had prepared for that day. A girl suggested that, instead, they enjoy the food that afternoon as they planned the next luncheon and some other events. The students who had been sulking indignantly a moment ago brightened up at this idea. Soon, the class came to consensus on this idea and began enthusiastically discussing their planning party and the food they would enjoy.

Innovations in Response to Emergent Needs

After the school's initial year, several changes were made to Essentials Academy's overall curricula in response to student's needs, both current and in the larger community. A new program was initiated that targeted at-risk high school students; however, by the end of the year, this program only served 5 percent of its originally intended student body. Other preexisting programs were adapted to meet the needs of students who had been enrolled during the school's first year.

At risk high school student program. This program originally targeted students, particularly female students, who had dropped out of high school or who were at risk of dropping out. Although Essentials Academy planned to enroll up to 20 students, only 5 enrolled. By the end of the 2002-03 year, four of these five students either dropped out or transferred to other schools. Only 1 student, a ninth grade boy, remained. Essentials Academy hoped to recruit and retain more high school students for the following year. According to one staff member, by 2003-04 there were numerous tenth graders, all of whom were in a general rather than at-risk curriculum. In the meantime, other measures were taken to improve the conduct and academic achievement of middle school and high school students.

Single sex classrooms. Starting in 2002-03, the seventh and eighth grade boys and girls were in separate classes. They hadn't been focusing enough before, and some staff suggested that single sex classrooms could help this problem. Parents had been surveyed as to their opinion as to whether they preferred to start single sex classrooms. The staff made the final decision, based in part on parents' feedback, and then notified the parents. Some students were disappointed with the new arrangement; girls took it harder than the boys. At times the girls and boys were separate, at times they were together. The advisory groups were co-ed except one day a week when they had single sex groups for gender-related issues. The director reported that this arrangement "works a lot better!" than the previous mixed classrooms.

Project-based learning. Project based learning was implemented at all grade levels. For example, the K-1 class worked on a PowerPoint project to improve their writing skills, typing skills, and computer literacy. A teacher explained that many of the older students transferred to Essentials Academy without the ability to organize thoughts and put them in writing; this project was designed to help students develop such skills at an early age.

Impact of the Charter School Law on the Implementation of the School's Mission

Essentials Academy's mission departed somewhat from the one originally envisioned by its founder, which targeted gifted, underachieving African Americans. However, the Office of School Options at ODE required that this mission be rewritten to include children of all races and ability levels.⁶ The school's original downtown location and its Afrocentric school profile attracted a student body that was nearly 100 percent African American. However, the students varied widely in their academic abilities and maturity levels. This created a student body that was quite different than that for whom the founders had prepared. They had expected students to be intellectually gifted, but unmotivated to learn in a traditional school. They expected that the children would be better behaved than those in the district schools.

Instead, according to a number of the teachers, Essentials Academy's students had most of the same academic and behavior problems as those in the surrounding public schools. The students indicated on their surveys that their fellow classmates often broke rules, lacked respect for one another's property, and did not take their schoolwork seriously. Occasionally, there were more serious examples of misbehavior. For example, some middle school students spread a potentially devastating rumor about a teacher at whom they were angry. On another occasion, four middle

⁶ Federal regulations require that charter schools recruit from all segments of the district. However, they may not select students on the basis of race, gender, or ability. If the school is oversubscribed, students are selected through a lottery.

school students ran away during a field trip; the National Park Service had to be called to assist in locating them. Most behavior problems were less severe, but still disruptive. According to a number of the staff, such discipline problems were a barrier to fulfilling the school's mission. The following year, the director made it clear that their "at risk" designation did not refer to students with severe behavior problems or histories of delinquencies (see chapter 10).

Adaptations of curriculum. State charter school laws require that 75 percent of students pass each area in the OPT or increase passage rates by 2.5 percent in every area each year. The OPT and OGPT were quite low during the school's initial year (see chapter 13), so Essentials Academy staff recognized this as an area that needed improvement. The following year, there were practice tests every eight weeks to prepare the students for the tests. In January the results of the tests were scored in order to target certain areas that needed work prior to the actual tests. The curriculum was then adapted to address these areas. The staff took measures to set this up to be complementary to what the teachers were already covering. Although Essentials Academy had an overall teaching philosophy that was closer to that of Montessori or the authentic assessment practices of LLL, there were no known complaints about or resistance to these adaptations.

Stakeholder Agreement and Satisfaction Regarding the Mission

Among the staff, agreement regarding fulfillment of the school's mission was fairly high ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.4$). There was also fairly high satisfaction with how well the staff thought that the mission was being followed (see Tables C:7, C:8). This was in spite of the numerous obstacles that the school faced during its first year. Among parents, there was less satisfaction regarding how well the mission was being followed, (see Table C:8 in Appendix C). This reflects a general pattern of Essentials Academy staff being more optimistic than the sample of parents.

At Essentials Academy, as in other charter schools, the staff realized that they sometimes had to adapt their educational approaches to meet the needs of the students, rather than expect to change the student body to meet their original plans. All four schools in our study faced dilemmas regarding how far they could go to accommodate students with special needs. Chapter 10 delves into some of these issues and how they were addressed within the boundaries of their schools' missions.

4.5 Conclusion

Charter school laws allow schools to develop unique missions and innovative curricula and instructional methods with which to fulfill them. Each of the four schools had missions that emphasized character development as well as academic achievement and educational approaches designed to meet the various aspects of their missions. All of them utilized various forms of multigrade classrooms, increased teacher-student ratio, individualized instruction, project-based learning, and character development as part of their curriculum. Yet each school had a unique focus as well as specific applications of each of these approaches.

At times staff acknowledged that other public schools in the Cleveland Municipal School District were utilizing elements that were similar to those in their charter school, but they were not implemented in the same manner. For example, the Cleveland Municipal School District included several Montessori schools that, like all four schools in our study, utilized multi age classrooms. However, within these multi age classrooms, each student received assignments according to his or her particular age-related grade level, rather than a true multi age setting where every student

received similar assignments regardless of chronological age. Nevertheless, at each of the four schools the main impetus for implementing particular instructional methods was not “research and development” of new innovations but fulfilling their schools’ unique missions.

Teachers and parents choose charter schools based largely on their missions; therefore, one should expect more agreement with the philosophy and values of the school among its stakeholders than in traditional public schools (Nelson & Miron, 2002). This should result in less time debating what the mission should be and more time devoted to carrying it out. Our study explored whether there was awareness of and agreement regarding the mission among staff and parents. On the surveys, all but one of all the teachers and other staff at the four schools reported an awareness of her/his school’s mission. Further, the overwhelming majority of the staff at all the schools was satisfied with the schools’ mission statements. This is not surprising, given that the mission is intended to be the foundation upon which most decisions—including the hiring of staff—is based. However, there were clear differences among the four schools as to how well teachers and staff thought the mission was being followed and fulfilled. At some schools, there was consensus over how the mission should be implemented and how well it was being fulfilled; at others, there was considerable disagreement.

There were numerous barriers to fulfilling the schools’ missions. At one school, fulfilling state requirements and its own child-centered mission was a challenge. At the other three schools, particularly salient barriers were students’ behavior problems and other special needs and lack of resources with which to meet these needs. This was especially the case at Riverview Scholars, the largest school in our study, which appeared to attract a disproportionate number of students with behavioral problems. However, this school also generated the largest number of innovative programs with which to address these issues, and there was increased cohesion of mission between 2001-02 and 2002-03.

Despite these barriers, in 2002-03 all the staff at MSM, nearly two thirds of the staff at RS, and all but one of the staff at Essentials Academy stated that it was “true” that “teachers are committed to the mission of the school.” The remaining staff at RS and Essentials Academy stated that this was “partly true.” Staff at LLL were not asked this particular question on their customized surveys, but it was evident via interviews, observations, and other survey items that LLL’s teachers were indeed dedicated to the mission of the school. This supports Chubb & Moe’s (1990) theory that teachers are selecting themselves into charter schools according to each school’s mission and tend to remain committed to the mission once they are in the school.

Missions appear central to charter schools from their very inception. Although some charter schools appear to be started with efficiency as the main impetus (Lacerino-Paquet et al., 2001), for many charter schools, including all four in our study, the mission is the school’s *raison d’etre*. As the founder and director of Lifelong Learners & Leaders explained, “You start a school because you have a particular type of philosophy and you want to start a school based upon it.” However, starting a charter school involves far more than creating a way to fulfill an educational mission. Our next chapter details the complex processes of starting a charter school and the barriers to doing so.

From Conception to Maturity: Challenges of Start-Up

Charter schools in theory are a wonderful opportunity to develop innovative approaches to model urban educational excellence. No bureaucracy; shortcut stuff that's in large systems. BUT . . . you never shortcut the need for resources, human and financial.

—A charter school board member

As the previous chapters detailed, the national charter school movement is only 12 years old, and Ohio's charter school movement is approaching its fifth birthday. The 4 schools in this study range in age from 2 to 5 years. In human years, the schools would be mere toddlers and preschoolers rapidly learning the basics of language, interpersonal skills, and activities of daily living; tenaciously striving toward independence while growing frustrated as they are confronted with their limitations. Drawing further on this analogy, it would be premature to ask the parents of such youngsters, "What do you think they will be when they grow up?" Yet charter school founders must attend to their long-range visions as they develop and execute their plans, even as they attend to daily crises. In this chapter we will explore the issues with which each school was confronted as it matured from conception to birth through the first 5 years of life.

Prior to their inception, charter schools require—and ideally involve—an exhaustive amount of conceptual and practical planning; everything from securing a facility to developing curricula. Once these plans have been developed and approved, they must be successfully implemented, even while encountering unforeseen, sometimes unavoidable obstacles along the way. Particularly crucial challenges include securing appropriate materials as well as human resources. Our study explored the processes of developing and implementing the four charter schools and the factors that have impeded or facilitated these processes.

We now turn our attention to how the founders of the four charter schools in Cleveland took advantage of the new opportunities to create alternative public schools. We relate how small groups of individuals took their education ideals and, with the help of state and private agencies, developed them into functioning schools. We also list the immense barriers that the founders and other school stakeholders had to surmount.

5.1 The Genesis of the Four Cleveland Charter Schools

According to one charter school director, there seemed to be two main impetuses for starting charter schools: education-driven and business-driven. The former starts with an education philosophy and then explores how it can be implemented. The latter starts with the premise of how to run schools more efficiently, with less emphasis on the particular educational program.

The curriculum is sometimes a mere “afterthought,” purchased elsewhere instead of developed on site (See also Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001; Lacerino-Paquet, Brown, Moser, & Henig, 2001). This director strongly preferred the education-driven approach and emphasized that all four schools sponsored by The Cleveland Foundation appeared to be education-driven. The following section describes how each of these four schools was initiated to fulfill its mission.

Main Street Montessori

Main Street Montessori (MSM) was started by a parent who lived in local community but had to send her child to far away to a private Montessori school. Her original purpose was to create a Montessori program in her own neighborhood. She set up a board with several community activists, including those who wanted to make Montessori more accessible to those with less income. The original intent was to create a private school; but when they became familiar with Ohio’s charter school initiative, they decided to pursue a charter. This would make Montessori more convenient for local parents who could afford it and also affordable to other local parents for whom a private Montessori education would be beyond their financial means.

Once MSM was successfully up and running, some of its founders decided to establish additional charter schools. They created a not-for-profit education management organization (EMO) called “EdUnited.” EdUnited then set up an additional seven schools and was extensively involved in staffing and managing them. MSM had a unique curriculum and more independence than the other EdUnited schools, but still relied a great deal on EdUnited’s services. Some MSM staff were quite pleased with the benefits from EdUnited, while others saw it as an encroachment on their autonomy and uniqueness. Some viewed EdUnited and its consortium of similarly themed charter schools as an example of the “business-driven” impetus for starting and implementing charter schools. Chapter 5 details the controversial role of EMOs, particularly EdUnited, in the governance and management of charter schools.

Riverview Scholars

According to the director of Riverview Scholars, two founders started the school to show that the challenge of urban education is not primarily student-or family-related. Instead, they believed that the inherent inability of traditional school and district bureaucracies to respond concertedly and creatively to the needs of individual students. A charter school, unencumbered by many of the regular public school and teachers’ union regulations and financially supported by various donors, seemed to be an ideal solution. However, start-up and development of the school appear to have been quite tumultuous. One founder, who was the original principal, left the school eight days after its commencement. The other founder, a former doctoral student in urban education and social worker, initially served as a co director and became the executive director in Spring 2001. In this new role, he oversaw the principal who was in charge of the school’s instructional aspects. The director said that the first principal’s abrupt departure, as well as several subsequent problems, may have stemmed from unrealistic expectations about the school’s initial challenges. Despite its rocky start, this school has begun to stabilize over the past three years and has since generated many innovative programs and satisfied parents.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders

Lifelong Learners & Leaders was started by a founding coalition of a developmental psychologist/educator, a physician with expertise in aging and adult learning, the executive director of the local center—the senior citizens’ center in which the Lifelong Learners & Leaders is based—and another teacher. Both former teachers had previously taught in various settings, including a private school, and desired to give private-quality education to disadvantaged students. All four founders desired to empower children as learners and were convinced that there are common components of learning that apply across all age groups: a genuine need/opportunity to learn, self-chosen learning methods, and the ability to learn in a risk-free environment. Initially, there was some skepticism from the local center board, members of which questioned why the board should endorse a program that concerns children, thus taking it away from its core mission of serving the elderly. However, there is now widespread acceptance of the school, especially since sharing between children, younger adults, and the elderly is part of its mission.

Essentials Academy

For a variety of reasons, the Essentials Academy seemed to have the largest number and most challenging barriers to its initiation. The school was founded by a woman who had launched another somewhat similar school in Detroit helped several other schools get started. Her original mission was to start a school for gifted, underachieving African-American students—she wanted to develop a school that spoke to those unmet needs. “I just did it. . . I’ve been doing this [helping to start new schools] for 12 years. I just filed the paperwork and started business. You find people along the way that buy into the vision.” However, despite her years of successful experience, this particular school faced numerous barriers that she did not foresee, starting with the application process.

ODE’s Office of School Options—a division created to sponsor and assist charter schools—initially did not accept Essentials Academy’s application. First, they asked that the original mission, which targeted “gifted, African-American underachievers,” be revised without references to a particular ethnic group or ability level, in order to avoid illegal discrimination. As we will detail later, this led to a student body that was different from that the founding staff had expected and for whom they had prepared. Even after several revisions, the Office of School Options staff were concerned about the format of the application. The founder was given a new list of standards, and she attended some workshops held in Columbus. She appealed to the state superintendents and finally got her 250-page contract accepted after various changes in the proposal and several trips to Columbus.

The other three schools in our study did not experience the barriers to application and sponsorship that Essentials Academy did. We now take a look at the overall application process, and the factors that may enhance or impede it.

5.2 Application and Sponsorship of the Charter Schools

Before opening a charter school, its founders must spend a considerable amount of time planning and drafting the charter application. This requires individuals with extensive skills and experience

in education, finance, and organizational design. Below we include a list of topics and issues that applications for starting a charter school must address:

1. Identification of charter applicant
2. Name of school
3. Grade or age served
4. Proposed governance structure
5. Mission and education goals, including curriculum, assessment, and accountability methods
6. Admission policy
7. Criteria for student evaluation
8. Suspension and expulsion policy
9. Involvement of community groups
10. Financial and audit plans
11. Antidiscrimination policies for students and faculty
12. Complaint procedure
13. Description and address of physical facility
14. Proposed school calendar
15. Proposed faculty and professional development plan
16. Report of criminal history records for employees
17. Official child abuse clearance statements
18. Plan for liability and insurance coverage
19. Plan for providing health and other benefits to employees

Once the applications are complete, they must be sent to their respective sponsors. As of June 2003, charter school sponsors in Ohio included Lucas County Educational Service Center, Tri-Rivers Joint Vocational School district, the University of Toledo, and 10 various school districts. Just prior to the passage of Am. Sub. 364, 105 of Ohio's 135 charter schools were sponsored by Ohio State Board of Education (OSBE), including all 4 in our study; all of them must seek new sponsors, since OSBE may no longer sponsor schools.

With the exception of Essentials Academy, none of the schools in our study experienced many problems with their application processes, in part because none of them had school names or mission statements that could have been construed as exclusive. None of the schools experienced political opposition elsewhere either, in part because they were sponsored by the state rather than the local district. In states where the only route to obtaining a charter is the local district, there tends to be more political opposition during the application phase.

However, as Am. Sub. H.B. 364 forbids OSBE from continuing to sponsor charter schools, sponsorship will be delegated to local governing bodies such as districts, universities, and nonprofit organizations; the ODE will oversee and assist these sponsors. As Chapter 3 details, 24 pending and current charter schools in Ohio were unable to open or to renew their contracts in 2002-03. Most of these pending schools were unable to open at all, despite ample preparation and planning, because they could not find another sponsor. As of Spring 2003, all four schools in our study were very concerned about finding a new sponsor who will respect their original missions and educational approaches.

Approval and support are necessary but insufficient for opening and running a charter school. Sufficient financial resources are essential, yet often difficult to obtain. Securing an adequate building is often the most formidable challenge. This next section details the various resources that are needed to operate a school and the challenges in obtaining these funds and materials.

5.3 Securing Financial and Structural Resources

The procurement of adequate funds and facilities often places a concrete stumbling block into the visionary development of charter schools (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 1999b). Representatives from the four schools in our study reported that an inordinate amount of time and effort had to be spent securing funding and structural resources, leaving them with less time to develop their mission

statements and curriculum. As Steve Ramsey of the Ohio Community School Center (OCSC) lamented regarding the inadequate money for facilities and restrictions on borrowing money, “No sane person would do this [charter schools] as a business!”

Sources of Start-Up Funds

There are several potential sources of funding for Ohio charter schools, although these are not always as substantial as many charter school stakeholders would hope. Start-up grants totaling \$150,000 per school over a 3-year period are provided by the state and federal governments. Many charter schools also receive start-up funds from private sources. For example, the 4 charter schools that are the focus of this study receive varying amounts of funds from The Cleveland Foundation, depending on the school needs and proposed uses of the funds. In total, this amounted to close to \$900,000, and on average this amounted to \$70,000 per year per school. In addition to start-up funds and other private grants, charter schools receive the same per-pupil foundation grants as other public schools. However, these grants may not suffice for schools that require additional money to secure adequate building space.

One challenge that all states have faced in funding charter schools stems from the unpredictability of enrollment, especially for the first year. Charter schools estimate their enrollment and request funding from their respective state departments based on these projections. However, a new charter school usually receives its July, August, and September payments from the state department prior to the finalization of its enrollment. Schools often overestimate this and have to send the extra funds back to their state departments. This has happened with a number of Ohio charter schools, which are facing closure due to the amounts of money they owe the state. To avoid this, Ohio began paying its new charter schools only 50 percent of their stated projections initially; once the school’s enrollment is stabilized and documented later in the school year, the state department pays the school the remainder of the money (ODE Office of Community Schools, 2002b). While this prevents schools from having to return overpayments, it often prevents them from obtaining all their funds in a timely manner. As one charter school advocate complained, “They got burned by overpaying schools in past, so now they’re Draconian.” To get around this delay in payments, new charter schools began to double their estimates at the beginning of the school year. This could lead to subsequent overpayments and administrative and fiscal chaos. In response, the ODE created a new policy in which charter schools could obtain 100 percent of their funds as soon as they demonstrated that they had fulfilled their enrollment claims.

There are other obstacles to obtaining the funds necessary to initiate and operate a charter school. According to the OCSC, charter schools receive an average of \$2,400 less in per-pupil funds than regular public schools. They have no access to state capital financing money nor parity aid. On the other hand, representatives of the CMSD shared figures with us that indicated that charter schools took more than their share of per-pupil funds (A. Masevice, personal communication, June 18, 2003). Chapter 14 describes some of the controversy over the per-pupil funding charter schools.

Partnerships are also helpful in securing funding, resources, and the know-how with which to manage them (LOEO, 2003a). Lifelong Learners & Leaders’ founding coalition brought with it a number of important resources. For example, the Local center provided substantial management and business resources. The school also received informal help from Case Western Reserve University. However, the director explained that she is reluctant to dilute the school’s mission through partnerships with universities and other similar organizations. Riverview Scholars had a wide range of partners in the community. One board member stressed how crucial, yet how time-consuming establishing such partnerships could be. Essentials Academy gained several

beneficial partnerships during its second year, including ones with Fifth Third bank. Partnerships also provide beneficial human resources; the respective chapters on governance and parent and community participation detail some of these benefits in the four schools in our study. Please see Appendix D for a list of each school's partnerships.

Despite these partnerships, staff at all 4 Cleveland charter schools indicated that funding issues are a major barrier to start-up and continued operation of charter schools, particularly regarding building space. However, new schools often find that this is not enough. As of 2001, around 40 proposed charter schools were unable to open in Ohio due to inadequate facilities (LOEO, 2001). Insufficient funds are available for securing adequate space; yet, until quite recently, regulations prohibited charter schools from incurring long-term debt. This prevented them from purchasing buildings using traditional mortgages. Recent changes have eased some of the burdens for charter schools in obtaining buildings, and pending legislature may provide further opportunities. In 2001, the charter schools became eligible for state loan guarantees, thanks to H.B. 94.

Limitations in Facilities at the Four Charter Schools

The above changes in borrowing did not come in time to help the four schools in our study with their initial facilities. All four had to start with a building smaller than they had hoped for and sought additional facilities as their school grew. Inadequate buildings and frequent moves can have detrimental consequences on learning, discipline, and staff and student morale. While this was particularly evident at Essentials Academy, it was an issue at the other schools as well.

Main Street Montessori. Montessori education requires a great deal of space, but finding adequate space in Old Brooklyn has always been a problem for MSM. This lack of space has caused numerous barriers to fulfilling the school's education missions, since instruction could not be implemented as planned. For example, MSM was initially unable to institute the Montessori botany lessons because it did not have a large enough space with the appropriate lighting. Outdoor learning is crucial to a Montessori education, but the children did not have an outdoor playground until an additional building was secured for the 2001-02 year. The school has adapted by making frequent field trips to the nearby zoo and engaging in other local outdoor activities. In addition to hampering the Montessori components of their education, the insufficient facilities affected the more traditional aspects of the students' education. Administering the state proficiency tests were difficult because of the lack of space.

Sharing a building with another organization can cause interorganizational problems as well as financial and logistical concerns. For example, MSM encountered problems from the church that rented space to it for the first four years; the congregants saw the school as an encroachment on the church's identity. The church needed tenants and was not receptive to other uses, so renting space to MSM was a matter of convenience. MSM used part of its positive cash balance at the end of the 1999-00 school year to fund an additional building space.

For the 2001-02 school year, MSM moved its main building to an office building two blocks away. The fourth through sixth grades, as well as space used as a gymnasium for all the grades, were held in the original church space. Staff charter school surveys indicated a substantial jump in satisfaction with facilities (see Table 5:1). While staff, students, parents, and board members were pleased with the additional space, many expressed a desire to have the whole school in the same building. These desires were eventually fulfilled; as of the 2002-03 school year, MSM purchased one larger school building for its entire school. The church space was no longer needed,

and the other building space was used by its education management organization, EdUnited. In addition to a new building, MSM now has adequate space and a learning garden for Montessori botany lessons on site, thanks to a partnership with Parkworks and help from MSM parents.

However, there were concerns that the building soon would be outgrown if the school continued to grow at the same rapid rate. Despite all the recent improvements in the school's facilities, lack of sufficient space, especially in light of the school's rapid growth, was the most oft-cited weakness of MSM by both staff and parents in 2002-03. Decisions were made to stem the growth of the school rather than seek yet another new building, a decision that did not please all of the stakeholders.

Table 5:1 Staff Satisfaction with Buildings and Facilities

Year	MSM		RS		LLL		EA	
	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)
2000-01	11	1.6 (0.7)	28	3.2 (1.1)	6	3.2 (0.8)	--	--
2001-02	13	3.2 (1.2)	28	3.3 (1.0)	6	3.3 (1.0)	13	3.1 (1.0)
2002-03	20	3.1 (1.0)	32	3.8 (0.9)	11	3.9 (0.5)	16	3.3 (1.0)

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Very dissatisfied and 5=Very satisfied.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. According to representatives of Lifelong Learners & Leaders, local center's rent rates for the space that was originally desired was too expensive. Fortunately, the school was able to negotiate a better rate by sharing space in the Intergenerational Resource Center during its first year. However, this space was insufficient, leaving the school no room to expand. Thanks in part to a grant from ODE, the school now shares local center's main building, which provides far more space. As of 2001-02, on the second floor of this building, two classrooms of younger students have their own, closed-off rooms, while the other two classrooms and the library share an open space that is divided by bookshelves and bulletin boards. Some staff and students complained about the noise level within the open-space rooms and others missed the "hominess" of the smaller space, but most seemed satisfied with the new arrangement. With the addition of a fourth grade for the 2002-03 school year, the school rented more space on the second floor of local center's main building. Considerable renovations were made to this space in order to create more classrooms and move the library to a quieter location.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders receives a lower rental rate by allowing local and other organizations to utilize its space for educational programs on evenings and weekends. This cooperative arrangement also promotes both local's and Lifelong Learners & Leaders' visions of lifelong learning. However, as of the summer of 2003, there were concerns about the increasing rental rate at local and some staff were considering looking into other rental options.

Riverview Scholars. The founding coalition of Riverview Scholars originally were interested in a building in a central city location. The founder noted that the coalition had to do considerable networking to get the owners of the empty parochial school to seriously consider renting to a charter school. Apparently, the administrators were skeptical because they had previously tried to work out a rental agreement with another charter school, which had backed out of the agreement just prior to finalizing the deal. The founder said there were no other options in the area as far as building space. In the end, the school signed a five-year renewable lease. According to Riverview Scholars' 1999-00 Annual Report, most of the staff and parents were very satisfied with this

building. Riverview Scholars staff reported that they have raised and invested over one million dollars in the school building, and expected to be operating at a deficit for several years since numerous renovations needed to be made. As of Spring 2003, negotiations were underway to rent additional space in the building for counseling and special education programs. They planned to invest an additional \$80,000 on renovations during the 2003-04 school year as well, and total capital expenditures at \$118,050. However, this total amount was only about half as much as the previous year through March 2003, when more classroom materials and furniture had to be purchased.

Essentials Academy. Essentials Academy had unanticipated problems with its facility that came extremely close to preventing the school from opening. Unbeknownst to the founders at the time, their original building owner had *not* provided a proper certification of occupancy and was in violation with the city. Essentials Academy was hit with the news of this building problem the Friday before school was scheduled to start. The director urged the commissioner not to close the building and lobbied with the city council to open the school. Parents did a lot of lobbying at city hall as well, and various stakeholders looked for emergency money. They tried to keep staff on board, even after the first allocation of money was taken away due to lack of adequate building space. Despite all the uncertainties and insecurities, the school staff did all they could to meet their incoming students' various needs, helping them feel safe and nurtured. For example, they set up a tutoring program at an alternative site prior to opening the school. Essentials Academy had to wait to open until the very last possible day that the schools were allowed to begin nearly a full month after the original start date. In the meantime, it lost 43 students. If the school had not been allowed to open, all the funds that had been invested in the school up to that point, including the founder's personal funds, would have had to be refunded to the state.

Once Essentials Academy was finally opened, the facility continued to be a formidable problem. The basement where some of the classes were held flooded repeatedly, ruining some computers. Without warning to the school staff, building repairs were repeatedly made during school hours, creating disruptions and making it unsafe for the students. The director and other stakeholders lobbied to secure a safer building, but funding issues were a barrier. At the end of February, days before the proficiency exams, the delinquent landlord was given notice to vacate and Essentials Academy was forced to relocate immediately. According to the director, the landlord was quite belligerent with the Essentials Academy staff, locking them out of the building and refusing to let them retrieve the school's belongings until the police intervened.

Fortunately, the local YMCA, with which Essentials Academy had been partnering for physical education classes, allowed Essentials Academy to move into its building until a permanent place could be secured. Staff and parents spent several long days moving Essentials Academy's materials from the old building to the YMCA, but heavy worth several thousand dollars was never recovered. Still upset with Essentials Academy for reasons that remain somewhat vague, the landlord of the previous building filed a lawsuit against Essentials Academy and claimed that its temporary residence at the YMCA violated several regulations. Plans for two other permanent sites fell through as Essentials Academy urgently searched for a new location.

Finally, the school staff found an old Catholic school building with 19,000 square feet available at an acceptable rate in the Tremont area. Facility problems continued there, as the director and her family had to install carpet and other building upgrades themselves after the contractors were unable to follow through with their renovations. Other renovations were needed, but the director decided it would be too disruptive to start them before the school year ended. By the time the school was revisited during January 2003, remarkable progress had been made on the building.

However, since they planned to double their enrollment for the following year, this building would be outgrown.

As of May 2003, the board had plans to rent yet another, larger building for the 2003-04 year—a Catholic school building that had twice the available floor space as their current location. It was in a location that was closer to the residence of many of the students. The fit seemed ideal, but there were concerns that the local district, which was undergoing a financial emergency and subsequent state takeover, would thwart the prospect. Fortunately, Essentials Academy experienced no resistance from the district. This building, too, would be temporary. In addition, Essentials Academy was making plans to build an 80,000 square foot building in another suburban area; this permanent location is tentatively scheduled to open in 2005. Table 5:1 depicts the levels of satisfaction that staff had with their buildings and facilities at each school during our 3-year study. In general, the levels of satisfaction with the facilities increased each year. MSM staff's levels of satisfaction with their buildings and facilities rose dramatically between 2000-01 and 2001-02, during which time they acquired their second building in addition to the church they had originally rented. However, the mean levels of satisfaction dropped slightly the following year, despite acquiring a permanent site with everyone housed in the same building. At both Riverview Scholars and LLL, satisfaction rates increased slightly between the first two years of the study and more substantially the following year. Both schools completed substantial renovations to their facilities between 2001-02 and 2002-03. Given the problems that Essentials Academy had with its facilities during its initial year, especially since about half of the staff did not complete their surveys until just after they were forced out of their original building and had to stay temporarily at the YMCA, it is surprising that the levels of satisfaction were as high as they were. Perhaps they were grateful to have someplace adequate to stay on a moment's notice.

5.4 Managing the Size and Growth Rate of Schools

Each charter school must decide how small to start, how large to grow, and how rapidly. As chapter 3 explains, charter schools often start very small, with just a few classes at the early elementary school grades. Each year thereafter until they reach their maximum size they may add new classes and/or grades, usually at the upper end as their older students matriculate.

Starting small and with younger grades has numerous benefits. First, it is generally easier to educate young children with little or no prior schooling than it is to re-educate older children who have done poorly in their previous schools (McDermott et al., 2003). Second, new charter schools, especially prior to recent legislation concerning loans for facilities, have had difficulty raising the funds to rent or purchase ample building space. As they mature and develop additional partnerships and funding sources, they may raise enough funds to house their growing school. Third, it is generally easier to build and maintain a cohesive group of staff and families with a smaller school.

Larger schools, on the other hand, have the advantage of greater funds (due to per-pupil funding) and economies of scale. They also attract and keep families who are concerned about moving their children from school to school as they age out of younger-graded schools.

Each of our schools experienced issues related to growth and decisions regarding how large to grow and how fast. Among the four schools, there was a wide variety of growth patterns, as Figure 5:1 illustrates. In this section, we explore how such decisions were made and by whom.

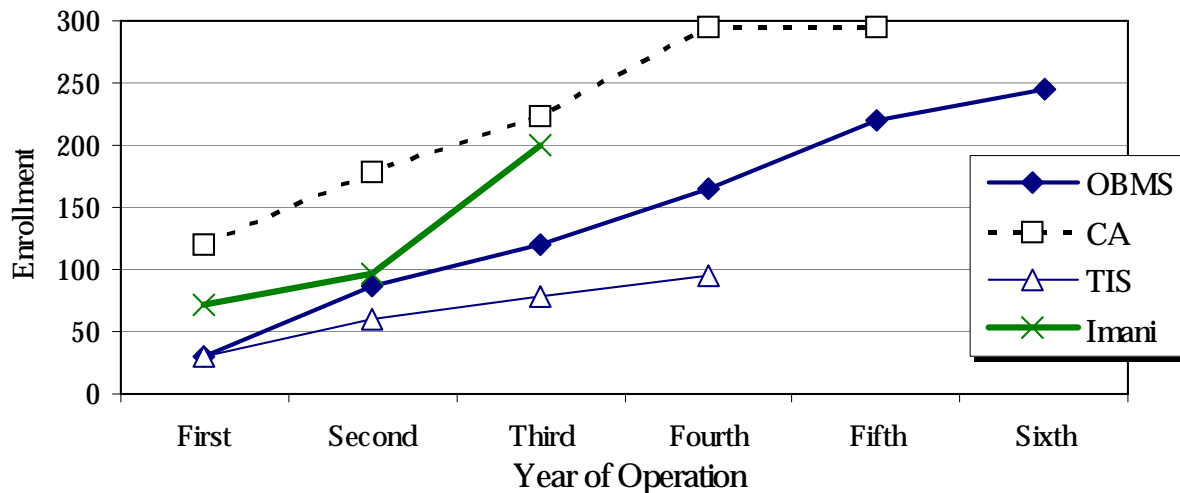


Figure 5:1 Growth Patterns of the Four Participating Charter Schools

We also touch on the interactive effects of growth and management, administration-teacher relations, and parent satisfaction.

Main Street Montessori

MSM started as a one-room school of first through third graders, with an independent board of founders and the director doubling as a co-teacher. Since then it has added one or two grade-levels per year, and the director has long since given up her dual role as a teacher. More significantly, MSM has become involved with a fast-growing EMO, EdUnited.

In 2001-02, as the oldest students were in sixth grade, board and staff decided to add middle school classes because parents worried where their kids would attend as they got older. The original plan was to have a separate middle school. Unfortunately these plans fell through because Am. Sub. H.B. 364 precluded OSBE as a sponsor and an alternate sponsor was not found. Instead, MSM's contract was modified to include a middle school. In 2002-03, the 4-5 graders were in Upper Elementary class and the 6th-7th graders were grouped into the Middle School; for 2003-04, the Upper Elementary school would include grade 4-6 (as it had the previous year) and the Middle School would include grades 7th-8th. MSM did not plan to add high school grades; as the principal explained, "We have to stop somewhere." EdUnited was considering opening its own high school.

Even with the growth stopped at 8th grade, there were concerns that the school had already grown too fast and could not afford to grow any further. In 2002-03, there were already concerns from staff and parents that their new, permanent location was too small. One parent complained that MSM was

Growing too fast, we will already be short on space in one more year. We haven't stabilized in size or structure yet. We have achieved so much in 5 years, but the constant stress of adding more classrooms and staff and reducing space is taking its toll. . . We need to finally limit our growth.

According to the principal, "They don't want another new building. This is our permanent home. That's why we don't want to grow too much again."

With the rapid growth of the school, new administrative procedures had to be put in place. For example, staff had to sign in each morning. Staff complained that these new procedures were cumbersome and bureaucratizing, and that they were losing their autonomy. The rapid growth coincided with the increased involvement of their EMO EdUnited, so staff assumed that all the new administrative procedures were due to EdUnited's growing influence. However, the principal explained that these new procedures were necessary for accountability and organization, regardless of EdUnited's role with the school. In 2002-03 the director stated that there had been some problems with discipline among the staff, especially among those who have been with Main Street Montessori since the beginning. Much of this appeared to be due to their resentment over EdUnited's real and perceived influence over the school. For example, some staff had been refusing to attend EdUnited-sponsored professional development meetings, stating that they were an irrelevant waste of time. The principal explained:

It is hard because we're growing, and the new procedures make it feel impersonal. But they are necessary with the growing school. They [the teachers] feel like they don't have as much of a say in how the school is run, but they do! For example there is now a new before and after school reading program. This was not initiated though EdUnited; the staff at MSM initiated it.

The board, staff, and parents all foresaw intensifying problems stemming from too much growth. The only way to curb the growth was to reduce the class size of the incoming kindergartens from 25 to 20 students per class. The board was concerned about how MSM could keep up their budget without the per pupil funding if they decreased their classroom size. The only feasible solution was to eliminate one Kindergarten teacher in each class and replace her with an assistant. The principal explained, "We need a reading teacher and Montessori teacher and each class. They work well. But often we have to compromise because it's not financially possible." She added, "The staff were angry about this. They wanted to know why the board couldn't figure this out sooner." Indeed, this was the decision that was made, and ultimately the newest Kindergarten teacher had to leave MSM despite her generally good performance. Some parents were upset over this decision; a couple parents even declined to enroll their children in the school after they had heard that their preferred teacher would no longer be there. Some teachers were also quite displeased with the whole situation; one quipped, "We grew too fast. We mutated. Gotta rein it back in."

Riverview Scholars

Riverview Scholars started larger than the other three schools, and each year was the largest school in our study. The executive director stated that "If I could do it all over again, I'd start smaller. Smaller classes; K-1 only. Size is a powerful factor." On the other hand, he cited some advantages to being a larger school. They could afford to hire more staff, including an accountant. When one staff person left, it didn't leave as big a "dent." Smaller schools had to cover more bases with fewer resources. Nevertheless, there were serious concerns about the schools pending growth.

Riverview Scholars started as a K-2 school and originally planned to grow to K-12. With a growth curve similar to MSM's and a student population that was needier and more challenging to educate, Riverview Scholars quickly decided to curb its growth. First, it planned to stop at 8th grade instead of 12th. In 2001-02, it decided to stop at 6th grade. Finally, in 2003, a decision was made to stop the growth at the 5th grade. The following details the processes used to make this decision.

With the input of a wide variety of stakeholders, the board debated whether or not to add a sixth grade. As the executive director explained the process, “Ultimately the decision involved lots of input. . . in a democratic way. . . a major piece of work.” The decision hinged on the question, how would it affect outcomes to add 6th grade? Five committees of board each met separately to make recommendation to the entire board. The strategic planning committee (a group with teachers, parents, and board) and finance committee were especially involved, but fundraising, facility, and education committees were included as well. Chairs of all the committees were at the strategic planning meeting in December 2002 where this decision was made. There were a total of 3 meetings with parents and 2 meetings with staff. Ultimately there was solid agreement.

The biggest controversy concerned the students who were currently in 5th grade. Staff felt more strongly about stopping at fifth grade, while parents were more ambivalent. They had concerns regarding where these students would enroll the following year, especially students who had special needs. There had been an FSO meeting prior to board, where all the parents initially wanted to stop at 6th grade instead of 5th. Fifteen parents came “to fuss with the board,” but after the meeting they seemed to understand the reasons for stopping at 5th grade. Still, the board understood the concerns regarding the students’ education beyond the fifth grade, and came up with an innovative solution. They applied to the Cleveland Foundation for a discretionary grant of \$4500 to hire a “parent helper” to find appropriate middle schools for 5th graders. The request was granted, and they hired a parent 10 hours a week for 5-6 months to help people find schools beyond the 5th grade. Several parents who were interviewed were very impressed with this service.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders

Unlike MSM and Riverview Scholars, LLL decided early on to start very small and stay rather small. They never intended to serve students over 100 students or grow beyond the 4th grade. This was intended to keep the school’s functioning running smoothly, with benefits such as regular director’s visits to the classrooms.

Not everyone agreed with this decision. Many parents were quite concerned over the options that their children would have after they matriculated from the 4th grade; this was the most oft-cited weakness of the school, according to parent surveys. A devoted mentor to the program was also quite concerned about this. The director went out of her way to find appropriate schools for matriculating fourth graders. The principal/director was firm in her decision to stop at fourth grade, but was nevertheless concerned about financial matters.

Essentials Academy

Essentials Academy started with a student body of 72 in grades K-1 and 5-7, and planned to enroll 200 students in grades K-10 by its third year. It was perhaps the fastest growing school among the four in our study; however, its enrollment did not always live up to its expectations. They lost 43 students at the beginning of their first year due to the temporary loss of a building. The following year they hoped to enroll 20 students in an alternative high school program for dropouts and at-risk students. Only 5 enrolled; among them 4 transferred or dropped out. By the school’s third year, according to one staff member there were only 150 students despite plans to enroll 200.

To accommodate the growing school, Essentials Academy has been procuring new buildings almost every year. The first two moves were due to reasons other than growth; they were forced from their building when the delinquent landlord got evicted, and then took temporary residence

in the YMCA in which they partnered. A permanent site was found in the Spring of 2002, but with the pending growth of the school a larger space was needed for the Fall of 2003. The move reportedly cost the school a great sum of money. They rented a space from a Catholic school which had recently closed; this building had twice as much available space as their then-current building, and was located in an area that was more convenient to most of Essentials Academy's families. They planned a permanent building, built from the ground up, in subsequent years.

5.5 Summary

Charter school founders may envision Utopian possibilities for their schools; however, they face numerous barriers during start-up that can hamper the fulfillment and even the development of these ideals. According to one of the founders with whom we spoke, idealistic expectations are one barrier to start-up and implementation, a phenomenon that LOEO (2001) and the state auditor (Petro, 2002) found to be widespread among Ohio charter schools.

Charter school founders have a comprehensive list to attend to prior to and during the opening of the school. Limitations in funding, physical facilities, support, and time prove to be the greatest barriers in starting a school. In each of the four schools in our study, securing adequate facilities was particularly problematic. Charter school founders spend considerable time securing the basic material needs of the school, leaving less time for developing the mission or curriculum. Further, the lack of resources can directly impede the fulfillment of the mission and curricula, if needed space or instructional materials are lacking and if salaries are too low to attract and keep quality staff. Charter schools must also decide how large to grow and how fast.

Despite these barriers, the four charter schools managed to attract and maintain sufficient staff and families to open their schools and venture forth toward fulfilling their respective missions. Another critical factor related to the successful start-up of these schools is governance, which will be covered in the next chapter.

Governance and Management of Charter Schools

[P]roper management of the work lives of human beings . . . can improve them and improve the world and in this sense be a utopian or revolutionary technique. (Abraham Maslow, 1998a, p. 1)

Charter school founders seem to share Maslow's Utopian visions of proper management's possibilities. The decentralized scope and increased flexibility of charter school governance appeared to make this dream possible. These alternatives are especially crucial in an era where, according to some school reformers, "[E]xisting [traditional public school] governance structures encourage acrimony and conflict among superintendents, the board, union officials, and central office staff" (Fuller, 2003, p. 2).

In this chapter, we explain how the Ohio community school law allows school boards greater flexibility and can promote increased harmony among school stakeholders. We then detail how each of the four schools we studied seized these opportunities, creating governing structures intended to enable their schools to function optimally. We briefly describe the foci of each school board, and the relations between the board and other school stakeholders. A section is dedicated to the controversy over education management organizations (EMOs), particularly how they affected one school in our study. We outline the interaction of boards, EMOs, administrators, teachers, and parents in managing a charter school. Finally, we describe how well the school staff think their boards are living up to the vision of what a flexible, decentralized school governance can accomplish.

6.1 Ohio Community School Law Governance Requirements

Ohio charter school law allows substantial flexibility in what the structure, function, and composition of the governing board may be. Generally, such boards are site-based, promoting local management of the specific charter schools. Many charter school boards include parents as well as prominent community members. Charter schools are required to follow the Ohio Ethics Law "except that a member of a community school governing board specifically may also be an employee of the board and may have an interest in a board-executed contract" [OH Revised Code § 3314.03(A)(11) (e)]. The law also allows charter school employees to be board members—a situation prohibited in Ohio's traditional public schools due to perceived conflicts of interest (LOEO, 2001). Currently, the law sets no requirements for the length of board members' terms.

Each charter school board sets its own regulations regarding membership and term limits. Once charter schools define these regulations and expectations, they are required to submit a comprehensive governance plan to the school's sponsor. The plan must specify the "process by which the governing authority of the school will be selected in the future" and the "management and administration of the school" [OH Revised Code § 3314.03(A)(19)(B)].

Unlike most traditional public schools, charter school governing boards are appointed, rather than elected. While some school reformers champion this structure in various types of school systems (e.g., Fuller, 2003), charter school opponents characterize this as undemocratic and nonpublic (e.g., OCPT v. OSBE, 2002). Tom Mooney, the president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers, decried that "These things are under their own self-appointed boards and aren't subjected to any accountability to the public or the tax dollars that are funding them" (Sandham, 2001). However, others contend this is the only way a school can foster and implement a common mission—a mission unrestricted by the will of the majority of public voters (Hill, Warner-King, Campbell, McElroy, & Colon, 2002). Further, appointed public school boards, while outside the norm, are not unique to Ohio's charter schools. Indeed, the CMSD has been run by a mayoral appointed board for years out of concern that the publicly elected board had served a skewed range of voters' special interests rather than the best interests of the students (Cleveland Initiative for Education, n.d.). Nevertheless, one may argue that the mayor is elected by the majority of Cleveland voters and hence represents the Cleveland public as she appoints CMSD board members.

Arguments regarding the publicness of appointed boards aside, Am. Sub. H.B.-364 prescribed a few additional restrictions on the governance of charter schools. For example, a charter school board must include "at least 5 individuals who are not owners or employees, or immediate relatives of owners or employees, of any for-profit firm that operates or manages a school for the governing authority"¹ (p. 105-106, lines 3158-3161). This is meant to address concerns that for profit education management organizations (EMOs) have excessive control over charter schools. In addition, the bill prohibits a person who owes the state money regarding a closed charter school or who is in a dispute over such a matter from serving on a charter school board.

While Ohio still provides few restrictions on charter school governance, The Cleveland Foundation has higher expectations when deciding which charter schools to fund. In particular, the Foundation wants a charter school's board to reflect the school's various stakeholders, including parents and educators. Nevertheless, schools have quite a bit of latitude in board structure. The four charter schools sponsored by the Foundation demonstrate the variety of possible governing board structures over time. These schools also demonstrate how the board structures can change dramatically due to various factors.

6.2 Origins and Evolution of the Four Charter School Boards

Chapter 4 detailed the often overwhelming requirements to starting and maintaining a charter school. A common problem is that groups attempting to establish and run charter/community schools have expertise in some crucial areas but lack it in others. For example, schools may be governed by experienced educators who lack business acumen or conversely by businesspeople

¹ It was unclear to officials at both ODE and LOEO whether this meant that beyond the 5 individuals, for profit EMO members could serve on the board (S. Burigana, J. Cunningham, & K. Allison, personal communication, June 17, 2003; S. Panizo, G. Timko, & N. Sajano, personal communication, 2003).

with little knowledge of teaching challenges (LOEO, 2003a). Representatives from each of the four schools agreed on the importance of having people who collectively possess strong expertise in all the fields relevant to school development and operation. However, keeping all these experts active on the board has been a challenge. Many factors have led to turnover and even reconfiguration of the boards.

Each of the 4 schools in our study had boards of different structure and function. Further, the composition and duties of each board changed over time, to varying degrees. The size of the boards ranged from 3 to 20 members, although frequent resignations and reconfigurations often altered the size and structure of an individual school's board. A board could be quite separated from the school staff or have numerous staff members serving on it. Boards also had differing foci depending on the age of the school, the school's most salient needs, the membership of the board, and the scope of the board's governance. These differences reflect the flexibility afforded organizing charter school boards. Following is a description of the origins and evolution of each charter school's board. We also describe the relations between each school's board and its other stakeholders, including other groups who are involved in the management of the school. MSM is described last because of its unique and somewhat controversial situation.

Riverview Scholars

Riverview Scholars, the largest school in our study, has the largest and most complex governance structure. The school started with 10 board members; and by April 2003, it had 20 members. Members have included parents, university faculty, financial experts, a pediatrician, leaders of business and non profit organizations, and various other prominent community members. Due to conflict of interest risks, teachers and staff are not permitted to serve on the board, although they are encouraged to attend meetings.

The board of Riverview Scholars also included four parents. The executive director explained that "They bring a more intimate knowledge of school since they're the main customers." He explained that one downside is that parents can have "too personal" a perspective and have trouble perceiving the issues concerning entire school. "We've grown as a board, but the minimum has always been at least two parent representatives. Twenty-five percent should be the maximum, but there is not an official policy."

The turnover rate among board members has been somewhat high, especially during the first year. The school lost five of the original ten board members between its opening in September 1999 and December 2000. Only one of the departing board members left due to conflicts over vision and policy; the others could not dedicate the time necessary to serve on the board. Indeed, a few board members expressed concern regarding other members who had the desire and ability to be influential, but were either unable or unwilling to devote sufficient time and effort. The executive director explained that there was an "art" to keeping the board involved and that turnover had been high because "we didn't get them involved in mutually satisfying ways in time." According to the original board president, despite the high turnover there has been no substantial change in the board's structure or function. The executive director explained, "Turnover is a good thing it can be constructive. Just like with our staff, its gotten better since turnover." The board has become more stable, notwithstanding the recent resignation of two very dedicated officers due to health reasons.

Foci of the board. As Riverview Scholars' board has become increasingly involved in issues of fund-raising and overarching policy development, it has become decreasingly involved in the school's day-to-day functions. A more hands-on approach was needed when the school was newer

and there were more crises that required everyone's immediate attention. This pattern has been observed in other charter schools as well. Letting go of daily administrative concerns may prevent micromanaging, which is believed to be highly problematic among district school boards (Fuller, 2003).

The Riverview Scholars board is highly involved in fund raising, including among its own members. One unique aspect of the board is the expectation that each member who can afford it will donate \$500 to the school. At one board meeting, there was discussion over whether this expectation should be increased to \$1,000 per board member. Some board members were afraid that this expectation would discourage less affluent members to join the board, especially parents. Board members who supported this increase emphasized that this donation was voluntary.

Relations between board and other stakeholders. In addition to the board, numerous committees have been developed to focus on particular areas or address specific issues. Each committee includes some board members, but also includes many other stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and other staff members. Currently, there is an executive committee, an education committee, a fund-raising committee, a finance committee, a facility committee, and a strategic planning committee. In addition, a manager's team and leadership team were created for the 2002-03 year. A family-staff organization (FSO) meets regularly, and communication between the FSO and the board has improved over the past year. Each of these committees and groups reports back to the board, thus playing a role in overall governance and decision making. Chapter 8 provides more details about the FSO and other committees that include parents.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders

Lifelong Learners & Leaders' original board had two divisions, each having a specific function. The school's four founders, minus one who withdrew from the school just prior to the signing of the state contract, made up the school's governing authority. The other members provided specific expertise and advisory support to the governing members. Only governing members could vote. This structure was created to ensure that only the original founding members would oversee the creation of the contract. After the contract was written and approved, the distinction among board members was eliminated. As of Spring 2003, the board had seven members.

Foci of the board. The board of directors sets and enacts policies relating to the school's operation and approves all personnel and budget actions. For example, during the 2001-02 school year the board enacted or adapted three new policies concerning admissions, expanding the geographic range but somewhat limiting the age range of new students. The board also set strategic goals for the 2001-2004 time span and for the 2001-02 school year, several of which directly addressed the school's unique intergenerational theme. While the board "serves the same function as a traditional school board," as their 2001-02 annual report describes, the goals that the board set for the school are quite unique. For example, one goal was to "expand and improve intergenerational learning opportunities that provide positive learning experiences for the school's diverse participants" (LLL, 2002, p. 28).

Relations between board and other stakeholders. There was considerable overlap between the board and the administration, especially during the first two years. The school was straightforward regarding these dual roles and addressed them directly in its 2000-01 annual report. The executive director was also the "principal-teacher" and a board member. Her husband originally served as board chairperson. Another board member served as executive director of the local center, the school's landlord. The board agreed that neither the executive director nor the board chair could vote on matters pertaining to the executive director's employment. Further, the

executive director of Local center could not vote on matters regarding the leasing of space or any matter relating to the school's financial relationship to Local center. From the start, the board chair planned to step down from his position by June 2002. A nominating committee recommended a replacement in April 2002. The executive director hoped to leave the board as well, once a suitable replacement had been found. However, she emphasized that her role on the board had been more an information provider than a decision maker.

No parents were on the LLL board, but the director was interested in increasing their participation in governance. She let parents know that they were always welcome at board meetings, but parents rarely attended. Other LLL board members wanted to increase collaboration among the board and parents as well. At one board meeting there was a discussion regarding the creation of procedures for parents to contact the board.

Essentials Academy

Essentials Academy had a board of eight members, including the husband of the school's director. As was the case at Riverview Scholars, staff were not permitted to serve as board members, but were encouraged to attend meetings. Parents were allowed to serve on the board. Considerable turnover on the board took place during and at the end of the school's first year. One parent resigned midyear, but another took her place. One member had to resign due to political pressures from her employer, a phenomenon found in two other charter school boards in our study. A lot of the board members had personal and family crises during the year, so the board's progress was impeded. Numerous board members, including the president, resigned after the end of the first year. The director recognized a need to rebuild and reorganize the board for the following year. By the second year the board included an attorney, a local business owner, a Ph.D. candidate in urban development, a former professional football player for the Cleveland Browns, the parent of an Essentials Academy student, and a community parent advocate. The director's husband still served on the board, but planned to resign at the end of the year. At the end of the 2002-03 year, two board members were asked to resign due to their consistent lack of attendance at board meetings; and two new board members were recruited for the following year. One new board member had served previously on the board of the Warren City School District; the other was the chair of the Black Studies program at Cleveland State University.

The diverse roles of the board members helped foster partnerships with organizations throughout the community. For example, one board member had been employed by various organizations that helped small businesses with facilities, economic development, and business retention, three areas that were quite pertinent to Essentials Academy. One former board member had been involved in an organization whose mission was to find employment for youth. Even after she resigned from the board, she continued to help Essentials Academy form a partnership with this organization, creating opportunities for students to find jobs as part of their service learning curricula. Essentials Academy had already formed a partnership with CSU's Black Studies Department for professional development, so including the chair of this department to the board enhanced the school's partnership.

Foci of the board. During the board's first year, it's overriding concern regarded finding a stable facility. During the second year the main focus was on board development. Facilities were the second issue, while fund development was the third priority. The board was directly involved in finding funders; this was closely linked to its development strategy. Board capacity was being built by including corporate members. For example, the board were worked with a local organization called "Business Volunteers Unlimited," whose duties included training members of NFP boards. This group provided a workshop on fiscal oversight to the Essentials Academy board.

Relations between board and other stakeholders. The school director reported that there were good, if not extensive, relations between the board and school staff. Some staff attended board meetings every month, and some attended only occasionally. Some staff members reported that they rarely attend board meetings because they are so involved in other school activities. One staff member said that communication between the board and staff was minimal and was unaware of any strong involvement between the staff and the board. Only two parents, excluding board members, attended board meetings last year. The director remarked, "I think it is because they are so involved in other things."

The director expected each board member to visit the classrooms at least once. Some board members had difficulty taking time off work to do so. One board member, whose child attended Essentials Academy, had frequently volunteered at the school during its first year. However, it made some staff anxious to have a board member in the classroom on a regular basis.

In addition to the board, there were two committees: the strategic planning committee (for creating the board) and the facilities committee. These committee meetings were not open to the public. The strategic planning committee disbanded after the board was established. As of 2003, the facilities committee was still quite active; as they were finalizing the rental of another building for the 2003-04 year and negotiating the construction of a permanent new building for the following years.

For the 2003-04 year, an "administrative cabinet" was created. Four staff who had had at least part-time teaching responsibilities the previous year would now have their work divided between teaching and administration. Their other teaching responsibilities included curriculum specialist, funding specialist and technical coordinator, social studies teacher, and service learning and intervention specialist. Two other members would be recruited for the administrative cabinet. One was a social worker who would also take over the community outreach and case management duties.

Main Street Montessori

The scope and structure of Main Street Montessori's (MSM) board changed substantially during its first five years. Its original board consisted of a Montessori activist, an attorney, a county treasurer, an accountant, a community organization officer, a human services professional, and a zoo specialist. By January 2002, this group was gradually winnowed to a board of three. Turnover was attributed, in part, to the community roles of the members. Political figures and parents of MSM students were originally thought to be ideal representatives of the board. However, political figures were often overcommitted and unable to invest sufficient time to the board. Parents tended to be focused on issues directly affecting their own children and had difficulty dealing with overarching school issues.

Around January 2002, one of the four remaining board members, an employee of the local zoo the school frequently visited, was asked by her employer to resign from the board. The employer was concerned that her role at MSM could be construed as bias against regular public schools. For much of the remaining school year, MSM was searching for additional board members who could represent the school's various constituents and devote the necessary time and effort to the school's overarching business aspects. However, the board remained at only three members for the remainder of the school year. Two of these three members were members of EdUnited, their education management organization (EMO), as well.

Relations between board and other stakeholders. MSM had always had a clear division of labor between the staff and the board, with the principal acting as the conduit between the two. During

the 2001-02 year, the teachers and the board president whom we interviewed agreed that the teachers and administrators were responsible for educating the students and taking care of day-to-day tasks, while the board was responsible for business-related matters. These roles became increasingly differentiated as the school matured and its daily functioning has steadied. During the 2001-02 school year, MSM teachers expressed that this division helped the school run smoothly and without unnecessary interference. The board's lack of involvement with the day-to-day tasks of education reflected faith in the teachers and staff to do their work well, according to the teachers. However, some staff and parents wished there were more interaction between the board and their respective stakeholder groups.

However, by the start of the 2002-03 year, MSM's governance changed dramatically. The MSM board was subsumed under a board for EdUnited. Including MSM, EdUnited served as the management company for eight charter schools in the Cleveland area. Members of the company board also served on the governing boards for each of the schools it managed. In the next section, we define EMOs, describe their prevalence in Ohio charter schools, and discuss their benefits and drawbacks. In particular, we focus on EdUnited and its perceived effects on MSM.

6.3 Education Management Organizations

Education management organizations are becoming increasingly popular among charter schools in Ohio and other states. EMOs provide a variety of contractual services to charter schools, from simply managing the payrolls and related administrative tasks, to providing on-site substitutes and specialized instructors, to "full service" EMOs that provide detailed curricula, substantial governance help, and administrative assistance. EMOs may be for-profit or not-for-profit. EMO proponents argue that competition, the profit motive, and freedom from governmental bureaucracies allow private management companies to provide more value for the money.

EMOs, particularly White Hat Management, have been gaining momentum among Ohio charter schools. As of July 2003 a total of 32 Ohio charter schools, plus 1 widespread on-line charter school, "Odehla," were managed by White Hat Management, a for-profit EMO (White Hat Management, n.d.). Eleven White Hat schools were in the Cleveland area. Other EMOs have thrown their hats into the ring in Ohio, including National Heritage Academy, Edison Schools, KIDS2000, Charter Schools Administration Services, Institute of Charter School Management and Resources, The Leona Group, and Summit Academy Management (LOEO, 2003a, b).

There has been considerable controversy concerning the roles of EMOs in Ohio and elsewhere. LOEO (2001) reported that EMOs have been helpful in obtaining sufficient human resources and facilities for charter schools. Often, contracting with an EMO is more efficient for a charter school than hiring regular part-time staff for clerical jobs, nurses, and specialty teachers. A full-time EMO staffer can divide her time among several different charter schools. However, EMOs, in particular the for-profit ones such as White Hat, have become a bone of contention for the public schools and even within the charter school movement (LOEO, 2001; Miron & Nelson, 2002). Some see EMOs as big business monoliths, defeating the vision of charter schools as small, decentralized, and easily responsive to staff, student, and family needs. The lawsuit against Ohio charter schools stated that involvement with for-profit EMOs violated a charter school's status as a nonprofit corporation (OCPT v. OSBE, p. 25). Ohio Federation of Teachers' president Tom Mooney asserted, "They want us to believe that a couple of dozen non-profit community groups just happened to decide to enter into the exact same contract for the same price for the same services with a for-profit management company . . . These are just a chain of company-run stores" (Sandham, 2001). Previously, there

were also concerns about conflicts of interest when associates of EMOs served on charter school boards. To address this issue, Am. Sub. H.B. 364 places strict limitations concerning employees or owners of for-profit EMOs serving on the boards of charter schools that contract for their services.

Three of the schools in our study had no interest in contracting with an EMO even for clerical services, preferring to retain their independence. A staff person at one of these schools was concerned that, given all the highly publicized controversy over EMOs, the “stigma” of working with an EMO could tarnish the school’s reputation.

MSM is the only school in our study that uses an EMO. EdUnited, a nonprofit EMO, was started by MSM’s board president and founder in 2000. EdUnited was also involved in starting 7 additional charter schools throughout the CMSD and its first-ring districts: 1 each in Cleveland, Lorain, Parma, Elyria, Mansfield, Euclid, and South Lorain. None of these seven schools follow the Montessori model; all follow a rather uniform “character education” curriculum. EdUnited’s founder stated that Montessori schools are very costly to run and, with the possible exception of an MSM middle school, he does not plan to start any more. An additional 12 EdUnited schools were approved by ODE, including the MSM middle school. However, these new schools were never opened after the passage of Am Sub 364, which forbid the OSBE from sponsoring new charter schools.

EdUnited Staff explained the various benefits they provided to the charter schools. As a consortium, EdUnited can call in national speakers for professional development. Their schools can each hire part-time gym teachers full-time through EdUnited, part-time at each school. In addition, EdUnited fosters connections by hosting grade level meetings among schools. Teachers, therefore, aren’t as isolated; they can brainstorm ideas among one another. EdUnited staff explained the various other perks that their own EMO provided. They host cross-school committees curriculum, character, and outreach so staff can improve situations at their own school as well as others. Secretaries at each school may not be equally experienced; EdUnited staff made sure that “everyone’s on the same page.” Belonging to an overarching EMO also provided mutual support to principals. As a EdUnited staff member explained, “Who do you turn to when you’re not part of a larger system? It’s similar to what public and groups of private schools do. Find out other ways to do things. Then schools can focus on education, not money.”

During EdUnited’s first year of operation, MSM teachers described it as a major change to MSM’s functioning: “We are no longer an entity unto ourselves.” Teachers stated that the effects of EdUnited were “Mostly positive—we could get a gym teacher. We’d had problems with gym teachers turning over. With EdUnited, we have guaranteed gym teachers, speech therapists, music teachers, a nurse, and funding for new books.” These teachers and staff are shared among the various EdUnited charter schools. The arrangement is more cost-effective than each school hiring part-time staff for each position. This seemed to result in less turnover in part-time staff as well, creating more continuity for the staff and students. Another teacher said that the “somewhat negative side” of EdUnited is that “We [MSM staff] have less of a say now. We used to be able to solve things more in-house. Now things have to be funneled through EdUnited. There are more committees. But we can get more books and other things to comply with state laws and regulations.”

By the 2002-03 school year, the influence of EdUnited had increased, as had the resentment of some MSM teachers. A teacher cited the EdUnited-based board as the school’s biggest weakness, stating, “They are not educators, and they make educational decisions without discussion with educators.” Some teachers were clearly irritated that they had to spend their time

at in-service meetings that were geared primarily toward the other EdUnited schools, which shared a common mission and curricular focus that was distinct from that of MSM. They appreciated the goods and services that EdUnited helped provide, such as health educators, but missed their previous levels of independence. Although a EdUnited staff member stated, “The principal has the authority in each school to run their own building,” the administration and staff of MSM sometimes thought that their authority was being undermined by EdUnited. One teacher explained that the governance functions had changed to “More top down running of things. More directives from the board.” Another teacher added, “We’re pretty well out of the loop as far as making decisions. Instead of deciding how high to jump, we jump as high as they tell us . . . and through whichever hoops they tell us.” This perceived loss of teachers’ influence on the school was reflected in the surveys as well (see Table 6:1). Decisions that previously could be made by MSM alone now had to be approved by EdUnited. For example, MSM teachers and administrators wanted to extend the school day and add additional planning days. EdUnited initially rejected the idea but, after some negotiation, accepted it. This extra layer of management slowed the implementation of ideas, which placed limits on innovations. The principal continued to act as the conduit between the staff and the board, relaying ideas and concerns. By the 2002-2003 year, when tensions between the teachers and the board increased, the principal referred to her liaison position as an “awful job.” Nevertheless, she was generally satisfied with EdUnited’s services and found that it was usually accommodating to the school’s unique approaches.

There were some concerns within Greater Cleveland’s education experts concerning the overlapping board of all the EdUnited schools. One person questioned, “What happens if the school’s staff and administration decide to fire EdUnited? How can they vote to do that if the entire board is composed of EdUnited members?” One of MSM’s staff expressed similar concerns. However, LOEO staff stated that since EdUnited was a nonprofit organization, and since its audits were unblemished, there was nothing in the governance structure that violated any regulations and no compelling reason to change it.

6.4 Satisfaction with School Governance

During the 2002-03 year, among the four schools the mean level of teachers/staff satisfaction with their school’s governance was fairly high, ranging from a low of 3.31 (SD=1.0) to a high of 4.5 (SD=0.7) on a scale from 1 (“very dissatisfied”) to 5 (“very satisfied”). Interestingly, the smaller the school’s staff, the higher the mean level of satisfaction with the governance. However, a sample of four schools is too small from which to draw generalizations. Further studies with much larger samples of schools can test this relationship.

Table 6:2 displays the staff’s satisfaction with school governance between 2000-01 through 2002-03, according to the Charter School Survey. Although MSM’s satisfaction levels dropped between 2000-01 and 2001-02 the year that EdUnited was initiated they rose slightly the following year, despite an increase in negative comments during staff focus groups. However, as Table 6:2 indicates, agreement with the item “Teachers are able to influence the steering and direction of the

Table 6:1 MSM Staff responses to “Teachers are able to influence the steering and direction of the school”

Year	N	Mean	SD
2000-01	11	2.8	0.4
2001-02	14	2.4	0.5
2002-03	20	2.0	0.7

Note: These items are on a 3 point Likert scale, where 1=False, 2=Partly True, and 3=True.

school” dropped substantially from 2000-01 to 2002-03. Riverview Scholars’ staff were less satisfied with governance in 2001-02 than they were in 2000-01, according to this survey. This was quite surprising to the executive director, who believed that staff satisfaction was higher in 2001-02 than in 2000-01. Further analyses showed that Riverview Scholars’s teachers were generally more satisfied than their other staff in 2001-02. Staff satisfaction with governance was consistently high at Essentials Academy and especially at LLL.

Table 6:2 Staff Satisfaction with Governance

Year	MSM		RS		LLL		EA	
	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)
2000-01	11	3.9 (0.7)	24	3.5 (1.0)	7	4.1 (0.7)	*	*
2001-02	12	3.3 (1.2)	28	3.1 (1.2)	6	4.2 (0.8)	10	3.9 (1.0)
2002-03	19	3.5 (1.1)	29	3.3 (1.0)	10	4.5 (0.7)	16	4.1 (0.9)

A decentralized school governance should ideally lead to increased cohesion of mission, staff collaboration and influence, increased accountability, and more efficient administration (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Awsumb-Nelson, 2002; Wohlstetter & Briggs, 2001). However, governance is but one issue that affects each of these variables. In upcoming chapters we will explore the various issues related to staff professional opportunities, administrative efficiency, mission cohesion, various forms of accountability, and how these issues interact.

6.5 Summary

Charter schools have extensive flexibility in governance structure. Their boards are appointed, not elected, and they can include parents and staff. Risks of conflict of interest notwithstanding, this can promote homogeneity of mission. This contrasts with the frequent gridlock in large public school districts caused by the competing interests of the superintendent, teachers’ unions, central office staff, and school boards (Fuller, 2003).

In addition to a common mission, it is essential for a board to include varied expertise needed to initiate and manage a school. Board members with particular community connections can help schools form valuable partnerships and obtain needed human, material, and organizational resources. However, maintaining a committed board can be quite challenging, because the responsibilities of starting up and governing a new school can take more time and effort than originally expected. All four schools had issues with board members’ participation and turnover at some point.

Many charter schools in Ohio and elsewhere are utilizing the services of EMOs. EMOs can provide a wide range of services from payroll management to intensive involvement in governance and curricula. Involvement with an EMO often requires a trade-off of independence for needed human and material resources, a balancing act that in other contexts has been referred to as “the paradox of empowerment” (Rappaport, 1981). The only school in our study that utilized an EMO experienced this paradox: its involvement in the school’s governance and management structure had positive effects on the available resources of the school, but also had some negative effects on the school’s perceived autonomy, teacher satisfaction, and mission cohesion and fulfillment.

In later chapters, we explore other factors that influence teacher satisfaction and autonomy, as well as mission cohesion and fulfillment. Before delving into these areas, we take a look at the staff and families who become involved in these schools of choice. In our next chapter, we introduce the people involved with these schools and the factors that attracted and kept them.

Who Chooses Community Schools and Why?

I am so happy that I had this choice of school for my child . . . Community schools are a definite plus in a city where the public school system is in shambles, especially for families who cannot afford parochial or private schools. –An MSM parent

Choice is a central concept of charter school reforms. Originally, families had limited choice when it came to public schools; school assignments were largely determined on the basis of the district or catchment area in which one lived. Only those families who could afford to pay tuition for a private school or relocate to a district with a better school system could exercise school choice. Charter schools provide a new, tuition-free school option for families. Important questions addressed in this chapter are, Who makes the choices to send their children to charter schools, and why?

In addition to being schools of choice for the families they serve, charter schools are schools of choice for the teachers and staff they employ. As we saw in the previous chapter, charter schools often start with a particular education mission and therefore should attract staff who share this mission. Questions related to teacher choice are, How are suitable teachers recruited to these charter schools? Which teachers and staff choose to work in a charter school? Why? The answers to these questions are explored in this chapter. When possible, they are compared with those from previous studies of charter schools in other states.

In this chapter, we first explore the characteristics of the charter schools' staffs, how they are recruited, and the reasons they chose employment at their respective schools. We then provide a brief description of the students who attend these schools. Finally, a section is devoted to describing of the parents who send their children to these four schools: who they are and why they chose to enroll their children in these schools. It is important to keep in mind that data presented in tables in this chapter are based on surveys from the 2002-03 school year unless otherwise indicated.

7.1 Who Are the Teachers and Staff?

Just as the 4 schools in our study varied substantially in size, age, location, and characteristics of students and families, so too did the size and composition of the schools' staff. Lifelong Learners & Leaders (LLL), the smallest school in our study, employed only 11 full- or half-time instructional staff, including 6 classroom teachers. Noninstructional staff and instructional staff who work only

a few hours a week supplement this small staff. The largest school in our study, Riverview Scholars, employed 36 staff who were at least half-time, 32 of whom returned completed surveys. Many of these are noninstructional staff who were hired in response to the unique needs of the student body.

Across the 4 schools in our study, 80 staff members returned completed Charter School Surveys during the 2002-03 school year. Of these 80 staff members, 48 were classroom teachers, 3 of whom were special education teachers (see Table 7:1). This low ratio of classroom teachers to other staff was mainly due to the large number of teaching assistants at the schools as well as the special program staff at Riverview Scholars.

Table 7:1 Staff Roles Across the Four Case Schools

<i>School</i>	<i>Classroom Teacher</i>	<i>Teaching Assistant</i>	<i>Special Education Teacher</i>	<i>Principal/or Key Administrator</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
MSM	15	0	1	2	3	20*
Riverview Scholars	15	5	2	2	8	32
LLL	6	1	0	1	3	11
Essentials Academy	9	1	0**	1	6	17
Total	45	7	3	6	20	80

* At MSM, the assistant principal was also a classroom teacher.

** Essentials Academy's special education instructor had to leave midyear due to health reasons.

Reasons for Choosing Employment at a Charter School

Table 7:2 displays ten reasons that teachers may have for choosing charter schools. Each reason was rated on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 connoting "Not Important" and 5 connoting "Very Important." This table includes the unweighted means and standard deviations of staff responses from all the schools, as well as those for each school. We have listed the items in rank order from most important to least important according to the grand total of staff in our study.

The three top-ranked reasons, all of which averaged 4.0 Likert-scale points or higher, were *Opportunity to work with like-minded educators*, *My interest in being involved in an educational reform effort*, and *Safety at school*. We now discuss each of these reasons, and compare them with those found in other studies of charter schools. (see Chapter 1 for further details about the composite comparison group).

The top-ranked reason for teachers choosing to work at one of the four charter schools in our study was *Opportunity to work with like-minded educators*. This echoes the results of surveys of staff at charter schools in various other states in the country. Interviews confirmed the staff's commitment to each school's unique mission. The popularity of this reason supports the theory that teachers should self-select into schools that are in line with their own personal values and philosophies.

My interest in being involved in an education reform effort was another high-ranking reason in Cleveland, as it had been in studies of charter schools in other states. This is not surprising, given the vision of the charter school movement to reform public education. *Safety at school* was another top-ranked item, similarly rated in the four Cleveland charter schools as in charter schools elsewhere.

Table 7:2 Reasons for Seeking Employment at This School

<i>School</i>	<i>Cleveland Community Schools (N = 80)</i>	<i>MSM (N=20)</i>	<i>Riverview Scholars (N=32)</i>	<i>LLL (N=11)</i>	<i>Essentials Academy (N=17)</i>	<i>Composite Comparison Group (N=1,605)</i>
Opportunity to work with like-minded educators	4.3 (0.9)	4.5 (0.9)	4.2 (0.9)	4.5 (0.9)	4.4 (0.7)	4.2 (1.0)
My interest in being involved in an education reform effort	4.1 (1.1)	4.0 (1.3)	4.0 (1.1)	4.0 (1.2)	4.5 (0.6)	4.0 (1.1)
Safety at school	4.0 (1.0)	4.2 (0.8)	3.8 (1.1)	3.8 (1.5)	4.2 (0.7)	3.8 (1.2)
Academic reputation (high standards) of this school*	3.9 (1.0)	3.8 (1.1)	3.4 (0.9)	4.6 (0.9)	4.4 (0.7)	3.7 (1.2)
The school has small class sizes*	3.7 (1.3)	2.4 (1.3)	3.8 (1.0)	4.5 (1.0)	4.4 (0.8)	4.0 (1.1)
Parents are committed	3.7 (1.0)	3.9 (1.0)	3.6 (1.0)	3.9 (1.4)	3.6 (0.9)	3.6 (1.2)
More emphasis on academics as opposed to extracurricular activities*	3.6 (1.1)	3.3 (1.2)	3.4 (1.1)	(not asked)	4.2 (0.8)	3.5 (1.1)
Promises made by charter school's spokespersons*	3.4 (1.3)	2.7 (1.3)	3.7 (1.4)	3.3 (1.2)	3.9 (1.0)	3.4 (1.3)
Convenient location	2.8 (1.4)	2.4 (1.0)	3.1 (1.4)	2.5 (1.6)	2.9 (1.6)	3.0 (1.4)
Difficult to find other positions*	2.2 (1.3)	2.0 (1.2)	2.7 (1.4)	1.8 (1.3)	1.8 (1.0)	2.3 (1.4)

* Significant ($p < .05$) differences among the four Cleveland charter schools.

Contrary to claims that charter schools tend to attract and hire teachers who are rejected or passed over by other schools, *difficulty to find other positions* was the lowest ranked reason for choosing to work in all four of the charter schools. This also reflects the findings of charter school studies in other states.

The surveys asked teachers and staff to list additional reasons for seeking employment at their respective schools. Many of these reasons involved agreement with the school's particular education philosophy and pedagogy. Others contrasted the school's small size and opportunities for autonomy and innovation with the large, bureaucratized public school system. As one teacher explained her reason for choosing to work at Lifelong Learners & Leaders, "I was interested in this school because it was a small non-profit organization that was in its early stages of development. This would not only enable me to grow with the organization, but allow me to contribute to its growth."

Recruitment of Teachers and Other Staff

We have seen what attracts charter school employees to their respective schools; we now explore the means by which the schools attract them. It is essential that charter schools recruit and hire staff who are a good fit with their missions and philosophies. In this section, we describe how each school recruits suitable staff and the characteristics that are sought.

Main Street Montessori (MSM). At MSM, the director primarily has been responsible for hiring teachers. Teachers were recruited from Montessori organizations such as the North American Montessori Teachers' Association (a mailing list and Web site were used) and the *Public*

Montessorian publication. They were also recruited from college job fairs. Some teachers came from other Montessori schools, both public and private. One challenge has been hiring teachers with both Montessori training and a willingness to adapt their instruction to meet Ohio state standards. It is not possible to staff the school with all Montessori-trained teachers, since many are not willing to compromise their Montessori philosophies and methods to meet state standards. Traditionally trained teachers are sometimes hired; after working at MSM for a year, they are sent to receive Montessori training. Since there are no Montessori training programs for elementary school teachers in the Cleveland area, this is a great expense to the school, especially since Montessori training programs can be as far away as San Diego. MSM has problems with retention as well as recruitment concerning the hybrid Montessori-traditional model, with Montessori trained teachers leaving for private Montessori schools. A founder of both MSM and EdUnited remarked that they will not attempt to start any more Montessori schools in part because of the difficulty they have faced in staffing them.

Riverview Scholars. According to the director and cofounder of Riverview Scholars, one of the most crucial lessons learned during the school's first year was the importance of good teacher recruitment practices. Dissatisfaction among teachers had been a major problem in its first year. Many teachers were brand new at the same time the school was and thus were naive about the challenges of working in an urban charter school. The director also noted that good teachers must "have the right values" as well as realistic expectations. The following year, only one teacher was in his or her first year. By the middle of the second year, the principal reported that they had little problem recruiting teachers, even stating that "people phone us" looking for teaching positions. However, finding and maintaining qualified teachers to work in an environment with so many challenges continues to be somewhat of an issue. Turnover continued to be fairly high through 2001-02, but the executive director remarked that most of the turnover has been for the better. By the end of 2002-03, staff turnover, with the exception of instructional assistants, slowed down.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. The director and founder of Lifelong Learners & Leaders explained that she and the other founders did not want to bring a lot of other decision makers into the emerging school until the mission and philosophy were fully developed and documented. Subsequent decisions, including the hiring of teachers who were "a good match philosophically," were then based on this original mission. Once these teachers were selected, they would contribute to its continuous development. When additional teachers needed to be hired in subsequent years, the director weeded out those whose educational philosophies did not match those of LLL. As one teacher explained, "If they [the philosophies] were different, it would be a battle." After the director's initial selection, veteran teachers took part in interviewing prospective new teachers.

For the first two years, LLL had high turnover despite high levels of reported satisfaction; most resignations had been due to personal or family reasons. However, the director was able to hire a cohesive, highly qualified team of teachers for 2002-03, all of whom are staying on for 2003-04.

Essentials Academy. With all its start-up difficulties, Essentials Academy had difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers and staff during its first two years. They were recruited through advertisements in newspapers and on the Internet. The director stated that more effort would have been put into recruiting if there had been more time. Nevertheless, a dedicated team willing to take a risk on a new charter school that lacked essential resources was created. Even after payment problems led to an 87 percent turnover in staff at the end of the first year, the director was able to recruit another team of teachers, in part at a local fair. Five of the staff who left after the first year returned by the fall of the second year.

Like the director of Riverview Scholars, Essentials Academy's founder and director recognized the risks of hiring inexperienced teachers with unrealistic expectations. An Essentials Academy staff member explained how a new charter school must hire staff who can make mature judgments on their own, yet are willing to be team players with multiple, flexible roles. As in any start-up business, the first year or so can be quite turbulent, so staff must be willing and able to adapt. Roles and responsibilities have to be fluid in the face of rapid change. "You need maturity and flexibility, not those who need to be told what to do." Similarly, LLL's director commented, "I look for self-starters as teachers." This echoes Bulach (1999), who found that the more mature teachers were, the less directive and more collaborative their supervisors needed to be. Teachers who preferred circumscribed roles and a hierarchical direction of authority were said to be better off teaching in a traditional public school.

When it comes to recruiting and hiring teachers, it is apparent that these four charter schools hire on the basis of educational preferences, values, and professional maturity levels. One concern among charter school critics nationwide is that these schools of choice may also cause sorting by demographic factors, thus insidiously leading to segregation (American Federation of Teachers, 2002; MacInnes, 1999). This may be of particular concern to Cleveland, which is considered among the five most racially segregated metropolitan areas of America (Kurth, Brand-Williams, & French, 2001). We therefore examined whether the charter schools in our study appear to be ameliorating or exacerbating this racial segregation. We now turn our attention to the gender and ethnic background of the teachers and staff at the charter schools.

Demographic Background of Teachers and Staff

Gender. Each school had instructional staff of both genders. However, as in most elementary schools, the staff at all 4 schools were predominately female. Of the 75 teachers and staff who reported their gender, 58 (77.3percent) were female and 17 (22.7percent) were male. Results were similar when only teachers were included: 80.4 percent female and 19.6 percent were male. This is fairly comparable to the CMSD district, where 73.8 percent of the teachers were female and 26.2 percent were male as of the 2001-02 year.

Race/ethnicity. As displayed in Table 7:3, the racial and ethnic composition of the staff varied quite a bit among and sometimes within the four schools in the study. The MSM staff were predominately, but not exclusively white; this reflects the immediate neighborhood and to a lesser extent the student body. While the students at LLL and Riverview Scholars were predominately African American, there was more ethnic diversity among the teachers. Staff at all four schools noted that they wanted their students to be exposed to positive role models of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A parent at Riverview Scholars was pleased with the racial diversity of the staff, stating, "This school is made up of all different races. And they come together as one. Each add different things to the school to make it work uniquely."

In 2002-03, Essentials Academy was the outlier as far as racial homogeneity. During the school's first year the staff had been somewhat more diverse racially, with a staff that was 83.3 percent black and 16.7 percent white. During this initial year an Essentials Academy staff member explained, "Appreciating diversity of culture, ethnicity, race, gender . . . the principles we instill in kids, we practice. They see them being played out in the real world." The change in demographics to a 100 percent black staff was not due to design, but by the educational elements that attracted primarily black staff. (Essentials Academy lost 55 percent of its staff, both black and white, by end of its first year, even after five staff members returned.)

Table 7:3 Race/Ethnicity of Staff at Four Cleveland Charter Schools

	<i>White</i>	<i>Black*</i>	<i>Asian or Pacific Islander</i>	<i>Total**</i>
MSM	17 (89.5%)	0 (0%)	2 (10.5%)	19
Riverview Scholars	15 (50%)	15 (50%)	0 (0%)	30
LLL	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)	0 (0%)	11
Essentials Academy	0 (0%)	17 (100%)	0 (0%)	17
CSMD	59.3%	36.4%	1.4%	6,478

*Because staff members of Essentials Academy included natives of Jamaica, Israel, Nairobi, Aruba, and China, we felt that the term “Black” was more inclusive than “African American.”

**Three staff members, one from MSM and two from Riverview Scholars, did not indicate their ethnic background. No charter school staff reported themselves as Latino or Native American.

Despite the racial homogeneity, there was a great deal of ethnic and religious diversity during the school’s second year. Staff members were Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and from other religions; their nations of origin included Israel, Jamaica, Aruba, and China as well as the United States. Staff were proud of their diversity, and there was a great deal of staff cohesion.

Regardless of the staff’s ethnic background, the most important characteristics concern their qualifications. We now turn our attention to the certification and experience levels of the staff.

Certification of Classroom Teachers

Ohio charter school law requires that teachers be certified, but alternative certification is permitted. As in the traditional public schools, uncertified employees may teach up to 12 hours per week. Overall, the majority of the classroom teachers in the 4 schools reported being certified, although certification levels varied considerably among the schools (see Table 7:4). The variations in certification were very similar to those in 2001-02.

At Riverview Scholars, one teacher was certified in a state other than Ohio and one was working to obtain certification. All the other teachers were fully certified in Ohio.

At Lifelong Learners & Leaders, all the teaching staff were certified in both 2001-02 and 2002-03. In 2000, the school’s first year, the Lifelong Learners & Leaders hired a teacher who had long-term substitute certification. The school did not renew her contract for the following year due to failure to obtain required certification.

At MSM, 78.6 percent of the teachers were certified, but in each classroom a certified teacher was paired with an uncertified teacher or teacher’s aide. This contrasts with most private Montessori schools, where most teachers were Montessori trained, but not state certified. A college degree is not even necessary to complete Montessori training; however, it is rare in the United States to have a Montessori teacher who does not have at least a bachelor’s degree. Often Montessori training is combined with a master’s degree program.

As a rule, the uncertified teachers at MSM were Montessori trained. However, not all the Montessori teachers are certified for elementary school through Montessori; some are certified as primary [preschool] instead. MSM’s goal is to have one person trained in both Montessori elementary and state certified in each class, plus one aide. The school offers sponsorship for Montessori training to all state-certified teachers, but there is no sponsorship for those who are Montessori trained to get state-certified.

During Essentials Academy's first year only half of the eight teachers reported being certified; the director explained that all but one had alternative certification. According to their performance management system, inexperienced teachers were paired with experienced mentors. The director explained that it had been difficult to hire certified teachers because the school was new and even lacked a permanent site to show prospective teachers. She was confident that since the school had become more established, they would have an easier time recruiting certified teachers in the future. However, after lack of payments led to a drastic turnover of the staff (see chapter 7), it was again difficult to hire teachers who were fully certified. Fewer than half of the nine teachers were fully certified in 2002-03, with the remainder working toward certification.

When asked, "Are you teaching in a subject area in which you are certified?" only 1 teacher in the entire sample answered "no" (an Essentials Academy teacher). Another teacher at Essentials Academy, 1 at Riverview Scholars, and 1 at MSM answered "not applicable," while the other 39 of the 43 teachers among the 4 schools answered "yes." Again, these findings were very similar to those of 2001-02. Any apparent contradictions with the data in Table 7:4 may be due to teachers having alternative certifications in their subject area rather than Ohio state certifications. By contrast, 94.7 percent of CMSD's K-8 school teachers were state certified in their teaching area in 2002.

Table 7:4 Certification of Classroom Teachers in Four Cleveland Charter Schools

	<i>Certified to Teach in This State</i>	<i>Certified to Teach in Other State</i>	<i>Working to Obtain Certification</i>	<i>Not Certified and Not Working to Obtain Certification</i>
MSM (N=14)	11 (78.6%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)
Riverview Scholars (N=15)	13 (86.7%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	0%
LLL (N=6)	6 (100%)	0%	0%	0%
Essentials Academy (N=9)	4 (44.4%)	0%	5 (55.6%)	0%

Source: WMU's Teacher/Staff Charter School Surveys. Only those who identified themselves as teachers are included in the analyses.

As a whole, the majority of the teachers in the four schools in this study were state certified. However, Ohio charter schools provide an opportunity for teachers with alternative certification to teach in a limited capacity. Nevertheless, as we saw earlier in this chapter, it was quite uncommon for teachers to indicate that they chose the charter school because of difficulty in obtaining employment elsewhere.

Experience of Classroom Teachers

There was a wide range of self-reported experience levels for the 49 classroom teachers in our study, from 4 first-year teachers to 1 teacher with 38 years of experience. The mean number of years

teaching was 7.9 with a median of 5 years². Among all 49 teachers, 32.7 percent reported having 3 or fewer years of experience, and 51 percent reported having 5 or fewer years of experience.

Most of the teachers' prior experience was at traditional public schools, but a substantial proportion of teachers had taught at nonpublic schools. A total of 46.9 percent of the teachers reported having at least 1 year of teaching experience at a noncharter public school prior to teaching at their current school, while 26.5 percent had taught in a parochial school and 20.4 percent had taught in a private school. Two teachers 1 at MSM and 1 at LLL had at least 30 years of experience teaching in private or parochial schools.

7.2 Characteristics of Students Enrolled in the Charter Schools

At each of the 4 schools, the ethnic ratios of the schools essentially reflected that of their surrounding community. Over 90 percent of the students at Essentials Academy, LLL, and Riverview Scholars were African American, while the students at MSM were 80 percent white according to both their 2001-02 and 2002-03 annual reports. However, this is over twice the proportion of minority students as the local community in general has. MSM has been striving to diversify its student body through extensive marketing to minority organizations/groups and local Head Start programs.

One temporary exception to the student body's demographics reflecting that of the surrounding neighborhood was Essentials Academy following its move to a school building in a neighborhood on the west side of Cleveland. The proportion of African Americans was much lower in this part of the city. (See Appendix B which contains data comparing the demographics of Essentials Academy and the neighboring public, non charter schools.) This "racial gulf" initially made some of the parents anxious about moving the school there. However, as the director explained enthusiastically, the move "tore down another barrier and the kids love it Some of the people who've lived in Cleveland their whole life have never even been to the other side of it." Presumably because of the move, Essentials Academy attracted more white and Latino students during its second year. However, it remained predominately African-American.

Some parents, however, withdrew from Essentials Academy after the move to Tremont; transportation difficulties may have played a role. Essentials Academy had to move to yet another building for the following year, because it planned to double its enrollment and needed more space. It proposed to rent a building in East Cleveland, from which a sizeable proportion of its students came, until a permanent site could be custom built in yet another area. Both places had a higher concentration of African Americans than the Tremont area.

Location. From where do charter schools attract their students? When we geo-coded the home locations of families (using mailing addresses for the parent surveys) we were able to develop maps that depicted the overlapping catchment areas for the respective schools. Main Street Montessori has a more focused catchment area, while the other three schools had broader and overlapping catchment areas. Except for Essentials Academy, the catchment areas surround the respective charters schools. With the latest relocation of Essentials Academy to a more residential part of town, it is now in the center the catchment area of its 2001-02 enrollment.

² This excludes the category of "other" types of schools, since teachers in previous studies frequently included irrelevant experiences in this category.

Previous School

According to the parent surveys, the students' homes usually were at least as far away from the charter schools as they were from the nearest public school. However, as the map displays, there were variations among the four schools as to the scope of their catchment area. Most of MSM students lived fairly close to their school. This may be due partly to the families they attracted and partly to the fact that no public transportation was available; the parents willingly sacrificed public bus service in order to keep their school's own unique schedule. By contrast, Essentials Academy's students covered a much wider area throughout Cleveland.

Table 7:5 School Type Previously Attended by Students As Reported by Parents

<i>School</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Public School</i>	<i>Private School</i>	<i>Parochial School</i>	<i>Did Not Attend School*</i>	<i>Other</i>
MSM	26	3	0	8	9	6
Riverview Scholars	22	9	0	2	6	5
LLL	16	4	0	1	5**	6***
Essentials Academy	10	7	1	2	0	0
Total	74	23	1	13	20	17

*This includes children who were too young to attend school prior to enrolling in their current school.

**All 5 were reported as having attended day care.

***Includes 4 at another charter school, 1 home-schooled, and 1 in a private preschool.

Reasons for Choosing Reported by Students

Among other matters, the students in grades 5 and above at MSM, Riverview Scholars, and Essentials Academy were surveyed regarding reasons that they chose to attend the school. Results of some of the items measuring this factor may have questionable validity, since a number of students had great difficulty understanding these items. Also noteworthy is that Essentials Academy was a newer school and all the students were in their first or second year there, while none of the students were in their first year and only two were in their second year among MSM's fifth through seventh graders. Students who had been at MSM or Riverview Scholars for several years and who may have been as young as first grade when they started might not have known the reasons why their parents originally enrolled them in the school.

However, it was rather clear that the top-ranked reason for attending each of the three charter schools was *My parents think this school is better for me*. This response echoes that in various other states as well (Miron & Nelson, 2002). *This school is smaller* was the lowest ranked reason at MSM and at Riverview Scholars; these were the two largest schools in our study. *My friends were attending this school* was the lowest ranked reason at Essentials Academy. Ratings were fairly low ($M = 2.4-2.7$) at all three schools for the item *I was not doing very well at the previous school*. This contrasts with the comments of many staff and some parents at Essentials Academy and Riverview Scholars in particular.

7.3 Characteristics of the Parents

Demographic Background of Parents

The characteristics of the parents varied both within and among each school. MSM was different from the other 3 schools for a number of reasons, many of which may have been to its location. All but 2 of the 28 MSM families surveyed reported being two-parent households, while a larger proportion of households from the other 3 schools, especially Riverview Scholars, were single-parent households. Income levels were conspicuously higher for MSM families. However, according to MSM's 2001-02 annual report, 45 percent of its families were at or below poverty level; and the director stated that "As we continue to grow, our poverty rate continues to climb."

Reasons for Choosing the Charter School Reported by Parents

Overall, the three top-ranked reasons that parents gave for choosing a charter school were, *Safety for my child*, *Good teachers and high-quality instruction*, and *I prefer the emphasis and educational philosophy of this school*. Table 7:6 contains the complete results by item and by schools. These reasons were ranked quite high ($M > 4.3$) at each of the four schools. These findings are similar to those of other charter school studies in other states (Miron & Nelson, 2002). Readers should be aware that the LLL director requested that some of the items be removed or altered for her particular school. LLL was a K-4 school that only accepted new students in K-1 during 2002-03, so items referring to a previous school would not be applicable to most LLL parents.

There was considerable variation among the four charter schools on some items. For example, the importance of the item *I prefer a private school but could not afford it* was notably lower for MSM than for Riverview Scholars or Essentials Academy. This reflects the wealthier neighborhood in which MSM is located and from which it tends to draw students. Among the four schools, the reasons *My child was performing poorly at previous school*, *Recommendations of the teacher or official at my child's previous school*, and *My child has special needs that were not met at previous school* were rated conspicuously lower by MSM parents than by Essentials Academy or Riverview Scholars parents. The low rating of these items by MSM parents may reflect that children from 35 percent of MSM's surveyed families did not attend another school prior to MSM (see Table 7:5). Interestingly, in 2001-02 Essentials Academy had higher ratings for these three items than Riverview Scholars; in 2002-03, the ratings were very similar between these two schools. LLL's customized survey did not include items referring to poor performance or unmet special needs at the previous school. However, it received the highest rating for the item *Recommendations of the teacher or official at my child's previous school*, which on their customized survey included the clarification *including preschool*. Indeed, the director had remarked that several preschools referred students to LLL, including a preschool designated for youngsters with emotional disturbances.

Despite these differences, themes recurred at all four schools on the open-ended questions regarding the reason for enrolling one's children in their school. At all four schools, smaller class size was a reason as were the caring attitudes of teachers and staff. As one parent from MSM stated, "I feel my children are safe and in good hands. The staff is nurturing and caring and treat my children like their own." A parent at Riverview Scholars said, "My child was very upset every day at his old school. Now he doesn't mind going to school. This school seemed warm and friendly when I visited."

Table 7:6 Parents' Reasons for Choosing Their Charter School, Rank Ordered by Mean Scores

	<i>Main Street Montessori</i>	<i>Riverview Scholars</i>	<i>Lifelong Learners and Leaders</i>	<i>Essentials Academy</i>	<i>Multi-state Composite Comparison Group</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Safety for my child	4.4 (0.8)	4.8 (0.5)	4.7 (0.6)	4.9 (0.3)	4.4 (1.1)
Good teachers and high quality of instruction	4.7 (0.5)	4.6 (0.6)	4.8 (0.4)	4.5 (1.1)	4.6 (0.8)
I prefer the emphasis and educational philosophy of this school	4.7 (0.6)	4.5 (0.7)	4.6 (0.6)	4.3 (1.1)	4.4 (0.9)
Academic reputation (high standards) of this school	4.2 (0.9)	4.3 (1.0)	4.7 (0.6)	4.3 (1.3)	4.3 (1.0)
Promises made by charter school's spokespersons	3.6 (1.3)	4.4 (0.8)	4.4 (0.9)	4.6 (0.7)	4.0 (1.2)
My interest in an educational reform effort	3.6 (1.2)	3.9 (1.0)	4.3 (1.1)	3.5 (1.3)	3.7 (1.3)
I prefer a private school but could not afford it	2.1 (1.2)	4.0 (1.3)	--	4.0 (1.5)	2.9 (1.6)
Convenient location	2.9 (1.1)	3.4 (1.5)	3.3 (1.6)	3.2 (1.4)	2.8 (1.5)
I was unhappy with the curriculum & instruction at previous school	2.5 (1.6)	3.7 (1.7)	--	3.0 (1.5)	3.3 (1.6)
My child has special needs that were not met at previous school	2.4 (1.7)	3.5 (1.7)	--	3.2 (1.5)	3.0 (1.7)
My child wanted to attend this school	3.2 (1.5)	3.3 (1.5)	--	2.5 (1.2)	3.4 (1.4)
My child was performing poorly at previous school	1.8 (1.4)	3.4 (1.5)	--	3.3 (1.2)	2.7 (1.6)
Recommendations of teacher/official at my child's previous school	1.5 (0.9)	2.6 (1.4)	3.8 (1.5)	2.4 (1.3)	2.3 (1.5)

Note: All items are on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = *Not Important* and 5 = *Very Important*.
Items are rank ordered according to importance of reason among all 4 schools.

7.4 Conclusion

Charter schools are schools of choice for the parents who enroll their children in them and the staff who choose employment there. This chapter explored the characteristics of the staff, students, and parents at each of four charter schools and their reasons for becoming involved with them.

Charter schools made efforts to recruit qualified teachers who fit their schools' values and philosophies. The selected teachers varied considerably in demographics and prior experience. At all four schools the staff were mostly female, as they are in most elementary schools, and they varied substantially in ethnicity. The teachers also varied a great deal in years of teaching experience. Most teachers were fully certified; only one school—a relatively new school with formidable start-up barriers—had trouble recruiting fully certified teachers. The three top-ranked reasons for choosing employment at a charter school were *Opportunity to work with like-minded educators*, *My interest in being involved in an educational reform effort*, and *Safety at school*.

The student bodies at each of the four charter schools largely reflected the demographic compositions of their surrounding communities. At each school except MSM, the vast majority of students were African American and had attended a public school prior to their current school. The size and location of the catchment areas varied as well. The number one reason that students

gave for selecting their charter schools was “My parents thought this school was better for me.” The parents varied in terms of race, income, and reasons for choosing the schools. However, at each school the top three reasons that parents gave for selecting the charter schools were *Good teachers and high-quality instruction*, *Safety for my child*, and *I prefer the emphasis and educational philosophy of this school*.

The differences in reasons for choosing each charter school—for teachers as well as families—indicates that charter school law can lead to the creation of a variety of schools that target different needs. Theoretically, when staff and families can select schools based on their own preferences, working environments, parental involvement, and cohesion of mission improve (Chubb & Moe, 1990). In the following chapters we will discuss other factors that affect professional opportunities for teachers, parental involvement, innovative instruction, and ultimately the school’s cohesion of mission.

Professional Opportunities for Teachers

Because charter schools are schools of choice for teachers as well as families, an important consideration is the professional opportunities that charter schools provide to teachers. Theoretically, schools with a decentralized administration and a unifying mission should provide more relevant and enriching professional opportunities for teachers. These opportunities may include everything from a positive working environment to autonomy and influence in the school to specific professional development activities.

According to the Ohio Department of Education (2001), “In high performing organizations, work is organized and managed to promote cooperation, initiative, innovation, and flexibility. . .” in this chapter we explore issues related to flexibility, cooperation, initiative, and the opportunities for innovations. This includes teacher-administrator relations and other phenomena related to autonomy in the classroom and influence over the school (Nelson & Miron, 2002). Since teachers are lifelong learners who must continually learn and be evaluated on their performance, we look at professional development, personnel evaluation, and more extrinsic aspects of professional opportunities—salary and benefits—and how those compare with other Cleveland charter and traditional public schools. Because a wide range of professional opportunities are related to turnover, we explore the rates of turnover, the reasons for it, and its costs and benefits. School climate appears to be associated with many of these issues; therefore, we start with an overview of school climate in general.

8.1 School Climate

When I worked at [a noncharter public school], I made a lot more money but I hated the job. Administration, accessibility, staff . . . it was misery! After a while, it was just for the paycheck. I don't know how long I would've lasted . . . I'm so calm now, but I was losing my temper then. The environment was seeping in.
— a charter school teacher

This quote illustrates the importance of a school's working climate to the well-being of the teachers. Obviously, a burned-out teacher working “just for the paycheck” cannot provide an optimal learning environment for children; the teachers' working conditions can ultimately affect the students. A negative climate and other poor working conditions lead to high turnover, which is detrimental to the functioning of the school and the students' learning. Conversely, a supportive, cooperative work environment can lead to a well-performing organization and, presumably, better student performance.

Although there are various definitions and conceptualizations of school climate, our study utilizes the rather broad definition used by the American Educational Research Association's special interest group for School Community, Climate, and Culture (Bulach, 1998):

Social-psychological attributes of the school (such as school members' shared ideologies, values, norms, beliefs, feelings, and expectations for school members' behaviors and for the school's structure and operation), and how these attributes are organized in formal and informal school groups, with particular interest in their relation to student learning and achievement and to effectively functioning classroom and schools.

In 2000-01 and 2001-02, we used the nationally normed School Climate Survey to look at some of the aspects of school climate. This survey was given to both teachers and parents in both years. It was also given to fourth through sixth graders at MSM in 2001-02, but results were not reported because many of the students had difficulty understanding it. The results of the parents' responses on the School Climate Survey are given in Chapter 11, "Market Accountability: Consumer Satisfaction." Indeed, for Riverview Scholars in particular, the levels of satisfaction with school climate were quite different for parents than they were for teachers. Table 8:1 displays the scales that are on this survey and the concepts it intends to measure.

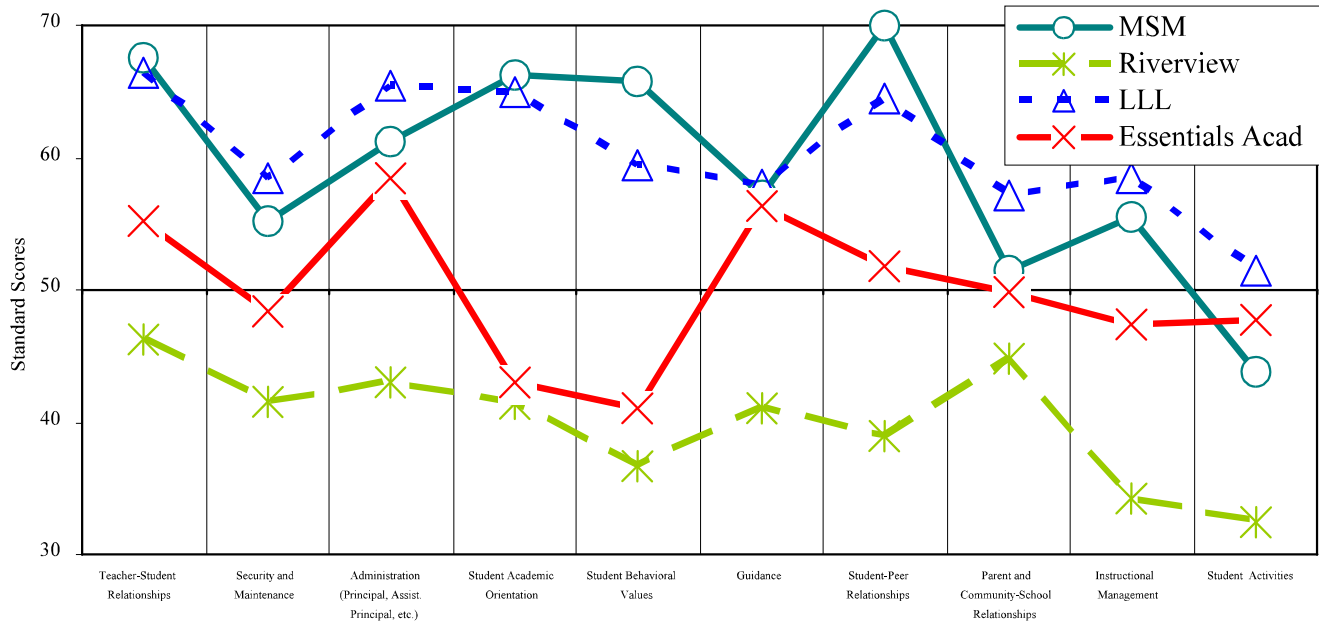
Table 8:1 Descriptions of Subscales on the School Climate Survey

<i>Subscale</i>	<i>Description</i>
Teacher-student relationships	The quality of the interpersonal and professional relationships between teachers and students
Security and maintenance	The quality of maintenance and the degree of security people feel at the school
Administration (principal, assistant principal, etc.)	The degree to which school administrators are effective in communicating with different role groups and in setting high performance expectations for teachers and students
Student academic orientation	Student attention to tasks and concern for achievement at school
Student behavioral values	Student self-discipline and tolerance for others
Guidance	The quality of academic and career guidance and academic counseling services available to students
Student-peer relationships	Students' care and respect for one another and their mutual cooperation
Parent and community-school relationships	The amount and quality of involvement of parents and other community members in the school
Instructional management	The efficiency and effectiveness of teacher classroom organization and use of classroom time
Student activities	Opportunities for and actual participation of students in school-sponsored activities

Source: Examiner's Manual, School Climate Survey

In this current chapter we focus on the teachers' and staffs' perspectives of school climate via this survey and various other methods. The results of each school's School Climate Survey for staff during the 2001-02 school year, plus the national norms for staff, are presented in Figure 8:1.

Figure 8:1 School Climate Survey: Teachers & Staff Results 2001-02



National norms designated by the 50th percentile

Readers should bear in mind that some of the School Climate Survey scales may not be readily interpretable; in part for this reason, the survey was not administered during the 2002-03 school year. For example, the *Guidance* and *Activities* scales are more relevant for schools that have older students and/or more extracurricular activities. The *Parent and Community-School Relationships* scale may also be hard to interpret, since survey takers may have differing interpretations of “community”—does it refer to the local area in general or only to those who have some connection with the charter school? Charter schools often have excellent support from parents yet indifferent or even hostile relations with the surrounding general community (Hassel, 1999). Low scores on this scale have been found in other studies of charter schools (Miron, Nelson, Sullins, & Risley, 2001; Nelson, Miron, Risley & Sullins, 2002).

Because the concept of school climate encompasses a broad area, further discussion of matters related to some of the scales are deferred to other chapters in this report. Some aspects of students' relationships with teachers, academic orientation, behavioral values, and peer relations are covered in Chapters 9 and 11. Chapter 11 also details the parent-school relations within each of these four schools. Chapter 14 describes the relations between Ohio charter schools and their surrounding communities, with a focus on the four schools in the study and their respective locales.

Further, the results of the surveys tell only part of the story of school climate and working conditions at the charter schools. We now focus on an essential element of school climate, the relations between teachers and administrators.

8.2 Relations Between Teachers and Administration

Although numerous phenomena influence staff professional opportunities, the relations between the teachers and the administrators are especially salient (Nelson & Miron, 2002). According to surveys of CMSD teachers, those who reported a lack of support from administrators were almost three times as likely to consider quitting their jobs as those who received adequate support (Van Lier, 2001). Evidently, support from administrators was also critical to the teachers in the charter schools we studied.

A recurring theme at each of the four charter schools, particularly the smaller ones, was the collegial, and even family-like, relations among teachers, administrators, and other staff. For example, a teacher at MSM described the school's climate as "Staff are as emotionally supportive as they possibly could be. It's a great environment for us to be in." Often, teachers and staff contrasted this with the more bureaucratic, hierarchical structure of the traditional public schools. At all four of the charter schools in our study, at least some of the teachers were emphatic about how their school's director and/or principal had consistently promoted the right balance of guidance, autonomy, and expectations for accountability. However, there was considerable variance among and in some cases within the schools as far as satisfaction with administrators. Table 8:2 displays the staff's satisfaction with the leadership and administration at each of the four schools.

Table 8:2 Teacher/Staff Satisfaction With Administrative Leadership of School

Year	MSM			RS			LLL			EA		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
2000-01	11	4.4	0.7	28	3.7	1.0	7	4.6	0.5	--	--	--
2001-02	14	4.3	0.8	28	3.3	1.3	6	4.5	0.8	13	4.0	1.1
2002-03	20	4.3	0.7	32	3.4	1.0	11	4.5	1.0	16	4.6	0.6

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Very dissatisfied and 5=Very satisfied.

As Table 8:2 displays, teachers and staff at Riverview Scholars was somewhat less satisfied with administration and leadership than those at the other three schools. While the principal/director has been the same at each of the other three schools since each schools inception, Riverview Scholars has experienced extremely high turnover in principals (although its current executive director has been with the school since the beginning). We therefore begin with a brief history of Riverview Scholars' staffing and how its tumultuous beginning is still in the process of being overcome.

Riverview Scholars had a rough start, with its principal (who was also a cofounder) resigning unexpectedly eight days after the school opened. The board worked fervently to replace her, but finding a permanent replacement who fit the school's mission and structure was quite a challenge. Two principals had been successful at their previous public schools, but staff found that their style was not appropriate in Riverview Scholars' unique setting. One was too harsh on the children; one was too distant from the teachers. The teachers were highly dissatisfied with these principals as well as with the instability in leadership.

Including interim principals, the current principal as of Fall 2003 is the seventh that the school hired during its first five years. Only one principal stayed as long as two years, from 2001-02 through 2002-03. She had originally applied for a teaching position, and the board had been so

impressed they offered her a job as a principal. The board and many of the staff seemed quite optimistic about her ability to bring order and stability to the school with a personal, caring touch. However, a number of the staff still expressed dissatisfaction with the school leadership in general. The high turnover of principals left a lack of consistency and clear guidelines. This was especially the case because prior to hiring the current principal, the director had shared leadership with the principals, thus limiting his authority to provide continuity and adherence to the original mission. Further, the rapid growth of the school necessitated a more structured organization; some staff thought that this “bureaucratization” impeded rather than facilitated teacher-administration communication. A similar situation occurred at MSM, which also experienced substantial, rapid growth. Others at Riverview Scholars believed that changes in protocol and procedures were made too quickly; paradoxically, the ability to rapidly implement new ideas is supposed to be a benefit of charter schools.

Nevertheless, as detailed in subsequent sections, a number of the staff were quite satisfied with this principal’s interpersonal style and how she promoted flexibility, cooperation, and autonomy. The principal expressed optimism about the relations between the teachers and administrators and how the charter school model promoted this. “Charter schools are more collaborative. Teachers are stakeholders; they wouldn’t be here otherwise. They have a say in what’s fair. We don’t need a union to settle disputes.”

At the beginning of the 2003-04 school year, this principal also resigned. According to the executive director, she was offered a far more attractive position elsewhere. She was replaced with a fourth grade teacher who was to act as an interim principal until a permanent replacement could be found. The executive director explained that Riverview Scholars “has very high standards in what it is looking for in a principal, and prefers to go with an interim until we find someone who meets these standards.”

Fluidity of Staff Roles

The roles of administrators, teachers, and other staff tend to be broader and more fluid in charter schools than in regular public schools. Smaller sizes, lack of restrictions, and lack of ancillary staff contribute to increased roles. There are benefits and drawbacks to this flexibility. One major drawback is staff getting spread too thin. One teacher at Riverview Scholars said that “Several staff members are overwhelmed by what their job entails, since there are extra duties added on.” At each of the schools, staff at various levels had to spend more time at school to get everything done; it was not unusual for directors to work from early in the morning through late at night without so much as a lunch break. Despite these challenges, staff at all four schools indicated that they appreciated the flexibility of their roles, with the emphasis on cooperation rather than narrowly defined job descriptions within a rigid bureaucracy. The psychologist at Riverview Scholars explained, “People who adapt best to working here are those who are flexible and don’t mind things added on or having to deal with problems that come up. Those who like things stable and unchanging won’t be happy. Working here is like paving down the path. Those who like structure will not be happy here.”

Table 8:3 displays the responses to the item, “Teachers have many noninstructional duties.” Interestingly, there appears to be a great deal of variance within each school on this item. This may be due to different interpretations of “noninstructional duties.” In fact, the director of LLL was concerned that this item could have either a positive or negative connotation. For her school’s adapted survey, she requested that the item be changed to “Teachers feel burdened by non-

instructional duties" in order to exclusively assess negative reactions to this item. This may account for the discrepancy between the results for LLL and the other 3 schools.

Both MSM and Lifelong Learners & Leaders started with an ideal of extremely fluid and overlapping roles: the director/principal would also teach. Since each of these two schools started as a single classroom of only 30 students, this initially seemed feasible. However, each director found that this dual role was far more difficult than originally expected and realized it would become increasingly unmanageable as the school grew. They eventually had to focus more on administration and delegated the teaching responsibilities elsewhere.

Table 8:3 Responses to the Item "Teachers Have Many Noninstructional Duties"

<i>School</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree or Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree or Agree</i>
MSM	20	6 (30.0%)	8 (40.0%)	6 (30.0%)
RS	26	10 (38.5%)	5 (19.2%)	11 (42.3%)
LLL*	11	11 (100%)	0	0
EA	14	7 (50.0%)	5 (35.7%)	2 (14.3%)
CCG	1,493	32.3%	26.0%	41.7%

* This item was reworded as "Teachers feel burdened by noninstructional duties."

While the director/principal of MSM delegated her original teaching duties elsewhere, one of the upper elementary teachers, who has 38 years of experience teaching at Montessori schools, now also serves as an assistant principal. He provides Montessori training to the non-Montessori teachers and carries out other essential duties. In addition, he took over the principal's duties when she was on sick leave for a month during 2003 and planned to take them over again when she left for her scheduled maternity leave during the Fall 2003.

At Lifelong Learners & Leaders, the executive director also considers herself both a principal and an educator. However, she wound up doing far less direct teaching than she had originally hoped to do, especially during the second year after the school's enrollment doubled. During the 2001-02 year, she was able to delegate some of the administrative work, such as grant writing. However, as a psychologist, this director also spent considerable time developing multifactorial evaluations (MFEs) and IEPs for special education and completing the volumes of required paperwork. As of late Spring 2002, a human resources committee was discussing how to further delegate her administrative duties. LLL also addressed the multiple roles of the other educators. In 2002-03, the board adopted a plan that allowed teachers to supplement their basic salaries by assuming other responsibilities. LLL's ultimate goal was to have a rotating principal system where each teacher would serve as a principal for one year.

Riverview Scholars was too large to even consider dual administrative/teaching roles. However, it experienced different dilemmas in delineating staff roles among both administrators and instructional staff. Originally, the codirector model of administration was attempted, with the founder and the principal sharing the directorship. According to Riverview Scholars' 2000-01 annual report, these roles led to a lack of board oversight as well as confusion about "who was really in charge." In April 2001, upon the resignation of the principal, the original founder/director was named executive director, with oversight over the new principal. This gave him more opportunity to implement the school's original vision. It also promoted a division of labor that was clearer to the teachers and other staff, with the new principal more in charge of their

guidance. The newest principal at Riverview Scholars made sure that her roles were clear yet flexible; this helped the morale of teachers and smoothed the functioning of the school. Although she never had as extensive a teaching role at Riverview Scholars as the directors of MSM and Lifelong Learners & Leaders once had at their respective schools, she frequently went on the “front lines” with the teachers—lunch duty, supervising classrooms—instead of staying in the background, dictating to others what to do.

In order to fulfill Riverview Scholars' various needs: instructional aides served multiple roles; they worked in classrooms, supervised during the lunch period, and substitute taught as well. Riverview Scholars, like many other charter schools, had difficulties obtaining substitute teachers. Unlike district schools, they did not have a large pool of substitute teachers from which to select on a moment's notice. Some charter schools used EMOs to take care of this problem; a group of substitute teachers would serve all of the schools who hired the EMO. Other charter schools, such as MSM, relied on parent volunteers; this was feasible since they had two teachers per classroom. Riverview Scholars, which lacked both an EMO and ample parent volunteers, took care of this problem by using instructional aides as substitute teachers. They also supervised students during lunch duty, another task that volunteers covered at MSM and LLL.

Both the teachers and the instructional aides voiced considerable dissatisfaction with this arrangement. As one teacher explained, "With so many of our children at risk. . . each grade should have a full-time assistant who is not used for lunch aides. We need substitutes on call, not constantly pulling out the grade-level aides." Planning was difficult, since teachers and aides could not predict when an aide would get called out to substitute teach. Numerous children needed the one-on-one attention of an aide, but they were not consistently available. Moreover, both teachers and aides complained about aides essentially being used as lackeys and babysitters instead of paraprofessionals. The low salary and lack of benefits also bothered aides; satisfaction with salary was considerably lower among aides than other staff. Despite these complaints, the administration had no plans to change this arrangement. Given the unavailability of substitute teachers and lunch aides, they saw no other alternatives.

Essentials Academy's staff also had fluid roles. Teachers often substituted for and helped one another and even took turns staffing the front desk. One staff member explained that the type of people who joined start-up companies, including charter schools, were those who could tolerate a lack of boundaries in roles. Those who thrived in the public schools preferred bureaucracy and structure. She explained that in a charter school, “If you worry about what's in your job description, you'll freak out. People here like to pitch in wherever its needed. The public schools can't be as flexible . . . Teachers [in charter schools] have to be OK with a flexible way of acting. Flexibility and autonomy become the dominant culture.” When asked what provided this autonomy, this staff person didn't hesitate to say the director's name.

However, some staff at Essentials Academy expressed that these fluid roles occasionally led to confusion, disorganization, and poor communication. A few parents and students complained on both surveys and student interviews about lack of organization, especially at the higher grade levels where students switched classrooms frequently. One staff member stated that “Communication is a major downfall at our school, amongst ourselves and from staff to parents. Within staff, communication is a major problem from top to bottom.”

Balancing Autonomy and Guidance

With a decentralized governance overseeing them and a common mission uniting them, in theory staff at charter schools should have more autonomy than staff at traditional public schools (Nelson

& Miron, 2002). While some studies indicate that charter school teachers are actually less satisfied with their autonomy than regular public school teachers (American Federation of Teachers, 2002), this could be because charter school teachers place greater emphasis on, and have higher expectations for, autonomy. In this section, we explore the staff satisfaction with the levels of autonomy at each of the four schools in this study. Further, we examine the effects that autonomy can have on both creativity and accountability.

As Table 8:4 details, expectations for autonomy were met at Essentials Academy and exceeded at MSM. This question was not specifically asked at LLL in 2002-03, but all the staff whom we interviewed reported a great deal of autonomy. While most of the staff seemed satisfied with their levels of autonomy at Riverview Scholars, some said they lacked sufficient independence.

Table 8:4 Responses to Teachers Will Be/Are Autonomous and Creative in the Classrooms

	<i>Initial Expectations</i>			<i>Current Experience</i>		
	<i>1 False</i>	<i>2 Partly true</i>	<i>3 True</i>	<i>1 False</i>	<i>2 Partly true</i>	<i>3 True</i>
MSM	0 (0.0%)	5 (27.8%)	13 (72.2%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (11.1%)	16 (88.9%)
RS	0 (0.0%)	4 (13.3%)	26 (86.7%)	1 (3.3%)	8 (26.7%)	21 (70.0%)
EA	0 (0.0%)	5 (35.7%)	9 (64.3%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (33.3%)	10 (66.7%)

Riverview Scholars. Despite the school's turbulent beginnings, some of the teachers enthusiastically expressed satisfaction with the current administration, particularly regarding the levels of autonomy provided to them. For example, three of the Riverview Scholars teachers had previously taught at another Cleveland charter school (one that was not in our study), and reportedly all three switched to Riverview Scholars around the same time. They were quite pleased with their new principal and administration in general. As one teacher explained, "[The last charter school] lacked leadership, and teachers weren't empowered to do things on their own. Here I could design things the way I want." Another explained how at Riverview Scholars, "The principal gives us guidance, but gives us more flexibility in a good way. There wasn't any behavior management at [the last school]. Here we know what to do." The other two teachers nodded emphatically, adding that the last school didn't support teachers. "[The principal] always supports the teachers and the teachers' decisions." Another teacher, who in collaboration with several other teachers had successfully written grant proposals for their school, remarked that their director "is very open to listening, but we know it takes a while to get things started."

On the other hand, in 2001-02 some teachers saw their autonomy at Riverview Scholars as a double-edged sword, especially prior to the long-awaited completion of a curriculum plan. One teacher explained that "We want to be creative, but we need to know WHAT to teach." Others agreed that there was too much flexibility and that more guidelines would be helpful. This lack of direction made teaching difficult, especially when it came to teaching children what they need to know for the off-grade proficiency tests. Apparently, too much autonomy coupled with a lack of clear guidelines could ultimately inhibit their accountability.

Evidently this message was heard by the principal. During a professional development lesson a month later, the principal announced, "Some have told me, 'I wish I knew what to teach when,'" as she introduced a unit on curriculum mapping for lessons on writing. At an interview later that day, the principal explained that when she had arrived at Riverview Scholars, there were not enough procedures, no curriculum plan, and teachers didn't know what to expect. They had the standards, but they were "just a book of stuff" without guidance on how to implement them in

their teaching. The principal worked hard with the teachers to provide the needed guidance on lesson planning, as was evident in the professional development session. She also actively sought feedback for improving the professional development content to meet the teachers' needs. By the 2002-03 year, most of the staff were satisfied with the curriculum plan that was put in place, notwithstanding an occasional complaint about the amount of work involved in creating a curriculum map in the middle of the year. Even with the increased structure, several staff stated that they were happy with the opportunities to innovate and the speed with which new ideas could be carried out. One teacher described the most positive aspects of the school as "Flexibility, relationship with students, caring staff, staff allowed creativity."

Although some teachers at Riverview Scholars were enthusiastically supportive of the administration, the staff surveys from the past few years indicated that there was considerable variance in terms of the teachers' satisfaction with administration. By the 2002-03 year, some of the teachers were quite satisfied with the administration and the policies, while others complained that autonomy and communication had gotten worse since the previous year. One stated, "There is a lack of communication and now more administrative layers in place—teacher representative, leadership team, management team, and an educational assistant for the principal. Teachers/staff rarely see each other and are not working together as effectively as we could." Ironically, these committees and procedures had been implemented to facilitate communication and impartial treatment among staff, in response to earlier concerns that conflict resolution needed to be more equitable and more formalized. While it is possible that the new procedures did inhibit communication, perhaps some staff simply had been more comfortable with a less formal system of procedures—a system that becomes less feasible as a school grows in size.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. By contrast, Lifelong Learners & Leaders had a great deal of commonality among the staff. However, it is a much smaller school. Carefully selecting staff who were of like mind was one way that this harmony was promoted. However, there was still considerable autonomy among the staff. As one teacher who had previously worked in the CMSD described it, "We are allowed to use our ideas a lot more here rather than follow a set curriculum. We can bring in things that our kids are interested in since we're all headed toward the same [overarching] goals."

Lifelong Learners & Leaders director explained that while she actively encourages innovation and collaboration among teachers, she insists that they do so within the context of a clearly defined mission. As the senior teacher as well as the director of the school, she views it as her role to communicate this mission. Several teachers reported that the director actively encouraged and supported innovation in the classroom. As one teacher described, "What's unique about this school is, as long as it's educational, [the director] says, 'let's try it.' For example, Black History is not just one month, but all year long. There's probably more flexibility here than at a [noncharter] public school, especially with older kids who would have more of a set curriculum at a regular public school." She added, "It's not like top-down. Not like everyone's at a certain level. Not a bureaucracy, not rules of 'seniority knows best.'" This reflected the school's philosophy, that learning was a lifelong process and that everyone, including the director, was a learner.

Essentials Academy. At Essentials Academy, where lifelong learning was also part of its vision, staff described their teacher-administrator relations very similarly. "Not top down like other public or private schools. We have a lot of autonomy. Bottom-up process . . . really both ways and laterally as well." Other staff at Essentials Academy similarly contrasted the administrator/teacher relationships at the regular public school—as well as one other charter school, which was not in our

study—with those at Essentials Academy. During the school's first year, one stated, "Here I don't feel any 'us against them.' We're all on the same wavelength and communicate very well, so no one feels out of the loop with anything. I can always reach [the director]. I had to have an appointment to meet with the principal of my last school. There wasn't an open-door policy. [The director] makes it possible. She wants to listen to her staff. It's her choice. Then again, she doesn't have 25 teachers. Larger schools can't do that —too many teachers." The director's accessibility made it easier to help with matters such as curriculum and instruction. There was time every day for lesson planning, and collaboration among teachers and staff was actively encouraged. One teacher described the director as providing formal mentoring "24/7." A curriculum specialist was on board during the school's first year, and she and the director worked together to make sure that the teachers had an appropriate curriculum and were following it. According to this staff person, "We have autonomy regarding the curricula. [The curriculum specialist] is very diplomatic. She makes suggestions, not demands." However, this specialist was no longer with Essentials Academy by the second year of the school. Given the school's high staff turnover and plans for rapid growth, one wonders if Essentials Academy will maintain these positive administration-teacher relations.

MSM. Teachers consistently emphasized the supportive, family-like relations among teachers, administrators, and parents at MSM. However, they sometimes thought their instructional styles were constrained, not by the administrators, but by the requirements from the Ohio Department of Education as well as the management company. Such tensions between external accountability and autonomy are prominent in public schools in general (Kohn, 2003) but may be especially salient at MSM with its unique pedagogy. A constant challenge for all the MSM staff was meeting the standards of the Montessori method as well as the state standards. Indeed, it was challenging to hire staff who were willing and able to teach using both paradigms. The director facilitated several professional development sessions designed to address these issues and was available throughout the year to help the teachers with them. Despite some initial conflicts, all the teachers have adapted well to this double set of standards. "We have twice the job, but we enjoy it." A teacher added, "We feel *loyalty* to our school and to the kids. We stay after school, go in after hours, even on weekends. You don't see much of that in a public school. There's *commitment*." Another added, "It all goes back to [the director] — what she looks for in staff—dedication and loyalty, fulfilling the needs of children. She put this all together from nothing."

The MSM principal was aware of the tension created by the need to conform to external standards and its impact on teacher autonomy and influence. Thus, she encouraged teachers to initiate their own solutions to meet students' needs. For example, teachers at MSM initiated a before and after school reading program. Although the teachers already had busy schedules, they were willing to devote additional time to this program. The principal explained that when something is staff-initiated, staff are more invested in it. "They give it their all. They want it to work. It makes a difference when they have a say in the needs of their children."

It seems ironic that despite the various complaints regarding the teacher perceived lack of influence over the direction of the school, the same teachers thought their expectations for autonomy in the classroom were actually exceeded. Evidently the teachers thought they were free to experiment within the classroom, despite a lack of influence over the school in general. This echoes the findings of Nelson and Miron (2002), who found that charter school teachers, like many non-charter school teachers, perceived more classroom autonomy than schoolwide influence.

A Key Element: Administrators in the Classroom

At each of the 4 schools, an essential element of the administrators' support was being physically present in the classrooms when possible. This contrasted with the experiences of the teachers in CMSD, where 67 percent of the teachers reported that their principals visited their classrooms only 1 to 4 times year. Fewer than a quarter (23 percent) of CMSD teachers reported that their principals visited their classes more than four times a year, and 11 percent said their principal never observed them (Scott, 2002). William Cullen Bryant, an elementary school in the same relatively affluent neighborhood as MSM, was cited as an exemplary school for having its principal meet with each teacher at least once a month (Scott, 2002). By contrast, at every school in our study, principals reported meeting with the teachers in each classroom at least once a week.

There are numerous benefits of having the principal visit the classrooms. This gave the director or principal direct experience in the classrooms: to observe what was happening, offer suggestions to the teachers, and immediately intervene if necessary. According to both teachers and directors at several of the schools, this was an ongoing form of *in vivo* professional development as well as a way to evaluate whether and how the lessons learned in more formalized professional development workshops were being implemented. This made the teachers feel supported and also gave them a sense of accountability. As a teacher at Lifelong Learners & Leaders explained, "The principal can work more one-on-one with teachers and with students. Teachers are more accountable that way—your boss is in the classroom with you . . . Principals in regular schools just put out fires every day, dealing with discipline issues." Further, as several staff explained, the principal's regular visits helped the students see him or her as a caring person who was involved with the day-to-day activities in the classrooms, rather than a punishing authority figure to whom one was sent after misbehaving. Indeed, at each school young students enthusiastically greeted their principal or director as she or he entered the room; occasionally, a youngster even scurried up to deliver a bear hug. Overall, the principals' and directors' presence gave the classrooms a sense of community as well as accountability and assistance.

Riverview Scholars had a high turnover of principals and a history of teachers' dissatisfaction with both autonomy and support. However, their principal from 2001-02 through 2002-03 was emphatic about the importance of visiting the classrooms for all the reasons described above. The former principals had not done this, much to the chagrin of the teachers. During the newer principal's first year, she realized that it would take a while to develop sufficient trust and rapport with the teachers, especially after their history with other suboptimal principals; but she thought she was making good headway. Two board members who had been with the school since its inception agreed, saying she was doing a "marvelous job" of promoting organization, good communication, and a sense of commonality to the school. Some of the teachers' interactions with the principal—including their insistence that they buy her lunch during an all-day professional development workshop—indicated that there was good camaraderie among them.

8.3 Opportunities for Professional Development

The principal being physically present in the class in order to provide support and feedback was just one way that professional development was promoted at each of the four charter schools. There were numerous opportunities—both formal and informal, on-site and off campus—for the teachers at each of these four schools to develop their professional knowledge and skills. This was crucial, because Ohio's state superintendent emphasized professional development as a cornerstone of meeting the expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act (Zelman, 2002).

Our survey examined teachers' experiences regarding professional development at their schools. We explored the differences between levels of satisfaction with professional development at each school for each year from 2000-02 through 2002-03. The levels of satisfaction were fairly high—a finding found in other, larger scale studies of charter schools as well (Nelson & Miron, 2002)—and stable year to year. One exception was MSM, which started with extremely high levels of satisfaction that lowered somewhat by 2002-03. In this section, we describe the various opportunities for professional development that staff had at each school, including local professional development committees, opportunities for attending workshops and conferences off-site, in-house trainings, and other staff events. We explore the factors contributing to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with these various activities.

Local professional development committees. Local professional development committees were one format teachers could use to improve their skills and knowledge. The Ohio Department of Education's Administrative Code, chapter 3301-24-08, requires that "Each public school district and chartered non public school shall appoint a *local professional development committee* to oversee and review professional development plans for coursework, continuing education units, or other equivalent activities" (ODE Center for the Teaching Professions, 2002). It was unclear whether this applied to public charter schools as well, but all four schools in our study were involved with some type of local professional development committees (LPDCs).

In 2000-01 and 2001-02, Riverview Scholars staff and Lifelong Learners & Leaders staff often met together as a local professional development committee. During the 2002-03 year, Riverview Scholars staff and Lifelong Learners & Leaders staff decided not to meet together any longer. The differing sizes of the two schools made this type of committee unwieldy; LLL staff had to critique a great number of instructional plans from the much larger Riverview Scholars. The schools decided that it would be more appropriate to work independently, with each school having its own LPDC. The director of LLL stated, "We have the capability to do it on our own, and it will be more efficient for both schools."

At one time, MSM was part of Riverview Scholars' and Lifelong Learners & Leaders's shared LPDC, but in 2001-02 they became involved with the various other schools operated by their management company instead. According to MSM's Annual Report (2002), involvement with the management company's professional development committee saved the school substantial funds, an important matter considering how much additional money also had to go toward Montessori training. Management company staff explained how its economies of scale enabled them to hire well-known consultants and speakers to present at their professional development meetings. EMO-based trainings in 2002-03 included workshops on special education, tolerance and bullying issues, occupational therapy interventions, and reading strategies and interventions.

However, satisfaction with professional development opportunities decreased slightly as a result of the involvement of the management company (see Table 8:5). There were frequent meetings and in-services with the company's other seven schools, which MSM teachers described as "rarely relevant" to their unique school. Teachers complained that as a result, "We lost our planning time, time with each other." Indeed, professional development opportunities tend to be more successful when they are linked to the mission of the school and involve collaboration among staff (Nelson & Miron, 2002). At times, MSM staff would fail to show up for management company-sponsored professional development meetings and have to be disciplined by the principal. This drove a wedge between the principal and the staff. Nevertheless, overall satisfaction with professional development was still fairly high at MSM.

Table 8:5 Staff Responses to the Item “There Are New Professional Opportunities for Teachers”

Year	<u>MSM</u>		<u>RS</u>		<u>LLL</u>		<u>EA</u>	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
2000-01	11	3.0 (0.0)	20	2.5 (0.7)	5	2.6 (0.5)	--	--
2001-02	13	2.6 (0.5)	24	2.5 (0.7)	6	2.8 (0.4)	12	2.4 (0.8)
2002-03	18	2.4 (0.6)	23	2.4 (0.7)	--	--	15	2.6 (0.6)

Note: All items are on a 3-point Likert scale where 1=False, 2=Partly True, and 3=True. LLL was not asked this question in 2002-03.

During its initial year, Essentials Academy was not part of any formal local professional development committee, but sometimes met with a local noncharter public school. Essentials Academy’s director indicated that in 2001-02, charter schools were generally unwelcome at district schools’ professional development committees; but by 2002-03 there was more cooperation among them. In 2002-03, Essentials Academy formed an LPDC with Cleveland State University’s Black Studies Department.

Other Professional Development Activities

Various other professional development activities took place at each of the four schools, both in school and elsewhere. Below are some examples of activities that took place during the three years of our study.

Main Street Montessori. MSM’s calendar included two full professional development days, four full-day planning periods, and four half-day planning periods. MSM’s professional development activities reflect its various affiliations: Montessori, its management company, and the charter school movement. Because its public school status hinders the hiring of all Montessori-trained teachers, MSM often hires state certified teachers and after one year pays for Montessori training over the summer. In April 2002, the MSM board sent all its staff and board members to Arlington, Virginia, to participate in the American Montessori Society national conference. In addition, MSM staff attended the Ohio Charter School Conference in Dublin, Ohio.

There also has been special training for MSM alone, such as lessons on how to incorporate preparation for the standardized tests into the Montessori curricula. In 2002, MSM also hosted a workshop for teachers and parents on a phonetic approach to teaching reading called “Phonographix.” In 2002-03, members of the MSM staff were involved in the Ohio Charter School Conference and the National Charter School Conference, plus workshops on Section 504 and the law, working with the difficult child, hands-on literature-based games and activities, and other activities. Planning time among MSM staff has reportedly decreased due to management company-based trainings as well as the new, staff-initiated Before and After School reading program.

Riverview Scholars. Riverview Scholars had nine professional days during the 2002-03 school year. The first four were just prior to the first day of school, one was the day after the last day of school, and the others were during the school year when students had a day off from school. The principal and other teachers were involved in administering the workshops, another example of collaboration and mutual learning. Teachers who wanted to lead a professional development

activity had to submit a form to the principal describing the activity, its rationale, benefits, intended results, assessment processes, and time line.

Regardless of who presented the workshops, teachers' input was essential. Topics were based on needs expressed by the teachers: for example, curriculum mapping and behavior management. At one particular professional development seminar in 2002, the principal started out by soliciting verbal and written feedback from the teachers on topics they needed for future professional development seminars. At the end of the session, surveys regarding the effectiveness of the workshop were administered.

There were other opportunities for professional development, such as workshops and conferences, both inside and outside the school. For all activities, teachers had to specify how the activities supported their formalized Individual Professional Development Plan and how they would actively utilize the knowledge gained from the experience. The principal would follow up on this, using classroom observations to see if these lessons were being implemented. Professional development activities included attending a particular workshop or conference. Mentoring processes and classroom observations were also encouraged. For example, in 2002 several teachers visited a local noncharter public school to observe how the Project Read literacy curriculum (see chapter 9) was implemented. Teachers' tuition for pursuing higher degrees was not paid; however, the rate of pay increased once higher degrees were achieved.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. LLL teachers are contracted for 10 months, providing a full week of professional development just prior to the start of the school year, and 2 additional weeks of staff development at the end of the year. At weekly staff meetings topics relating to curriculum and teaching are regularly discussed; the director meets with each teacher for 30 minutes each week. However, the directors' open door policy is considered the most essential element of professional development.

In addition, despite limited funds for this purpose, the school supported various teacher and staff professional development activities outside the school. Teachers were enthusiastic about the flexibility regarding professional development; with the director's approval they can choose the workshops and sessions they wish to attend. The director and administrative assistant also attended numerous workshops and conferences. All four teachers attended a literacy conference as well as various other conferences. LLL provided paid release time for teachers to visit nearby suburban elementary schools for classroom observations. In addition, LLL provided tuition reimbursement for teacher coursework toward a master's degree.

Essentials Academy. Ongoing professional development was central to Essentials Academy's philosophy of lifelong learning. Prior to Essentials Academy's opening, a week-long, intensive staff retreat helped consolidate the school's goals and plans. Essentials Academy set aside every Friday afternoon for staff meetings "to advance individual and collective performance." One teacher described the intensity of the professional development as, "Compared to previous job, very high. The director demands a lot from us. It was rough at first. I felt she was tough but it paid off. It's been good to me." In addition, every teacher had planning periods during the day while students were in specialty classes such as music or gym. During these planning periods, teachers worked alone or conferred with one another. Staff also met as a group every day after school to review the day and update one another on any pertinent issues. At the end of the year, teams of teachers were expected to create detailed portfolios of their lesson plans for the future and present them to other staff members. Middle school staff were sent to Centerville for a 13-day leadership retreat.

A crucial component of staff development, as well as quality control, is personnel evaluation. In the next section, we describe some of the personnel evaluation methods at each of the four charter schools in our study.

8.4 Personnel Evaluation

Although staff at all four schools reported using systematized, documented processes to evaluate their teachers, staff reported that in-class observations and feedback were major components of teacher evaluations as well. For the most part, teachers were quite satisfied with the evaluation of their performance, and this satisfaction tended to increase each year (see Table 8:6).

Table 8:6 Assessment of Performance

Year	MSM		RS		LLL		EA	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
2000-01	10	3.6 (1.1)	22	3.8 (1.0)	5	4.0 (1.2)	--	--
2001-02	13	4.2 (0.7)	28	3.6 (1.0)	5	4.0 (0.7)	11	3.9 (0.8)
2002-03	17	4.0 (1.0)	30	4.0 (0.8)	10	4.6 (0.7)*	13	4.2 (0.8)

*At the request of the director, this item was reworded as “Feedback regarding your performance.”

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Very dissatisfied and 5=Very satisfied.

Main Street Montessori. Observation was the primary method of staff evaluation at MSM. The principal observed the teachers’ practices, then held conferences with each teacher. She stated, “I love being in class. We need to spend an hour in each class each week informally. I’d like it to be productive—I act as a second set of hands as well as observing.” While most observation and conference processes were informal, others were formal. The formal conferences started with the process of writing up to three goals for one’s own professional development and how one planned to meet these goals. Goals could be under the areas of relationships with children, parents, or colleagues; classroom management, curriculum development, and understanding of and implementation of the school philosophy. Each teacher was to write up to three goals in detail, the plan they would take to strive towards these goals, and things that the principal could do to help the teacher achieve these goals. The principal then based her observations and evaluations around these goals. The principal explained how this was very thorough and conformed to Montessori philosophy. However, it was also time-consuming for all involved.

The other schools operated by the management company simply used a check-off list for their observations, marking items as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The EMO respected MSM’s unique method of staff evaluation, and did some monitoring of it and found it acceptable.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. As was the case at MSM, in-class observation and mutual discussion was the primary component of staff evaluations at LLL. The principal/director of LLL met with each teacher for at least half an hour once a week to discuss progress. She considered this a dialectical approach and preferred to think of it as feedback instead of evaluation, with the latter’s judgmental, top-down connotations. Indeed, she requested that the word “evaluation” be changed to “feedback” on our survey’s item concerning staff evaluations.

Several teachers expressed enthusiasm about this type of constructive feedback. One described the director and her feedback processes as follows:

I've never heard or criticize anyone. She helps us think it up, refine it, and she is never critical. She never says, "don't do that, do this." She allows you to make mistakes but never pointed them out as mistakes, just learning experiences. But I can show her what I'm learning. I can go next door and say, "look what my student is doing now!" She is great as a role model, as a mentor, as an individual. . . She makes us feel like she is so thrilled to have all of us as a team.

In addition, there was a formal write-up at the end of the year. This involved a "Praxis framework." As the principal described it, "I ask teachers to do a self-evaluation prior to their formal evaluation. It's helpful to know that THEY think their areas of strength and weaknesses are." This fosters constructive communication and ideas for areas for improvement.

Riverview Scholars. The principal of Riverview Scholars explained that the charter schools were not under state law as to how often to evaluate teachers. She thought that teachers needed more supervision early on and two final evaluations at the end of the year. Since there was no tenure at Riverview Scholars, evaluations were more ongoing and had greater consequences. In 2001-02, the principal was dissatisfied with the evaluation tools that had been developed by previous staff. She wanted to revise them with the input of a committee of staff members. She emphasized that "The [evaluation] tool should be helpful to teachers as well as the principal."

In response to some concerns about the administration and its effectiveness, Riverview Scholars conducted formal evaluations of its principal and director in the spring of 2001. The primary tool was a set of surveys for the teachers and other staff to fill out: one to evaluate the principal's work, the other for evaluating the director's work. Both were developed by a board member who was a professor in education. The principal also created and administered another survey to the staff regarding her own effectiveness. The principal resigned around the same time that the results of her own survey were tabulated; some speculated that these results led to her resignation. Perhaps more importantly, the results of these surveys were used to reconfigure the school's leadership, with the director supervising the new principal. Originally, the staff decided to use these surveys every year, not only during times that a problem was suspected. A revised round of surveys was used for the staff to evaluate the principal and the executive director in the spring of 2002. However, the director and principal decided not to use these or any other surveys in 2002-03. By the 2003-04 year, Riverview Scholars was once again revisiting how to conduct the most effective personnel evaluations.

Essentials Academy. Essentials Academy had a detailed plan for evaluating teachers and staff; it was part of their performance management system, which evaluated teacher performance and, to some extent, the school as a whole. Its goal was to make sure that each staff member's duties meshed with the school's mission and succeeded in striving toward that mission. The system included "ongoing staff coaching and supervisor feedback, collegial dialogue and shared planning, and two formal progress review meetings" (p. 3). Staff members worked with their supervisors and colleagues to establish a performance management system plan that included goals, benchmarks, and action steps. These goals had to "relate to routine work assignments, resolve identified problems, support innovation, promote professional development, and advance the institutional or departmental mission" (p. 4). Each staff member was paired with a mentor. Throughout the year, the staff would meet on a regular basis with their supervisor and colleagues to "monitor individual and collective progress."

However, the director stated that this elaborate performance management system had not been implemented during the school's first year. Presumably, more immediate crises precluded its use. It was unclear to what extent this system was used during the school's second year.

Furthermore, there were formal performance reviews each year. Evaluations were based on a rubric that included four levels, "Apprentice" through "Distinguished." As part of their evaluations, staff had to develop portfolios to display their performance. Areas to be assessed included planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Salary increases were intended to be commensurate with levels. Staff who did not move up a level after two years did not have their contracts renewed, but procedures for grievances were in place. However, the inability to pay the teachers their final paychecks on time at the end of the 2001-02 led to all but one of the teachers to resign. Although a number of these staff did eventually return for the 2002-03 year, it is not clear whether they were re-hired at their original salary or if they moved up a level according to the original plan.

School climate, autonomy, and opportunities for professional development are important, although not exclusive, factors in professional opportunities. More extrinsic, concrete matters such as salary and benefits are also factors in overall satisfaction with one's job and ultimately may effect retention. In the next section, we explore the salary and benefits at our four charter schools, how they compare with others, and the staff's level of satisfaction with them.

8.5 Salary and Benefits

Charter schools, as a rule, tend to have much lower salaries than traditional public schools. Part of this may be due to the tendency to hire less experienced teachers (Miron & Nelson, 2002). Much of it may be due to lack of available resources, since many funds must be funneled to facilities and administrative expenses (see Chapter 13). Table 8:7 contrasts the salaries offered at charter schools in the Cleveland areas with those of comparable schools in the CMSD as well as the CMSD as a whole. According to the CMSD Website, the salary range for teachers is \$33,240 for a "step 1" teacher with a BA to \$56, 670 for a "step 10" teacher with a master's degree plus at least 30 graduate credit hours; the average salary for a K-8 teacher is \$43,345. Interestingly, all of the Cleveland charter schools for whom we had data, except for those funded by The Cleveland Foundation, had average salaries that were less than the lowest starting salaries for CMSD teachers.

Table 8:7 Salaries at Community Schools and Matched CMSD Schools

<i>School</i>	<i>Average Teacher Salary 2001-2002</i>
<i>Community Schools:</i>	
Charter School A	\$14,800
Charter School B	\$26,665
Charter School C	\$31,255
Charter School D	\$27,437
Charter School E	\$26,092
Main Street Montessori	\$33,748
Riverview Scholars	\$33,976
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	\$33,640
<i>Matched CMSD Schools:</i>	
Public Elementary School A	\$47,297
Public Elementary School B	\$50,910
Public Elementary School C	\$43,151
Public Middle School E	\$48,007
Public Elementary School F	\$45,862
Public Elementary School G	\$51,032
Public Elementary School H	\$51,313
Public Elementary School I	\$40,661
CMSD Average for all K-8 Schools	\$43,345

Source: Downloaded from ODE's website, <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/>

Note: The listed salaries for 2 other community schools

At LLL, the director reported to us verbally that the teachers' base salaries ranged from \$33,000-\$38,000 for the 2002-03 year, with opportunities to earn more for additional tasks. The director explained that there was "less pay than the CMSD, but they got to be involved in the development of the school." This echoes the perspective of Kohn (2003), who found that salary was far less important to most teachers than autonomy and influence over the school. Essentials Academy did not report its salary schedule.

How satisfied were the staff with their salary and benefits? Table 8:8 displays the responses to this question on the surveys. For the most part, staff were not as satisfied with these aspects of their job as they were with other aspects; but despite their salaries being lower than those of most of the CMSD, they were relatively happy. As one MSM teacher explained, "You make choices in life. We've sacrificed pay for a better work environment." Another added, "We're not paid as much, but inside we can say, 'We did a good job, we love the kids, we love the families.' In a big district I would burn out so fast."

Table 8:8 Satisfaction with Salaries and Benefits

	Year	MSM		RS		LLL		EA	
		N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
Salary	2000-01	11	3.3 (1.2)	25	3.0 (1.1)	7	3.9 (0.9)	--	--
	2001-02	14	3.0 (0.9)	28	2.8 (1.1)	6	3.5 (1.4)	13	3.5 (1.3)
	2002-03	20	2.9 (0.7)	32	3.1 (1.2)	11	3.1 (1.1)	16	3.5 (1.0)
Benefits	2000-01	11	3.0 (1.2)	21	3.3 (1.2)	7	3.7 (1.1)	--	--
	2001-02	13	2.6 (1.0)	27	3.3 (1.3)	4	3.5 (1.0)	12	2.6 (1.2)
	2002-03	20	3.3 (0.8)	30	3.1 (1.2)	11	3.3 (0.6)	16	3.6 (1.1)

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Very dissatisfied and 5=Very satisfied.

As these remarks indicate, numerous intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence staff satisfaction. We now explore the relation between overall staff satisfaction (including administrative satisfaction with teachers) and school turnover. We explore how the charter school laws and lessened regulations affect the rates of and reasons for turnover.

8.6 Turnover and Job Security

Employee turnover is quite costly to schools, particularly regarding the loss of effective teachers and other staff. Various costs are involved in terms of recruiting, training, and acclimating new staff. Further, the loss of staff can lead to a vicious cycle of low staff morale and high turnover. A rapid and/or high turnover of staff creates a lack of continuity for staff and for students, potentially impeding professional development for the staff and academic progress for the students (Nelson & Miron, 2002).

On the other hand, functional turnover, or the dismissal of unsatisfactory staff, can make a positive impact on a school. Dismissing staff is less complicated in charter schools than in regular public schools, where union contracts and tenure make it quite difficult to fire a teacher. The potential threats of a lawsuit can outweigh (or seem to outweigh) the problems posed by a deficient teacher. One director explained how not renewing several teachers' one-year contracts helped the school seek more appropriate staff instead. Another key administrator emphasized how necessary it was to quickly dismiss some ineffective staff partway through the year. At each of the four

schools, at one time or another, directors declined to renew the contracts of suboptimal teachers in order to seek teachers that were a better fit for their school.

Riverview Scholars. After the 2000-01 school year, nine full-time staff left, including the principal. Of those nine, four had contracts that were not renewed. Two teachers who were hired for the 2001-02 year left during the same year. Eight additional full-time staff left at the end of the year. Of these eight, three had contracts that were not renewed. One left because of illness, one left because of “personal concerns,” and one sought a position with more job security. No reasons were available regarding the other two staff who left Riverview Scholars.

The principal explained that in some cases, teachers who were burned out from teaching in the public schools sought employment at Riverview Scholars hoping for revitalization. These teachers were usually disappointed, since Riverview Scholars had a challenging student population and high expectations for staff. As the principal emphasized, “This is not a renewal school.”

By the end of the 2002-03 school year, turnover had slowed down notably. The principal stated that only one staff person’s contract would not be renewed. Three teachers were leaving to stay home with their young children, and one instructional aide was leaving to be a full-time teacher elsewhere. The staff was now up to 50 members. However, much to everyone’s surprise, the principal resigned at the beginning of the 2003-04 school year. A fourth grade teacher took her place as an interim principal, and the executive director and board searched for a qualified, permanent replacement.

Table 8:9 below contains estimate teacher attrition rates for each of the four schools. These figures indicate that Essentials Academy, the youngest school, has had the greatest difficulty retaining staff, while MSM, the oldest school, has the lowest attrition. Aside from the age of the school, these figures speak to stability and relative levels of satisfaction of teachers and staff.

Table 8:9 Estimated Rates of Staff Attrition

<i>School</i>	<i>Left before the start of the 2002-03 year</i>	<i>Left before the start of the 2003-04 year</i>
Main Street Montessori (N = 15)	2/15 (13.3%)	3/20 (15.0%)
Riverview Scholars (N = 31)	8/31 (25.8%)	5/40** (12.5%)
Lifelong Learners & Leaders (N = 9)	4/9 (44.4%)	2/11 (18.0%)
Essentials Academy (N = 15)	8/15* (53.3%)	5/17 (29.4%)

* By the end of the 2001-02 year, 13 out of 15 (86.7%) staff left Essentials Academy, but 6 of the staff who had left returned at the start of the following year.

** In addition, the principal resigned just after the start of the 2003-04 school year.

Main Street Montessori. Three staff left MSM after the 2000-01 school year, and two left after the 2001-02 school year. In all five cases, the contracts were not renewed for the following year. At the end of the 2002-03 school year, one teacher’s contract was not renewed; this teacher had expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the changes in MSM’s management and often failed to conform to the school’s new expectations. Another kindergarten teacher’s contract was not renewed after the decision to reduce the kindergarten staff to one teacher and one aide per classroom. She was offered the lower position of an aide, but turned it down to seek a teaching position elsewhere. A third teacher left MSM to teach at a Montessori school whose practice more closely conformed to original Montessori pedagogy.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. Despite the high levels of staff satisfaction as indicated by both surveys and interviews, staff turnover was quite high at Lifelong Learners & Leaders. The administrative director and one teacher left after their first year, 2000-01. The teacher did not have her contract renewed because she did not meet requirements for certification. The administrative director left to have a baby, came back temporarily in January 2002-with the unique perk of being able to take her infant to work with her-but eventually left to stay at home with her child.

Although LLL had the highest proportion of turnover from 2001-02 to 2002-03, it reported the greatest level of job security, as well as very high overall satisfaction with the school. However, four out of nine staff, including three of four instructional staff, leaving for any reason can have a large impact. One teacher sought a higher paying teaching position in a wealthy suburb of Cleveland, a common phenomenon in the local area (Bainbridge, 2002). Two teachers left because their spouses were transferred out of state. The teacher turnover was particularly difficult for multiage classrooms designed to keep some of the same students with the same teacher for more than one year. The LLL director explained one reason for this turnover: "When LLL started, the board and principal-teacher adopted a strategy of seeking to hire inexperienced teachers with a solid philosophy and knowledge base and to provide extensive mentoring. A downside of this approach became clear: young teachers without particular ties to the Cleveland area are less likely to stay here. This is a widespread problem in Cleveland and has been referred to as the 'brain drain.'" However, the director stated that, "In general, although teacher turnover has been high, there has been an increase in the quality and effectiveness of the teaching staff each year as a result."

Fortunately, the turnover rate turned around for LLL the following year. LLL was able to hire four highly qualified, experienced teachers for the 2002-03 school year. All of the classroom teachers returned for the 2003-04 school year, and an additional teacher was hired by May 2003. The special activities instructor left to pursue art full time, and the contract for a part-time administrator was not renewed. The Title I teacher planned to return if funds were available for a full-time position.

Essentials Academy. Despite reportedly high satisfaction with the school's climate, administration, and opportunities for professional development, Essentials Academy had an alarmingly high staff turnover rate after its first year. Two staff left during the 2001-02 school year; reasons for their leaving were not provided to us. In the spring of 2002, 8 of the 12 staff reported that they planned to return the following year; the remaining 4 did not answer this question. However, shortly after the end of the 2001-02 school year, all of the teachers and staff, except for the principal and 1 teacher, left when the school was unable to pay them on time. The principal said the delay was due to delayed property tax relief payments to schools and other agencies (see Ohlemacher & Theis, 2002); however, ODE staff stated that this issue should not have affected charter schools' ability to pay their staff. The principal then demanded that those responsible for the lack of funds explain to her staff why Essentials Academy couldn't pay them. Some staff were quite upset because the principal herself did not tell them sooner. Eventually, the principal obtained the funds to reimburse the staff, using funds from the Cleveland Foundation that had been earmarked for their facility. Six out of the original 14 staff returned, including the principal.

It is interesting that at a school where all the teachers appeared so satisfied with their working conditions, the attrition rate was at one time as high as 86.7 percent, and still as high as 53.3 percent after the payment issues were resolved and six teachers returned. One wonders if the staff were indeed as satisfied as they indicated on their surveys and in their interviews, or if the precarious

situation that their school had been in—especially during the first year—made them reluctant to express negative feelings about their school for fear of appearing disloyal.

During the schools' second year, several staff left midyear. One well-liked special education instructor left due to health reasons; one administrator was let go due to consistently poor performance. Two other staff members left midyear, although one returned the following year. During a focus group, several staff insinuated, with muffled snickers of agreement, that the midyear turnover of some of staff had been beneficial to the school. At the end of the year, one teacher's contract was not renewed due to poor student performance and demonstrated lack of control over the classroom.

Tragically, one dedicated teacher became terminally ill, but insisted on teaching as long as she could, explaining that the job was what kept her going. At times she was so debilitated that the principal insisted that she leave for a sick day. The students were informed of her illness; the older students discussed the grieving process during their advisory committees. Despite her declining ability to teach, the board decided unanimously (and quite tearfully) to keep her until the end of the year, with the teaching assistant taking over many of her former duties. However, when the teacher, whose health was visibly continuing to deteriorate, requested to continue teaching the following year, the principal regretfully declined.

At least one other teacher did not return for the 2003-04 school year. We were unable to get information from the school on the return rate of the other staff for the 2003-04 year.

Does this flexibility in termination lead to job insecurity for teachers? As Table 8:10 displays, results of the survey item on insecurity are mixed and vary from school to school. Interestingly, at both Riverview Scholars and MSM, the number of staff who left by the end of the 2001-02 year equaled the number of staff who agreed or strongly agreed with this item. [In 2002-03, three at MSM, eight at RS, and two at Essentials Academy agreed or strongly agreed with this item; everyone at LLL disagreed with this item]. However, there is no clear evidence that the insecurity is due to lack of tenure or collective bargaining. The insecurity also may be due to the threats from charter school's adversaries to encumber or even eliminate all charter schools in Ohio. Given the increase in agreement with this item at all three schools between 2000-01 and 2001-02, the anticharter school lawsuit initiated in May 2001 may have been a factor. Further, in 2001-02 most of Essentials Academy's teachers took this survey shortly after their school was evicted from its original building and forced to move into a temporary space at the local YMCA. Such an experience is likely to make a staff person anxious about the future of the school. Indeed, given the experiences of Essentials Academy during its first year, it is surprising that this item was rated as low as it was.

Table 8:10 Staff Responses to the Item "Teachers Are Insecure About Their Future"

<i>School</i>	<i>2000-01</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>
Main Street Montessori	1.5 (1.0)	2.5 (1.1)	2.4 (1.1)
Riverview Scholars	2.3 (1.1)	3.5 (1.1)	3.0 (1.1)
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	1.3 (0.5)	1.7 (0.8)	1.5 (0.5)
Essentials Academy	--	2.9 (1.5)	2.1 (1.0)

8.7 Conclusion

Staff at each school often described their school's working environment as more "family-like" than bureaucratized, even at the school where teacher satisfaction and school climate had the lowest mean and a high variance. The localized governance, as well as the philosophical homogeneity, allows for increased autonomy, expedited changes in policies, and more flexible roles for staff. Coupled with the small school size, this allows for processes that promote both effective professional development and school culture-building, such as frequent director visits to the classrooms. This flexibility, autonomy, and expediency can be a double-edged sword, at times leading to excess work, unclear expectations, or disorganization. These in turn can lead to staff turnover, especially when coupled with the lower salary and benefits of charter schools.

The charter school bargain, "autonomy in exchange for accountability," may apply to charter school staff as well as the schools as a whole. Teachers may be given more autonomy by their administrators and governing boards than those in traditional public schools. As some teachers in our study indicated, this increased autonomy was a major contributor to their job satisfaction. However, charter school staff as a rule are denied the security of tenure and the benefits of a union. Staff can be fired at will for unsatisfactory performance or a "poor fit" with the school's philosophy and environment. Turnover tends to be higher than at traditional public schools, in part due to year-long contracts not being renewed. Therefore, one may say that charter school teachers are held more accountable than teachers at traditional public schools.

Parent and Community Involvement

School choice theory assumes that parents who choose to enroll their children in a particular school will be more invested in their children's education than parents whose children are enrolled in a public school solely by default of their residence (Chubb & Moe, 1990). This investment should translate into a greater amount of participation in the school and its various functions (Miron & Nelson, 2002). The decentralization of charter schools and the common mission that unites its various stakeholders generally mean that extensive parental participation is seen as enhancing rather than intrusive. Moreover, the additional demands of a start-up school and the limited funds available for auxiliary staff to complete them often mean that charter school staff need all the help they can get from parents and other volunteers.

In addition to parents, various other community members are often vital contributors to a charter school's functioning. At times, partnerships with certain organizations that share a common mission enhance the opportunities for all involved. As schools receive much-needed human resources, community volunteers gain vital career experience or simply personal gratification.

In this chapter we explore the types of opportunities that charter schools provide for parental and community participation and their implications for supporting and/or steering the directions of the school. Next, we look at the quantity of time parents are volunteering in the four schools in our study. In subsequent sections we detail each school's visions for parental and community involvement, how the vision has played out, ways of encouraging involvement, and barriers to volunteer participation. Finally, we discuss the impact of parental and community participation (or the relative lack of it) on the education in charter schools.

9.1 Types of Opportunities for Participation

Parents may have opportunities to participate in charter schools ranging from the actual founding of the school to supporting their teacher recommendations for assisting their children. Some roles, such as serving on the board of directors, give parents direct influence over the school's direction. Other roles, such as providing clerical assistance or chaperoning field trips, are invaluable means of supporting the school's functions, but yield little or no influence on school policy. Below we list the wide range of opportunities that the four schools collectively created for parents.

Although community members are also invaluable sources of participation, in this section we limit our focus to the participation of parents, who are also the primary consumers of these schools

of choice. Later sections will address the roles of community volunteers, especially as they pertain to each charter school in our study.

Founding the charter school. Some charter schools are initiated by grass-roots organizations composed primarily of parents. MSM was catalyzed in part by two parents who wanted a Montessori school in a specific neighborhood in the city. These parents, however, are no longer involved in the governance or management of the school.

None of the other schools in our study had parents who were directly involved in the founding of the school. However, all four schools, to varying degrees, encouraged parents to be involved in influencing the direction of the school. Direct participation on the board of directors was one of these roles.

Serving on the board of directors. This is one of the most influential positions that a parent can have on the charter school. However, there are both benefits and drawbacks to having parents serve in such a position. Studies of Michigan charter schools suggest that school boards on which parents serve are more likely to have internal conflicts (Horn & Miron, 1999). This is because parents often have a vested interest in their own children's needs and are unable or unwilling to serve the interests of the school as a whole. In this study, some school staff and parents said it is the board's, administrators', and staff's responsibility to run the schools; as schools of choice, parents should either support them or enroll their children elsewhere if they are dissatisfied.

Despite these risks, none of the four schools in our study had policies forbidding parent participation on the school boards. Parents were permitted and often actively encouraged to participate in governance. Several parents had served, at one time or another, on the school board in each school except for LLL, where staff and board members were hoping to increase parental participation in governance. At times there were issues with parents having a restricted focus on their own children, but for the most part such arrangements have been successfully implemented. Riverview Scholars' executive director said, "Parents on the board have worked well. I wouldn't do it any other way."

Serving as a paid employee. In three of the four schools in our study, some parents were also paid staff. In some cases, such as several of the teaching positions at Essentials Academy, teachers were hired, then evidently decided to send their students to the school. In other cases, such as the parent coordinator position at LLL or the assistant at Riverview Scholars that helped families find middle schools for matriculating fifth graders, parents started as active volunteers in their schools, then eventually got hired for paid part-time positions.

Attending board meetings as visitor. As public schools, all charter schools are subject to the "sunshine laws" that mandate school board meetings be open to the public, including parents. In all four schools in our study, parents were welcome, if not actively encouraged, to attend board meetings. However, parents rarely attended. Parents were more involved in activities that involved specific tasks or day-to-day activities than on the overarching governance of the school. These activities are detailed below.

Serving on auxiliary committees. At each school there were opportunities for parents to participate in various formal committees, as either a leader or participant. Each school had some type of organization consisting of both parents and staff, analogous to Parent/Teacher

Organizations in many public schools. Various other committees had varying levels of influence on the schools. Some were entirely parent-led; others were collaborations between parents, staff, and/or board members. Some committees discussed and helped make decisions on factors that profoundly affected the direction of the school, such as Riverview Scholars' Strategic Planning Committee that helped decide how many grade levels their school should eventually include. Other committees were less influential and more supportive in nature and served mainly to assist with activities such as fund-raising, classroom volunteering, and chaperoning. One school had a Classroom Liason Committee that facilitated communication among parents and teachers.

Contributing material and human resources Parents were involved in the procurement of material goods and funds, both directly and indirectly. Some parents donated their own funds; others solicited funds through elaborately planned fund-raisers. Other parents donated books or other instructional items as well as furniture and shelves.

In addition to providing material goods, parents provided much needed voluntary labor to the schools in the form of custodial work, landscaping, snow removal, and clerical work. Some parents helped establish partnerships with other organizations, including other public schools that their older children attended. Parents also provided direct assistance to students in the forms of classroom assistants, tutors, lunchroom and playground aides, and field trip chaperones.

Providing feedback. Parents provided feedback regarding their school's functioning, often offering suggestions for improvement. With a smaller scale school system, it is easier to solicit and act upon parental feedback for decision making; school administrators were generally more accessible. Some parents' concerns were well received by the school staff; other feedback was seen as divisive and unproductive. Parents filled out surveys on a variety of issues, including general satisfaction surveys from our study as well as surveys from the schools and their management companies. Much of this feedback, especially from the school-designed surveys, was directly used in decision making. Parents also attended parent/teacher conferences and other staff/family meetings to discuss their concerns.

Actively supporting their children's education. Following through on teacher recommendations, making sure their children completed their homework, and supporting their school's disciplinary actions are expectations that are certainly not unique to charter schools, nor do they directly influence the direction of the schools. However, according to a number of the teachers and administrators in our study, upholding such responsibilities are the most crucial things a parent can do to ensure the quality of their children's education, and the success of the school as a whole. Regarding parents who failed to live up to such expectations, one exasperated teacher sighed, "Kids need to be parented well. If they could parent, we could teach." Conversely, teachers who thought their students' parents were actively involved in their children's education were enthusiastic about how much could be accomplished.

9.2 Time Spent in Schools

With these new opportunities for actively investing in their school of choice, how much time are parents spending volunteering for the charter schools? Table 9:1 displays the number of hours parents indicated they spent in their schools in a typical month. However, this random sample of surveyed parents may not accurately reflect the contribution that parents make to the schools.

Contributions such as soliciting or directly donating funds or materials might not be included as hours of volunteer work in the schools. Parents who were also half- to full-time employees of the school were given staff surveys and excluded from the parent surveys. Perhaps most saliently, many staff seemed less concerned with actual volunteer hours or material contributions from parents than an active investment in their children's education.

Table 9:1 Number of Hours of Volunteer Work at School Per Month

<i>School</i>	<i>0 Hours</i>	<i>1 - 3 Hours</i>	<i>4 - 6 Hours</i>	<i>7 - 9 Hours</i>	<i>10 - 12 Hours</i>	<i>More than 12 Hours</i>
MSM (N=27)	9 (33.3%)	7 (25.9%)	2 (7.4%)	1 (3.7%)	3 (11.1%)	5 (18.5%)
RS (N=23)	10 (43.5%)	9 (39.1%)	2 (8.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.7%)	0 (0.0%)
LLL* (N=16)	10 (62.5%)	4 (25.0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)
EA (N=10)	4 (40.0%)	6 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total (N=60)	23 (38.3%)	22 (36.7%)	4 (6.7%)	1 (1.7%)	5 (8.3%)	5 (8.3%)

* LLL's data are from 2001-02, since this question was not asked during 2002-03. Please see section 9.5.

Although the survey item categories make the number of volunteer hours hard to quantify accurately, it was clear that of the four schools, MSM had the most hours of parental volunteer work. It also had the highest proportion of two-parent households (89 percent of respondents) and reportedly the highest proportion of mothers who were not employed outside the home. The president of MSM's parent group emphasized that parents who worked were not pressured to volunteer when it was not feasible.

How do charter schools encourage parental participation in the schools? At some charter schools, explicit expectations for parental involvement are spelled out before the parents even enroll their students. Some schools even require parents to sign a contract committing them to a certain number of volunteer hours. Such schools defend this practice as assuring ample parental involvement. Others see this as an insidious form of discrimination against families who are unable to fulfill such a commitment, particularly those headed by single parents or dual-earner couples (Miron & Nelson, 2002). Even if students are never turned down or expelled for violations of this contract—a practice that would be legally difficult to uphold—the expectations for involvement could actively discourage certain families from enrolling their children. While all the schools in our study explicitly expected the parents to be involved in their children's education, often spelling these expectations out in parent handbooks, none of them used binding contracts or reportedly pressured parents to volunteer.

How satisfied were school staff with the parents' involvement in and potential influence over the school? In 2002-03, most were moderately satisfied, with the mean response on the item "*parents are involved and can influence the direction of the school*" ranging from 3.3 (SD=1.0) through 3.7 (SD=0.7). ANOVA yielded no significant differences on this item among the four schools, despite the differing quantities of parental participation. The results of these two survey items tell only a small portion of the story; we solicited other forms of quantitative and qualitative data

¹ By request, at LLL this item was changed to, "*Parents are involved and supportive,*" a somewhat different connotation

regarding parental participation. However, one major barrier to obtaining reliable information on parental participation is that the parents who are willing to be interviewed regarding their experiences at the schools are generally those who are the most active and involved. They are also likely to associate with other active, involved parents. Therefore, the few parents who were interviewed are unlikely to be representative of all the parents at each school. The randomly sampled surveys may have provided a somewhat less skewed representation; however, we could not obtain the perspectives of those parents who were sent surveys but did not take the time to fill them out and return them. We therefore asked the school staff, on both interviews and surveys, about their opinions regarding parental participation as well.

We now look at the expectations that each school has for parental participation. The various opportunities each school provides for parental involvement, from governance to supporting roles, and briefly outlined. We explore the extent to which parents are taking advantage of these opportunities to participate. When applicable, we also discuss opportunities for other community members to volunteer their services to the charter schools.

9.3 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at MSM

Adding to the community spirit is parent involvement. A special brand of community pervades the classroom because the parent is not treated as an alien but as a collaborator. Children begin to see that the educational destiny is part of the parent's direct input and action. The school is a community celebration and all are involved with events such as campouts, discussions, and workdays. (The Montessori Messenger, January 2003.)²

“MSM parent volunteers here are extraordinary,” an MSM teacher remarked. “They really want to participate in their children’s education. It’s true in private [Montessori schools], but there’s more here.” Other staff expressed similar sentiments. As one enthusiastic parent who frequently volunteered in the schools described it, “The involvement of parents is higher here at MSM. There’s more investment. No teachers vs. parents; it’s a team: teachers ... staff ... students... parents ...” One teacher agreed, “Parents help out a lot. Everyone collaborates. That’s part of the climate. We help each other.” Other teachers at MSM as well as staff members of the management company contrasted this with some of the other public schools, where parents who frequently volunteered were considered a nuisance. Management company staff explained, “In [noncharter] public schools, parents are discouraged from coming in . . . There were complaints in Euclid [a first-ring district] about parents needing a 24 hour notice before coming in. They’re like fortresses.” A teacher commented, “Unlike public schools, we *want* the parents here! We wish they’d come more often.” This was especially true because the school could not afford to hire extra staff to conduct various tasks for teachers, and staff were already spread thin. A teacher laughed, “Here the more [parents] the better! We don’t want sole responsibility!”

Two teachers who had previously taught at a private Montessori school said that at MSM parents were more collaborative with the staff than private school parents. One commented about private school parents often acting demanding and somewhat entitlement-minded. Perhaps this was because the parents at MSM shared responsibility for the school, rather than paying high

² This quote was from an article entitled “Social Development –Making Friends” in MSM’s monthly school newsletter, *The Montessori Messenger*.

tuition for other people to operate it. Nevertheless, some parents and teachers thought the school would be better off with even more parental involvement, especially in the classrooms.

Opportunities for parental volunteerism in supporting roles. Most of MSM’s volunteer opportunities concerned supporting roles, both within and outside formal parent organizations. During MSM’s second year, a parents’ organization called CAMP –Caring, Active, Montessori Parents–was created. It included 8 pages of bylaws, which had been developed by a committee of 10 parents and was given to all parents. CAMP’s purpose was to assist teachers with volunteer services. It was strictly for parents, but staff and teachers were welcome as “honorary” members. CAMP’s president explained that every MSM parent is considered a CAMP member, although actual involvement varied among parents. Monthly meetings had about 30 parents attending each meeting, but there was a lot of variance in attendance. “Usually, the same group of 50 ‘active doers’ is involved. I wish I had the answer to increase this. We have a great bunch.”

At the CAMP meeting and beyond, the parents brainstormed ideas for solving logistical problems, such as the hectic parking/ drop off situation. They raised funds to enhance the students’ learning experiences and meet Montessori’s expectations. To meet the Montessori requirements for botany lessons, they raised funds for Parkworks, a “learning garden” for the beginning of the 2003-04 school year. They planned to install another playground in April 2003, because middle school students had complained about the lack of recreational facilities for older youth. One parent started a Scholastic Book Fair at MSM; as a result, “Now we have a phenomenal library.”

In addition to formal participation through CAMP, there were various volunteer opportunities during the school day, including tasks such as answering phones, filing, copying, laminating materials, repairing equipment, and cleaning bathrooms. Additional committees of volunteers participated in everything from snow removal to assisting with reading. Parents donated shelves and other materials. They found resources on the Internet to share with teachers and staff. They supervised students at lunch—providing a welcome break for staff—and assisted with arts and crafts and music. During the school’s fourth year, when the school was divided into two separate buildings, parent volunteers walked the students to the building down the street for gym class. Some activities that were crucial to their curriculum, such

as frequent field trips to the local zoo and park, would not have been possible without parent volunteers.

Despite this high level of reported parental involvement, according to the staff surveys, there has been a slight drop in agreement with the item *Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction and School Activities* between 2001-02 and 2002-03 (see Table 9:2). Although parental involvement continues to be high, the degree of influence over instruction and school activities may have dropped some due to the influence of the management company as well as state and federal mandates.

Table 9:2 MSM Staff Responses to *Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction and School Activities*

Year	N	Mean (SD)
2000-01	10	3.8 (0.8)
2001-02	15	4.0 (1.0)
2002-03	19	3.5 (1.2)

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Strongly disagree and 5=Strongly agree

Parental influence in school direction and activities. Although parents were highly involved in procuring the necessary resources for educational and recreational activities, according to the CAMP president they were not involved in curricular decision making. “Parents so far have never brought up curricular concerns at the meetings,” she stated. However, after standardized test-taking was identified as a weakness among MSM students in 2001-02, a mother compiled worksheets for students to take home and practice pencil-and-paper tests.

Parental participation in the actual governance of MSM was more limited; some parents and staff considered this a weakness. The current MSM board, which completely overlapped with the boards for the seven other charter schools run by this management company please see Chapter 5), does not include parent representation. In fact, only one of the seven school boards for this EMO includes a parent representative. Parents' overall agreement to with item "Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School" dropped slightly from 2000-01 to 2002-03 (see Table9:3). Again, the influence of management company and other mandates may have been factors. One parent commented on her survey,

This school began as a small independent charter school, but is now affiliated with a non-profit corporation operating several charter schools. While this may help administrative functions, I wanted to be directly involved in my children's education and not just a part of a PTA group.

However, not everyone saw the parents' disengagement with MSM's board as problematic. Some parents served on MSM's original board; however, this became an issue when they had focused excessively on their own children. A management company staff member remarked that parents rarely attended board meetings concerning any of their schools because their issues were best addressed by a teacher or principal instead. Although parents were welcome at board meetings, this was not actively encouraged. Management company staff added that most parents who attended school board meetings at CMSD had been invited by disgruntled board members who wanted to stage an "uprising." However, there have been no such parental uprisings at any of the charter school boards in our study.

Table 9:3 MSM Parents' Responses to the Item "Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School"

Year	Initial Expectation			Current Experience		
	False	Partly True	True	False	Partly True	True
2000-01	2 (12%)	5 (29%)	10 (59%)	1 (6%)	5 (31%)	10 (63%)
2001-02	5 (23%)	8 (36%)	9 (41%)	2 (8%)	8 (33%)	14 (58%)
2002-03	3 (14%)	9 (43%)	9 (43%)	3 (12%)	10 (40%)	12 (48%)

9.4 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at Riverview Scholars

Riverview Scholars holds informative workshops for the parents and community. For example, Parent/Family Organization meetings are held once a month on Saturday afternoons, board meetings are held once a month during the week in the evening, and workshops also are held during the week in the evening. Furthermore, all of these arranged meetings are planned conveniently for the families as well. For instance, childcare is provided for families attending the meetings and [so is] food. —A Riverview Scholars parent

Riverview Scholars parents had numerous opportunities to become involved in the school's governance and administrative functions. In addition to the board of directors on which two parents served (see Chapter 6), there were six committees that reported to the board: Education,

Executive, Facilities, Board Development, Fundraising, and Finance. In addition there was a Strategic Planning Committee, which is perhaps the most integrally involved in shaping the direction of the school. This committee includes several parents, three staff, and four board members. According to the Board of Trustees chair, the committee “began with a revisiting of our mission and the ideals upon which this school is established. We are taking stock of our experience . . . and making a sincere effort to learn from our mistakes and from our success” (Riverview Scholars 2000-01 Annual Report, p. 2). The committee examines curricula, policies, procedures, and other topics affecting the school. According to one staff member who herself is not on this committee, “It is well balanced, and represents the school.” She then added, “If this were tried at the public school, it would be a huge group! A hundred people! Small school size allows this kind of governance. Everyone here is on one page.”

Family Staff Organization. A Family/Staff Organization (originally called the Parent/Family Organization) was created to help the school realize its mission. It included separate committees for activities and programming, communications, classroom liaison, and fund-raising. Fund-raising included organizing sales of holiday goods and hosting book fairs. Parents used the surplus money from these fund-raisers to buy playground equipment for their school. They then put in many volunteer hours setting it up. Parent workshops were held—some involving children, some parents-only with childcare provided—regarding matters such as preparing students for the proficiency tests. In addition, the steering committee gave parents the opportunity to participate in the more fundamental decision-making aspects of the school; details on this committee are in the Governance chapter.

According to the Family and Volunteer Programs Director, the average attendance at FSO meetings was 20 parents during 2002-03 year. In previous years, they had averaged 35 parents at the monthly meetings. The Family and Volunteer Programs Director thought this drop in attendance was due to a variety of reasons, some of which, paradoxically, concerned a more parent-driven organization as well as other opportunities for parental involvement. “This was the first year that we had parent officers in place with a more parent led organization. Additionally, we instituted the classroom liaison committee, so many parents are able to offer their feedback on issues or share concerns without physically coming out to a meeting.” Further, she cited “lack of time and information overload” as major barriers for parental involvement.

Other opportunities for parental involvement. Between 2001-02 and 2002-03, numerous elements were added or enhanced to encourage parental involvement in their children’s education. For example, Riverview Scholars provided “keep books” to families: books that students in the kindergarten and first grade take home with them, so the parents can get involved in teaching them to read. An interactive workshop for parents and staff, led by a professional consultant, concerned communication issues between parents and teachers. New policies enforced more teacher-parent interaction; for example, parents were immediately contacted by telephone if their children missed a certain number of homework assignments or had certain disciplinary infractions. According to our surveys, staff satisfaction with parental involvement and influence increased from 2001-02 to 2002-03 (See Table 9:4). Nevertheless, numerous staff wished parental participation were better.

Table 9:4 *Riverview Scholars’ Staff Responses to Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction & School Activities*

<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
2000-01	26	3.8 (0.8)
2001-02	26	2.8 (0.9)
2002-03	29	3.3 (0.9)

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Strongly agree and 5=Strongly disagree.

Limitations to parental involvement. Since a large proportion of the families at Riverview Scholars are headed by single, working mothers, parental participation was difficult to achieve, despite accommodations such as holding events on Saturdays with childcare available. Some parents who were interviewed remarked that they wished they could get more involved in the schools' activities, but it was not feasible due to their busy schedules.

Lack of parent involvement, not just in the management or support of the school but in their child's daily education, was seen by some staff as a major barrier to teaching. Some teachers were frustrated that attempts to engage parents in their children's education were not always successful. One explained, "The parents often fail to follow through with working on a problem. They rarely show up at meetings. You need to grab them in the hall or you won't see them again." One teacher described a solution that worked for her traditional public school, but was not feasible for a school of choice which served a wider range in the community. "At the other public school where I taught, there was never an excuse to miss PTA meetings—we picked the parents up right at their homes. But we can't do that for Riverview Scholars. It's too spread out [geographically]." The teachers discussed how generations of bad experiences with schools had impacted the parent-teacher relationships at Riverview Scholars; parents often played out their expectations of adversarial teacher/family relationships into self-fulfilling prophecies. One teacher described how there should be more outreach to parents, such as coffee klatches or dinners devoted to get parents and staff acquainted with one another in a comfortable, nondefensive atmosphere. Other teachers agreed this could work but sighed, "With what time?"

Despite some staff dissatisfaction with parental involvement, parents for the most part seemed satisfied with the schools' opportunities to get involved (see Table 9:5). One parent whom we interviewed was grateful that the school took such an active concern with his child's academic and behavioral issues, even though it was a hassle for him to take time off work to address them. Another parent, who was an active member of the FSO, was delighted by what she perceived as widespread parental involvement in the school. One parent stated:

I appreciate the fact that family involvement is encouraged and insisted on. The family has a lot of input and involvement. We all know one another and give a great deal of support to the school. I also like the positive reinforcement.

Table 9:5 Riverview Scholars Parents' Responses to the Item: "Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School"

Year	Initial Expectation			Current Experience		
	False	Partly True	True	False	Partly True	True
2000-01	1 (5%)	6 (27%)	15 (68%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	15 (75%)
2001-02	4 (18%)	4 (18%)	14 (64%)	3 (13%)	6 (26%)	14 (61%)
2002-03	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	16 (80%)	5 (23%)	2 (9%)	15 (68%)

In addition, there were various opportunities for community members to volunteer their services to Riverview Scholars. A program called "America Reads" provided tutors for students, to help them develop literacy skills. There were also numerous volunteers from City Year, a service program under AmeriCorps for 17-24 years olds. They tutored the students in literacy and worked with them in the Before/After school program. These volunteers worked with a variety of schools in addition to Riverview Scholars. One remarked at how much better the physical and

social environment was at Riverview Scholars than at the CSMD schools at which he'd worked. Overall, it appeared that Riverview Scholars provided plenty of opportunities for parental and community involvement at various levels, but the actual participation did not always live up to their ideals.

9.5 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at Lifelong Learners & Leaders

LLL offers educational and volunteer opportunities to family members of enrolled students and to older adults in the community . . . We emphasize family involvement in our school because this is so important to a child's academic progress. -Lifelong Learners & Leaders Fact Sheet

As its name implies, family involvement is central to Lifelong Learners & Leaders. Family members are expected to be active participants in their children's education, and numerous events and ongoing opportunities are in place to encourage this involvement. A day of parent-child visitation before the school starts each year affords parents and children an opportunity to visit the school together, before the child comes to school alone. Parent-teacher conferences had 100 percent attendance for all of the first three years. In 2002-2003, according to the director, "We had many family events that were well attended including two performances, end of year awards and graduation, family potluck, roller skating parties, and an end of year picnic." There were also opportunities for parents to visit the school, meet with staff, and observe the student's work during open houses and "portfolio days." In the classrooms prior to such days, students eagerly discussed how they planned to display their projects for such events. Regarding parental involvement, one teacher stated proudly:

My experiences are different than that of my friends who teach in the CMSD. ALL my students' parents came to their parent-teacher conferences! All made this choice. The education of their kids is important. . . The fact that parents have chosen the school makes a difference. They are more involved; they care about their children's education.

Some family members were regular volunteers at LLL as well. Parents volunteered in the classrooms, as chaperones on field trips, and as reading mentors. One family member contributed more than 100 hours as both a reading mentor and a school librarian. Parents contributed financially as well, raising more than \$2,000 toward a playground in 2003. However, there has been little parental involvement in governance. The director stated, "While we work hard to involve parents in the life of the school (parents group, as volunteers, etc.), they have not played a large role in governance yet . . . We have considered when and how to add parent(s) to the board—and they are always advised that board meetings are open to all and that they are welcome to attend."

In 2001-02, a part-time parent coordinator, herself a parent of three children at the school, led a parent organization designed for parents, by parents. There was some infrastructure, but according to the school's director, "It evolves the way parents want it to evolve." During the 2001-02 school year, it evolved from a staff-led organization to one that was completely parent-led. This organization hosts monthly meetings that often have guest speakers from various local organizations. Approximately 15 parents and other caregivers attend each meeting.

Surprisingly, in 2001-2 the results of the Parent/Guardian Charter School Surveys showed that Lifelong Learners & Leaders had the lowest level of parental volunteerism (see Table 9:6). This

may have been due in part to the relatively large proportion of single parents and dual career families, an issue shared with Riverview Scholars and Essentials Academy. However, according to the LLL staff, there were no shortage of volunteers and mentors. One staff member described a uniqueness of the school as “Mentors are made to feel an integral part of the program, trained by [the director] in order to feel confident and competent in helping the students, embraced by staff and students for the contribution they make to our program.”

The director of LLL felt strongly that it was not the parent’s responsibility to influence instruction or school activities, and on LLL’s customized survey for 2002-03 this item was changed to “parents are involved and supportive.” This was seen as the intended responsibility for parents. While some staff were occasionally irritated by parents who were uninvolved or in opposition to some of the school’s policies, for the most part staff were quite pleased with the involvement of parents.

Opportunities for community involvement. In 2003, the Lifelong Learners & Leaders was recognized by The Cleveland Foundations’ Initiative for Successful Aging as an example of an opportunity to benefit senior citizens and youth alike. “Lifelong learning,” one of the cornerstones of Lifelong Learners & Leaders’s mission, was cited by this initiative as one of the keys to successful aging as well. A local television program concerning the Initiative for Successful Aging featured LLL, focusing on one long-term reading mentor but including the perspectives of various staff and students.

The survey results highlighted in Table 9:7 suggest that parental influence at LLL increased from the 2000-01 school year to the 2001-02 school year. Also parents initial expectation in terms of having influence in the direction of the school was largely fulfilled according to their current experience when completing the survey.

Table 9:7 LLL Parents’ Responses to the Item: “Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School”

Year	Initial Expectation			Current Experience		
	False	Partly True	True	False	Partly True	True
2000-01	3 (18%)	9 (53%)	5 (29%)	3 (16%)	10 (53%)	6 (32%)
2001-02	3 (20%)	6 (40%)	6 (40%)	0 (0%)	9 (60%)	6 (40%)

9.6 Opportunities for Parent and Community Involvement at Essentials Academy

Parental involvement was explicitly encouraged at Essentials Academy. Parents signed a contract committing them to a total of four hours volunteer work; however, this was not enforced nor were there consequences for failing to fulfill this expectations. In Essentials Academy’s first year the assistant to the superintendent was in charge of this volunteer recruitment; the director found him well-suited to this position and able to develop a good rapport with parents. School staff tried to get at least two volunteers in the building every day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Table 9:6 LLL’s Staff Responses to Parents Are Involved and supportive

Year	N	Mean (SD)
2000-01	5	3.4 (0.6)
2001-02	7	4.0 (0.8)
2002-03	11	3.7 (0.7)*

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Strongly agree and 5=Strongly disagree.

There were about ten regular volunteers in the building. Two helped in the K-1 room, three assisted in the cafeteria, two helped during dismissal, and one was an accountant who helped with the office work. Other parents helped arrange transportation. After the assistant to the superintendent resigned in 2002, Essentials Academy no longer had the personnel to continue this formal arrangement, but they hoped to reinstate it later.

Although regular parent participation was not always high, parents did pitch in all they could during crises. When the school faced the threat of not being allowed to open, parents lobbied to open it. When Essentials Academy was forced out of its building and into a temporary location at the local YMCA, countless parents helped move furniture and equipment from one building to the other over a four-day period.

Parent-Staff Council. In 2002-03, an organization called the Parent-Staff Council was created. Unfortunately, there was a great deal of internal conflict on the board; much of this was attributed to the leader’s antagonistic governance style. According to the director, this group “never got beyond gripe sessions.” One parent left the school because of conflict on this council. Some parents quit the council and decided to volunteer at Essentials Academy informally instead. Eventually, the Parent-Staff Council disbanded.

Participation in governance and direction of the school. Although one parent served on the board, there was little parental participation in governance. Parents preferred succinct projects, such as helping with graduation ceremonies, to attending formal board meetings. Parents would rather download governance-related materials from the web than attend meetings; the director was hoping to get a more organized system in place for disseminating such information. Relative to the other schools, parents at Essentials Academy had initial expectations that they would have influence in the direction of the school, but when we surveyed them it was apparent that their expectations were not being met (see Table 9:8).

Table 9:8 Essentials Academy’s Parents’ Responses to the Item “Parents Can Influence the Direction and Activities of This School”

Year	Initial Expectation			Current Experience		
	False	Partly True	True	False	Partly True	True
2001-02	3 (25%)	4 (33%)	5 (42%)	4 (36%)	4 (36%)	3 (27%)
2002-03	1 (11%)	3 (33%)	5 (56%)	2 (25%)	5 (63%)	1 (13%)

Table 9:9 illustrates how the staff rated parental involvement and influence at Essentials Academy. These figures suggest that staff perceived parental influence to be less at Essentials Academy than at the other three schools.

Supporting roles. Even after the resignation of the assistant to the superintendent and the break-up of the Parent-Staff Council, many parents volunteered at the school on an informal basis. Parents raked leaves, shoveled snow, and worked in the garden. Often, they wouldn’t even tell the staff—they would just initiate these grounds work projects

Table 9:9 Essentials Academy Staff Responses to Parents Are Involved and Can Influence Instruction and Activities

Year	N	Mean
2001-02	13	3.2 (1.1)
2002-03	16	3.3 (1.0)

Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Strongly agree and 5=Strongly disagree.

independently. Some parents made phone calls; others brought in labels for books. They volunteered in the classrooms and on field trips. “We had to turn parents down for chaperones for advisory trips-too many volunteers!” explained the director. “Staff and parents communicate well, they have a lot in common.”

Providing feedback. Essentials Academy frequently solicited the opinions of parents when making educational decisions. The director designed a survey for the parents that assessed general levels of satisfaction but also sought input on decisions such as whether to instruct middle school boys and girls in separate classrooms or together. In this particular case, both staff and parents agreed that having the boys and girls separated in at least some of the classes was preferable.

Not all parental feedback was positive or even considered constructive. The director described how some parents called her at all hours of the day and night, at work and at home, with complaints. They even showed up at her house. At times, they called ODE to express a grievance. The overall results of the Parent/Guardian Charter School Survey showed less satisfaction than did results at other schools; this was true in both 2001-02 and 2002-03. By 2002-03, the director explained how the parents of the students who had started coming the previous year were more involved and encouraging than the parents who had enrolled their students for the first time in 2002-03. “This year’s parents are different. Maybe they just don’t know how to interact. They probably had bad experiences with school systems when they were young. They enable their kids’ bad behaviors.” Paradoxically, according to the director the students’ behaviors were generally better in 2002-03 than they had been the previous year; particularly disruptive students, such as those who had been expelled from other schools, had been discouraged from enrolling.

9.7 Conclusion

Parental participation, essential to charter schools, was actively encouraged by each of the four schools in this study. As schools of choice, parents are theoretically more likely to participate; as small, decentralized schools, parental participation is more likely to have an impact on the school. Opportunities for parental participation ranged from serving on decision-making boards to active involvement in their children’s education; the latter was considered the most essential.

Although the amount of parental volunteer time varied from school to school, parents at the four charter schools seemed generally satisfied with the opportunities to get involved at their respective schools. Regarding the influence they had in their schools, parents’ expectations were often fulfilled and even exceeded. However, staff were sometimes disappointed by the levels of parental participation, even at schools where plenty of opportunities for it were provided.

Charter schools provide opportunities for community involvement as well. Riverview Scholars provided educational and professional opportunities for young adults, including graduate students. Lifelong Learners & Leaders was recognized by the city of Cleveland as an ideal opportunity for senior citizens to become involved in their community. Each school had mutually beneficial partnerships with other local organizations. Given the interdependence between charter schools and their parents, students, and to some extent, the greater community, perhaps the term “community schools” is especially fitting.

The Dilemmas of Special Education in Charter Schools

In 1975 the passage of new federal laws brought the right to a Free and Public Education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities. Unfortunately, public schools have had to “wrestle with properly accommodating students with disabilities in general education classrooms, finding enough qualified staff members to work with such students, and then, perhaps hardest of all, finding the money to pay for everything” (Sack, 2000). All public schools receive extra funding for students with special needs, and Ohio, unlike some states, pays a differential rate of compensation according to the nature of the student’s disability. However, the extra funds are often insufficient, especially for students with complex disabilities that are expensive to accommodate. For example, in the CMSD one bedridden student cost the district more than \$50,000 per year to educate (A. Masevice, personal communication, June 18, 2003). Human resources to meet the special needs of students are also scarce. Special education teachers are hard to come by, in part because the heavy demand of documentation required by IDEA often detracts from instructional time and leads to burn-out. All of these problems have been amplified in charter schools, which must conform to the same laws but with fewer financial and human resources. The dilemma is, how can charter schools be equitable to students with all types of needs, while remaining financially viable and true to their educational mission?

10.1 Charter Schools: Equity vs. Mission Coherence?

Charter school laws allow for unique school missions and educational approaches; at the same time, they require that charter schools admit all students regardless of their ability level. Meeting the diverse ability levels of students has been a complex issue for charter schools all over the nation (Ahearn, 1999; Ahearn, Lange, Rhim, & McLaughlin, 2001; Fiore, Harwell, Blackorby, & Finnegan, 2000). Many argue that a school of choice should not be expected to reinvent itself in order to meet the needs of every potential student. This creates a public policy dilemma: how much latitude can charter schools have as far as “counseling out” students who do not appear to be a good fit with their schools' particular mission and educational approach?

Some argue that many charter schools already have too much of this latitude, implicitly discouraging certain types of students from enrolling. Some charter schools, particularly those managed by for-profit EMOs, have been found to enroll a disproportionately low number of students with special needs, especially students with moderate or severe disabilities that can be expensive to accommodate (Miron & Nelson, 2002). This was one of the complaints of the lawsuit

against charter schools in Ohio, directed particularly at schools run by for-profit EMOs (OCPT v. OSBE, 2002).

On the other hand, according to representatives of the Office of School Options, some charter schools in Ohio attracted a disproportionately *high* number of students with special needs. One possible reason for this is that parents are dissatisfied with the traditional schools' abilities to accommodate their children's needs. Perhaps they believe that charter schools may better serve these students because of their small size and their focus on student-centered learning. The character education theme in many charter schools also may motivate parents of students with disciplinary problems. We now look at the four charter schools in our study, the proportions of students with special needs at each school, and the possible reasons for the proportions of special needs students at each school.

10.2 Prevalence of Students with Special Needs

How many students with special needs attend the four charter schools in our study? Table 10.1 displays the number and proportion of students identified as having special needs and the students' various types of special needs. However, as the following section explains, the answer to this question is not straightforward, given all the issues involved in identifying students as having special needs.

Table 10.1 Prevalence of Students with Special Needs, 2002-03

	<i>Number of Students With Special Needs</i>	<i>Total # of Students</i>	<i>Percentage of Special Needs Students</i>	<i>Types of Disabilities</i>
Main Street Montessori School	27	220	12.3%	19 speech and language only; 8 LD, DD, or SED
Riverview Scholars	46	295	15.6%	LD, SED, DD
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	8	78	10.3%	6 in speech & language, 1 ED, 1 OHI
Essentials Academy	8 (plus 6 in assessment process)	97	8.2%	LD; behavior
CMSD	10,291	69,534	14.8%	(extremely broad range)

Numerous issues are involved with designating students as having special needs. In some cases, parents enroll their children in charter schools without disclosing that they had been previously diagnosed with a disability, perhaps to give them a chance to succeed in a different environment without a stigmatizing label. In other cases, children who have been struggling in the public schools never get evaluated for special services due to a shortage of special education staff hours. In either case, charter school teachers often discover that a number of their students have needs that require special and sometimes costly services. In such situations, schools cannot be compensated for services unless or until they have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) on record. This has been an issue for all of the schools in our study, both financially and educationally.

In some cases, a charter school's low student-to-teacher ratio, multigrade classrooms, nontraditional curricula, and/or individualized instruction can meet the needs of a child who might otherwise require an IEP (Nathan, 2002). Indeed, all four schools in our study used varying implementations of all of the above methods and were often able to accommodate students differing learning needs with or without IEPs. Riverview Scholars used a literacy program *Project Read/Language Circle*, that was intended to "reach the alternative instructional needs of students, thereby reducing the number of students referred for special services" (Language Circle Enterprises, n.d.). One satisfied parent at Riverview Scholars remarked, "The public school [my son] was attending had literally stripped him of his self esteem. . . The final straw was when the teacher said he had a learning disorder. Luckily I didn't listen and pulled my child out. He is still a little behind, but Riverview Scholars is working hard to change that." Students who do require IEPs may not need as extensive or restrictive interventions as they would in a traditional public school classroom. LLL's director explained, "With class sizes of 15-16 we can generally successfully 'mainstream' a child with behavioral accommodations that would really not work in a class of 25-30. One psychologist remarked that our entire school 'is an intervention.'"

Similarly, staff at all four schools explained that because their schools include nontraditional grade levels, students can be placed in a class that is appropriate to their developmental levels regardless of their chronological age. As the mother of a child at MSM explained, "They don't feel they've failed if they're not at the same level as their peers. The multigrade classes help. They can do things above or below their particular grade level without a problem." A middle school student at MSM said that she would recommend the school to a friend "because you can't get behind or go too far in learning, it's one-on-one." The director of LLL explained a similar advantage of developmentally grouped classrooms. If they remain in a similar multigrade class the following year, "They aren't repeating their original grade level; they pick up where they left off within the same class."

Educational innovations notwithstanding, how many teachers have students in their classrooms who require IEPs? Table 10:2 displays the number of classroom teachers, excluding special education teachers, who have students in their class who require special education services. Responses to this question were compared for 2001-02 and 2002-03 (this question was not asked in 2000-01).

Table 10:2 Classroom Teachers' Responses to the Item "Do You Have Special Education Students in Your Classroom?" (TEACHERS ONLY, SPECIAL ED. TEACHERS EXCLUDED)

<i>School</i>	<i>2001-02</i>		<i>2002-03</i>	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Main Street Montessori School	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)	1 (7.1%)	13 (92.9%)
Riverview Scholars	3 (27.3%)	8 (72.7%)	6 (46.2%)	7 (53.8%)
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	1 (25.0%)	3 (75.0%)	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Essentials Academy	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (100%)
Total	7 (25.9%)	20 (74.1%)	10 (23.3%)	33 (76.7%)

As this table indicates, there were some changes in the proportions of teachers who served students with special needs at both MSM and Riverview Scholars. At MSM, a much larger proportion of teachers had students identified for special services in 2002-03 than 2001-02. However, the director of MSM stated that there had not been a major change in the number of

special education student during this two-year period, and she was unsure why the surveys revealed such a difference. The phenomenon was the opposite at Riverview Scholars, in part due to a number of students who had been mainstreamed in 2001-02 being placed in a special class in 2002-03. Table 10:3 displays the degree of responsibility for which classroom teachers who report having special needs students are responsible for implementing the IEPs. Although there is some variability in all classes except LLL, at all four schools the majority of teachers indicated that they shared the responsibility approximately equally with other staff.

Table 10:3 Responses from Classroom Teachers Regarding the Extent to Which They Are Responsible for Implementing the IEPs for Students with Disabilities

	<i>Not At All Responsible</i>				<i>Solely Responsible</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Main Street Montessori (N=13)	1	1	7	3	1
Riverview Scholars (N=7)	0	0	4	1	2
Lifelong Learners (N=2)	0	0	2	0	0
Essentials Academy (N=9)	0	1	5	3	0
Total (N=31)	1	2	18	7	3

10.3 How Each School Addresses Special Education Issues

The process of evaluating students for special services and developing their IEPs is crucial to children's education, but it can be extremely time-consuming. This issue has received national attention since many special education staff have been leaving the field because of the excessive paperwork demands and its impact on teaching (Goldstein, 2003; Sack, 2000). Charter schools must uphold the same laws regarding IEPs as other public schools, but the IEP paperwork mandates can be especially burdensome for sparsely staffed charter schools. If students' IEPs are to be consistent with the schools' unique missions and philosophies, even more time and effort may have to be put into developing or revising them. We now turn our attention to how each school addresses the issues of students' special needs and the specific concerns in meeting the students' needs in their unique setting.

Main Street Montessori School

MSM's special education instructor stated that her reason for joining the school was "Principal of school very caring and committed to the students, especially the special needs kids." At MSM, 27 out of 220 students have special needs; however, 19 of these students require speech therapy only. Disabilities among the other 8 students include Learning Disabilities, developmental disability, and severe emotional disturbance. All of the students are mainstreamed. Sometimes the students with special needs are pulled out of their classrooms for special services, sometimes the special education teacher or other specialists meet with the students in their individual classroom. A satisfied parent remarked, "The school seems to be aware right away that a child needs additional help. Unlike public schools, they give the problem help right away. . ." However, there have been dilemmas regarding students who have trouble adapting to Montessori's child-directed

expectations. One teacher stated that the school's biggest problem was the influx of students from other schools who had serious behavior problems.

The management company plays a major role in identifying and servicing students with special needs. A psychologist, special education coordinator, speech therapist, and occupational therapist are all hired out through the management company. Many of these management company staff are involved in MSM's intervention assistance, which involves a team process to identify students with special needs. The special education coordinator helps conduct the observations. The psychologist conducts all the assessments including achievement tests, IQ tests, behavioral observations, and interviews with students. She also attends IEP meetings to explain the results of testing. The management company was quite proud of the special education services it was able to provide for all its schools and publicized this information at public meetings regarding charter schools and the services it provided for them. One company staff explained how "Two elected officials left a management company meeting very impressed. They'd previously had misinformation that we can select out special education kids."

The helpfulness of the management company in identifying and educating students with special needs is somewhat of a paradox. On one hand, the involvement of company requires somewhat of a departure from the original Montessori philosophy, which was designed to be more individualistic than the current MSM hybrid style. On the other hand, the management company makes resources available for students with special needs that otherwise would be much more difficult to come by. Unlike private Montessori schools MSM must serve students with all types of special needs, and the management company helps facilitate this. By contrast, Miron & Nelson (2002) found that schools who utilize EMO's tend to have the lowest proportion of students with special needs.

Riverview Scholars

Riverview Scholars had the highest proportion of students identified for special services and many others who were identified as needing to be evaluated for services. There were a great number of staff to address their needs, including a full-time psychologist and two special education teachers. However, the school struggled to keep up with the large number of needs. One teacher expressed, "We need greater financial resources to hire more staff--aides, full-time speech, more OT, and additional special ed. teachers to provide Title 1 services, pull-out children on IEPs. We have a disproportionately high number of students who would benefit from receiving special education services and not enough manpower to provide these services."

The principal of Riverview Scholars stated that they identified new students with special needs quite often. She explained, "Over half the new students that come here we wind up evaluating. Five of the new third graders have come in at a first grade level. They were never identified as having special needs by CMSD. We have fourth graders who come in at an early second grade level. We've had students who've been retained twice, but never evaluated. We had a third grader who age-wise should've been a fifth grader; he's now in special education." She elaborated the difficulties in getting students assessed for special services. "The process to get a student evaluated and get an IEP takes a whole month! The student must be tested; parents must come in. . . how can you even set reasonable goals for the students or the school under these circumstances?" Many other students were not officially designated as having special educational needs but did have emotional or behavioral needs that required the intervention of their social worker. As of January 2003, at least 40 (13.6 percent) of Riverview Scholars' students had been serviced by the social worker.

Why are there so many students with special needs at Riverview Scholars? According to the principal, "The first year the school opened, numerous students with special needs were enrolled. Their parents told other parents what a great job Riverview Scholars did with their children. Even doctors recommend us." (This was confirmed on at least one parent survey last year.) She then described the paradox of being successful with students with special needs, a paradox that a board member had also described the previous year: the supply of human resources had difficulty keeping up with the demand. Some parents and staff indicated by both survey and interview that they were concerned about the large proportion of students with behavior problems. In 2002, one parent listed this as the reason she was withdrawing her daughter from the school. Some staff were skeptical about their school's ability to meet the needs of students with the most severe behavioral problems. One stated, "If we can't accommodate them, they aren't getting the help they need and they are interfering with the other students' learning."

In 2002-03, some additional changes were made to accommodate students' various special needs. A full-time psychologist was hired in response to concerns that a half-time psychologist had not been sufficient the previous year. Multigrade classrooms, or "split" classrooms, were created for students in grades 1-2, 2-3, or 3-4 who were particularly behind academically. There were also some self-contained classrooms for students with emotional handicaps, developmental handicaps, or severe learning disabilities; the previous years, such students had been mainstreamed, but pulled out for special services. Some staff thought this was a change for the better. "These kids had really struggled in the regular classes, and they were teased and victimized by the other kids. They are doing much better now socially." One teacher added, "Ideally, they should be mainstreamed, but it's not feasible yet because we need more aides." However, other staff felt strongly that the decision to create self-contained classrooms was based on efficiency for the staff, not the best interest of the students. One opined, "The teachers need to be taught how to deal with difficult children so they don't have to be with [the special education teacher] all day."

The school administration decided to discontinue the special education classroom for the 2003-04 school year. The principal explained, "We will have full inclusion for the special education students since our most needy left as fifth graders and those remaining have done so well. They are ready for the classroom with support." The multiage classrooms would be discontinued as well, "due to difficulty with maintaining numbers and placement." For the 2003-04 school year, the Riverview Scholars board was also in the process of negotiating rent for additional rooms in its Temple building for the purposes of special education activities and counseling. These decisions illustrate how Riverview Scholars was continuously adapting its educational approaches to best meet the ever-changing special needs of its student body.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders

We sometimes find ourselves in a situation where we can meet the child's learning needs without putting the stigmatizing label of special on him/her. That gives the child a chance to progress without the label. If we are successful, the label is never necessary. However, if the child is leaving LLL and the label is necessary for more individualized learning elsewhere, we will do the evaluation process and get that in place before the child leaves to pave the way the Principal/Director of LLL

LLL had a relatively low proportion of students with IEPs, as well as a low proportion of teachers who taught students identified for special services. However, much of this was due to the school's philosophy of grouping students by their developmental level regardless of their age and of providing individualized instruction to all students, not just those classified as requiring IEPs. The

director of LLL asserted, "[W]e really have not seen learning problems that are not due to home factors, language issues, or behavior stuff. I think [learning disabled] is a highly overused category in regular schools (and a main reason I left that field in the first place)." She later stated that the school has not had to identify any student as learning disabled. One student who had previously been identified as "developmentally disabled" was found to have an IQ of 85—below average, but well within the normal range. This classification was removed, and with sufficient individualized instruction, he was able to succeed in a regular classroom without an IEP.

Nevertheless, there were students who required special services in addition to the individualized instruction in developmentally appropriate classes. Six students had speech and language services, one required services for behavioral difficulties, and one was classified as "other health impaired." There was no full-time special education instructor to create or revise IEPs for these students. The director of Lifelong Learners & Leaders lamented, "We had quite a few students whose IEPs [from their prior schools] were just bad and not compatible with our philosophy. Redoing several MFEs [Multi-factorial evaluations] and IEPs, especially without a regular school psychologist on staff, has taken an amazingly huge amount of time. I even end up typing all the forms and playing the main role in managing the special education requirements."

However, these efforts appeared to pay off. For example, one student had severe emotional and behavioral problems and a long list of previous diagnoses prior to enrolling at LLL. The director assumed that the parents had been getting this child evaluated and reevaluated until they found an appropriate diagnosis and treatment. While she was enrolled at LLL, she was diagnosed with a serious psychiatric condition and classified educationally as having an Emotional Disturbance (ED). She was placed on a strict behavior plan and given a full-time aide, and with this structure she was able to make great strides behaviorally and academically. However, once she was preparing to graduate from the fourth grade, her family had to look for a new school. The family had not had good experiences with the public schools, but various parochial and private schools saw the "Emotional Disturbance" label in her records and refused to let her parents enroll her. Some of her teachers expressed that since her behavior had improved so dramatically, she no longer needed to be classified as ED. However, it appeared that she was able to succeed only because she had appropriate services; if the label were removed, she wouldn't get the services to which she was entitled. The stress of this dilemma caused the girl to temporarily regress emotionally. She was finally recategorized as "OHI (other health impaired)-behavior issues," a label which still entitles her to have full time aide, but is somewhat less stigmatizing than ED.

Even with individualized instruction in conjunction with well-designed IEPs, LLL—like many other charter schools—could not feasibly meet the special needs of every student or their parents' requests for particular accommodations. At one point the parent of a child with severe, multiple disabilities inquired about sending her child to Lifelong Learners & Leaders so that he could be "mainstreamed" there. The principal-director informed the parent that he should only be mainstreamed if it were in his best educational interest, but the parents had a right to refuse a pull-out. If he were placed in a pull-out class at LLL, he would be the only child in it—an alternative far more isolating than a pull-out class in a school that served a number of students with similar needs. Eventually, this parent opted to keep her child in his current school, where an appropriate pull-out class was available. The principal of LLL lamented, "A school with 78 kids can't offer range the of special education services that a larger school system can offer. Can we realistically provide the same kinds of things?"

Essentials Academy

As of Spring 2003 Essentials Academy had eight students with IEPs and six more in the process of evaluation for special services. Most of these students' disabilities were fairly mild, such as learning disabilities and behavior problems. According to the director, many more were not identified, but probably had ADHD. Some parents wouldn't sign papers permitting their children to be evaluated for special services because they didn't want them categorized. This was problematic because schools must provide necessary services, but they won't get paid unless parents sign the permission forms.

The director of Essentials Academy described a particularly difficult situation with a parent whose child had special needs. She refused to sign the IEP, wanting it modified in ways that were not feasible. Despite this refusal, she insisted on holding the school to the letter of the IEP. However, she refused to let the school psychologist see her child. She brought in advocates who were negative toward Essentials Academy staff, and even threatened a lawsuit. She came into school every day, disrupting the classroom. In response, the school started a new policy regarding visitation, which this parent thought was unfair. She did appreciate the special education teacher; unfortunately, he had to resign after suffering a stroke. According to the school's director, her child was really developing well, but his mother continued to be disruptive. She eventually left and enrolled her son in a private school, but staff there told her he was uneducable. She wanted to re-enroll him at Essentials Academy, but because of her prior disruptiveness and threats of a lawsuit, the director refused. The director sighed that some parents made demands regarding their children's special needs that were so outrageous, some charter school advocates speculated that they were part of a plot to destroy charter schools financially and/or litigiously.

According to the director, during Essentials Academy's first year a large number of delinquent or behavior-disordered students enrolled at Essentials Academy. The charter school director also claimed that when public school administrators inquired about enrolling behavior-disordered students, she was firm that Essentials Academy was a school for underachievers, not an "alternative" school for delinquent students. Essentials Academy's director explained that as a designated "at risk" school, there was more leeway in being selective about the types of students whom they enrolled. Indeed, HB 282 does state "admission may be limited to . . . students that meet a definition of 'at-risk,' as defined in the contract."¹

However, ODE staff explained that the "at risk" designation absolves the schools of the requirement to provide general education classes to all students, but does not give schools the right to discriminate on the basis of abilities or disabilities (S. Burigana, personal communication, June 17, 2003). School staff can advise families that their child's profile does not match their targeted "at risk" group, but must accept the students if the parents still opt to enroll them. For example, one parent chose to enroll one of her children in a school designed specifically for children with autism, even though this child did not have autism or any related conditions. Her other child, who did have autism, attended this school and she wanted the siblings to attend the school together. The school staff provided a special curriculum for this nonautistic student. Essentials Academy's practice of "counseling out" certain students, while not flagrantly illegal, remains questionable.

We now see some of the unique issues that each charter school in our study has regarding students' special needs and ways to meet them. We now turn our attention to how satisfied staff and parents are with the services that each school provides for students with special needs.

¹ http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/BillText123/123_HB_282_1_Y.htm

10.4 Satisfaction with Special Education Services

Table 10:4 illustrates the staffs' agreement with the statement *This school provides appropriate special education services for students who require it*. The staff at Riverview Scholars had the lowest mean and greatest variability regarding satisfaction with special services, despite a substantial number of programs put in place for students with special needs. This is most likely due to the larger number and proportion of students with special needs, as well as controversy over the most appropriate methods for accommodating their needs.

Table 10:4 Responses from Teachers and Staff Regarding the School's Ability to Provide Appropriate Special Education Services for Students Who Require Them

	<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>				<i>Very Satisfied</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Main Street Montessori (N=20)	1 (5%)	2 (10.0%)	5 (25%)	6 (30%)	6 (30%)
Riverview Scholars (N=31)	4 (12.9%)	11 (35.5%)	4 (12.9%)	8 (25.8%)	4 (12.9%)
Lifelong Learners (N=11)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (36.3%)	4 (36.3%)	3 (27.3%)
Essentials Academy (N=16)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	7 (43.7%)	5 (31.3%)	3 (18.8%)

No items on the parents' survey specifically addressed the fulfillment of students' special needs. However, one item concerned the expected and experienced availability of support services ("counseling, health care, etc."). This question was asked of both parents and teachers in 2001-02 and 2002-03. There was a general trend of parents being somewhat less satisfied with support services in 2002-03 than in 2001-02. However, there were no indicators as to why this was the case.

According to staff interviews, at all four of the schools in our study there were children who were advised to transfer to schools that could better accommodate their special needs. Most reenrolled with CMSD, but one enrolled at another charter school. At this point there has been no known controversy over such actions at any of the four schools. At least in these schools, although the balance between adherence to a unique mission and serving the special needs of students has been challenging, it has not fueled litigation as it has elsewhere.

10.5 Summary

Providing effective special education is a conundrum for all public schools, but maybe even more difficult for charter schools. Although charter schools must uphold the same IDEA laws as all other public schools, they often lack the resources that a large, centralized district can provide. In addition, charter schools are often founded around a particular mission and educational approach, and not all students can be appropriately educated in this manner. There are questions as to how much charter schools should be expected to adapt themselves to meet the needs of every potential student.

All four schools in our study had a significant number of students with special needs and different methods of addressing them. MSM found the management company quite helpful in meeting the special needs of its students, but as chapter 6 details, the involvement of this EMO came at a price. Riverview Scholars had an unusually large and ever growing proportion of

students with special needs and controversies among the staff as to the best ways to address them. They were continuously developing new methods of addressing these needs, but as more and more families heard about their success with such students, they had difficulty keeping up with the demand. LLL was able to serve a wide range of student needs with its small classrooms and individualized instruction, but there were limits on what types of needs they were able to accommodate. Essentials Academy reported some difficulties with students with seemingly intractable behavior problems as well as uncooperative parents who constantly put the school staff on the defensive. Contrary to the purposes of the “at risk” status as explained by ODE staff, they used this status to define their targeted student body, explaining to prospective families that “at risk” did not include severe behavior problems.

Market Accountability: Consumer Satisfaction with the Charter Schools

For generations, the only families who could exercise school choice were those wealthy enough to afford either a private school or a relocation to a public district with a superior school system (Bainbridge, 2002). Charter schools, along with other alternatives such as vouchers and home schooling, introduced school choice to a broader array of families.

As parents ultimately make the choice to enroll their children in charter schools, their satisfaction with these schools is essential. Disappointed parents may transfer their children out of charter schools. When this happens, charter schools lose the funds distributed to them on the basis of those students' enrollment. Therefore, parental satisfaction may be essential to the fiscal survival of a charter school. Student satisfaction is crucial as well, because students are also considered primary consumers. Although their parents may have the final authority over whether to enroll their children, undoubtedly the students' opinions on this matter carry some weight. Indeed, this is the crux of the market model of accountability; satisfied families will remain with the charter schools of their choice, while dissatisfied families will withdraw and enroll elsewhere (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

According to one of the directors, "The most important measures of parent satisfaction are not what parents say on a survey, but what decisions they make with regard to enrollment." In this chapter, we start by looking at the rates of student retention at each school and the reasons for retention or attrition. Through data gleaned from surveys and interviews, we also examine other indicators of customer satisfaction. We take a closer look at parental satisfaction with the charter schools and the reasons behind it. Last, but certainly not least, we look at the students' perspectives on the charter schools.

11.1 Consumer Demand: Student Retention

How many students leave the charter schools in our study each year and why? Before addressing this question, we will briefly explore how many students leave the CMSD schools each year and why. Cleveland is a fairly mobile district; 18 percent of students from a total of 52 CMSD schools left in the middle of the 2000-01 year¹. Much of this has been attributed to poverty in the area;

¹ http://www.cleveland.k12.oh.us/research/reporting/Mobilty_and_Stabilty_2000_2001_School_Year.PDF

families move to other neighborhoods or into family member's homes when they can no longer afford housing in a certain neighborhood (Clark, 2001).

However, because of longstanding problems with the CMSD (see Chapter 14), it is likely that some families move out of the district in order to enroll their students in a superior public school system. As of 2000, the elementary school with the lowest poverty rate in CMSD had 58 percent of its students qualifying for free and reduced lunch; some neighborhoods had rates as high as 97 percent (CMSD, 2000). This suggests that wealthier families in the Cleveland area tend to send their children to private schools or relocate to more affluent suburban districts. However, measures of the latter phenomenon would be extremely hard to attain, since obviously numerous factors enter in to families' decisions to relocate.

In fiscal year 2002, 5.2 percent of Cleveland's students opted out of the district public school systems specifically to enroll in the 16 charter schools in the city, plus an additional 13 charter schools (including cyberschools) outside the district (LOEO, 2003a, b; Masevice, 2003). However, the main reason that students left the CMSD was family relocation to another district. For 3 out of the 4 charter schools in our study, this was also the main cause of student attrition.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. LLL has experienced a high level of student retention both within and between school years. During 2001-02, only 4 of the 64 students (6.3 percent) left during the school year, none out of dissatisfaction with the school. All 4 left due to a change of residence the precluded feasible transportation to LLL. Fifty-eight of the 60 students (97 percent) enrolled at the end of the year reenrolled for 2002-03. The families of the 2 who did not reenroll "attempted to do so after the open enrollment period ended and could not be accommodated." Since then, LLL has changed its policies in order to retain more students. After a couple of the families moved out of the district but very much wanted to remain with LLL, the school enlarged its catchment area to include surrounding school districts.

Between 2002-03 and 2003-04, two families pulled their children out of LLL because of dissatisfaction with the school. The director said that these parents had various complaints from day one, and she wondered why they had chosen LLL in the first place. For example, one parent was irate about her daughter cleaning up the bathroom, although she, along with the rest of the class, had volunteered for this task. Another parent was upset over the "zero tolerance" policy for hitting. The director said that if families didn't agree with the school policies, they were free to leave. A couple families simply did not re-enroll their children before the stated deadline, despite numerous notices from the school. One was quite annoyed when she learned that it was too late to enroll her child. Despite these isolated cases, most families remain quite satisfied with the school and keep their children enrolled year after year.

Main Street Montessori School . Between 2002-03 and 2003-04, a total of 30 students from 21 families left MSM. Of the 21 families who left, 9 moved to other school districts or states, 4 transferred because of transportation issues, and 6 felt that other schools would better suit their children's needs (e.g., religious preferences, special education, purer Montessori). One was unhappy with the class placement, and one wanted her child to complete kindergarten at his current Montessori school and transfer into MSM by first grade. As one teacher explained, "This is a school of choice. They don't have to come here. They are free to go elsewhere. But it doesn't happen too often." Explaining the reasons for dissatisfaction, she continued, "Some parents are dissatisfied because we set high expectations. We had some parents who were enabling their children not to work hard." Nevertheless, "Most families leave because of a job transfer. Very few

leave because they are dissatisfied.” Indeed, according to school staff this had been the pattern for previous years as well.

Family satisfaction with MSM helped the school maintain its prior students and recruit new ones as well. A teacher explained how satisfied parents encouraged other families to enroll at MSM. “The school has grown because of word of mouth. Not much recruitment or advertising. Mainly siblings, friends, and family of the original 30 kids. Members of churches, friends etc . . . There is a waiting list.” However, the director explained that it was difficult to count how many students were on the waiting list at any point in time. Families are understandably reluctant to transfer their children multiple times to different schools. Therefore, once they are wait-listed, they often enroll elsewhere and lose interest in transferring to MSM.

Riverview Scholars. Riverview Scholars retained 85 percent of its students between 2001-02 and 2002-03. The executive director explained that, according to exit interviews with parents, turnover was somewhat higher after the school’s third year because of a “3 strikes and you’re out” mentality. In other words, parents gave the school 3 years to stabilize; and after the third year, some parents grew impatient and transferred their students elsewhere. There were concerns that the school “didn’t have its act together regarding classroom management and student discipline.” Indeed, in 2001-02 one mother stated on her survey that she was not planning to reenroll her child because other students’ pervasive behavior problems had disrupted teaching and learning.

However, various enrollment factors indicated that most families were satisfied with Riverview Scholars. A number of families who had previously withdrawn their children re-enrolled them at Riverview Scholars in 2002-03 and “are pleased.” There were 15 students (5 percent of enrollment) who left in the middle of the 2003-04 year. Of those 15, 6 moved out of the area, 1 had health issues, 6 were unhappy with the school, and 2 left for other, unspecified reasons. In addition, Riverview Scholars had no trouble keeping up its enrollment and in fact had a substantial waiting list. According to Riverview Scholars’ Family and Volunteer Programs Director, “Last year [for the 2002-03 school year] we had about 80 applications and roughly 60 on the wait list for grades K-5, more than half for kindergarten. Keep in mind the wait list is consistently growing since we continue to put names on it throughout the school year.”

Essentials Academy. Essentials Academy had the highest student attrition among the four schools, and was the only school of the four that had experienced problems attaining full enrollment. During its first year, Essentials Academy lost 45 students before it even opened because the school did not have a building until the end of September, the very last possible day that it was permitted to open for the year. Throughout the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years turnover among students continued to be somewhat high, especially at the oldest grade levels. Four of the five high school students left Essentials Academy mid-year in 2002-03; the director had originally planned on serving up to 20 at-risk high school students. The director attributed turnover among other students to a variety of reasons.

Essentials Academy’s director explained how some parents who had pulled their kids out of Essentials Academy later tried to get them back in. “Kids come in, they don’t study, don’t do well, then they leave. Then they get kicked out of other schools and try to come back here.” By the end of the second year, the director was considering refusing reenrollment to or counseling out families who were continually disruptive. For example, a girl who had been in 3 or 4 different schools prior to Essentials Academy, was frequently verbally abusive to teachers. When the school disciplined her, her parents defensively told the director that the teachers were disrespecting their daughter

and that she had a right to speak her mind. The director sighed, “My posture is changing. I might need to help students like this find another school.” Despite such concerns, the director was confident they could attract enough students to double enrollment for the following year.

By the 2003-04 school year, according to one staff member, 150 students were enrolled, although the director had originally planned for 200. It was unclear whether the school board and administration had decided to enroll fewer students than originally planned for 2003-04, if the school failed to attract 200 students, or if the staff person was simply mistaken as to the enrollment figures.

11.2 Parental Satisfaction with the Charter Schools

Just as there was considerable variation in teacher/staff satisfaction with the four schools (See Chapters 7-8), there was variation on parents’ satisfaction. Indeed, just as there were two general patterns of satisfaction (near unanimously high satisfaction vs. wide range of satisfaction and dissatisfaction) among the teachers and staff, these two patterns were also present for the parents. While there appeared to be more dissatisfied teachers at Riverview Scholars than at the other three schools, the parents at Riverview Scholars seemed satisfied with most issues. Indeed, one recurrent complaint among the parents at Riverview Scholars was that they needed to “keep the faculty happy” and decrease the staff turnover. On the other hand, Essentials Academy parents were less satisfied with their school than were parents at the other schools though Essentials Academy’s reported teacher/staff satisfaction was fairly high.

Satisfaction with instruction may be central to parental fulfillment. “Good teachers and high quality of instruction” was the number 1 reason parents enrolled their children in their respective schools, with “I prefer the emphasis and educational philosophy of this school” and “Academic reputation (high standards) of this school” not far behind (see chapter 5). To measure satisfaction, a scale was developed using exploratory factor analysis on the 15 items related to parent satisfaction. One scale emerged that included items related to satisfaction with instruction. Table 11:1 displays these items.

Table 11:1 Items on the *Satisfaction with Instruction* Index

This school is meeting students’ needs that could not be addressed at other local schools.
I am satisfied with the school’s curriculum.
I am satisfied with the instruction offered.
I think the school has a bright future.
This school has high standards and expectations for students.
Teachers and school leaders are accountable for student achievement/performance.

The scores for the index of satisfaction with instruction (Table 11:2) varied in the same general pattern as described earlier. ANOVA showed that 2001-02 and 2002-03, Essentials Academy parents were significantly less satisfied with instruction than were parents at the other three schools. However, Essentials Academy had a lower response rate than the other three schools. Those with the strongest opinions may have been the most likely to complete their surveys. Furthermore, the variance in scores was higher for Essentials Academy than for the other three schools. Then again, the high attrition rate may confirm parental dissatisfaction with the schools.

Apparently, the process of the instruction, rather than simply the results, were important to the parents. When asked about the positive aspects of the school, many parents referred to the school's particular educational approach (e.g., Montessori, whole-language, hands-on learning, African-centered). The survey items reflect this process orientation as well. These responses support the theory that families at charter schools will sort according to their educational preferences.

Table 11:2 Mean Scores for Parent Satisfaction with Curriculum and Instruction

School	Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Main Street Montessori	2000-01	17	4.3	0.6
	2001-02	26	4.6	0.5
	2002-03	27	4.3	0.8
Riverview Scholars	2000-01	25	4.2	0.9
	2001-02	25	4.1	0.9
	2002-03	24	4.1	0.9
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	2000-01	22	4.6	0.5
	2001-02	16	4.8	0.4
	2002-03	17	4.5	0.7
Essentials Academy	2001-02	13	3.3	1.4
	2002-03	10	2.9	1.5

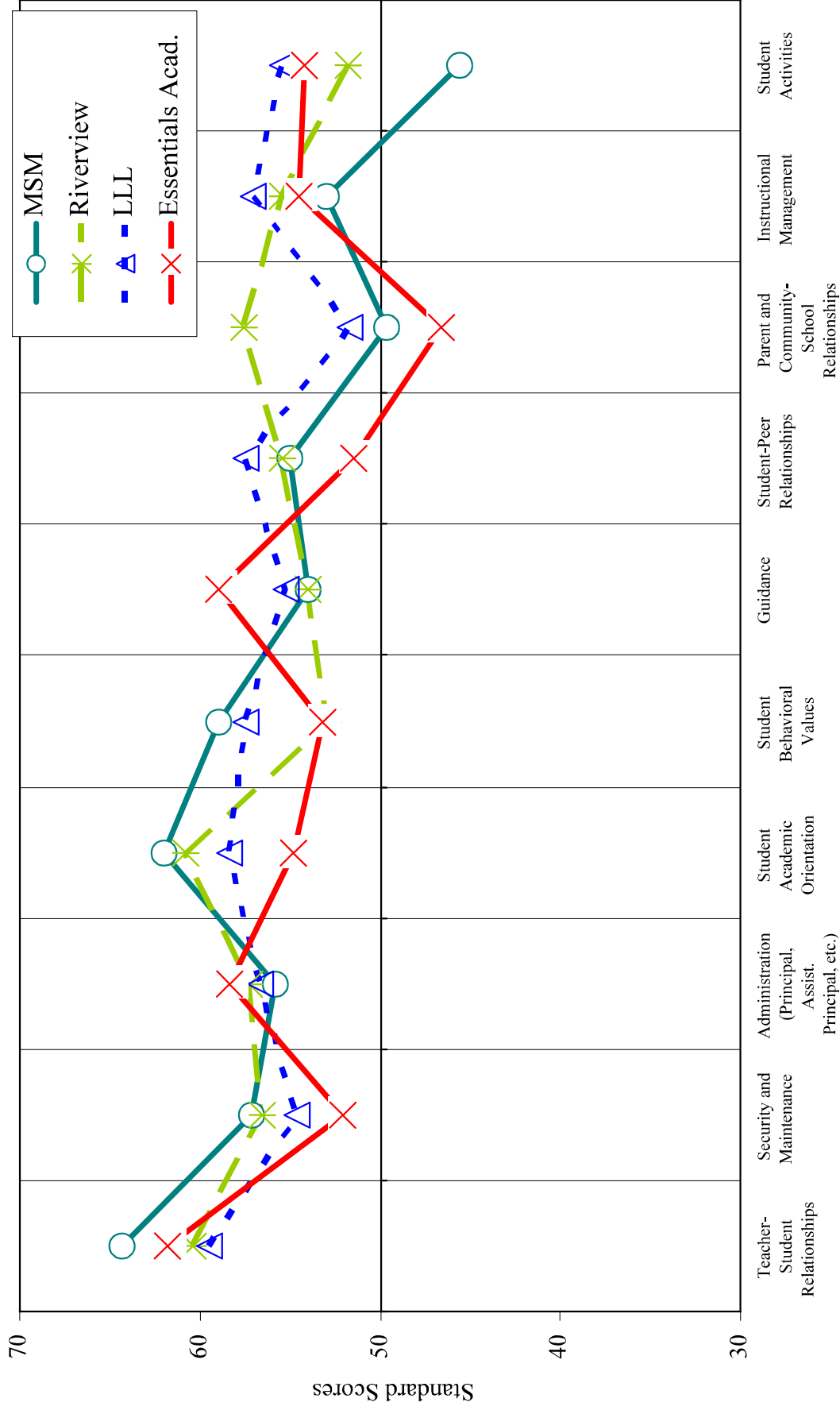
Note: The items on the survey were scaled where 1=Very dissatisfied and 5=Very satisfied.

11.3 School Climate

Instruction is not the only reason that parents choose to enroll their children in charter schools, nor is it the only criterion by which they evaluate the schools they choose. The relationships a school fosters between and among students, teachers, and parents are often considered essential. Indeed, a repeated theme at each school in our study was how the positive school climate—particularly the relationships among the administrators, teachers, parents, and students—was among the main reasons people chose, despite all the challenges, to become involved and stay involved with their respective charter schools.

One instrument we used to assess the level of parents' satisfaction with the school climate in 2001-02 was the School Climate Survey, the same survey we used with the teachers and staff at each school. Please see Table 8:1 in Chapter 8 for the scales on the School Climate Survey. Figure 11:1 displays the results of each scale of the School Climate Survey for each of the four schools. The national norms for each scale are presented as well. Notably, for almost every scale for every school, results exceeded national norms. Once again, the scales for "guidance" and "activities" may not be interpretable, since these scales are more appropriate for schools having older students and/or more extracurricular activities.

Figure 11:1 School Climate Survey: Parents/Guardians Results



National norms designated by the 50th percentile

Open-ended comments regarding the positive aspects of the school on the parents' surveys indicated an emphasis on the interpersonal aspects of school climate. For example, a parent at Lifelong Learners & Leaders commented, "Everyone is caring and personable and I believe this helps the learning." A parent at MSM praised "Teachers, principal, parent volunteers, school's spirit of joy, security and well-being. . . willingness to get better, to provide more services and a better environment for our children."

We now look at some of the components of school climate: individual attention, a sense of community, and school safety.

Individual attention. One aspect of school climate that is especially salient to charter schools is the amount of individual attention that each student receives. As Table 11:3 indicates, expectations for this were quite high at the three schools where this question was asked. However, there was considerable variation as far as fulfillment of this item. Expectations were generally met at MSM. A parent at MSM stated that the most positive aspects of the school included, "wonderful student to teacher ratio. A Montessori school that individually meets each students needs. Excellent teachers and principal who take an interest in us as a family. Able to be very actively involved as a parent. A very nurturing environment." The customized surveys for Lifelong Learners & Leaders did not have an item comparing expectations to experiences as far as individual attention was concerned. However, they did have an item measuring agreement with the statement "My child receives enough individual attention." For this item, the mean score was 4.4 (SD=0.6) on a 5-point Likert scale. One parent at Lifelong Learners & Leaders stated, "Teacher-student relationship appears to be the greatest strength of LLL. The teachers pay good attention to every student, and help them according to their individual needs." However, these expectations for individual attention were not met as frequently at Riverview Scholars and especially at Essentials Academy, where 6 out of 9 parents marked this item as "false." However, as with all other parent survey items the low response rate on Essentials Academy's surveys must be taken into account.

Table 11:3 Expectations and Current Experiences for the Item, *My Child Will Receive/is Receiving Sufficient Individual Attention*

	<u>Initial Expectation</u>			<u>Current Experience</u>		
	<i>False</i>	<i>Partly True</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>False</i>	<i>Partly True</i>	<i>True</i>
Main Street Montessori	0 (0%)	3 (12.5%)	21 (87.5%)	1 (4.0%)	3 (12.0%)	21 (84.0%)
Riverview Scholars	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	23 (95.8%)	3 (12.5%)	5 (20.8%)	16 (66.7%)
Essentials Academy	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	6 (66.7%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (11.1%)

A Sense of Community. While individual attention is important, a sense of community may be an overarching component of school climate. For this reason, perhaps it is especially fitting that charter schools in Ohio are referred to as "community schools." As stated on the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation's Web site (n.d.), "[Charter schools] tend to be small, intimate schools where everyone knows everyone else's name—the kind of place one would call 'community.'" A parent at Riverview Scholars stated that the most unique aspect of the school was that "The family involvement is strong and there is a feeling of community." One item on the Parents Charter School Survey directly addressed the question: "This school reflects a community atmosphere." At three of the four schools, at least 83 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this item. Table 11:4 displays the results of this item.

Table 11:4 Parent Responses to the Item, *This School Reflects a Community Atmosphere*

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Main Street Montessori (N=24)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.2%)	5 (20.8%)	18 (75.0%)
Riverview Scholars (N=24)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.2%)	3 (12.5%)	8 (33.3%)	12 (50.0%)
Lifelong Learners & Leaders (N=14)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)	13 (92.9%)
Essentials Academy (N=10)	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (40.0%)
Total (N=72)	3 (4.2%)	2 (2.8%)	6 (8.3%)	14 (19.4%)	47 (65.3%)

As one parent from Riverview Scholars emphasized about the school climate:

Staff and teachers try their best to meet everyone and make a family-type setting. The classrooms are not too crowded. The school has stood behind any statement made during orientation. Teachers are very helpful and caring about children's learning

A parent at Lifelong Learners and Leaders described the school as having:

Community involvement, small class size, family, and friendly atmosphere. Principal has really moved forward with the things the school is supposed to offer from the onset. School takes parents concerns seriously.

Safety. School safety is one important aspect of school climate. Furthermore, it was one of the top reasons parents gave for enrolling their children in their respective charter schools (see chapter 5). Table 11:5 displays the numbers and percentages of surveyed parents at each school who reported concerns about safety in 2002-03. Interestingly, the rates at which parents reported safety concerns was fairly consistent year to year, but the reasons were somewhat different. In 2001-02, more parents expressed concerns about the buildings themselves. This is not surprising, given that all four schools shared buildings with other organizations at the time, and especially because of Essentials Academy's problems finding a safe facility. In both 2001-02 and 2002-03, there were a number of concerns about other students' behavior being problematic, particularly at Essentials Academy.

Table 11:5 *Do You Have Concerns About Your Child's Safety at School? (2002-03)*

	No	Yes
Main Street Montessori (N=27)	24 (88.9%)	3 (11.1%)
Riverview Scholars (N=24)	23 (95.8%)	1 (4.2%)
Lifelong Learners & Leaders (N=17)	14 (82.4%)	3 (17.6%)
Essentials Academy (N=10)	4 (40.0%)	6 (60.0%)

11.4 Student Satisfaction

Students are the ultimate consumers of charter schools. We administered Student Charter School Surveys to grades 5-7 at MSM, the fifth graders at Riverview Scholars, and grade 5-8 students at Essentials Academy. (See Chapter 2 for more details on the surveys and their administration.) The

students were more focused during the 2002-03 administration of the survey than they had been during the 2001-02 administration, and seemed to have less difficulty understanding the items.

The results of some of the survey items are presented in Table 11:6. There were substantial differences among the three schools on most of the items. One exception was the item “This school provides enough extracurricular activities”; all three schools scored uniformly low on this item. Conversely, all three schools scored rather high on the item, “Teachers and administrators know me by name.” However, in general, students at MSM seemed more satisfied with their school than students at Riverview Scholars or Essentials Academy.

MSM students reported feeling much safer at their school than did Essentials Academy students at theirs, though reasons for a lack of safety at Essentials Academy were not provided. MSM students were also more satisfied with the grades they received. MSM students were somewhat more likely to agree that they were more interested in learning at their current school than at their previous school. Some of these differences may be attributed to the characteristics of students enrolled at each respective school. As Chapter 5 indicates, families who enrolled their children in Essentials Academy or Riverview Scholars were far more likely to have children with special needs unmet at previous schools, referrals from previous schools, and/or a history of poor scholastic performance.

The most notable differences were responses, both on the survey and during the administration thereof, to the item, *If the teacher left the room, most students would continue to work on their assignments*. Most students at MSM responded positively to this item; this is consistent with the school’s emphasis on child-directed learning and with the evaluator’s observations of students’ independent work in the classroom. However, not only did students at Riverview Scholars and Essentials Academy give this a very low mark, but there was considerable laughter after this item was read out loud, especially at Essentials Academy.

Table 11:6 Student’s Perceptions of Their Schools

	MSM	RS	EA
I am learning more here than at the previous school	4.2 (1.1)	3.8 (1.7)	2.6 (1.6)
Students at this school are more interested in learning	3.7 (1.2)	2.2 (1.6)	1.7 (1.1)
My parents are glad that I attend this school	4.5 (0.9)	3.4 (1.5)	3.1 (1.7)
This school provides enough extracurricular activities	2.2 (1.4)	2.1 (1.5)	2.2 (1.6)
Students feel safe at this school	4.3 (0.9)	2.9 (1.6)	2.0 (1.3)
Students respect one another and their property	2.6 (1.2)	1.6 (1.2)	1.4 (0.9)
The school building is clean and well maintained	3.6 (1.1)	2.5 (1.6)	1.9 (1.4)
If the teacher left the room, most students would continue to work on their assignments	3.8 (1.1)	1.5 (1.1)	1.8 (1.2)
Teachers & administrators know me by my name	4.4 (0.8)	4.0 (1.5)	4.5 (1.1)
This school is a good choice for me	4.5 (0.9)	3.2 (1.7)	2.1 (1.5)

Note: All items are on a 5-point Likert scale where 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

Students were interviewed at Main Street Montessori School and Essentials Academy. Students were not formally interviewed in the other two schools because they were younger. At MSM, the students were interviewed briefly regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their school; a classroom of fourth through sixth graders were interviewed in the Spring of 2002, and sixth and

seventh graders were interviewed during the Spring of 2003 (see chapter 2 for details). When asked what the fourth-sixth grade students liked best about the school, the most common responses involved “teachers.” This was also a prevalent response to the open-ended survey item about the school’s strengths, such as, “The teachers are nice. They do not pressure you to do anything you don’t want to do.” Some students explained that the teachers were more available to help them than the teachers at their previous school had been. One student remarked, “I like it that teachers can be here when we need them. At my last [Catholic] school, they couldn’t be.” Other students commented about the “fun” they had at school.

When asked what could be improved about their school, the most common responses both years concerned curricular and extracurricular activities (e.g., adding sports, health class, science experiments, cheerleading), facilities (e.g., lockers instead of cubbies; more bathrooms; a playground for older students) and, occasionally, student behavior. All these answers echoed the responses to the open-ended questions on the surveys, as well as concerns that parents had. Steps were already in place to address some of these concerns. The parent organization was raising funds for new playground equipment for the older students. According to the middle school teacher, there was discussion regarding intermural sports among other EMO schools and/or private schools. Although student behavior wasn’t nearly as salient a concern at MSM as it was at some of the other charter schools, as part of the Montessori pedagogy processes to encourage mature, prosocial behavior were built into the curricula at all grade levels.

Students at Essentials Academy were not available for interviews in 2001-02, but students in grades 5-9 were interviewed in the Spring 2003. While a number of Essentials Academy students also expressed a desire for more extracurricular activities such as athletics and art, most comments—both positive and negative—concerned the difficulty of the general coursework. Some students complained that the work was too easy at Essentials Academy, especially those who had previously attended a parochial school. A sixth grader who had previously attended a Catholic school remarked, “Like at this school you gotta learn mostly fifth grade stuff. There we were learning seventh and eighth grade stuff in fourth grade. It’s not challenging enough here.” Others were pleased with how much more they were accomplishing at this school than at their previous school.

One student remarked that Essentials Academy was better “educationwise and behaviorwise.” However, another student said that the school needed to change “The kids. Try to get them to stop being rude to teachers. Seventh and eighth graders cussing ‘n’ stuff.” Indeed, during both 2001-02 and 2002-03 there were numerous complaints from both staff and students regarding student misbehavior. On the other hand, students as well as staff and parents were pleased with the small school size. One student commented, “The teachers can help you when you need help. They don’t have 30 other kids.” Another said that what he liked best about Essentials Academy was that “It teaches you how to be more of a leader.”

11.5 Conclusion

Market accountability, which is dependent on consumer satisfaction, is a lynchpin in the school choice philosophy. Turnover, retention, and waiting lists are all indicators of this. Student attraction and retention were fairly high at each charter school in our study except for Essentials Academy. Much of this, especially during Essentials Academy’s initial year, was due to its difficulties in securing a stable, permanent facility.

Parent and student satisfaction levels, as indicated by surveys and interviews, are other indicators of market accountability. According to our surveys, for the most part parents were

satisfied with the curriculum, instruction, and school climate. One outlier was Essentials Academy, which had a lower mean and wider variance in the levels of parent satisfaction with curriculum and instruction as well as numerous other variables. However, in 2001-02 parents at all four schools gave responses that were higher than the national average on most or all of the scales that measured school climate. If parental satisfaction is a cornerstone of charter schools' success and even existence, it is one that at least three of the four schools in this study appear to have earned.

According to our surveys for fifth graders and up, students at MSM were generally quite satisfied with their school, while students at Riverview Scholars and Essentials Academy were somewhat less satisfied. This may reflect that many students who transferred to Riverview Scholars and Essentials Academy had histories of poor school performance and/or behavioral issues.

In the next chapters we focus on other cornerstones of defining a charter school's success, ones that are arguably the most essential. These are the accountability components of a charter school: accountability for financial responsibility, regulatory compliance, and—perhaps above all—scholastic achievement.

Fiscal and Regulatory Accountability

The crux of the charter school agreement involves increased autonomy in exchange for extended accountability. Community schools are accountable to their sponsors as well as to their consumers; they must demonstrate fiscal responsibility and compliance with regulations in addition to adequate scholastic achievement. As in various other states (Miron & Nelson, 2002) fiscal mismanagement is the main reason that charter schools in Ohio close down. Therefore, compliance with fiscal regulations as well as other rules is crucial.

In this chapter we describe the regulations to which charter schools must adhere. We describe how Ohio's charter schools, particularly the four schools in our study, appear to be living up to them. Because fiscal responsibility involves more than compliance with regulations, we also examine the revenues and expenditures of each of the four schools in our study and, to the extent possible, how they compare with other charter and noncharter public schools in the Cleveland area. Reasons for the differing expenditures and revenues between and among charter and noncharter schools are explained.

12.1 Fiscal and Regulatory Compliance

Despite the assorted financial barriers (see Chapter 4), charter schools must demonstrate prudence and responsibility with the funds provided to them from various sources. Ohio law requires charter schools to maintain the same financial records as traditional school districts, including the preparation and submission of an annual financial report for the auditor of state. In addition, charter schools are expected to be audited annually for their first two years of operation and biennially thereafter. Exceptions are made if the charter school receives \$300,000 or more in federal revenues, in which case an annual audit is required (LOEO, 2001). Additional "special" audits are required if there are indications of fraud, waste, or abuse (Petro, 2002). However, a school cannot be shut down or even penalized because of unpaid debt alone; in part, this is because "unpaid debt" is hard to define consistently (S. Burigana, personal communication, June 18, 2003). There are no statutory regulations to withhold payments to schools.

In addition to financial prudence, charter schools must demonstrate compliance with all the required laws regarding staffing, transportation, and other administrative matters. According to LOEO (2001), 10 of the 15 first-generation charter schools received at least 1 "finding" in their audit report related to an instance of legal noncompliance or lack of internal controls over financial reporting. However, most of these findings were minor and simply accompanied with

recommendations for improvement.¹ Four Ohio charter schools, none of which were in Cleveland, had findings for recovery for 1999-00. In 2000-01 Riverview Scholars had some minor findings regarding its management system; however, none of the schools in our study had any major “findings for recovery.” On the other hand, 6 Ohio charter schools, none of which were in Cleveland, had findings for recovery for 2000-01 that required financial restitution.

In 2003, 8 of the 82 community schools for whom audits were available were cited as having findings for recovery for the 2001-02 academic year. Lifelong Learners & Leaders was listed as one of these, although the finding was against one of the school’s employees and the Lucas County Educational Services Center (LCESC) Treasurer, not the school itself. LCESC, which Lifelong Learners & Leaders had hired to conduct its payroll, sent one of LLL’s employees (who had since left LLL) a duplicate payment of \$1,300. The school notified the employee of the error and requested a repayment, but the money was never remitted. As the director explained, “The finding was on behalf of the school so that we could recovery the money from Lucas County [Educational Services Center] and/or the employee.” The LCESC treasurer also “failed to withhold city income taxes from its employees” (Montgomery, 2003). The school paid its share of city income taxes and asked each employee to remit the amount they owed to the city; all but three employees complied. The auditor mandated taxation remittance totaling \$781.53, in addition to the \$1,300 owed by the other employee for the duplicate payment. The LCESC took responsibility for these errors and reimbursed the school. The auditor recommended that LCESC improve its payroll procedures to avoid future errors.

Neither MSM nor Riverview Scholars had any findings for recovery or minor findings for the 2001-02 academic year. In fact, Riverview Scholars was among the first to turn in a completed audit for 2001-02. The minor findings that Riverview Scholars had in its 2000-01 audit were determined to have been corrected. The administration had hired additional staff, both full time and contractual, to assist with business and financial matters; the board purchased and utilized a software program for these purposes as well. According to the executive director, in 2002 the state auditors said that this was above and beyond what any of the other Ohio charter schools had done.

Essentials Academy, on the other hand, did not provide auditable 2001-02 financial records to the state auditors (LOEO, personal communication, June 18, 2003). Therefore, no audit of Essentials Academy was available on the auditor of state’s Web site.² According to the ODE staff (S. Burigana, personal communication, June 18, 2003) Essentials Academy inaccurately reported its enrollment, including the number of students with disabilities, and was overpaid. Thereafter, its payments were reduced in order to make up for this overpayment. In addition, according to Essentials Academy’s internal financial records (June 2003), it didn't report its EMIS data on time and was penalized more than \$40,000. ODE started 2002-03 with a total of 68 schools out of compliance. Only 6 of these schools were still out of compliance by the end of year, including Essentials Academy. This resulted in a 10 percent reduction of funds; Essentials Academy

¹ Financial audit reports for the 2001-02 school year were available at <<http://auditsearch.auditor.state.oh.us/RPIE/>> for MSM, Riverview Scholars, and The Inter-generational School.

² There were other concerns regarding Essentials Academy’s fiscal prudence and regulatory compliance. For example, a book company called us to complain that Essentials Academy owed them more than \$16,000 for textbooks; they had tried numerous times to contact the school but could not reach them. They contacted The Evaluation Center after an on-line search revealed our involvement with the school.

eventually got its records in just before the deadline. However, for reasons that were not clear, Essentials Academy was accidentally overpaid once again and had to repay ODE.

The number of Ohio charter schools with findings for recovery increased from four in 1999-00, to six in 2000-01 and eight in 2001-02. Although the total number increased, the percentage of schools decreased as the total number of schools grew. The charter schools have learned, through experience and with training, how to keep financial records and file the appropriate reports accurately and in a timely fashion. One charter school founder explained how each year the schools became more familiar with the reporting procedures while ODE became more efficient in its assistance and support.

12.2 Revenues and Expenditures of Charter Schools

Where do the charter schools get their funds? Charter schools obtain the same per-pupil funding as other public schools, including extra funds for students with special educational needs or disadvantaged statuses (Title I funds). In addition, they often receive grants from federal, state, and private sources. Table 12:1 displays the per-pupil revenues for the four Cleveland charter schools participating in the study. Except for Essentials Academy, these figures were calculated based on the audited reports available online. Charter schools often rely on private grants and donations, as displayed in Table 12:1. Appendix D contains lists that outline the sources of private grants and donations for each of these four schools; annual reports and other documents were used to glean these sources of private funding. In some cases, dollar amounts or ranges were also provided.

Table 12:1 Per-Pupil Revenues Based on Figures Reported in Audits for the 2001-02 Fiscal Year

	<i>MSM</i>	<i>RS</i>	<i>LLL</i>	<i>EA</i>
State Foundation and DPIA Revenue	\$5,739	\$6,019	\$5,900	\$8,175
Local Sources of Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other Operating Revenues	\$222	\$323	\$85	\$134
Federal or State Grants	\$1,229	\$1,938	\$4,532	\$3,356
Private Grants and Contributions	\$8	\$1,809	\$2,244	\$1,886
Investment Earnings	\$25	\$18	\$45	\$0
Total	\$7,224	\$10,106	\$12,805	\$13,552

Note that the auditor of state was not able to review the figures reported by Essentials Academy. The school's financial manager did, however, provide us with a budget for the 2001-02 school year. The source of data for the other schools is the Auditor of State Web site <<http://auditsearch.auditor.state.oh.us/>>. In its School Report Card, the Cleveland Municipal School District reported receiving revenues of \$10,043 per pupil for the same year.

In 2002, Steve Ramsey of Office of Community School Center and Clint Satow of Office of Community School Association each explained how the fiscal needs of the charter schools are not the same as those for traditional public schools. New charter schools have especially great financial needs when it comes to securing a facility and obtaining resources such as furniture and equipment. These needs are often met using federal and state grants for charter schools, operating grants, and private donations. For example, according to the finance committee for Riverview Scholars, their school "historically funded approximately 74 percent of its capital expenditures

using temporarily restricted gifts and grants.” It is challenging to determine the per-pupil revenue and spending allotment on areas such as instruction, building operations, administration, and pupil and staff support, given the differing needs and various funding sources that charter schools have. Therefore, per-pupil comparisons between the charter schools and district schools can be misleading. As a rule, charter schools are much smaller than traditional school districts. The small size and decentralization often mean that a greater proportion of their funds must go toward administrative costs. In addition, charter schools must also spend a greater proportion of their revenues on securing a building. Chapter 4 details the various barriers to securing a facility.

We examined per-pupil expenditure data from ODE’s website, which listed per-pupil expenditures on instruction, building operations, administration, and pupil support. However, much of the data was incomplete and some of the data appeared to be erroneous. For example, one Cleveland charter school (which was not in our study) was listed as having “-\$2” per-pupil expenditures for pupil support. Reported per-pupil spending on instruction ranged from 32 dollars to 42,587 dollars. The “Total Expenditures Per Pupil” column usually did not even come close to the sum of the four prior expenditure columns, but no information was given as to why. It is suspected that many charter schools report erroneous data to ODE. This appears to be due to the lack of support and inexperience of charter school administrators. Some charter school officials with whom we spoke stated that the procedures for reporting EMIS data were confusing. Some steps have been taken to improve the accountability on the authorizers’ ends; the next section details these significant steps.

12.3 Recent Statewide Legislation to Improve Fiscal and Regulatory Accountability

In theory, charter schools’ contracts with their sponsors are rather direct. Spend the funds responsibly; keep the books balanced; comply with all the regulations; and above all, demonstrate academic achievement as promised. Failure to meet any of these obligations may result in the closure of the charter school. The reality has been less straightforward. Charter schools are far more likely to be closed because of fiscal and/or managerial problems than academic failures. For these reasons, when it comes to charter schools’ accountability to their sponsors, the “autonomy in exchange for accountability” bargain has been a bone of contention on both sides of Ohio’s charter school debate. Charter school opponents lament the excessive independence of charter schools with insufficient accountability (Willard & Opplinger, 1999). On the other hand, charter school advocates often complain about the lack of autonomy and excessive demands for accountability. As one exasperated director in our study quipped, “Autonomy, what autonomy?”

When the Ohio State Board of Education (OSBE) sponsored as many as 105 schools, the autonomy and accountability issue became particularly thorny. ODE holds the schools that OSBE sponsors to the same performance standards as the other public schools as set by the Ohio General Assembly (LOEO, 2002). However, critics charged that it is a conflict of interest for ODE to provide assistance to charter schools and then to demand accountability from the same schools. Other detractors said ODE was not holding schools accountable to their respective contracts; the lawsuit specifically named ODE and OSBE as defendants for this reason (OCPT v. OSBE, 2002). Meanwhile, charter schools decried the lack of assistance from ODE, even after the Office of School Options was directed to meet this need. One director in our study complained that ODE was quick to penalize charter schools for shortcomings, but slow to provide support to help them meet the required standards. Both lack of oversight and lack of assistance have been blamed in part for Ohio’s charter school failures, most of which involved fiscal mismanagement. By 2002 Ohio

charter schools had a closure rate that was double that of the national average, with 8 of the 99 charter schools forced to close (Petro, 2002). As of June 2003, 12 of the total 147 charter schools had closed.

The auditor of state made a number of recommendations to improve the rates of compliance and reduce the number of failed schools. He recommended that all charter schools establish an audit committee to monitor and review the schools' accounting and financial reporting practices and to follow up on findings and recommendations resulting from an audit. He also suggested that the Office of School Options provide in-depth training on statutory responsibilities to prospective community school board members and administrators (Petro, 2002). However, the most substantial recommendation made repeatedly by the auditor of state was to eliminate the Ohio Department of Education as a direct sponsor of charter schools. The auditor's report indicated that ODE was unable to provide either sufficient oversight or sufficient assistance to the 79 schools it sponsored (including 4 that closed). It was recommended that both the oversight and the assistance should be localized, since ODE lacked the resources to assist schools all over the state (Petro, 2002). Instead, ODE would oversee and provide guidance to the local sponsors.

These recommendations were incorporated into H.B. 364. An amended substitute version of this bill was passed in December 2002, "Am. Sub. H.B. 364." Prior to the passage of this bill, an additional 30 schools were accepted for opening in Fall 2003. However, 24 others were denied opening or renewal after the bill was passed. We shall soon see the impact of having only localized sponsors for charter schools and whether it improves their compliance and/or the quantity and quality of the assistance they need.

Am. Sub. H.B. 364 increased the accountability of for-profit EMOs with whom charter schools contracted. Prior to this law private, for-profit EMOs were not required to be audited. Now contracts with EMOs who use at least 20 percent of the school's funds must be audited at the transactional detail level, and the audit must be available to the public.

Am. Sub. H.B. 364 made a number of additional mandates regarding charter school accountability. For example, it requires that each charter school has a fiscal officer who is a licensed school treasurer or business manager or must complete at least 16 hours of continuing education classes in school accounting. [R.C. 3314.16.] It mandates that the governing authority of a charter school must file an annual 5-year revenue and expenditure projection with ODE, just as school district boards of education must file. [R.C. 3314.03(A)(11)(d).] Further, an annual report of the school's activities, academic progress, and financial condition must be submitted to LOEO within 4 months after the end of each school year. The annual reports must be submitted to the school's sponsor and to the parents of the school's students as well. [R.C. 3314.03(A)(11)(g).]

12.4 Conclusion

Because charter schools are publicly funded and accountable to the general public as well as their sponsors, fiscal and regulatory accountability are vital to a charter school's existence. Virtually all of the 12 charter school closures involved fiscal mismanagement. Many other charter schools have experienced substantial financial accountability issues, which did not jeopardize their existence thus far, but nonetheless caused a great burden to charter school staff and potentially other stakeholders as well. Am.Sub. H.B.364 dramatically altered the sponsoring relations for charter schools in order to promote greater fiscal and regulatory accountability.

The auditor of state posts to a Web site the audited reports of each of the community schools from which it receives auditable reports. This was a major source of our financial data. We have some recommendations for the auditor of state regarding the listing of community schools audit

reports on its Web site. One school that had complied with all regulations but whose treasurer, who had been contracted from another agency, had made substantial errors in payroll was marked for having “findings for recovery.” On the other hand, two Cleveland community schools³ that had been verbally reported by staff at both LOEO and ODE as having a pattern of late, missing, or inauditable records was not listed at all on the auditor’s Web site. We recommend that (1) some type of demarcation be used to differentiate delinquent schools from those that are having difficulties with the payroll personnel with whom they contracted and that (2) schools that failed to complete auditable reports within a specified time frame be listed as such.

Although regulatory compliance and fiscal responsibility are essential, ultimately, the purpose of a school is to provide a satisfactory education. In our next chapter, we explore the performance of each of the four schools in our study and the various ways in which this is assessed and reported.

³ One of these two schools was not included in our study. Various stakeholders in our study, including ODE staff, LOEO staff, and former teachers and parents, had emphatically complained to us verbally about various aspects of this particular school. However, with no public records available, none of it could be substantiated or refuted.

Performance Accountability

ESEA [the Elementary and Secondary Education Act] is sure to bring both challenges and opportunities. As we move forward with the implementation, it is important to stay focused on the **goal**, which is to **close the achievement gap**, and its key **strategies**, which are to hold **schools, local education agencies and state education agencies accountable** for academic achievement. . . and to **give parents options** in the education of their children.¹

This quote regarding the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), popularly known as the “No Child Left Behind” Act, emphasizes the roles of accountability in improving education for all children across America. It also mentions giving parents options in the education of their children, a concept central to the charter school movement. The ESEA especially emphasizes school choice for parents with children in “chronically failing schools,” a label that has been used to describe the Cleveland Municipal School District. Cleveland has been the focus of a number of interventions to address its overall performance level, and it has been host to a number of reforms intended to provide new opportunities for parents with students enrolled in the district. Examples of the latter include the Cleveland scholarship program (voucher schools) and the community schools reform (charter schools).

How well are these new schools of choice demonstrating accountability, particularly relevant to the Cleveland Municipal School District? Metcalf (2001) evaluated achievement gains made by students in the voucher program relative to the gains made by similar students attending traditional public schools. His findings were largely mixed. LOEO (2003c) examined the student achievement in 59 Ohio charter schools and compared them with the state standards, with similar noncharter public schools, and with the objectives the charter schools specified themselves. LOEO found that charter schools, like most traditional public schools, were far from meeting state standards. Moreover, charter schools generally had performance levels similar to comparable schools. Also, LOEO found that the charter schools were not achieving the performance objectives specified in their contracts. The body of research is still very weak in determining the outcomes of these reforms with certainty. In this chapter, we will make our own small contribution to the body of research examining the relative performance of newly started charter schools in Cleveland.

¹ http://www.ode.state.oh.us/esea/Superintendent/General_Overview.asp

We start this chapter by describing some of the expectations to which both traditional and public schools are held. We include comparisons between the charter schools and their matched schools (see Chapter 2) performance on some standardized measures. Because these comparisons only tell part of the story, detailed information is provided for each case school regarding the educational progress of students. However, because usable student-level data were not available for most of the schools for the 2002-03 year, many of the detailed analyses were performed for years 2000-01 and 2001-02 only.

Regardless of how the results of standardized tests are analyzed or reported, the limited scope of what standardized achievement tests measure often clashes with the alternative missions of the charter school. Indeed, the charter school movement was intended to include unique missions with corresponding goals, objectives, and methods by which to measure progress on them. This helps schools only be accountable to outside agencies and can help them self-evaluate and further develop their school accordingly. Charter schools have the opportunity to define these goals, objectives, and assessment methods in their contracts. Therefore, in addition to looking at standardized test scores, we also explore the extent to which unique goals and objectives are being defined, measured, and met. In the conclusion we address a number of relevant issues, such as the appropriateness of the Ohio accountability system and the importance of revising charter school contracts to reflect relevant and measurable objectives.

13.1 Charter Schools and Standardized Accountability Measures

The superintendent of Ohio Public Schools described her vision for the public schools, based on Ohio's standards-based reform and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in particular. Performance accountability was a major component of this. Specifically, her vision included the following:

- "Schools that challenge all students to meet rigorous and reasonable academic content standards
- "Schools that focus squarely on the needs of students—emphasizing results—not process
- "Schools that have made effective, non-punitive accountability measures a part of their everyday activity—that hold students, educators and themselves responsible for achievement"²

Presumably, this vision applies to charter schools as well. In general, charter schools are held accountable to the same academic requirements as traditional public schools. However, the specific requirements for accountability are determined by a contract between the school and its sponsor. The charter document or contract states the academic objectives of the school which include, but are not limited to, the state standards. The school, in turn, is responsible for demonstrating progress toward these objectives and reporting their progress in the mandated annual report that is submitted to ODE each year.

One mandatory method by which both charter schools and traditional public schools are assessed is the Ohio Proficiency Tests (OPT), which are given at grades 4, 6, and 9. This test includes five areas: Citizenship, Math, Reading, Writing, and Science. For each of the five areas, the benchmark is that 75 percent of students will pass or that there will be gains of at least 2.5 percentage points each year. Each charter school contract must include these two criteria (LOEO, 2002).

² <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/superintendent/newsletters/may02.asp>

The results of these tests, as well as other indicators of school achievement such as attendance and graduation rates, are reported in local report cards that are made available to the public. Tables 13:1 and 13:2 display the results of the OPT for the 2002-03 school year as reported by the local report cards. This table includes the results of the charter schools in our study when applicable, as well as two “matched” schools listed directly under each charter school. (See Chapter 2 for details on “matched” schools.) Table 13:3 displays the gains in percentages of fourth grade students who passed each portion of the test from 2001-02 to 2002-03. Because there were fewer than ten sixth grade students at both MSM and Essentials Academy during the 2001-02 year, we did not find it appropriate to attempt year-to-year comparisons of passing rates for sixth graders. However, in the school-specific section we did include year-to-year passing rates of sixth graders for MSM (see Table 13:3).

Table 13:1 Passing Rates: Fourth Grade Ohio Proficiency Test, 2002-03

<i>School</i>	<i>Citizenship</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Science</i>
<i>Lifelong Learners & Leaders</i>	Not counted	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%	Not counted
Public Elementary School A	56.5%	69.6%	71.8%	74.3%	72.9%
Public Elementary School B	36.4%	56.8%	54.3%	77.3%	52.3%
<i>Main Street Montessori</i>	47.6%	42.9%	61.9%	61.9%	57.1%
Public Elementary School C	81.3%	76.0%	78.8%	90.7%	74.7%
Public Middle School D	30.8%	34.6%	47.2%	70.6%	42.3%
Public Elementary School E	63.3%	68.3%	67.7%	85.0%	55.0%
<i>Riverview Scholars</i>	12.2%	2.4%	31.7%	58.5%	7.3%
Public Elementary School F	28.7%	37.9%	54.4%	62.1%	29.9%
Public Elementary School G	26.2%	42.9%	49.4%	55.3%	52.4%
Cleveland Municipal School District	46.9%	50.1%	59.1%	70.9%	49.5%
Similar School Districts	38.5%	38.5%	48.2%	66.5%	36.5%

Note: The source of all data are the local report cards, with the exception of Lifelong Learners & Leaders, from which we used data reported in its 2002-03 annual report.

Table 13:2 Passing Rates: Sixth Grade Ohio Proficiency Test, 2002-03

<i>School</i>	<i>Citizenship</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Science</i>
<i>Main Street Montessori</i>	45.5%	36.4%	45.5%	100%	36.4%
Public Elementary School C	63.8%	60.6%	66.0%	83.2%	53.2%
Public Middle School D	36.7%	26.8%	39.0%	76.0%	53.1%
<i>Essentials Academy</i>	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Cleveland Municipal School District	44.0%	34.7%	49.4%	76.0%	41.4%
Similar School Districts	44.1%	29.8%	42.8%	76.1%	37.5%

Note: The source of all data are the local report cards

Table 13:3 Gains in Passing Rates from 2001-02 to 2002-03 (in percentage points) on the Fourth Grade Ohio Proficiency Test

<i>School</i>	<i>Citizenship</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Science</i>
<i>Lifelong Learners & Leaders</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Public Elementary School A	24.4	32.1	18.2	22.5	14.0
Public Elementary School B	-12.7	16.8	-7.5	10.0	10.5
<i>Main Street Montessori</i>	2.1	-29.8	-1.7	-29.0	-6.5
Public Elementary School C	23.1	17.7	31.9	21.9	11.2
Public Middle School D*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Public Elementary School E	-5.9	-2.9	-3.5	0.4	-14.2
<i>Riverview Scholars</i>	-11.1	-4.6	20.1	12.0	0.3
Public Elementary School F	0.8	13.5	27.7	21.4	-0.3
Public Elementary School G	-0.5	20.2	40.1	14.0	39.1
Cleveland Municipal School District	2.7	6.2	19.0	10.3	6.9
Similar School Districts	-3.0	-0.3	7.2	1.5	-0.4

Note: The source of all data are the local report cards.

*Prior to 2002-03, this middle school did not include a 4th grade.

In the instances where comparisons were possible, the findings are rarely positive and often inconclusive. This was the case whether looking only at 2002-03, or at relative gain scores. This supports the findings of LOEO (2003c), who found that whether looking at charter schools versus traditional schools as two overall groups or matched school-by-school on similar characteristics, charter schools are generally not doing better than their district counterparts. (Notably, LOEO did not look at relative gain scores). In both cases, the very small numbers of eligible charter school test-takers limits the value of comparisons; LOEO (2003c) found that even large-looking differences between the charter schools' passing rates and those of their matched schools were often statistically insignificant.

In our comparisons of fourth grade OPT passing rates, only LLL had comparable or higher scores than its neighboring schools; however, according to its annual report only 4 students were eligible to take the OPT test in 2002-03. Even MSM, which has been cited for consistently outperforming the district (LOEO, 2002), did not outperform its high-performing neighboring schools during 2002-03. Its fourth grade passing rates actually decreased notably in several areas between 2001-02 and 2002-03; however, year-to-year comparisons are of questionable validity since only 11 MSM students were eligible to take the fourth grade test in 2001-02. Additionally, the principal cited a cohort effect, stating that the fourth grade students in 2001-02 were generally more advanced than those in 2002-03. Riverview Scholars made notable gains in its reading and writing passing rates between 2001-02 and 2002-03. However, its neighboring schools had even larger gains and gains in more areas.

All charter schools that are at least two years old have their local report cards publicly available on the Internet. However, prior to the 2002-03 school year, charter school opponents had complained about what they saw as a double standard concerning charter schools. The local report cards of charter schools, unlike all other public schools, were exempt from the rating system of

“academic emergency” through “excellent” (See Table 13:4). This rating system is based on the number of indicators met. Indicators include meeting the benchmark of the 75 percent passing rate on a given area for a given grade level. They also include attendance rates (benchmark of 93 percent) and graduation rates. As of 2002-03, schools are also rated using a performance index score based on the categories of OPT scores such as below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced; see Table 13:4 footnote for details. They are also rated based on the federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress for various subsets of students.

Table 13:4 Indicators and Performance Ratings for Cleveland Schools, 2002-03

<i>School</i>	<i>Number of State Indicators</i>	<i>Number of State Indicators Met</i>	<i>Performance Index Score (0-120) pts.*</i>	<i>Adequate Yearly Progress **</i>	<i>District Rating</i>
<i>Lifelong Learners & Leaders</i>	1	1	86.0	Met	N/A
Public Elementary School A	11	5	87.4	Met	Continuous Improvement
Public Elementary School B	11	5	81.8	Met	Continuous Improvement
<i>Main Street Montessori</i>	11	2	76.4	Met	Continuous Improvement
Public Elementary School C	11	6	87.5	Met	Continuous Improvement
Public Middle School D	11	2	67.5	Not Met	Academic Emergency
Public Elementary School E	6	2	85.2	Met	Continuous Improvement
<i>Riverview Scholars</i>	6	1	52.4	Not Met	Academic Emergency
Public Elementary School F	6	1	65.5	Met	Continuous Improvement
Public Elementary School G	6	1	67.8	Met	Continuous Improvement
<i>Essentials Academy</i>	1	1	60.7	Met	Excellent
Public Elementary School H	6	1	63.5	Not Met	Academic Emergency
Public Elementary School I	6	1	62.8	Not Met	Academic Emergency
Cleveland Municipal School District	22	6	71.4	Not Met	Academic Watch

* "Performance Index Score: A weighted average of the . . . assessment results across all tested grades and all subjects based on the performance levels of: untested, below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. The percentage of students at each performance level is multiplied by 1.2 (advanced), 1.0 (proficient), .6 (basic), .3 (below basic), or 0 (untested) and the products are summed. The score is on a scale of 0 to 120 points with 100 being the goal." (Source: <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/definitions/keyterms.asp>)

** Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): "The federal mandate that holds schools accountable for the performance of subgroups, as well as all students." The goals are for each subgroup of students [e.g., ethnic groups, income levels] to meet or exceed the annual objectives, or to make progress over the prior year. (Source: <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/definitions/keyterms.asp>)

However, there are problems in applying the same scales to charter schools. These rating scales were originally designed for districts, which included all grade levels and large numbers of

students. Charter schools often lack many or even most of the indicators of performance, because they do not have students in the grades that are given the Ohio Proficiency Tests, or they have fewer than ten students per grade level. Hence, passing rates could jeopardize the confidentiality of certain test-takers. Therefore, some charter schools had attendance as the only criterion measurable by the local report cards' standards. Both LLL and Essentials Academy were in this situation, and both met their singular criterion of 93 percent attendance rate. However, LLL was not given a rating because of its lack of applicable indicators, while Essentials Academy was given the rating of "Excellent." No explanation was available as to how Essentials Academy earned this rating based on only one indicator. However, the staff of Essentials Academy proudly displayed their rating on a bulletin board at their school, and a staff member boasted about how they had the highest rating of any charter school in Cleveland.

A weakness in using the local report cards as an accountability tool is that they are often based on incomplete or inaccurate data according to LOEO (2003c). On the other hand, some charter school staff have complained to us about the "confusing" procedures for reporting EMIS data. Regardless of the reasons for the incomplete data, this gap prevents accurate conclusions from being drawn.

Even if such inconsistencies in labeling a school's ratings were corrected, the local report cards may not be the most appropriate method for measuring and disseminating information regarding Ohio's charter schools. First, the small size of many charter schools makes passing rates of proficiency tests inadequate. Comparing charter schools to district or even neighboring schools may not be ideal, since charter schools often attract students who were performing poorly in their previous schools (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 1999b). Further, it has been argued that the educational mistakes of the prior school system may take years for a charter school to overcome. It may be more appropriate to measure year-to-year student progress. Ideally, the same students are measured year after year with similarly scaled tests. Unfortunately, changes in student bodies, changes in the tests that the school uses, and inadequate reporting of individual student data (which is often difficult to obtain due to confidentiality concerns) limits this method of comparison. Gradewide year-by-year measures may be inaccurate due to cohort effects. In these next sections, we use both these measures when feasible to conduct year-to-year comparisons of student performance at each school on a variety of standardized tests. When feasible, we also explore the results of other forms of educational assessment.

13.2 Student Achievement at Riverview Scholars

Data provided to us for the analysis include student, class, and school level data from three years of the Off Grade Proficiency, Grade 4 Ohio Proficiency Test (2002), and one year of results from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (2002). Table 13:5 illustrates the range and scope of standardized tests administered by Riverview Scholars. The underlined items in the table refer to the tests for which we received usable data from the school to analyze it. Even though test data for the OGPT were available for three years, only second grade students took the test in 1999-00 and not all subject tests were covered by each grade in the subsequent years. Our aim was to analyze the data based on individual gains over time. We were able to do this by comparing 2000-01 and 2001-02 OGPT results. A data file with individual level data on the ITBS in 2003 was sent to us but it was not possible to extract the data from the diskette in a usable form.

Table 13:5 Standardized Tests Administered at Riverview Scholars from 1999-00 to 2002-03

Test	Type of Test	Subjects	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT)	Criterion Referenced	Reading, Writing, Science, Citizenship			Grade 4	Grade 4
Off Grade Proficiency Test (OGPT)	Criterion Referenced	Reading, Writing, Science, Citizenship	Grade 2	Grades 1-3	Grades 1-3	Grades 1-3
Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)	Norm Referenced	Reading, Language, Mathematics		Grades 1-3	Grades 1-3	Grades 1-3, 5

Ohio Proficiency Test

The Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT), which is administered to fourth, sixth, and ninth grade students, is Ohio's only state-mandated test for students. The 2002 spring administration of the test was the first time that students from Riverview Scholars took part in this test, since this is the first year that the school had students in fourth grade.

In 2002, 43 fourth graders took the OPT, although the results from 7 students were excluded from the school's averages because of their special needs. Interestingly, the performance of the 7 students who were excluded was similar to the other students who were considered in the school aggregate, except in writing and citizenship where the 7 students with IEPs outperformed the other students. There are a couple of possible reasons for this. Staff at Riverview Scholars repeatedly remarked that there are numerous low-performing students who should be evaluated for IEPs, but the time and resources cannot always keep up with the high demand. Such students are potentially miscategorized and may not be getting the educational services they need. Another possibility is that the scores for students with IEPs reflect the success the school has had in implementing the IEPs and in supporting these students. The fact that the performance levels are currently very low is also a likely explanation for the small difference between students with or without IEPs.

Appendix E, Exhibit E:1, contains charts that illustrate the results for Riverview Scholars in 2002, compared with Cleveland Municipal School District's results from the previous year (2001) and the 2002 preliminary results for the state. The proportion of students meeting or exceeding state standards was noticeably lower at Riverview Scholars than across the district. Given that this was the first time that the students at this school had taken the state proficiency test, these results should be considered baseline data. As we shall see, the results on the other tests for students in the lower grades in 2002 are higher than the results for the fourth graders.

Depending on the subject test, between 5 and 42 percent of the students either met or exceeded the state standard on the Ohio Proficiency Test in 2002. Performance on the writing test was highest, with 41.7 percent of the students meeting the state standard. However, this was still far from the state goal of 75 percent of all students meeting the standard.

In 2003, results on the Grade 4 OPT went up in all subjects except math where there was a slight dip in scores. The best results were still in writing, where 59 percent of the students met state standards. The largest gain was in reading where scores climbed from 11 percent meeting state standard in 2002 to 32 percent meeting state standard in 2003. The lower right-hand chart in Figure 13:1 illustrates the Grade 4 OPT results for 2003.

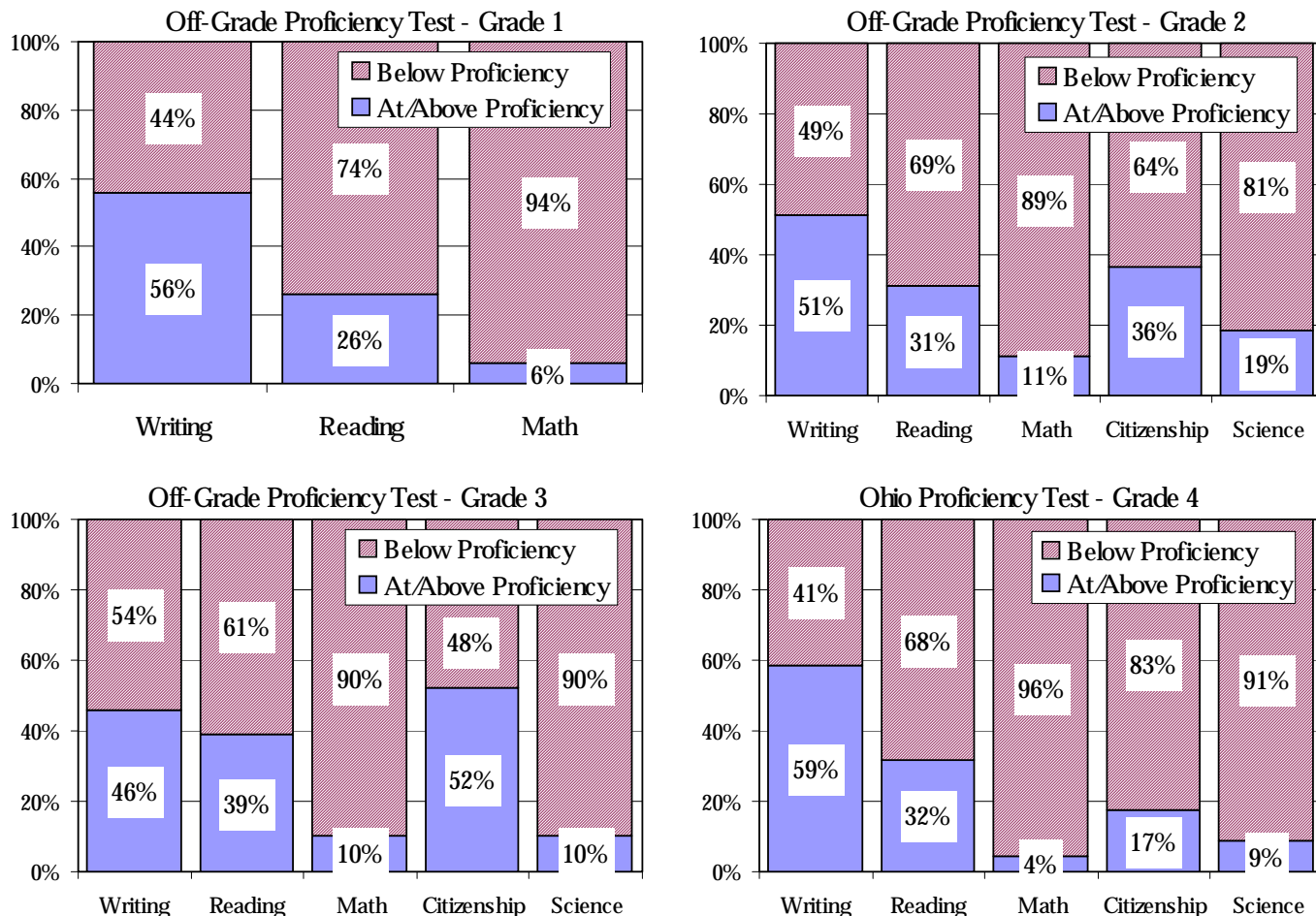


Figure 13:1 Riverview Scholars Performance on the Ohio Proficiency Test and Off-Grade Proficiency Tests in Spring 2003

Note: While the actual number of test takers varied by subject area, an average of 50 students took the test in Grade 1, 45 students in Grade 2, 48 students in Grade 3, and an average of 46 students who took the various subject tests in Grade 4.

One important weakness of state tests administered in relatively new schools or in schools with high mobility rates is that the test cannot truly measure the impact of the school. This is because many students included in the analyses spent most of their previous years of schooling in traditional public schools. Thus, performance of these students should largely be attributed largely to their previous school and not the current school in which they took the test. Figure 13:2 was designed to compare the results for students who have been at Riverview Scholars for 1 or more years, as opposed to students in their first year at the school. This comparison allows us to control for some of the impact of newly enrolled students. Seven students who took the OPT had been enrolled in the school for less than a year. Five of those students did not meet state standards on any of the subject area tests. One student, however, was at or above state standards on 2 subject tests; another student met the state standard in 1 subject test. In this instance, these 7 students largely did not perform differently than the 29 students who were at the school for more than a year.

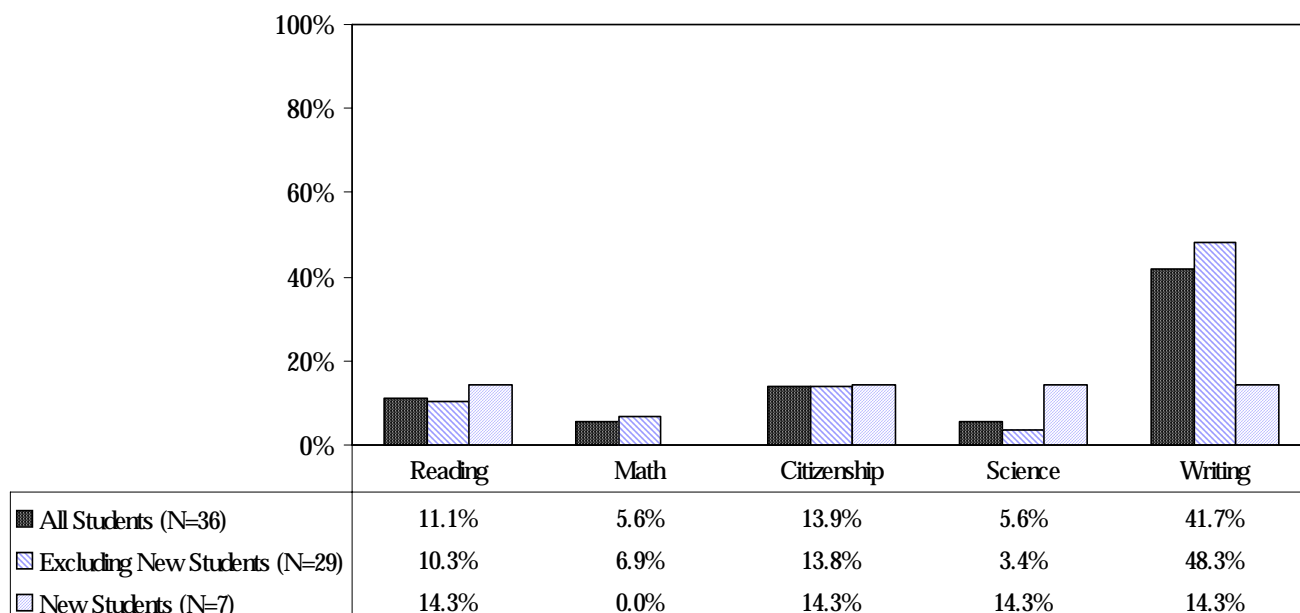


Figure 13:2 Grade 4 Ohio Proficiency Test Results for 2002, Percentage of Riverview Scholars Students At or Above State Standards

Off Grade Proficiency Test

Riverview Scholars has been taking advantage of the state's Off-Grade Proficiency Test (OGPT), which is offered for grades not covered by the Ohio Proficiency Test. The OGPT covers the same 5 subject areas as the Ohio Proficiency Test. In the spring of 2000, 29 second graders took the off-grade test. In subsequent years the numbers taking the Off-Grade Proficiency Test increased to more than 135 annually, because grades 1, 2 and 3 were all included.

Figure 13:3 illustrates the school's performance on the off-grade proficiency test. The charts on the left-hand side of the page illustrate the results for the 2001-02 school year (this test was administered in spring 2002). From these charts it is apparent that the performance levels in the lower grades in 2002 were generally better than the performance levels of students in the higher grades. Each chart in the figure illustrates the percentage of students below, at or above the state standard. The first 3 charts in Figure 13:1 illustrate the most recent OGPT results from Spring 2003. These results indicate that performance levels had largely evened out across the grades.

The charts on the right-hand side in Figure 13:3 illustrate the progress of groups of students over time. We refer to these as consecutive class cohorts. For example, these cohorts follow second grade students in 2000, third grade students in 2001, and fourth grade students (taking the OPT) in 2002. This analysis does not match individual students, which should be apparent since there are substantial changes in the number of test takers each year. While there is still some "noise" in these trends, this is deemed to be a more accurate means of measuring gains than comparing consecutive groups of students at the same grade levels (i.e., last year's second graders compared with this year's second graders).

Because we received individual student data from Riverview Scholars for the earlier years, we were able to control for the influence of new students. Ninety students in either second or third grade in 2002 took the OGPT. Of these, ten students were new to the school; the remainder had been at the school for one or more years. We refer to the latter group as the stayers. We analyzed

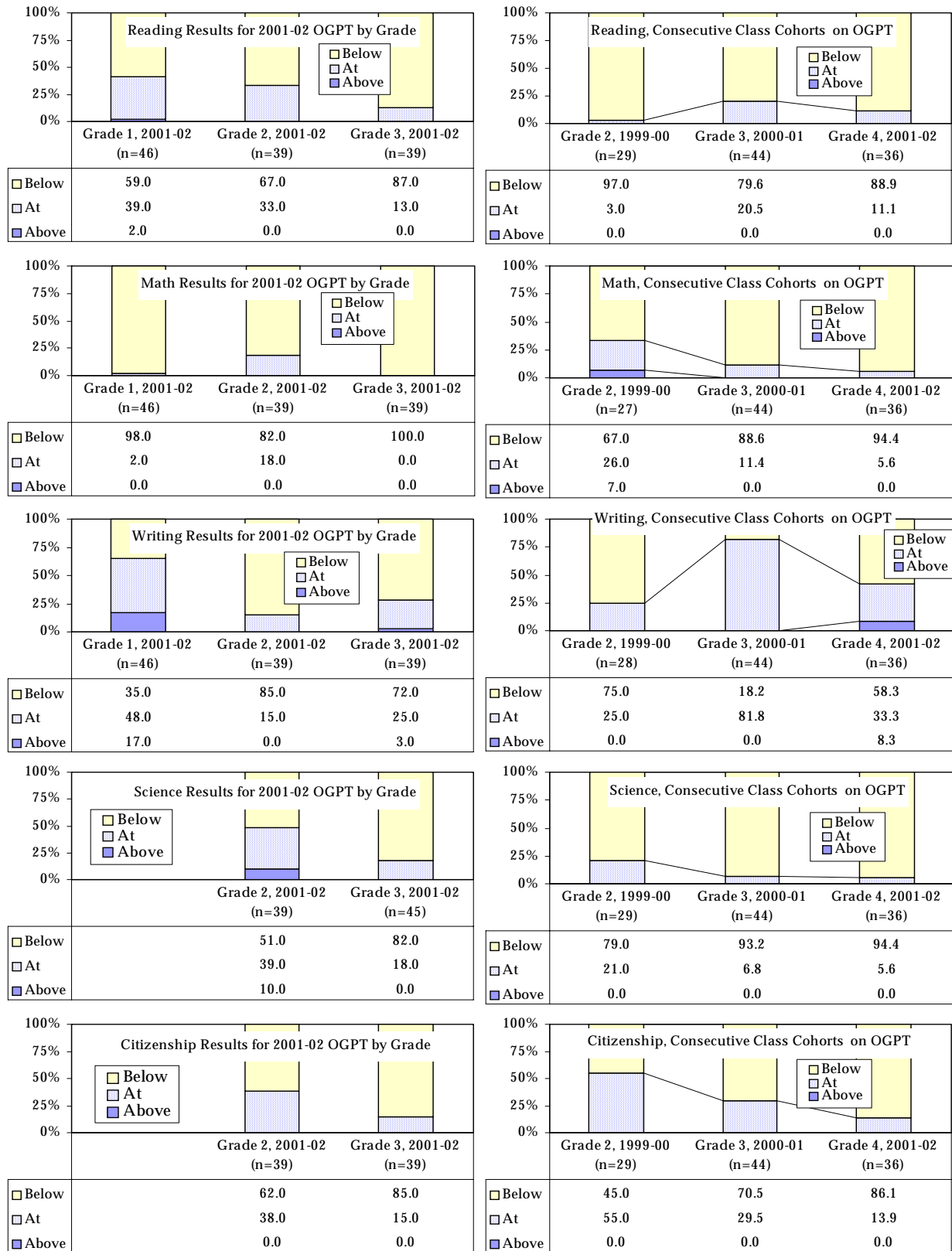


Figure 13:3 Riverview Scholars' Performance on Off-Grade Proficiency Test, by Grade
 Charts on the left-hand side display 2002 results. The charts on the right-hand side illustrate change over time for consecutive classes of students. Subjects are organized by row.

Table 13:6 Off-Grade Proficiency Test Results for Riverview Scholars and CMSD, Spring 2001

<i>Percent At or Above State Standard</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Math</i>	<i>Science</i>	<i>Citizenship</i>
<i>Riverview Scholars</i>					
Grade 1 (N=45)			11.1%		
Grade 2 (N=46)	17.4%		19.6%		
Grade 3 (N=44)	20.5%	81.8%	11.4%	6.8%	29.5%
<i>Cleveland Municipal School District</i>					
Grade 1	52.9%		32.6%		
Grade 2	26.8%	52.3%	41.8%	40.9%	56.0%
Grade 3	25.9%	42.0%	25.8%	23.7%	44.2%

Note. These results for CMSD are based on weighted averages for 82 elementary schools within the Cleveland Municipal School District. The source of the data is the district's Interactive Data Source <<http://www.cmsdnet.net/OREA/reports/interactive/IDS/>>

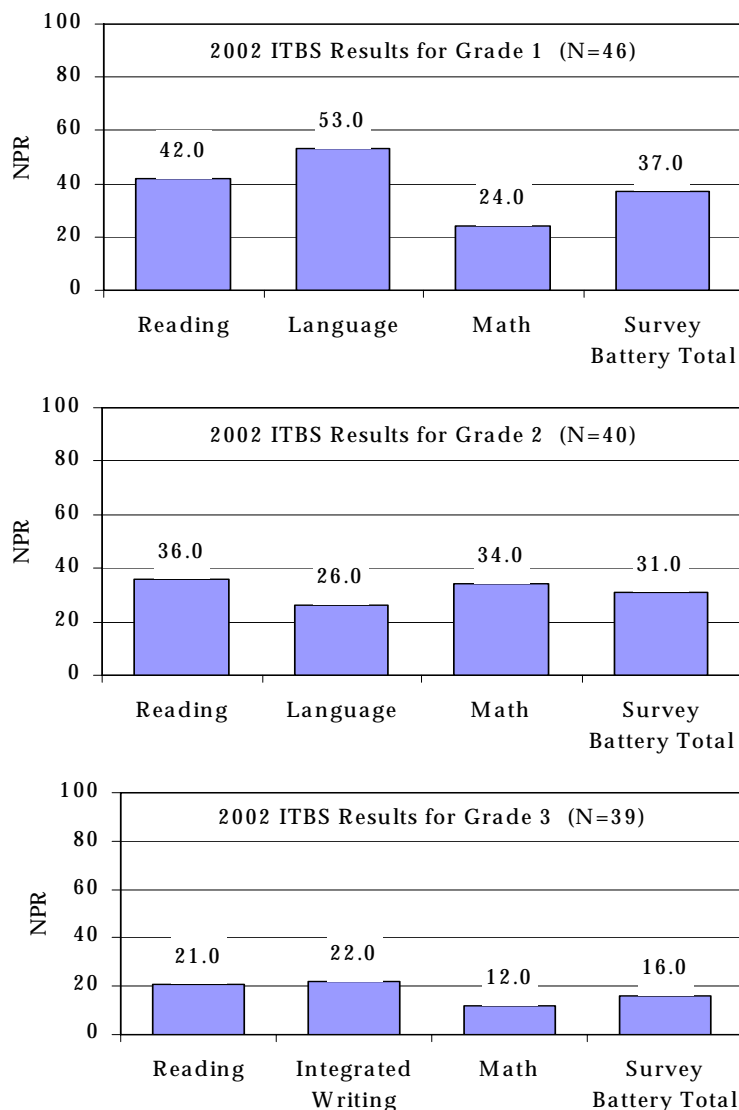
the data with and without the new students and found essentially no difference between the stayers and the new students. Only in reading did the stayers have a 2.5 percent advantage. On the other subject tests, the differences were 1 percent or less.

It is difficult to obtain comparative data on the Off-Grade Proficiency Test since it is an optional test intended to serve as a diagnostic tool. It was possible, however, to obtain and calculate OGPT results for the local district for the 2000-01 school year. Because of possible changes in the test over time, we compared Riverview Scholars results from the same year. Table 13:6 presents the results for spring 2001 for both Riverview Scholars and the Cleveland Municipal School District. Comparing the two groups indicates that the students at Riverview Scholars were also lagging behind district scores on the OGPT.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills

Figure 13:4 contains Riverview Scholars's 2002 results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). This is a

Figure 13:4 Riverview Scholars Results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, 2002 (National Percentile Ranks)



norm-referenced test, so the average national percentile ranks (NPRs) indicate how the students performed relative to a national norm of students at the same grade level. Only the results for language at the first grade level exceed the 50th percentile, indicating that students are above the national average. Across the various grade and subject level tests, the average NPR ranged from 12 percent to 53 percent. While there is no particular pattern in how the school performed by subject area, there is a clear pattern in performance levels by grade. As with the OGPT, students in the lower grades performed better than students in the higher grades. This is a good indication that student performance at Riverview Scholars is likely to improve over time.

In summarizing the overall results for Riverview Scholars, one can conclude that the results from the last few years indicated that the school lags behind the district and the state. While noticeable gain scores are already evident in some subject areas, the test results in the coming years are likely to be more positive, since the students in the lower grades have shown better test results than students in the upper grades. Additionally, the school staff is going to have more time to implement and improve both the academic and disciplinary interventions they have designed for the school.

13.3 Student Achievement at Main Street Montessori

Main Street Montessori (MSM) administered a number of different standardized tests over the past three years as shown in Table 13:7. The underlined items in the table refer to the tests for which we received data from the school. In the school's initial contract, it was noted that the SAT-9 norm-referenced test would be used in addition to the state mandated OPT. Instead, the school ended up using the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT). In the school's 2000-01 annual report, it was noted that use of the WRAT was discontinued due to concerns about its administrative reliability. Instead, MSM began using a different norm-referenced test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

Table 13:7 Standardized Tests Administered at MSM from 1999-00 to 2001-02

<i>Test</i>	<i>Test Type</i>	<i>Subjects</i>	<i>1999-00</i>	<i>2000-01</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>
Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT)	Criterion referenced	Reading, Writing, Science, Citizenship	Grade 4	Grade 4	<u>Grades 4 & 6</u>	<u>Grades 4 & 6</u>
Off Grade Proficiency Test	Criterion referenced	Reading, Writing, Science, Citizenship	Grades 1-3	Grades 1-3, 5	Grades 1-3, 5	Grades 1-3, 5
Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)	Norm referenced	Reading, Spelling, Mathematics	Grades K-4, <u>fall</u> and <u>spring</u> tests	<u>Grades K-5 Spring</u>		
Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)	Norm referenced	Reading, Language, Mathematics			<u>Grades 1-6</u>	Grades 1-7

This school has been in operation longer than the other three case schools, so potentially there exist more years of test data. Unfortunately, we did not receive two years of individual student results from any given test so we could not conduct an analysis of gain scores based on individual student results.

Ohio Proficiency Test

Table 13:8 displays the results of the fourth grade OPT test over a four-year period. Because there are few students in each of the upper grades in this school, few students took the OPT in grades 4 and 6. There was no sixth grade at MSM until 2001-02, when there were only eight sixth graders. Therefore, year-to-year comparisons are of limited value on the OPT. Table 13:9 illustrates the Grade 6 results. (Appendix E, Exhibit E:2 illustrates the OPT results for 2000-01).

The state goal on this test is that 75 percent of the students will meet or exceed state standards in each of the grade and subject tests. MSM exceeded the state standard in Grade 4 writing in 1999-2000 and 2001-02, and nearly met the state standard in Grade 4 math in 2001-02. In 2002-03, between 43 and 62 percent of the fourth graders and between 36 and 100 percent of the sixth grade students met or exceeded state standards in each subject area.

Table 13:8 MSM Passing Rates on 4th Grade Ohio Proficiency Tests

	<i>Citizen</i>	<i>Math</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Science</i>
1999-00	50.0%	30.0%	40.0%	80.0%	40.0%
2000-01	50.0%	28.6%	42.9%	71.4%	28.6%
2001-02	45.5%	72.7%	63.6%	90.9%	63.6%
2002-03	47.6%	42.9%	61.9%	61.9%	57.1%

Source: ODE Website

Table 13:9 MSM Passing Rates on 6th Grade Ohio Proficiency Tests

	<i>Citizen</i>	<i>Math</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Science</i>
2001-02	50.0%	37.5%	37.5%	75.0%	37.5%
2002-03	45.5%	36.4%	45.5%	100.0%	36.4%

Source: 01-02 Direct Results Reported from MSM; 2002-03 Local Report Cards

Because small numbers of students and substantial cohort effects can skew the year-to-year comparisons, the OPT results from the same group of students between 2000-01 and 2002-03 were also compared. Fourth grade OPT scores from 2000-01 were compared to the 6th grade OPT scores from 2002-03, since for the most part these were the same students. Indeed, MSM conducted this same comparison and displayed it in their 2002-03 annual report. These results indicate gains in reading and writing for this cohort group of students. See Table 13:10 for this comparison.

Table 13:10 MSM Passing Rates: Within Cohort Comparison

	<i>Citizen</i>	<i>Math</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Science</i>
2000-01 4 th grade	50.0%	28.6%	42.9%	71.4%	28.6%
2002-03 6 th Grade	45.5%	36.4%	45.5%	100.0%	36.4%

Sources: ODE Web site; 2002-03 MSM Annual Report

Wide Range Achievement Test

During the 1999-00 school year, the WRAT was administered twice to provide information on the value added during the course of the year. Based on these data a report was prepared for the school (MacLeod, 2000) that summarized the findings and identified students that would qualify for Title 1 tutoring (i.e., students with test scores below the 50th percentile). Thirty-three students were below the 50th percentile in reading, 48 in spelling, and 44 in math. On average there were 9 fewer students in each subject (reading, spelling, and math) below the 50th percentile in May 2000 than there were during the October 1999 administration of the test.

During the 2000-01 school year, the school also used a pretest/posttest design using the WRAT. The overall scores were much higher. However, the school demonstrated growth only in reading, while the scores for spelling and math remained static. Appendix E, Exhibit E:3 illustrates these results. These results on the WRAT also indicated that the students in the lower grades were performing better than the students in the upper grades. Nevertheless, because the number of students taking the test in each grade was small, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills

Students at Main Street Montessori took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for the first time in October 2001. Students in Grades 1 to 3 were tested in three subject areas: reading, language, and math. The composite score for these three grades is the average national percentile rank across the three subject areas. The tests administered to students in grades 4, 5, and 6 included three additional subjects: social studies, science, and sources of information. The composite is the average across the six subject tests. The results for the school were rather impressive with averages for students in the first three grades all well above the 50th percentile, except for language in grade 3. Students in grades 5 and 6 generally scored lower, with the average for all students generally below the 50th percentile. The one subject area where the students performed relatively less well was language. The results by grade and subject are illustrated in Figure 13:5.

Aside from the standardized tests, MSM uses a number of other methods to measure and record student progress. As detailed in Chapter 4, MSM uses a hybrid of traditional and Montessori instruction and assessment. Montessori's assessments are based mainly on using manipulables and having teachers observe, analyze, and record the students' progress. Portfolios of the students' work is another form of assessment. Report cards with descriptions such as "proficient," "progressing," etc., instead of traditional letter grades are sent out to parents. Unfortunately, the results of these were not clearly covered in any of the annual reports.

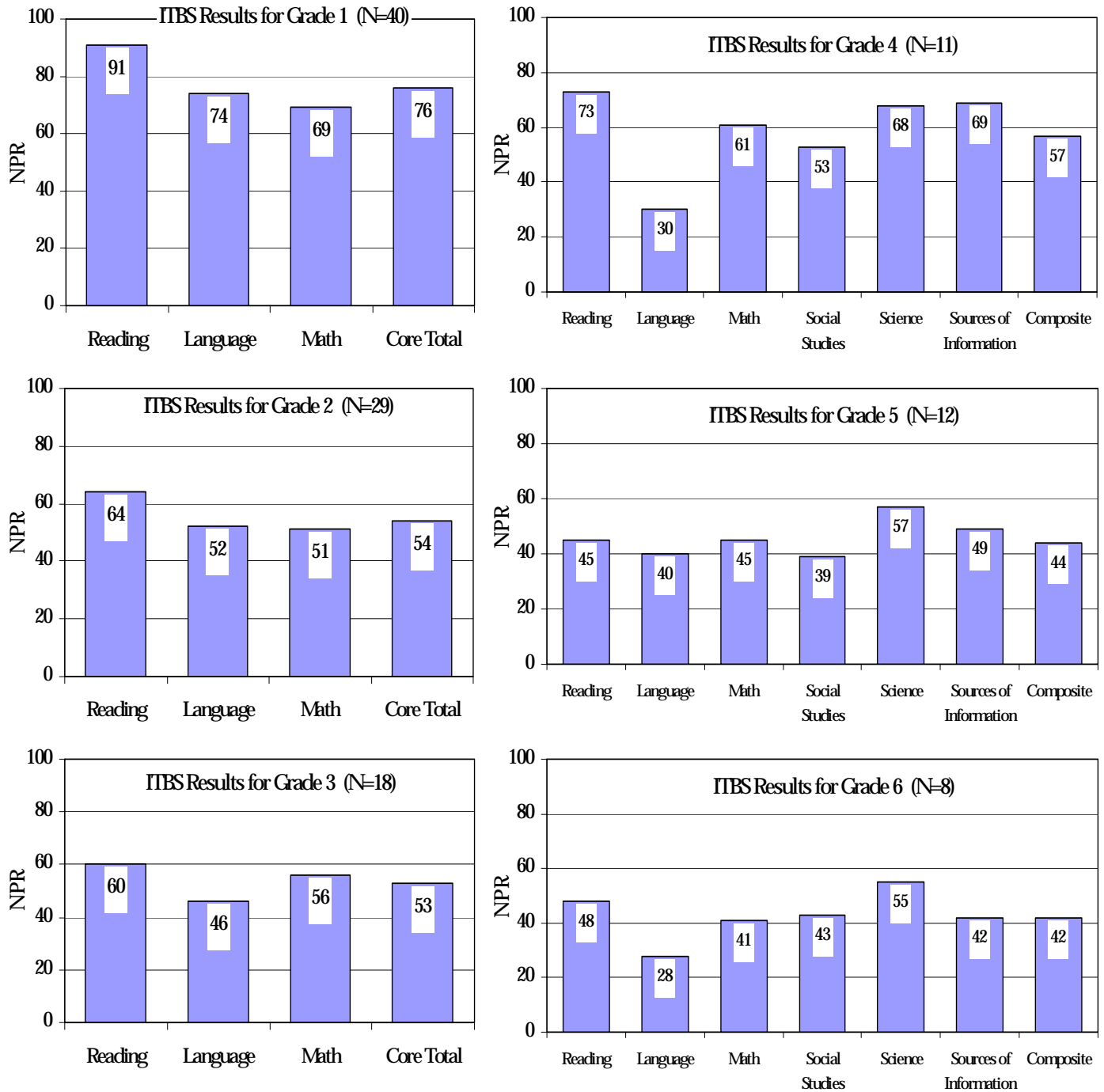


Figure 13:5 Results for Main Street Montessori on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills Test was administered in October 2001

13.4 Student Achievement at Lifelong Learners & Leaders

Lifelong Learners & Leaders provides a nongraded learning environment where children are placed in learning groups based on their developmental stage. Nevertheless, the school indicates in its contract and in its first annual report that the goals and objectives for learning are oriented toward the state's fourth grade standards, which are the basis of the Grade 4 Ohio Proficiency Test. In other words, the curriculum the school uses is adopted from the Ohio State Model Curriculum.

The instruction offered by the school differs greatly, however, from the instruction offered in traditional public schools. Instruction is more individualized and is based on each student's developmental stage. The use of standardized tests conflicts with the philosophical approach of the school, particularly since this school currently is serving only children at the lower elementary level. Instead, preference is given to authentic assessment and the use of rating rubrics. While the assessment tools used by the school are appropriate for the mission and focus of the school, and while this form of assessment is most useful for teachers, it is likely that some policymakers will be unable or unwilling to interpret and assign value to the findings. In this section, we provide an overview of the achievement results reported by the school.

The students' classification and progress were assessed by developmental level, as displayed in Table 13:11. The school's contract includes a detailed rubric of benchmarks for each developmental stage in the following areas: reading, writing, math, science, social studies, art, technology, environmental sciences and responsibility, and wellness and health. During its first year of operation, the school focused much of its work on language arts. For this reason, only results related to language arts were included in the school's first annual report. A summary of these results can be found in Appendix E, Exhibit E:5

Table 13:11 Developmental Stages Used by Lifelong Learners & Leaders for Placement and Assessment

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Substage</i>	<i>Approximate Grade Equivalent</i>	<i>Expected Passing Time</i>
Emerging	Role Play Experimenting	K to 1	End of 1 st Grade Equivalent Level
Beginning	(none)	1 to 2	End of 2 nd Grade Equivalent Level
Developing	Transitional Independent	2 to 3	End of 3rd Grade Equivalent Level
Refining	(none)	3 to 4	(Not specified)

Source: Implementing the Vision: Lifelong Learners & Leaders's 2000-01 and 2002-03 Annual Reports.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders: Examples of Authentic Assessment Indicators

LLL made it clear that not all students were expected to progress from one level to the next during one school year. However, as Tables 13:12 and 13:13 indicate, specified amounts of progress were expected. For example, at least half of all students were expected to move up a level during the school year, and all were expected to progress within their level. Tables 13:12 and 13:13 provide details regarding these benchmarks and progress made towards them.

Table 13:12 Percentage of Students who Progressed from One Level to the Next During One School Year

<i>Area</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Benchmark</i>	<i>Progress Achieved</i>
2001-02	Reading	50%	55.0%
	Writing	50%	50.0%
2002-03	Reading	50%	76.6%
	Writing	50%	64.9%

Source: 2001-02 and 2002-03 Annual Reports

LLL did not always meet the goals it set for itself, and was clear about this in its annual report. However, it used its shortcomings to shape its instruction for the following years. For example, they missed the benchmark of 85 percent of students testing on grade level in writing. It was determined that 5 of the 14 students who were below their developmental level met all stage benchmarks except spelling. As their annual report spelled out, "This indicates a need to improve spelling instruction during the 2003-04 year."

Table 13:13 Students At Age/Grade Appropriate Developmental Level

<i>Area</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Benchmark</i>	<i>Progress Achieved</i>
2001-02	Reading	85%	93.0%
	Writing	85%	91.0%
2002-03	Reading	85%	89.7%
	Writing	85%	82.1%

While not all students were expected to move up an entire developmental level during the school year, the benchmark was that 100% would progress within their developmental level. There were several different indicators of progress on this level; for example, an increase in recognition of capital and lowercase letters. Table 13:14 displays the progress that was made in this area for 2000-01 through 2002-03.

Table 13:14 Progress within Emergent Level: Letter Recognition

<i>Year</i>	<i>Mean Number of Capital Letters Recognized</i>	
	<i>First Trimester</i>	<i>Third Trimester</i>
2000-2001	7.5	24.5
2001-2002	13.1	24.7
2002-2003	17.5	25.3

All three of the schools who turned in annual reports utilized the data from our parent and/or staff satisfaction surveys. However, only LLL in its 2001-02 and 2002-03 thoroughly described the goals, benchmarks, and progress achieved on indicators of satisfaction. Riverview Scholars reported data from all three years of our study, but did not include benchmarks.

As with the previous school year, nearly all students were demonstrating some progress. Because the school records the results from the assessments for each student, this provides very useful information for teachers and parents. Unfortunately, outsiders are not able to understand how great or small the progress is because there are no relevant comparison groups, or no norms with which to compare these gains.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders: Standardized Test Philosophies, Usage, and Results

Lifelong Learners & Leaders also used some standardized testing: the Terra Nova Cat Basic Multiple Assessment at the third grade level and the OPT at the fourth grade level. Results were positive; however, the number of test takers was quite limited due to the size of the school and limited numbers of older students. In 2002-03, there were only 9 students who took the Terra Nova; all 9 (100%) met the benchmark of a stanine score of 3 or above. Only 4 students took the OPT. Three of them passed the first time, thus meeting the 75 percent benchmark, while the fourth student passed it during a summer administration.

Despite these positive results, the director of Lifelong Learners & Leaders maintains that the use of standardized testing yields little relevant information that could be used to improve instruction. Furthermore, she believes that the students in this school are much too young to be burdened with lengthy standardized tests. However, she found them useful for assessing and improving test-taking skills. For example, some otherwise proficient readers performed poorly on the standardized tests because they lacked the skill of re-reading a text passage before answering questions about it. This helped the school find a particular skill to work on for the following year. On the other hand, one student who passed the writing portion of the OPT was considered not to be a proficient writer by the authentic assessment standards.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders is not the only charter school that we are aware of with a philosophy and vision that is opposed to excessive use of standardized testing, particularly with students in lower elementary. However, Lifelong Learners & Leaders used excellent methods for assessing not only academic progress, but non-academic progress as well. In the next section, we explore some of these methods.

Nonacademic Measures of Student Progress

While each school in our study reported utilizing alternative measures for assessing their unique missions and goals, we were only able to obtain detailed reports of results on these measures from Lifelong Learners & Leaders. We now discuss this school's alternative goals, the unique methods by which they were measured, and the progress that was made.

At Lifelong Learners & Leaders, students' behavior was evaluated on the basis of how it demonstrated the seven "community values" that are considered essential to lifelong learning and spirited citizenship: integrity, work ethic, accountability, respect diversity, interpersonal skills, use of resources, and honoring elders. Progress was measured by teachers using a rubric of 22 specific behaviors spanning the 7 value categories. Figure 13:6 lists the categories and specific behaviors. Teachers rated each child's behavior using a 3-point rubric: NY=Not yet demonstrated, D=Developing appropriately, and A=Achieving consistently the required values.

<u>Personal Integrity</u> Is truthful and honest Shows positive leadership	<u>Interpersonal Skills</u> Shares and takes turns Listens to ideas of others Interacts well with peers Interacts well with adults Solves interpersonal conflicts effectively
<u>Work Ethic</u> Stays on task during work time Takes pride in own work Works independently	<u>Shared and Responsible Use of Resources</u> Uses school materials appropriately Returns books and materials to school on time Cleans up after using materials
<u>Choice and Accountability</u> Uses class time wisely Accepts consequences for choices Shows verbal self-control Shows physical self-control	<u>Honoring Interconnected Web of Life and Time</u> Interacts appropriately with adult visitors and volunteers
<u>Celebration of Diversity</u> Values opinions and ideas of others Willingly helps others Shows interest in learning about a variety of cultures Responds to culturally diverse literature	

Figure 13:6 Lifelong Learners & Leaders's Community Values

Source: Implementing the Vision: Lifelong Learners & Leaders's 2000-01 Annual Report.

During each school year, improvements have been shown across all seven categories. By the third trimester, in each category the majority of students were consistently demonstrating the required values. Younger students often showed the greatest improvement, especially with regard to work ethic, accountability, and interpersonal skills.

13.5 Student Achievement at Essentials Academy

Essentials Academy opened in September 2001 and catered to students in grades K-1 and 5-7. Because this was the first year of operation, the results from the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT) and the Off-Grade Proficiency Test (OGPT) should be considered as baseline results. We never received results from the 2002-03 school year, and because of the small number of sixth graders and lack of a fourth grade, no results of the OPT were publicly available. Figure 13:7 contains the school's 2001-02 OPT results for grade 6 and OGPT results for grades 1 and 5. There were only a small number of test takers at each grade. However, these results can provide information on the performance levels of students that the school attracted during its first year. As can be seen, the performance levels were rather low.

These results were used in curriculum planning. For example, there were more practice tests during the 2002-03 school year and more preparation for the exams. Because of the lack of performance data, it is not possible to consider how the new practices and test preparation at the school affected performance. We next take a closer look at how each school reported their outcomes on various types of goals and objectives, particularly during the 2002-03 school year.

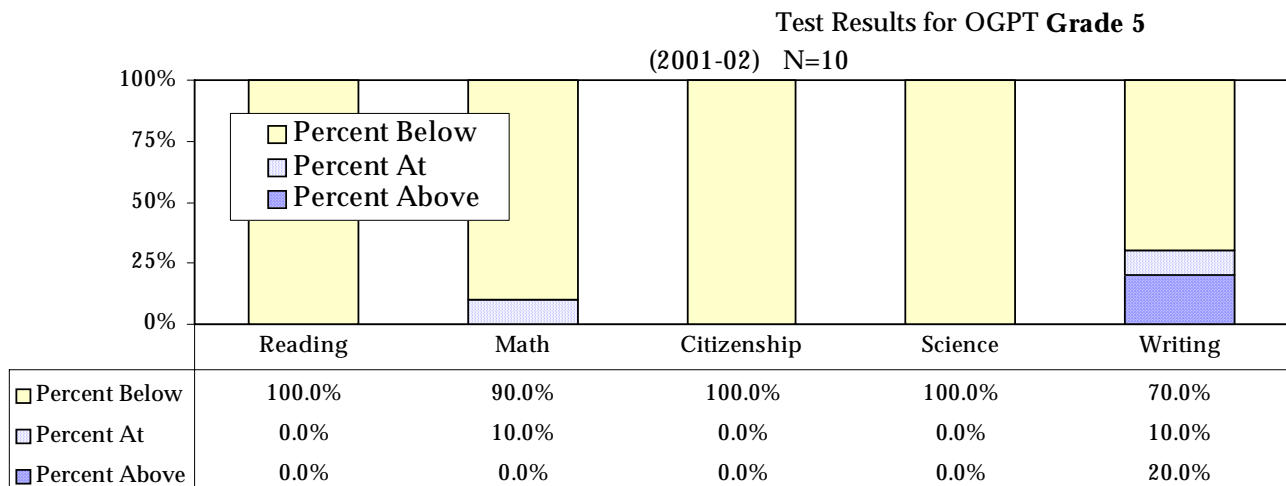
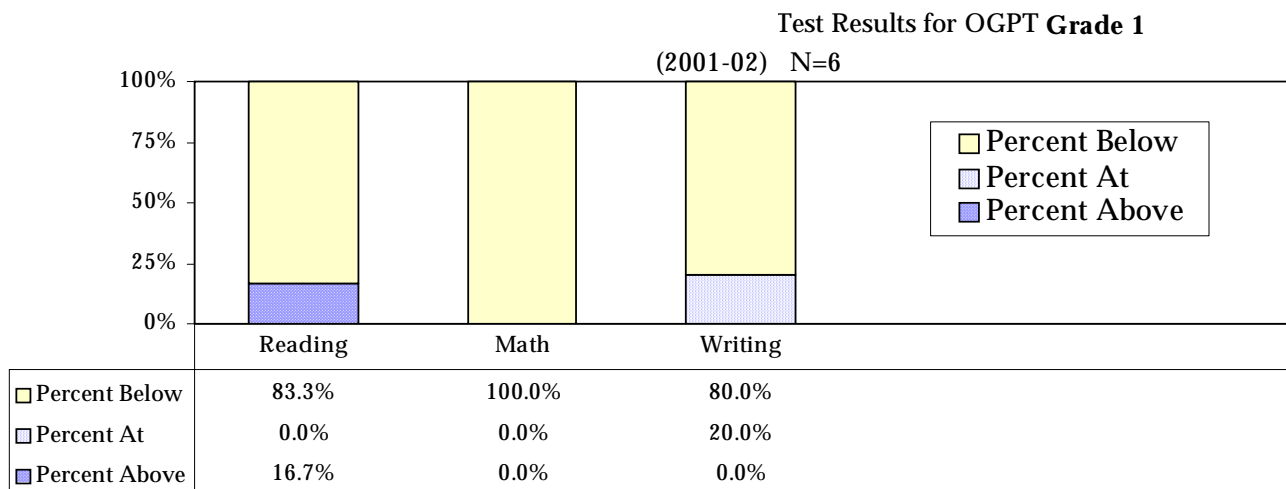
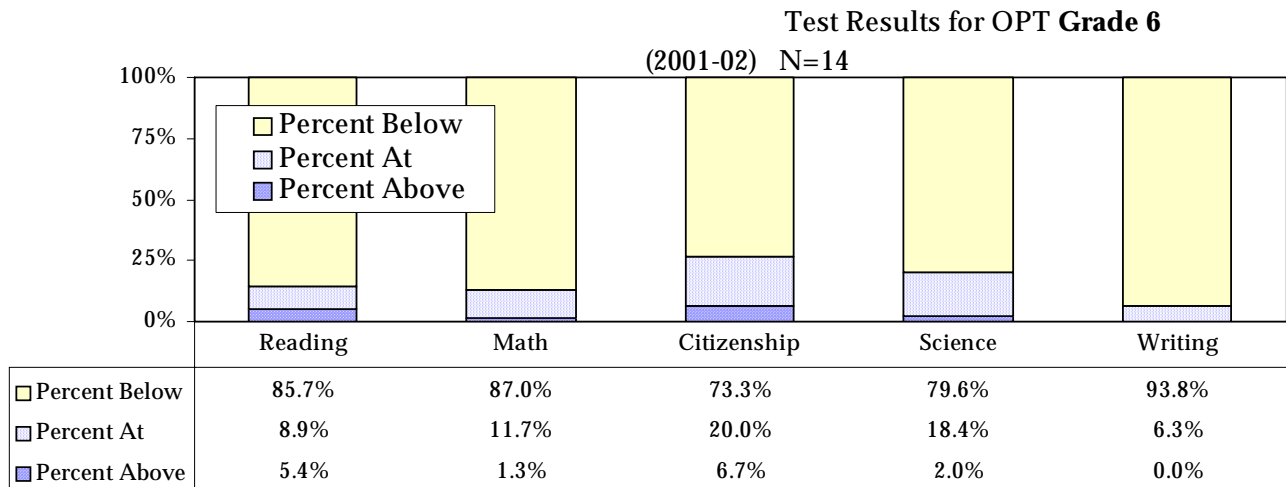


Figure 13:7 Essentials Academy: Performance on the Ohio Proficiency Test and the Off-Grade Proficiency Test, 2001-02

13.6 Charter School Goals and Objectives as Reported in Annual Reports

Lofty sounding mission statements often adorn school conference rooms and superintendents' offices. But if a mission statement is to be a true road map for change, it must be both broadly understood and translated into explicit criteria for assessing results. -Wagner, 1993

A charter must include realistic, measurable, relevant goals with specific benchmarks; and the subsequent annual reports to the sponsor must clearly display the progress toward these goals. Ideally, schools also must explore reasons for success or failure in meeting the goals and develop plans for continuing their successes and correcting their shortcomings. This is what helps schools become “learning organizations” that continually evaluate themselves and strive toward improvement (Davidson, 2001; Awsumb Nelson 2002). Thus far, there is little evidence that the charter schools throughout Ohio are living up to this ideal. LOEO (2003c) found that few charter schools were meeting the performance goals outlined in their contracts. Further, the schools’ goals and progress toward them were often ill-defined in the first place.

Our evaluation team explored how well each of the four schools in our study are faring as far as reporting on their goals and objectives in their annual reports. We examined each school’s mission, goals, objectives and relevant benchmarks to measure progress. First, we looked at each school’s mission statement (see Chapter 4 for details) and found them all to be educationally relevant. We then made a subjective analysis of the objectives articulated in the annual reports that covered the range of goals set out in the mission statements. The objectives fell into three areas: (1) educational progress of students; (2) mission, purpose, and specialized focus of each school; and (3) organizational viability: finance and governance. Most objectives were defined for the educational progress area. For each area we counted the total number of measurable objectives and compared this number with the number of objectives that, according to the data provided in the report, were met or partially met by the school. Overall, the 3 schools succeeded in completely or partially meeting around 80 percent of their objectives. The remaining 20 percent of the indicators that were not met included objectives for which there was insufficient data to analyze. When eliminating objectives for which there is insufficient evidence of passing or failing, Cleveland charter schools met 100 percent of their objectives. However, there was great variability in the number of measurable objectives from each school, as well as the overall quality of the contracts and annual reports. We now look at how each of the four schools in our study fared.

Annual Reports: Findings for Each School

We were able to obtain the contracts and 2000-01, 2001-02, and at least parts of 2002-03 annual reports for all the schools except Essentials Academy. All were quite detailed, and it was evident that considerable effort had gone into preparing them. They often painted a colorful, rich description of the school, with heartfelt messages from school staff and board members. However, a weakness in most of the annual reports was an incongruence between the goals and benchmarks stated in the contracts and the reported progress on these goals in the subsequent annual reports. With the exceptions of the 2001-02 and 2002-03 annual reports from Lifelong Learners & Leaders, the performance goals listed in the contracts often were not sufficiently operationalized and often lacked details regarding benchmarks or even information about the measurement tool that would be used. The annual reports had ample descriptive information about the schools, but they often did not report on the goals as stated in their contracts. Similar findings were reached by LOEO (2002, 2003c) in its broader state evaluation.

Riverview Scholars. Riverview Scholars' contract listed broad goals, "key experiences" implemented to reach the goals, and detailed objectives, but no clear benchmarks with which to assess progress on these objectives. The annual reports included numerous outcomes of its standardized tests and many indicators of parent satisfaction. Moreover, its "Quality Improvement: Challenges and Steps Taken" section thoroughly identified the school's weaknesses and listed plans for improvement. In addition, school staff reported implementing a school specific Student Information System, making it only the second school or district in Ohio to incorporate and track all relevant state standards in a student database.

Despite this database, as well as all the positive qualities of the annual reports, the annual reports often lacked clear objectives as well as benchmarks. When members of the evaluation team addressed this issue with the principal, she seemed reluctant to detail goals and benchmarks in the annual report. She explained, "This school enrolls students midyear who are 1-2 grade levels behind. The process to get a student evaluated and get an IEP takes a whole month! The student must be tested; parents must come in . . . how can you even set reasonable goals for the students or the school under these circumstances?" Some benchmarks were included in Riverview Scholars' 2002-03 annual report, notably the passing rates for the OPT. However, the overall format, although rich and colorful, was not as concretely organized as it could be.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders. In its contract, Lifelong Learners & Leaders included detailed benchmarks on goals for each of four different developmental stages in nine different topic areas: reading, writing, math, science, social studies, art, technology, environmental sciences and responsibility, and wellness and health. However, its 2000-01 annual report addressed only progress in reading in its annual report; other topics were covered only on a process level. Of course, given the intricacy of the nine rubrics³, it would be challenging to display progress on each goal in each area as originally detailed.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders' annual report for 2001-02 was a tremendous improvement as far as clearly defined measurable goals, objectives, and benchmarks. In fact, the ODE highlighted its annual report as an ideal that other charter schools should emulate, and The Evaluation Center staff provided copies of the annual report to the other three charter schools. However, some academic areas that were described in the contract were not covered fully in the annual report (e.g., social studies, science, artistic studies, fitness, health). These areas were covered as far as implementation processes only. Granted, literacy and math may be the most essential in terms of accomplishing the mission of "lifelong learning." It may be too much to ask of teachers to document assessments in every subject based on the original rubrics; assessment and accountability should not jeopardize instructional processes. One project that The Evaluation Center undertook in 2003 was to help create a user-friendly Access database for recording and reporting progress in various areas based on the objectives and benchmarks in the original contract.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders' 2002-03 annual report had a similarly well-organized and detailed format. It included more than 20 well-defined and operationalized objectives in the areas of educational achievement, other mission-related goals (e.g., student values), and organizational viability. The benchmarks for these goals and the progress toward them was well documented.

Main Street Montessori. MSM included 223 pages of Montessori-based objectives in its contract, including objectives for grade levels its school did not include. However, the only outcomes

³ These rubrics can be found in Attachments A-I in the school's contract.

covered in the annual reports were for the standardized tests the students took. In 2001-02, MSM's annual report described a change in its contract regarding the standardized tests that would be used for student assessment, i.e., discontinuing the WRAT and adding the ITBS (in its initial contract, the school planned to use the SAT-9).

The 2002-03 annual report included six month growth rates for grades K-7 on the ITBS and passing rates of grades 1-6 on the OPT and OGPT. However, the results of all the OPT and OGPT passing rates were identical (MSM Annual Report 2002-03, p. 16), indicating a likely reporting error. The Montessori components of instruction, whose outcomes were thoroughly detailed in the contract, were covered only in a philosophical and process-oriented manner in each year's annual report. The fit between the contract and the annual reports could be substantially improved. The principal expressed a desire to include more substantial evidence of progress on Montessori-based goals in the annual reports. However, she reported that its EMO staff preferred that the format remain the same, since it had never received negative feedback.

Essentials Academy. Essentials Academy did not have an annual report for us in either 2001-02 or 2002-03. The ODE requires annual reports as one of its accountability measures.

General Findings Regarding Contracts and Annual Reports

In general, we found that the fit between the contract and the annual reports could be substantially improved. LOEO (2003c) obtained similar findings, noting that annual reports were often submitted late or lacked relevant information. However, it is often unreasonable to expect charter schools' annual reports to provide an accurate and timely report on every objective outlined in their contracts, especially given the enormous scope of the objectives and the difficulty in measuring some of them. Charter school founders often create contracts with idealistic goals and detailed assessment tools, in part because such high standards and detailed assessment ideas are more likely to win the approval of an authorizing agency. However, it is unrealistic to expect new charter schools' contracts to include measurable and relevant goals with realistic benchmarks, since the contracts are drawn up before the schools even begin operation. Goals and benchmarks often have to be revised in accordance with the characteristics of the student body and various other unpredictable factors. Moreover, new charter schools may not reach perfection in defining goals and accurately assessing progress on them during the first year, when addressing immediate crises often takes precedence. Other states have recognized this and provided more time for charter schools to refine their goals and objectives. For example, Massachusetts allows charter schools at least four years to refine their measurable objectives. Our work with charter schools in Connecticut required three years, with extensive technical assistance, before the charter schools were able to formulate and measure specific objectives that were relevant to the schools' missions.

Regardless of the implausibility of a school meeting all its self-stated goals, the failure to meet or at least address them could serve as grounds for revocation or nonrenewal of the charter. Granted, the pressure from satisfied parents and other constituents to keep underachieving schools open may preclude what may be seen as a violation of their contract (Bulkley & Fisler, 2002). Nonetheless, this is especially risky in Ohio's political climate, where charter schools and several of their sponsors have been threatened with lawsuits over their alleged lack of accountability. The charter schools have the option of revising their contracts to be clearer and more pragmatic. Such revisions can hold them accountable to realistic goals, while reducing the risk of closure for failing to live up to unreasonable expectations.

13.7 Summary and Recommendations

Performance accountability may ultimately be the most important kind of accountability for charter schools. This may be demonstrated, not only by the mandated methods of standardized tests as reported in the local report cards, but also by the unique goals, objectives, and methods by which to assess them.

According to the local report cards, the charter schools in our study generally did not fare well on standardized tests, even when compared to neighboring district schools. However, the local report cards may not be the best way to demonstrate charter school progress. Low numbers of students in particular grades may prohibit reporting the results. Even when the results are reported, comparing them with other schools, even neighboring schools, may not tell the entire story. Low performance compared with other schools may be due in part to charter schools attracting low-performing students.

Contracts and annual reports, in theory, provide a sound measure for establishing and reporting on progress and performance. This is especially important in charter schools that emphasize the value of phenomena other than standardized test scores. One school in our study did an exemplary job of defining and reporting on their school's unique goals, benchmarks, and progress. Two schools' annual reports included elaborate detail about the schools' values and processes, but few relevant benchmarks and indicators with which to measure progress. One school failed to give us an annual report at all. All over Ohio designing adequate annual reports has been a challenge (LOEO, 2003a).

While the charter school bargain implies increased autonomy for increased accountability, Ohio goes further than many other states in mandating that charter schools must be held accountable to the specific objectives they state in their contracts. The state's charter school law requires that schools report on these objectives in their annual reports. These requirements provide charter school authorizers in Ohio with considerable leverage and grounds for revoking or deciding not to renew charters granted to the community schools. Other states have ratcheted up reporting requirements for charter schools over time; but the Ohio law, from the very beginning, made the reporting demands explicit. Unfortunately, most charter schools cannot demonstrate that they are meeting the objectives specified in their contracts, because the objectives are not sufficiently defined or are not measurable. The objectives reflect initial planning ideas from before the schools were opened. After the schools start operation, the mismatch between objectives specified in the contract and the actual program that evolves becomes quite apparent.

Charter schools in Ohio, including at least three of the four in our study, require more time and support to refine and improve their measurable objectives. Authorizers should make it clear that schools have the opportunity to revisit these objectives and modify the contracts. At the same time, the demand that charter schools must report on their objectives in the annual report needs to be heard loudly. One board member expressed his unwillingness to modify the annual report since the school had never received any negative feedback regarding previous annual reports. Some of the schools appear to use the annual report more as a marketing tool than as an accountability tool. Thus, their inclination is to provide more descriptive information about the school rather than report on the original objectives.

According to the auditor of state, ODE has not been providing adequate assistance to schools to help improve their accountability plans. Further, the auditor of state claims that ODE has not been holding the schools accountable to their contracts. As per H.B. 364, both assistance and oversight will be delegated to local entities. There are concerns that the local sponsors will have

different standards depending on their political views toward charter schools. To prevent this, ODE will be expected to provide oversight as well as assistance to the local groups. Time will tell if this improves the accountability of the charter schools and, ultimately, the scholastic outcomes.

The findings in this chapter underline one of the weaknesses of Ohio's accountability plan for charter schools. If we examine the performance accountability of our four case schools using the lens of the state, we find very temporal results for two of the four schools. However, when we use the lens of the schools in their own efforts to demonstrate accountability for student progress, we find test results from a variety of norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests. The schools include evidence from other sources such as surveys or school- or classroom-based assessments. Because the state accountability test is limited to grades 4, 6, and 9 and does not yield information on individual gains, it is insufficient for capturing the progress made by most of the charter schools. Nevertheless, the burden of evidence lies with charter schools. They should not hide behind the weaknesses of the state assessment test, but instead should seek out other, more appropriate measures for capturing student progress in their schools. One school in our study has done so quite well. The charter school law as it currently exists leaves charter schools vulnerable to be closed because most are not demonstrating that they can meet even the objectives they set for themselves. While no charter school closures in Ohio to date are due solely to performance accountability, no one can say for certain whether the authorizers will strictly hold the charter schools to their contracts in the future. In the meantime, improvement is still needed for most of the charter schools to serve as a model for accountability. One school in our study has been cited as such a model. More than other charter schools, we believe charter schools sponsored by The Cleveland Foundation have the potential for serving as model schools and as levers for change in the traditional public schools.

Impact on the Cleveland Public Schools and Community

As autonomous, less regulated, yet accountable public schools, community schools . . . can spur school reform by serving as a vital ‘research and development arm’ for the benefit of all public schools. – Office of School Options’ *A Policy Paper for the State Board of Education* (2000)

In Chapters 3 and 4, we explored the innovations from the charter schools in Ohio and the four schools funded by The Cleveland Foundation in particular. In this chapter we explore whether these innovations are diffused into the public schools, particularly in the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD). We also explore whether the charter schools have other impacts on CMSD’s educational programs, such as spurring competition. Further, we examine other impacts of the charter schools on public education, such as financial and administrative impacts. Throughout this chapter we explain the reasons for charter schools’ impacts, or lack thereof, on district schools, particularly in CMSD.

This chapter begins with a brief history of the state of CMSD and the various attempts, both within and outside, to reform it. We describe the relations between CMSD and the charter school movement and how that relationship influences the ability of the charter schools to impact school reform. Next, we look at two statewide legal matters that may influence charter-host district relations throughout the state of Ohio: a new bill regarding various aspects of charter school law and a recently dismissed lawsuit against charter schools in Ohio. We then examine an area of major concern to charter school opponents: the financial and administrative impacts on district schools. Finally, we look at the positive collaborations between charter and noncharter schools and their implications for school reform.

14.1 A Recent History of the Cleveland Municipal School District

Before exploring the extent to which Cleveland community schools have had an impact on surrounding public schools, it is useful to review the recent history and current state of the area’s largest public school district. The Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD), which enrolled around 76,000 students as of 2000-1¹, has had a decades-long history of dysfunction and poor student outcomes. In the early 1990s, the Cleveland City School District was “in the midst of a financial crisis that is perhaps unprecedented in the history of American education” (Petro, 1996,

¹ <http://www.cmsdnet.net/students/index.htm>

p. 2-1). In 1996, auditors found that the district had been performing abysmally. None of the 18 state standards for minimal acceptable performance were met, designating Cleveland an “academic emergency” district. Ninety percent of ninth graders failed the basic proficiency test, and fewer than a third of the students graduated from high school (Petro, 1996). Furthermore, according to the Supreme Court voucher case (*Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 536 U.S. 2, 2002) “For more than a generation . . . Cleveland’s public schools have been among the worst performing public schools in the nation.”

Over the past several years, various reforms had been attempted from within and outside the district. In 1995, a federal district court placed CMSD under control of the state. In 1997, House Bill 269 created CMSD’s current governance structure with the mayor’s appointment of the current Board of Education in place of the elected board². The purpose was to create a board that focused on policies that concerned student achievement rather than on the “special interests” of the elected board members (Cleveland Initiative for Education, n.d.a, b; Hill et al., 2002). Michael R. White, who was Cleveland’s mayor at the time, asked the Cleveland Summit on Education and the Cleveland Initiative for Education to help him coordinate and implement the newly restructured governance. He appointed nine board members from a slate of candidates selected by a local nominating panel, creating the only mayorally appointed school board in Ohio and one of the few such boards in the nation.³ This board convened in 1998, the same year Michael White appointed Barbara Byrd-Bennet as CEO of CMSD.

Barbara Byrd-Bennet quickly initiated a number of reforms in the CMSD. Some included more explicit content standards and a new grading system for all the schools. She also set a new policy requiring minimum attendance and academic requirements for grade promotion. In addition, the length of each school day was expanded (Corrigan, 2002). Other reforms were more radical, such as closing 16 failing schools and phasing out middle schools in favor of K-8 schools (Corrigan, 2002; Lyles, 2002). In addition, \$20,000,000 was spent on security-related measures such as metal detectors, ID cards, and cameras (Corrigan, 2002). Since 1998 many improvements have taken place in CMSD, most notably moving from the lowest rating within the Academic Emergency category to the highest rating within the Academic Watch category as of the 2002-03 school year. Six out of 22 performance indicators were met where previously none had been met (CMSD Media Advisory, August 2003). There were notable improvements even within indicators on which the CMSD did not meet the standards. For example, while only 22 percent of fourth graders passed the reading tests in 1998, 59 percent passed them in 2003 (CMSD Media Advisory, August 2003). In addition to these academic improvements, the fiscal health of CSMD went from critical condition to “about as clean a school audit as we’ve seen” (Cited by Lyles, 2002).

These improvements occurred even as the economy turned sluggish in the early 2000s. In June 2002, state funding ran short and public schools, governments, and hospitals were temporarily withheld payments (Ohlemacher & Theis, 2002). In March 2003, Gov. Bob Taft cut Ohio’s aid to schools by \$90.6 million. Cleveland faced a cut in government funding from \$375,377,516.03 to \$371,298,725.03—a loss of \$4,078,791.00.⁴ CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennet indicated that classroom sizes would have to increase as a result of these cuts.

² <http://www.cmsdnet.net/board/>

³ <http://www.cmsdnet.net/board/boardchair.htm>

⁴ http://www.cleveland.com/education/agate.ssf?/news/more/district_cuts.html

Meanwhile, throughout the mid-1990s and early 2000s other reforms outside the realm of the traditional public school system sprang up in Cleveland. Starting in 1996, the Pilot Project Scholarship Program was introduced to provide financial aid, or “vouchers,” to enable students to attend a participating private or public school of their choice. Public school proponents worried that such a program would siphon off funds from the lean public schools budgets, a concern that undoubtedly grew as public school funds shrank. There were also concerns regarding the constitutionality of the program. Because 96 percent of Cleveland families used their vouchers for religious schools, the federal appellate court initially ruled that the program violated the separation of church and state. An appeal regarding this controversial school reform was taken all the way to the United States Supreme Court, where on June 27, 2002, the decision was reversed and the voucher program was confirmed as constitutional.

Ohio’s charter school law, which went into effect in 1997, provided additional, nonsectarian school choices for Cleveland families. In fact, two of the original “Hope Academy” voucher schools shut down and reopened as charter schools (Gill et al., 2001). CMSD was among the first districts to include charter schools, starting with MSM and three other charter schools that were not in our study. According to The Cleveland Foundation’s grant-making strategy (1999), “[Charter] schools add an important arrow to Greater Cleveland’s school reform quiver: they help area districts establish a new way to foster strong, distinctive schools and hold them accountable” (p. 1). This was one of the reasons that The Cleveland Foundation chose to fund qualified start-up charter schools as part of its commitment to school improvement.

Indeed, significant improvements in the CMSD have been made since the charter school initiative was started in 1997. Should the charter schools in Cleveland receive credit for them? Most local education experts believe there is insufficient evidence for this. Many other reform efforts within the CMSD were independent of the charter schools. For example, there was the transition of CMSD high schools into smaller “learning communities,” or “schools within a school.” These were designed to provide the benefits that small schools often offer. Other schools had service learning projects, Montessori-like curricula, or programs in which senior citizens mentored younger students. Most of these programs were initiated before the charter schools in our study were started. Some of the programs were initiated after the establishment of the charter schools but still appear to be have been developed independently of their influence. All had significant differences between the curricula in the charter schools in our study. CMSD staff cited the district’s mission as the driving force behind such changes, not the influence of nor competition with the charter schools.

Indeed, there is little evidence of diffusion of innovation from the charter schools to CMSD. Further, according to one local educational expert (personal communication, March 2002) there has been remarkably little diffusion of innovation even within the CMSD. Individual schools within CMSD have implemented significant changes and demonstrated remarkable progress as a result. However, this has not transferred to all the other schools within the district. Given that there was little evidence of diffusion of effective innovation from within the school district, this expert was highly skeptical that district schools would attempt to emulate the charter schools’ innovations. This was particularly unlikely because many CMSD staff distrusted the charter school movement, as was apparent by our staff interviews.

Further, during the 2002-03 year there were only 17 charter schools in a district with 121 non-charter public schools; expecting the former to greatly impact the latter would be akin to “a pea trying to move a boulder,” as another local educational expert described. Numerous other stakeholders agreed that Cleveland’s charter school movement was not large or well-established

enough to promote substantial change. This echoes the findings of Finn, Manno, and Vanourek (1999a), who discovered that large urban areas—paradoxically, the first places to attempt charter school reform—were the least impacted by charter schools. The lack of impact was mainly due to their larger size and complexity of problems and attempted solutions. The widespread opposition to charter schools in Cleveland and throughout Ohio was also perceived to be a major barrier to promoting school reform via charter schools. As we shall see, the quality of relations between the charter schools and the host districts profoundly affects the impact of the charter schools on the traditional public schools.

14.2 Community Relations and Diffusion of Innovation

Charter schools potentially might have a variety of impacts on surrounding public schools, including influences on educational practice, school funding, and administrative practice. We begin with impacts on educational practice and the mechanisms through which such diffusion might operate.

Charter schools were originally designed, not only to expand parental choice in public schools, but also to provide incentives for traditional public schools to improve their performance (OSO, 2000). Thanks to lessened regulations, charter schools were seen as schools that could experiment with new educational innovations. If these experiments were successful, they could be emulated by the other public schools. Conversely, charter schools could provide an alternative against which the public schools would have to compete. This competition would spur the public schools to improve in order to avoid losing students to the charter schools. These scenarios reflect two potential models by which innovations may diffuse from charter schools to traditional public schools: the collegial model and the market competitive model. The collegial model postulates that diffusion takes place through open cooperation, while the competitive model postulates that it takes place as the result of competing for the same market share (Miron & Nelson, 2000; Miron & Nelson, 2002).

In the collegial model, the charter school willingly shares its ideas with the noncharter schools, which attempt to emulate them. This presumes cooperative relations between the host district and the charter schools, relations that now appear to be more the exception than the rule in some states. Such relations are most feasible when the charter school is initiated and/or sponsored by the host district (Miron et al., 2001). However, the evidence suggests that collegial diffusion is quite unusual in Ohio, where local sponsorship or even support has been rare (Finn, 2000). Fully 105 of Ohio's 135 charter schools are currently sponsored by ODE, pending the requirements for each of these schools to find a new sponsor. Lucas County ESC sponsors 9 schools and the University of Toledo sponsors 7 schools. As of June 2003, 13 of the Ohio charter schools, including 9 cyberschools, are sponsored by their local school boards, and most of these district-sponsored schools are quite new. According to the Center for Education Reform (2001), Ohio charter school law received the highest possible rating as far as "schools may be started without evidence of local support." While this might grant more freedom to start charter schools, the charter schools that lack supportive relations with their host districts may be less likely to share their innovations willingly.

Generally, a relationship that ranges from uncooperative to hostile may not foster the open sharing of ideas; this phenomenon has been seen in other states as well (Hassel, 1999; Nelson, Miron, Risley & Sullins, 2002). Communications between charter schools and traditional public schools regarding innovations may be limited and even discouraged. Adversarial relations may

lead traditional public school staff to discredit rather than emulate or even actively compete with the charter schools. The “us and them” mentality may extend beyond this. At three of the four charter school boards in our study, members were pressured by their employers to resign from their respective charter school boards out of concern that their membership demonstrated a stance against CMSD. In some cases, constituents of the public school district may even seek ways to sabotage a local charter school movement, mainly through the promotion of legislation that greatly impedes their development (Hassel, 1999). This was quite evident in Ohio. Stephen Ramsey, the president of the Ohio Community Schools Center, referred to district public schools’ opposition to charter schools as “focusing on killing the program rather than focusing on improving their own” (Sack, 2002).

Several charter school administrators described how the state and local media, particularly Cleveland’s major paper, the *Plain Dealer*, were invariably critical of charter schools. We found numerous *Plain Dealer* articles that seemed to support this (e.g., Sidoti, 2001; Stephens, 2001; Welsch-Huggins, 2002). We also found articles in other major Ohio newspapers that were hostile to charter schools all over the state (e.g., Mrozowski, 2001; Oplinger & Willard, 1999; Willard & Oplinger, 1999). According to various charter school stakeholders, the local media also promoted confusion between charter schools and various other controversial school reforms, such as voucher schools and other alternative schools (e.g., Stephens, 2001). Furthermore, the most egregious charter school failures were highlighted in order to forewarn the public about the potential disasters of allowing any charter schools to exist in Ohio (e.g., Oplinger & Willard, 1999). The Coalition for Public Education created and widely distributed a four-page bulletin opposing H.B. 364, attacking the “disaster” of Ohio’s charter school movement with a collage of quotes and headlines from nearly three dozen Ohio newspaper articles and editorials critical of charter schools (The Coalition for Public Education, 2002). Stephen Ramsey described the public relations campaign against charter schools as the “multiple slashes until dead approach.” (Personal communication, January 2002).

We were able to interview three principals of CMSD elementary/middle schools regarding their opinions of local charter schools, as well as four other staff at one of these three schools. Virtually all these staff expressed a lack of information concerning what charter schools even were, with one principal demonstrating unfounded prejudice against them. One principal, referring to a special experimental program in which her school was involved, asked us, “Do you consider us a charter school?” She had never heard of the actual charter school that was located just a few blocks from her own school. At two of the schools, staff repeatedly referred to parochial schools as charter schools. One school psychologist emphatically criticized the special education practices that occurred at parochial schools, assuming that either parochial schools were a form of charter schools or that parochial schools and charter schools had similar policies regarding special education.

One principal immediately reacted to our inquiries with disdain against charter schools. She explained to us that one of the charter schools had transferred nine students with severe behavioral and academic programs to her school as late as April. We asked her to check her records to see which charter school had sent these students. She then revealed that it actually had been another CMSD school. She made many disparaging remarks about the Cleveland area charter schools in general, then later indicated that she was only vaguely aware of Riverview Scholars and the HOPE schools but none of the other charter schools.

Teachers and staff at all four of the charter schools were painfully aware of the antagonism from the districts’ public school systems, as well as charter schools’ subsequent lack of positive

impact on them. For example, during a focus group of four MSM teachers, one explained, “Community schools went from 0 to 60. They are seen as taking money from the public schools. But we provide better services. . . new options. . .” Another MSM teacher followed, “I see what we’re doing as providing an opportunity for kids to be more successful. We should be an example that other schools should model.” When asked if any of the local public schools were trying to model themselves after MSM, the response was a unanimous, emphatic “NO!” As a teacher explained, “They want their money back. But we think beyond money. We think, ‘What services can we provide?’”

On the other hand, an MSM board member, who was also the founder of the EMO described how one of their new EMO-run charter school in Parma (a first-ring district) developed an all-day kindergarten program, and soon Parma started an all-day kindergarten of its own. He thinks the district’s all-day kindergarten was initiated in response to the similar program at the charter school.⁵ Nevertheless, he was disappointed by the contentious relations between the charter schools and the Cleveland area districts. “We were hoping for better relationships, but now we just hope they leave us alone. Lorain [another first ring district] hates us. We can’t be concerned; we just focus on providing the best education we can. We have to wait until the animosity dissipates to form relations.”

Charter school innovations can catalyze innovations in the district even in the absence of positive interschool relations. If a charter school is demonstrated to be successful as a result of a certain innovation, the district school may—with or without consulting the charter school—replicate the innovative ideas in order to encourage more parents to enroll their children in the public school. They may also take on other improvements unrelated to the charter schools’ specific innovations in order to prevent the attrition of district school students to the charter schools. This demonstrates the market competitive model of diffusion. While not as friendly as the collegial model of diffusion, this model has the potential for improving both charter and noncharter public schools as they are forced to compete for limited student enrollment.

As the charter school movement grows in Ohio, district schools are feeling the need to compete with them. The superintendent of the Dayton school district, where there were far more charter schools than in any other Ohio district, stated the following:

We know if we are going to be competitive, we're going to have to demonstrate our ability to educate children. I wouldn't sit here and tell you charter schools haven't spurred us to push forward and improve, but by the same token, it's just appropriate and proper that we do so (quoted by Gewertz, 2002, p. 19).

Paradoxically, one way that Ohio school districts recently have been coping with the competition of charter schools is to sponsor their own charter schools, particularly on-line cyberschools (see Chapter 3 for more on cyberschools). Evidently, this was in response to the growing popularity of cyberschools throughout Ohio that were managed and sponsored by other entities. ECOT (Electronic Classrooms of Tomorrow), the original Ohio cyberschool that opened

⁵ When charter schools introduce all-day kindergarten, it is a common response by districts to follow suit. In part this is because districts realize that this could be an effective strategy for charter schools to capture or increase market share. When charter schools attract families with an all-day kindergarten program then these families are likely to stay in the charter schools and even enroll siblings in the same school.

in 2000, was sponsored by Lucas County Educational Services Center; Tri-Rivers Career Center sponsored TRECA a year later. White Hat, the largest EMO in Ohio, opened OHDELA cyberschool in 2002; that same year 4 public school districts—Akron, Elida, London, and Reynoldsburg—each sponsored its own on-line charter school (Office of Community Schools, 2002). Additionally, at least 21 additional school districts expressed an interest to ODE in sponsoring electronic schools for the 2002-03 year (LOEO, 2003a). Although only conversion schools are permitted in districts not designated as Urban 21, academic watch, or academic emergency, Am. Sub. 364 designates cyberschools as conversion schools, thus opening this possibility to all districts (S. Burigana, personal communication, June 17, 2003). Additionally, as of 2002 at least 100 districts had informed the Ohio Department of Education about their desire to start their own nonchartered virtual schools. Most of those districts are contracting with the Marion-based TRECA Digital Academy, which already sponsors its own online charter school, to help them develop their district-run online schools. Some Northeast Ohio districts expect to sign similar contracts with the Lakeshore Northeast Ohio Computer Association, which provides technology services. This strategy allows districts to offer their students online classes while keeping per-pupil funds. Whether the districts sponsor on-line charter schools or start their own noncharter cyberschools, this “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” phenomenon appears to be another form of competitive diffusion of innovation.

Nevertheless, according to LOEO (2003 a), most district schools cited the annual report cards, not competition from charter schools, as the impetus for self-improvement. However, this report also stated that four school districts were stepping up their marketing and customer service efforts, in part to prevent their students from transferring to the charter schools.

While relations between the district and the charter schools may be adversarial, personal friendships may remain among the teachers in both school systems (Miron & Nelson, 2000). A teacher at a charter school might share ideas with her friend at a district school. The district school teacher might replicate innovations that her friend found effective, if she had the freedom to implement them within the more regulated district. The resulting impacts were tiny, incremental grass-roots effects on an interpersonal level. Nevertheless, as one local education expert explained, “You can’t underestimate the potential effects of an active parent saying, ‘The community school does this, why can’t we?’ Community schools are grass roots, and so is their impact. Its hard to measure, but don’t underestimate it.” She added that if charter schools are no different from the district schools, there would be no impact. Given the numerous innovations within the four schools in our study (see Chapter 4) , there is plenty of potential for impact if circumstances allow it.

Our study found a couple examples of such a potential for grass-roots diffusion. One staff member of LLL had a mother who worked in CMSD as a program developer. The LLL staff member explained LLL’s philosophy and innovations in detail to her mother. This CMSD program developer then expressed a desire to infuse LLL-like innovations into the CMSD schools: intergenerational activities, small classrooms, reading mentors, multiage classrooms, and young students learning from each other. She and her colleagues were not sure to what extent these ideas could be implemented within CMSD, given the constraints of the budget and various regulations. At Riverview Scholars, the principal stated that an associate of hers in a first-ring district was so impressed with Riverview Scholars that she hoped to infuse similar programs in her own school district. Time will tell if these intentions eventually initiate new programs in the districts.

Nonetheless, there is still little evidence of cooperative competitive diffusion from charter to noncharter schools in Cleveland. This is probably due to the fact that charter schools enroll a small proportion of all public school students in the area, as compared with cities such as Dayton. As of Spring 2003, 121 schools were in the CMSD, including 62 elementary and 23 K-8 schools, but

only 17 charter schools in the same locale. Thus, it is unlikely that the charter schools in Cleveland pose much of a competitive threat to the district schools. However, CMSD did choose to sponsor a military-style charter school that opened in the Fall 2003; perhaps the growing popularity of the current charter schools in Cleveland influenced this decision.

There have been widespread concerns that the charter schools have had a growing negative impact on CMSD, especially regarding finances. In fact, finances may be the biggest bone of contention regarding the impact of charter schools on district schools throughout Ohio and elsewhere.

14.3 Financial and Administrative Impacts on District Schools

We have urban districts that are already bleeding, and [charter advocates] say, 'Let's apply leeches.' Then they say, 'Oh? Are you still bleeding?' and they apply more leeches.

--Tom Mooney, president of the Ohio Federation for Teachers, quoted by Gerwertz, April 2002, p. 19

Many supporters of the Cleveland Municipal School District are opposed to charter schools in the belief that they will syphon off an excessive amount of money from the school district. This loss could ultimately threaten teachers' job security as well as the quality of the public schools. In the lawsuit against the charter schools, the plaintiffs claimed that about \$132 million in state and local funds was diverted from district public schools to charter schools during the 2001-02 school year. The funds were to support the 22,730 students who were enrolled in charter schools at a rate of about \$5,807 per student. There were concerns that if the additional schools approved by OSBE and the University of Toledo opened during the 2002-03 school year, thus increasing statewide charter school enrollment to 25,000 students, \$175 million would be diverted to charter schools. According to the complainants, Cleveland Municipal School District stood to lose \$14.8 million in state funding and \$7.9 million in local funding to the charter schools during the 2002-03 year.

According to LOEO (2003a), a total of \$22,017,219 was transferred from the CMSD to charter schools during the 2002-03 year—a greater monetary loss than any other district in Ohio except for Cincinnati's \$27 million. This amounted to a 6.2 percent loss of state foundation funding as a result of a 5.2 percent loss of enrollment. This contrasted with a 20.8 percent loss of state funds in Dayton, where 15.5 percent of the students transferred to charter schools. However, the CMSD calculated that it lost \$33.3 million to a total of 29 charter schools, including 12 schools that were either located outside the district area or were on-line electronic schools (Masevice, 2003). This was based on the loss of 5,610 students each at \$5,935 per-pupil funds. This was \$9.4 million more than originally projected for that year. Given the aforementioned budget cuts to public school districts, the impact of this loss can be quite detrimental.

Charter schools do not directly take money from districts that was generated from local taxes. Instead, state funds that were to pay for the students in district schools follow them to the charter schools. However, local funds are determined in part by the per-pupil funding from the state, which is calculated *before* subtracting the funds that are diverted to charter schools. Therefore, district schools do lose out on local funds as an indirect result of the charter school transfers. Local funds would only be necessary to *directly* fund charter school students if so many students transferred to charter schools that per-pupil state funding ran out

In addition, according to the lawsuit (OCPT v. OSBE, 2002), an estimated \$5 million was overpaid to numerous Ohio charter schools based on overestimations of enrollment. Although

these schools were required to refund their overpayments to the state, not all have complied. Several schools that were asked to pay back this money, and who have been threatened with closure over the matter, are responding by suing the state. To avoid additional such situations in the future, the state board revised its payment plan to charter schools. New schools now initially receive payments based on 50 percent of their estimated enrollment and receive the remaining funds once enrollments are solidified (ODE Office of Community Schools, 2002b).

The substantial and growing loss of state funding to district schools must be considered. Until recently, the number of students leaving district schools for charter schools had been so small that it was unlikely to have made a significant impact. During the 1999-00 year, among all the public schools that lost their students to charter schools, the average number of transferring students was only 11, dispersed across various grade levels. During this period, 5 of these 11 public schools (1 of which was in Cleveland) lost 25 or more students from the same grade, possibly causing a teaching position to be eliminated (LOEO, 2001). Not only does such a situation threaten teachers' job security, but these losses could financially affect the entire school, since the savings from dismissing 1 teacher would not offset the costs of the facility and administration. Further, although losing fewer than 25 students per grade may not lead to the loss of a teaching position, it would mean fewer students and hence less per-pupil funding per classroom, without the loss of a teacher to at least partially offset the cost.

Although in 1999-00 only 5 schools faced the prospect of losing 25 or more students in the same grade, the number of Ohio's charter schools nearly tripled by 2002-03. Currently, there are no available data regarding how many schools lost more than 25 students in the same grade during the 2001-02 or 2002-03 school years. However, the overall number of district students that have transferred to charter schools has steadily grown, with the subsequent loss of per-pupil funding from the district schools.

As indicated in Chapter 3, the number and size of Ohio's charter schools will continue to grow. Although the range of districts in which charter schools may start has expanded to include "academic watch" districts, the birth rate of new charter schools may slow since OSBE may no longer sponsor new schools. Currently, the total number of charter schools is now capped at 225. Time will tell if this expansion incurs a progressively greater financial and/or administrative impact on the district schools.⁶

14.4 Impact of Legal Actions on Charter Schools

A number of contextual factors likely contribute to the lack of clear diffusion of ideas from charter to noncharter schools in Cleveland. First, recent legislation could ultimately affect the impact of the charter schools on the district schools throughout Ohio. Am. Sub. H.B. 364 forbids OSBE from continuing to sponsor charter schools, but it allows charter schools to open in "academic watch" as well as "academic emergency" districts. Since the passage of this law, some districts have sponsored new charter schools, particularly online charter schools. Even Cleveland has since sponsored its own new charter school. This might foster the sharing of ideas more readily than arrangements where charter schools exist despite the will of the district. However, it is unlikely that many of the districts will be eager to sponsor preexisting charter schools that were originally

⁶ Whatever the amount of financial resources charter schools take away from other public schools, the most important policy question is whether any such losses are justified by gains in student achievement in charter schools and (through competitive pressures) noncharter schools.

sponsored by OBSE and developed against the desires of the district. Further, some charter schools, including at least one in our study, expressed concerns that if the local district took over their sponsorship they risked losing their autonomy and hence support to provide their unique programming. Charter schools that are developed in collaboration with the district, or at least with the understanding from the start that the district is their sponsor, might not be as likely to encounter such dilemmas. In the future, we shall see how many districts agree to sponsor charter schools, the relationships between the hosts and the schools, and the resulting impact of the charter schools on district schools.

The most blatant threat to charter schools was the lawsuit against numerous representatives of charter schools in Ohio; details regarding this lawsuit are covered in Chapter 3. While charter schools that contract with for-profit EMOs were the primary target, ultimately all charter schools in Ohio were affected and even threatened with possible termination. Essentially, the lawsuit charged that the charter schools violated the Ohio state constitutional “system of common schools.” Further, the lawsuit stated that the sponsors of charter schools—other than the then six schools sponsored by their districts—had not “considered the impact of community schools upon the ability of school districts to provide for a thorough and efficient public school system within their districts” (OCPT v. OSBE, p. 18). The lawsuit was dismissed in April 2003, but the plaintiffs planned to appeal.

Despite the dismissal, it is likely that this lawsuit and the publicity that surrounded it influenced public perceptions of charter schools and reduced cooperative relations between districts and charter schools. Nevertheless, there have been some cooperative relations between charter schools and noncharter schools, both public and private. In the next section, we detail some of these relations within the four schools in our study.

14.5 Collaborations with Noncharter Schools

While thus far there are few examples of the charter schools serving as either role models or competence-spurring competition, there have been some examples of charter schools collaborating with traditional public schools as well as nonpublic schools. Perhaps if such collaborations become more involved in the future, they may influence one another so that all improve. Further, they could serve as role models to other charter and noncharter schools, encouraging more collaboration among them and easing the tensions between district and charter schools in general.

Riverview Scholars collaborated with several local noncharter public high schools. Perhaps these public schools did not see Riverview Scholars as a competitive threat, since the high schools covered completely different grade levels. The high schools sent their students as literacy volunteers and volunteer arts and crafts instructors for the after school program at the Riverview Scholars. High school students also provided childcare during the charter school’s parents’ meetings.

One project concerning a 2002 “Freedom Walk” to commemorate the underground railroad involved extensive collaboration between Riverview Scholars and a local high school. This project was spurred by a well-known civil rights activist and grandmother of one of the Riverview Scholars students, who walked more than 400 miles across the Midwest along the path of the underground railroad to celebrate the slaves’ treacherous journey to freedom (See also Chapter 4 for a vignette about her involvement with a Literacy Block lesson). Many staff and students at Riverview Scholars participated in a much shorter version of this walk around the parks of Cleveland. The path was studded with landmarks created by the local high school. A staff member

at this high school had a child at Riverview Scholars, thus facilitating this interschool collaboration as well as exemplifying parental participation. This highly publicized Freedom Walk celebrated the African-American community and its supporters, as well as drew attention to Riverview Scholars and the participating high school.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders had a partnership with a local private school that held similar philosophies. Groups of students visited one another's schools about once a month and engaged in activities together, including swimming in the private school's pool. An eight-year-old at Lifelong Learners & Leaders was quite enthusiastic about this partnership, especially how they surprised each other with gifts and snacks on occasion.

During its initial year, Essentials Academy had an informal partnership with public schools in East Cleveland with whom they shared curricular ideas. There was also some informal sharing with a private school. No interschool activities among students were reported during the school's first year. In the spring of 2003, Essentials Academy was involved with a "Career Day" at Tremont elementary, a district public school in the surrounding neighborhood. The Essentials Academy "step team"—a dance team that was quite popular among Essentials Academy's students—performed at this Tremont event. This was their first out-of-school performance. This event piqued Tremont staff's interest in Essentials Academy. They asked the students how Essentials Academy helped them develop. Tremont was happy to have Essentials Academy students there and invited them back for more events. Perhaps as the school becomes more settled, further interschool partnerships will begin.

On the other hand, there was virtually no collaboration between MSM and the noncharter schools, even those that also had a Montessori focus. The only exception was some informal sharing with the heads of private Montessori schools. Interestingly, there was more sharing and collaboration with the seven EMO-run schools that had quite different missions and curricula than MSM. As a teacher explained in 2002, "The difference between this school and private Montessoris is that we have to answer to public and state standards. There are three other public, noncharter Montessori schools in Cleveland, but they're more traditional than we are. We don't confer with them. We're different as a charter school, and now we're with this EMO too. That's who we confer with. There isn't any collaboration between us and the other public Montessori schools. They see us as competition." Time will tell if this competition ever spurs improvement within these public schools, instead of simply antagonism against MSM.

14.6 Summary

Despite some small changes from 2001-02 to 2002-03, to date there appears to be very little impact of the charter schools on the Cleveland Municipal School District and surrounding districts. Much of this may be due to CMSD's size and the magnitude of its problems, many of which are being addressed from within, with varying degrees of success. The small scope of the charter school movement in Cleveland, let alone the four small schools in our study, may not be enough to significantly impact such a district. The biggest impact on the district—and, indeed, throughout the state—appears to be widespread hostile reactions to charter schools, as expressed in scathing articles in the media and ultimately in the recently dismissed lawsuit against charter schools. Fear of losing resources to the charter schools appears to be especially incendiary; as charter schools increase in number, this concern increases as well. These inimical attitudes have not been conducive to school reform, either in the form of emulating the charter schools' innovations or in

actively competing with them. The district-charter relations often seem more analogous to bitter adversaries in a battle rather than healthy competitors in a race.

However, over the past year there has been an increase in the district sponsoring its own online schools, including online charter schools, partially in response to the growing popularity of such schools. The dismissal of the lawsuit, the legislation ending state sponsorship but expanding district sponsorship, the recent increase in district-sponsored charter schools, and the spread of charter/noncharter collaborations may improve relations and hence foster diffusion of innovation among the school systems. Perhaps the charter school movement will realize this school director's optimism: "Once they accept the fact we're here to stay, then maybe we'll have more of an impact. They'll have to see—what are we doing well?"

Charter Schools Can Work: A Summary of Lessons Learned

Schools operating on the principals of] decentralization, competition, and choice . . . should tend to possess the autonomy, clarity of mission, strong leadership, teacher professionalism, and team cooperation that public schools want but (except under very fortunate circumstance) are unlikely to have (Chubb & Moe, 1999, p. 67.)

Charter schools are designed to be decentralized schools of choice where governing boards, staff, and families are united around a common mission. In exchange for this autonomy, these schools must demonstrate fiscal, regulatory, and performance accountability. Market accountability, or the satisfaction of the families, is also imperative. Theoretically, with less philosophical conflict and bureaucratic “red tape” to impede progress, charter schools should be empowered to reach their educational goals and thus demonstrate their accountability to both their sponsors and their customers. Our study explored how charter schools utilize the opportunity space they have been provided by the charter school law and to what extent they are implementing the ideas contained in charter school theory. Specifically, these opportunities and ideas concern (a) cohesion around mission, (b) governance, (c) parental participation, (d) professional opportunities for teachers, and (e) innovative curriculum and instruction. Ultimately, charter schools should not only impact the students whom they educate, but also the public school system as a whole. Their innovations should spur the other public schools to reform themselves in order to compete for the districts’ students. Figure 15:1 displays a simplified “logic model” of the intended theory behind charter schools. The ultimate question is, how well does this theory play out, and what limits its effectiveness?

The previous 14 chapters described how the 4 charter schools sponsored by The Cleveland Foundation, and to a lesser extent Ohio’s charter schools in general, are approaching these ideals. The numerous barriers that hinder them from reaching these visions were discussed in depth. This final chapter consolidates the lessons learned from our study, relating them back to the original questions in the RFP regarding school implementation, student learning in charter schools, charter schools’ role in school reform, and programmatic self-evaluation and accountability in charter schools. Further, this chapter discusses preliminary theories regarding what facilitates or impedes progress in each of these areas, with a particular focus on implementation.

This chapter includes a series of tables that briefly cover what appeared to be the major strengths and limitations of each of the four schools in this study. Each area of implementation, student learning, potential for impact on the district, and self-evaluation is covered in a table.



Figure 15:1 Logic Model and Illustration of the Charter School Concept (Adapted from Miron & Nelson, 2002)

These tables and their surrounding sections of text imply what may be necessary for a school to function well and what some of the indicators of good functioning may be. Some of the outcome criteria presented in the tables are based on a priori decisions regarding what is important for a charter school to achieve (e.g., adequate test scores and/or gains; parent satisfaction; teacher satisfaction; positive school climate). Other outcome criteria were based on the missions of the particular school, such as Lifelong Learners & Leaders's goal of uniting senior citizens, younger adults, and children in learning. Some process criteria, such as professional development opportunities, were decided a priori while others were derived from stakeholders who presented their opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their respective school's implementation.

Most of the data we were able to collect involved the implementation of charter schools. Indeed, the charter school movement in Ohio may be too new to greatly affect student learning or create substantial impact on the surrounding district schools. Additionally, there are numerous impediments to effective self-evaluation. As explained in Chapter 1, this report is more formative than summative in nature, focusing more on the context and processes of each charter school's development than on its outcomes.

15.1 Implementation

Implementation, particularly during the planning and initial start-up phase, requires ample time, skills, and resources. Chapter 5 covered the basic requirements for start-up; various subsequent chapters touched on other components that facilitated or hampered the continuing implementation of charter schools. Table 15:1 lists some of the apparent strengths and weaknesses of implementation at each school.

Our findings indicate that effective implementation of a charter school involves an orchestration of numerous balancing acts, several of which concern independence versus interdependence. When developing and attempting to create cohesion around a common mission, there should be a balance between providing educational options and promoting access and equity. When deciding on structures for governance and management, one should consider the balance between needs for resources and desires for autonomy. Professional opportunities involve a balance between flexibility of roles and clear, reasonable expectations for duties. Effective

administration involves a balance between promoting autonomy and providing guidance for teachers. The next subsections detail some of the factors that need to be addressed in order to approach these balances.

Table 15:1 Charter Schools' Strengths and Weaknesses Regarding Implementation

<i>School</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
Main Street Montessori	High cohesiveness around mission for both staff and parents Ample parental involvement Ample opportunities for professional development Effective partnerships with community organizations (zoo, banks, YMCA) High parent, student, & staff satisfaction with school climate Effective administrative leadership	The board completely overlaps with that of its EMO and does not represent MSM's various constituents Staff and board often conflicted regarding educational foci, professional development, and other issues Attempts to curb rapid growth led to dismissal of good staff and subsequent resentment
Riverview Scholars	Numerous partnerships with community, including some public schools and universities Administrators who are working hard to identify and correct school's prior weaknesses, (e.g., by implementing literacy programs, curriculum mapping, behavior management training) Democratic decision making Numerous opportunities for parental involvement and influence Parents satisfied with school climate and mission	High principal and teacher turnover during the initial years A relatively large proportion of staff were dissatisfied with the school climate, parental involvement, and leadership
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	High parent/guardian & staff satisfaction with school climate High cohesiveness around mission for both staff and parents Very high satisfaction re professional development opportunities Numerous opportunities for parental/community involvement Beneficial ties with various community groups	Initial high staff turnover, despite high staff satisfaction Small school size led to financial and administrative challenges
Essentials Academy	High cohesiveness among staff regarding mission Ample planning time prior to opening Substantial planning time built into regular schedule	High staff turnover Deficits in organization and communication Attempts at rapid growth and frequent, expensive changes of facilities Indications of financial difficulties

Cohesion Around Mission

Cohesion around a common mission is a somewhat downstream goal of charter schools, just short of the ultimate goals of customer satisfaction and student achievement. It is also considered to be the facilitator of many upstream goals such as parental participation, professional opportunities for teachers, and innovative curriculum and instruction—all of which should in turn further enhance the cohesion of mission. Therefore, ample coverage is given to this topic. At each school

in our study, the cohesion around the mission was fairly high. Riverview Scholars' was a bit lower among staff, but it improved notably from 2001-02 to 2002-03. Essentials Academy's was high for staff but low for parents. Below are factors that appear to contribute to cohesion of mission.

Realism. A school's mission and its subsequent goals and plans should be pragmatic given the school's environment, student characteristics, and available resources. Unrealistic expectations are a common cause of lowered morale, turnover, and even charter school failure (LOEO, 2001). The executive director and principal of Riverview Scholars, which had a high turnover rate of both principals and teachers (see Table 15:1), largely attributed its turnover to idealistic expectations about what the school could accomplish in a short time frame. This school had to adjust its expectations as well as provide more services to help the school meet its mission.

Equitability. School choice for parents, teachers, and administrators will, theoretically, lead to self-sorting by agreement with a common mission. However, critics charge that such self-sorting may lead insidiously to racial/religious/SES segregation and/or discrimination against students with disabilities, especially if a school's mission implies that only particular students need apply. Cleveland is already so segregated that it is hard to imagine that school choice could worsen it. Ironically, the school with the highest proportion of white students (80%) had the most racial diversity, especially when compared with its surrounding neighborhood which was 91 percent white. The other schools served very few non-black students, which reflected their original surrounding neighborhoods.

One challenge when developing a mission is finding a balance between providing additional educational choices and promoting equity. This is true on a policy level as well. Should charter schools intentionally cater to students of a particular race, religion, gender, or ability level? Is to do so expanding options to families whose needs are not met in the district school or insidiously promoting discrimination and segregation? Essentials Academy faced this dilemma. Its original mission specifically catered to gifted, underachieving African Americans. ODE's Office of School Options required that the mission be revised without reference to any particular race or ability level¹. The founder agreed to revise it, but this ultimately led to a student body that was different from what she and her staff had originally anticipated. Academic and behavior problems were rampant at this school, and the staff were not always equipped to address them. A charter school should demonstrate equity as well as realism given the school's lack of control over the types of students it may enroll.

Agreement on what the mission should really mean. Missions are dependent upon the values and priorities of its leaders and constituents. Especially in noncharter public schools, mission statements are often vague and open to interpretation. They may seem to be created to mean all things to everyone, while at the same time the diverse realm of stakeholders emphatically disagree on how the mission should be interpreted. At each of the four schools in our study, there was general agreement on what the mission was and how it should be interpreted.

Related to this issue is agreement on how the mission should be carried out. What types of curriculum and instruction are congruent with the mission? Which are feasible given restrictions on time, resources, and regulations? Do certain elements of the curriculum that are congruent with the mission in theory contradict it in practice? (E.g., a pedagogy that stresses authentic assessment may require so much documentation that teachers have little time to actually spend with students.)

¹ Since this time, Am. Sub. H.B. 364 has allowed charter schools to cater to "gifted" students, but must nevertheless accept all students.

While generally there was mission cohesion among staff and parents, at a couple schools in the study, opinions regarding how to fulfill the mission were not as consensual.

Congruence between the mission and the families whom the mission is intended to serve. School founders often have a particular profile of students they hope to attract to their school. However, as public schools they must be open to any student who enrolls. At times, this creates incongruence between the original mission and plans with which to carry it out and the families who choose to enroll their students. One example is a school in Chicago that originally aimed to educate Latino youth who spoke English as a second language. This school wound up attracting a large proportion of English language learners from other nations and languages of origin (Nelson et al., 2002). Essentials Academy and Riverview Scholars were in a similar situations, since each attracted more students with academic and behavioral issues than originally intended. Riverview Scholars responded by creating a broad array of programs and elements to address academic and behavioral challenges and hiring additional staff to run them. Essentials Academy counseled out families of students with severe discipline problems or antagonistic parents, a move that the director cited as legal within the realm of a designated “at risk” school, yet the staff at ODE regarded as highly questionable.

In theory, charter schools attract like-minded staff and families. In reality, this may be more a factor for staff than families. Safety at school was ranked among the most important reason for families to choose a school; this echoes the findings of MacInnes (1999). Further, some reasons for families to choose a school may depend more on dissatisfaction with the previous school, a students’ academic failure, or discipline problems at a previous school. Although these ratings were ranked much lower on the surveys than issues related to school’s mission and educational approaches, one wonders if demand effects play a role on the surveys. Other studies indicate that issues that concern parents often have little to do with mission or education approaches, even if their superficial answers to such questions indicate otherwise (MacInnes, 1999). In spite of these caveats, there did appear to be cohesion of mission at all four schools, with the possible exception of parents at Essentials Academy.

Although a substantial degree of cohesion is essential, ideally it should be based on mutual cooperation rather than deference to a charismatic leader or governing board. Because charter school law, unlike traditional public school laws, allows school administrators and other staff to participate on their governing boards, there is potential for a monopoly of power and/or responsibility. There is also the potential for a mutually cooperative group with an optimal distribution of responsibility and influence. Below we discuss the characteristics of governance and management that appear to best facilitate the implementation of a charter school.

Governance and Management

Charter school proponents view the lenient laws regarding charter school governance and management as providing freedom from stifling regulations and political gridlock. Conversely, charter school critics fear that such governance will be undemocratic and nepotistic, fraught with conflicts of interest and providing fewer safeguards for abuses of power. Below are attributes of a successful governance and management structure and how well the schools in our study lived up to these ideals.

Multitalented. A wide range of possible stakeholders may serve on a charter school board. Because initiating and implementing a charter school requires a wide array of responsibilities, it helps if the governing board and administrative leaders have a broad range of talents and experiences. Some school failures, according to the president of the Ohio Charter School

Association, can be attributed to a team of leaders who possess substantial educational skills but lack business acumen or vice versa. Board members for the four charter schools included, at one time or another, education experts, attorneys, representatives of various community agencies, and financial experts. Boards with collective expertise in a wide range of areas were best able to overcome the numerous challenges inherent in starting a charter school (LOEO, 2000; 2003a).

The biggest challenge the schools seemed to face was keeping effective board members for this voluntary and time-consuming position. At several schools, board members were forced to resign out of their employers' concerns that their position implied an antidistrict school bias. One school started with a diverse board, but various members left and a less representative board ensued.

Efficient. Our study found some evidence that the decentralized governance increases the administrative efficiency. In each school decentralized governance, combined with small school size and common mission, helped facilitate communication, decision making, and progress regarding stakeholders' concerns and ideas. As a staff member of Riverview Scholars (RS) enthusiastically described, "Because it is a charter school, there are less politics. It quickens the process. For example, when I got the idea for a yoga class, I presented it to the board and they accepted it the next day. It got started the next week!" Riverview Scholars' principal explained other important benefits of the charter schools' governance and structure. "The school is smaller and more manageable. We can have a more personal relationship with the kids." A small school with a decentralized governance creates a less bureaucratized and more personalized atmosphere. However, as the size of RS grew, so did the scope and structure of its governance. Some staff thought that communication was adversely impacted as were the opportunities for the teachers to be heard by the administration. This phenomenon was more salient at MSM, where the governance structure was quickly evolving along with the growth of the school.

Limited conflicts of interest. The flexibility in laws concerning charter school governance can lead to different relationships among the board and the school's other stakeholders, such as administrators, staff, and parents. The smaller scale of charter schools means that board members are generally more accessible to teachers and administrators. Further, lessened restrictions on who can serve on a charter school board combined with the method of board member selection (appointment rather than election) means board membership often overlaps with school administration and staff. This can help a school find the expertise and the cohesion that is necessary to run a school, but potentials for nepotism and monopolies of power should be minimized. For example, at Lifelong Learners & Leaders, both the director/principal and her husband served on the board for the first two years that the school was in operation, but neither could vote on matters concerning the director/principal's employment. By contrast, by its fifth year MSM shared essentially all the same board members with seven other schools that operated under the same EMO. Many MSM staff found this overlapping relationship problematic and opined that the board did not take MSM's unique pedagogy into account when making uniform policies and decisions for all their schools.

Providing a balance of autonomy and resources. Despite the benefits of localized governance and management, there are also drawbacks. Resources, both human and material, may be more difficult and expensive to obtain. A school with site-based management often spends more per-pupil funding on administration, because it does not share administrators with other schools within a large district (Nelson, Muir, & Drown, 2002). Other human resources that are usually distributed throughout a large district, such as speech therapists, special education instructors, and other specialized instructors, may be more difficult and expensive to hire. Material resources, such as books and equipment, may be harder to obtain as well. Effective leaders must obtain the

resources they need without sacrificing their independence. In theory, EMOs can help schools meet these needs. The fear is that EMOs will obtain an unreasonable profit from charter schools and in the process recentralize and homogenize such schools. Only one school in our study utilized an EMO. We found that this EMO increased available human and material resources, but at the expense of autonomy.

Connected to the community. The founders and/or leaders of charter schools can benefit from the expertise of other individuals and organizations in the community as well. A critical leadership skill includes the ability to network with community organizations and form beneficial partnerships. According to a board members of Riverview Scholars, this requires a substantial amount of time, effort, and interpersonal skills. However, these investments can pay off, since the community ties may be helpful to the school's success and at times even to its existence. MSM had partnerships with the local zoo, YMCA, and a bank, all of which provided unique, ongoing educational experiences for the students. Riverview Scholars' many partnerships included City-Year Cleveland, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, a senior citizens' center, and two local museums, which provided human resources and various professional development and educational opportunities. LLL was effectively partnered with Case Western Reserve University. However, the director was concerned that too many partnerships could inhibit the school's autonomy.

On the other hand, Essentials Academy started off with fewer positive working relationships within the community. However, one of its partnerships may have saved its very existence. The downtown YMCA, with whom Essentials Academy had partnered for physical education, provided a temporary facility after Essentials Academy was suddenly forced out of its original building. The following year, Essentials Academy developed numerous partnerships throughout the community. According to Essentials Academy staff, they partnered with the Black Studies Department at Cleveland State University for professional development and later had representatives from this department serving on its school board.

While connections to the community are important, connections with the parents of students are even more vital. As parents ultimately choose whether or not to enroll their children in charter schools, it is crucial to keep them satisfied and involved. The next section details lessons learned about parental involvement.

Parental Involvement

According to charter school theory, school choice promotes parental participation and involvement (Awsumb-Nelson, 2002). Critics fear that active parents will leave regular schools, leaving no good role models in them (McInnes, 1999). Our study found that schools that attract low income families, which have a high proportion of single parents and dual-earner couples, have less parental participation than those that include more two-parent homes with stay-at-home mothers. However, even schools with low income families tend to attract parents who are more invested in their children's education. Nonetheless, teachers and staff sometimes complained about the lack of parental involvement in their children's education, even regarding simple matters such as making sure that their children completed their homework and followed through on disciplinary matters.

All of the schools in our study actively encouraged parental participation. Some schools such as Riverview Scholars had committees available whereby parents could help in the general direction of the school. Parents' work schedules were taken into account when scheduling events

and meetings, and at one school childcare was often available at meetings. In addition, each school strove to improve ongoing communication between the staff and the parents.

Although parental investment in their children's education is generally positive, once in a while it can appear detrimental. According to some of our school directors, occasionally parents who seem hard to please anywhere enroll their children in charter schools, where they continue to find fault. Sometimes these parents withdraw their children from the respective charter schools, only to attempt to re-enroll them later when they become dissatisfied with other available alternatives.

While parent involvement is crucial, teachers and other staff must be satisfied with their work environment and professional opportunities.

Professional Opportunities for Teachers

Charter school leaders should recruit, hire, and train high quality staff who can help the school fulfill its mission. Maintaining staff over time is also important, because turnover can be detrimental to a school's functioning. This may be challenging, given that charter schools often lack the salaries, benefits, and job security that public schools may offer. These are among the reasons that turnover is often problematic at the charter schools. However, the one-year contracts and lack of tenure facilitate the "functional turnover" of suboptimal staff. Below are some of the features that contribute to professional opportunities for teachers.

Effective professional development. In order to maintain effective staff, a charter school, as any school, must be able to provide quality professional development (Zelman, 2002). Theoretically, a common mission will unite teachers and make meaningful professional development more feasible. Partnerships within the community, including those with other charter and/or noncharter schools, can be very helpful for this. Staff at Lifelong Learners & Leaders and Riverview Scholars temporarily met with one another for professional development, while MSM had training with the other charter schools associated with their EMO. However, at times the unique structure or pedagogy of a particular school made these partnerships more of a hindrance than a help.

Opportunities for relevant training outside the school and local community also help; for example, teachers at several schools attended conferences out of state regarding their specific types of instruction. A curricular plan for teachers to follow, with a proper balance between teacher autonomy and instructional program coherence, is also essential (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). Riverview Scholars initially lacked sufficient curricular guidelines for teachers. The administration worked hard to establish a curriculum map and to coordinate the school's various programs; most staff were quite pleased with the results of these efforts. On the whole, the staff in the four charter schools in the study were satisfied with their opportunities for professional development.

Flexible, yet organized staffing structure. Once charter school teachers and staff are hired, establishing a proper division of labor may be challenging. The roles of staff in charter schools are generally more flexible than they are in traditional public schools; this promotes cooperation rather than rigid adherence to one's job description. However, it can be tempting for a director to attempt too many roles at once or expect staff to cover too wide a range of responsibilities. Misunderstandings regarding which person is responsible for which tasks can occur. The challenge is to find the optimum balance between flexibility and organization, promoting a climate with the interpersonal connectedness of a family as well as the efficiency of a well-functioning agency. Related to this is promoting the right balance of autonomy and direction. An effective leader should create a space in which qualified people can do their jobs well, with effective guidance but without micromanaging.

Autonomy in the classroom. Decentralized management united by a common mission can lead to more autonomy for classroom teachers. Since teachers and staff are hired based largely on their commitment to a school's mission, it is likely that whatever unique lesson plans or events the teachers create will be in line with the school's basic philosophy. At least some staff at each of the four schools expressed enthusiasm about the flexibility and opportunities for innovation that their administration and governance provided them. The staff at Riverview Scholars were, as a whole, less satisfied with their autonomy than were the staff at the other schools. However, some Riverview Scholars staff were quite enthusiastic about their levels of autonomy, especially when compared with other public schools (both charter and noncharter) at which they had previously taught. This autonomy allowed teachers to experiment with innovative instructional practices. Below we discuss elements that make educational innovations more likely to succeed.

Innovative Curriculum and Instruction

According to charter school theory, a lack of regulations will increase opportunities for innovative curriculum and instruction. Charter school opponents fear that lack of regulations will lead to ineffective, experimental techniques or the promotion of offensive social agendas. Below, we cover the degree to which innovative curricular and instructional processes were created and the factors that limited or enabled these innovations. We again stress that at each of the four schools, staff were less concerned about the novelty of their approaches than with their effectiveness.

Conforming to state standards. In the four schools we studied, teachers created various innovative teaching methods and educational projects that were readily approved by their localized leadership (see Chapter 4). However, the charter schools still had to meet state standards; this influenced the degree to which curriculum and instruction could differ from that of the traditional public schools. A few parents and/or students complained that the unique grading systems were confusing, but most who had concerns about the curricula regarded the curriculum and instruction as too traditional.

Yields measurable results. Charter schools have particular mission and corresponding goals that may be approached using unique educational methods. The outcomes of these methods must be measurable and the results of the measures must be reported. While LLL did a remarkable job of this and is continuing to improve its assessments and reporting, the other three schools had alternative pedagogies that were rich in description but lacking in measures and results. This was also a finding of LOEO (2003c) and a phenomenon found in other states as well (Nelson et al., 2002; Miron et al., 2003).

Adaptable, but not impulsive. Curriculum and instruction should be adaptable to changes in the students' needs. For example, a student body may be quite different than that for which leaders and staff initially prepared. Educational challenges may come up for which teachers and staff have no clear solutions. Immediate action is often demanded; but hastily selected solutions, implemented without regard to the context of the overall mission and infrastructure, often backfire (Newmann et al., 2001). Again, practical methods of measuring success or failure of implementation and results is helpful.

One particular phenomenon that also requires a delicate balancing act is the size and growth rate of schools. Although it is not considered an opportunity space or intermediate goal, it is such a salient issue that we have devoted a special section to it.

Size and Growth Rate of Schools

Studies have shown that in noncharter public schools, there are neutral to positive effects of small school size on various aspects of a school, including climate, inclusiveness, and even scholastic achievement (see Cotton, 2001). Charter schools tend to be substantially smaller than regular public schools, and there may be a relationship between their size and their effectiveness. It may not be coincidence that the school in which both teachers and parents were most satisfied started with 30 students and had the slowest growth curve. Another school also started with 30 students, but its rapid growth created managerial, staffing, and facility problems around its fifth year. The other two schools had started a bit larger; both initially had more difficulty getting board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students “on the same page” regarding fulfillment of the mission. These disagreements often led to strained interpersonal relationships and a less positive school environment. While one of these two schools planned to grow at an even faster rate once its most formidable problems began to stabilize, the other opted to stop its growth at a much smaller level than originally anticipated. These phenomena echo the findings of earlier, larger scale studies, which showed positive relationships between small school size and school climate (Cotton, 2001).

Small school size allows for administrative practices that facilitate positive school climate, professional development, and personnel evaluation. For example, the director or principal can make frequent visits to the classrooms to observe teacher performance, provide help and feedback, and connect with the students. Directors can have an open door policy, rather than requiring teachers to make appointments to speak with them. This promotes both efficiency and positive interpersonal relationships among teachers and administration.

On the other hand, the benefits of a larger school are similar to those of belonging to a consortium of schools or an EMO. For example, with additional per-pupil funds, more staff can be hired and more material resources obtained. In addition, the loss of each staff person has a smaller effect on the school as a whole. LLL, the smallest school in our study with intentions to stop growing at 100 students, experienced some problems related to its small scale. When 3 teachers left the school for personal reasons, LLL lost 75 percent of its teachers. Fortunately, a new cohort of teachers was just as effective and all stayed on the following year. However, by the end of the school’s third year there were concerns about how to manage their lean budget, especially after rental rates rose. A school that is fairly large yet independent from other school systems or EMOs can reap the benefits of both autonomy and resources. However, the drawbacks of a larger school usually still apply. Key administrators may suffer from the burdens of running a larger school without the benefits of an EMO or consortium of similar schools.

Teacher-to-student ratio is related to, although not synonymous with, small school size. MSM, Lifelong Learners & Leaders, and Essentials Academy each had teacher-student ratios of around 1:15, plus occasional adult volunteers. Riverview Scholars had about 16-18 students in each class, plus aides. When the teacher-to-student ratio is high, teachers can get to know each child well and understand his or her educational needs. As an instructor who transferred from CMSD to Essentials Academy explained, “In a class of 20-25, you can only have a close relationship with 2-3 students. Here, we have a relationship with all of our students.” Surveys showed that all of the staff at Lifelong Learners & Leaders and all but 1 teacher at Essentials Academy disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement *Class sizes are too large to meet the individual student’s needs*. However, 45 percent of MSM’s staff and 29.6 percent of Riverview Scholars’ staff agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Although the teacher-student ratio was about the same at MSM in 2001-02 and 2002-03, satisfaction with class size decreased during these two years. This

may reflect resentment over the pending change to have only 1 teacher and 1 aide in each kindergarten class. Riverview Scholars reduced its class sizes in 2002-03, and satisfaction with the class sizes increased notably.

At each of the four schools, some parents remarked about how the higher ratio of teachers to students led to more one-on-one attention than in the traditional public schools. As far as expectations and experience, the item *My child will receive/is receiving sufficient individual attention* varied from school to school. High expectations for this were generally met (and at times even exceeded) at MSM and Lifelong Learners & Leaders, while they were not met as frequently at Riverview Scholars and Essentials Academy. However, especially at Riverview Scholars, this is likely due in part to high initial expectations.

One might reasonably argue that regardless of the levels of satisfaction with a school's implementation, the bottom line is how well students are learning. Our next section addresses this issue, as well as barriers to assessing it.

15.2 Charter Schools' Performance and Market Accountability

Both academic performance and customer satisfaction are downstream goals of the charter school theory (see Figure 15.1). Our study examined performance accountability by looking at standardized test score outcomes, unique measures and, to a small extent, at process. To assess market accountability, we looked at staff and parent satisfaction with the curriculum and instruction and at older students' satisfaction with teaching. We also looked at student retention. Table 15:2 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of each school's performance and market accountability.

At three of the four schools, customer satisfaction was high as indicated by full, stable enrollment, waiting lists, and positive feedback from parents and/or students. However, many argue that customer satisfaction is not nearly as important as student achievement. Earlier studies have shown little relation between student achievement and parent satisfaction (MacInnes, 1999; Miron & Nelson, 2002).

Standardized test scores are often considered an important indicator of student learning. For these criteria, the available data thus far are negative at face value and, upon further analysis, inconclusive. It is clear that at this point the students are not meeting the state standards. In some cases, they appear to be performing even worse than their district and neighborhood counterparts. In other cases, we did not obtain the data needed to make these judgments.

However, there are various possible explanations for the apparent failures. One is that the charter schools are unable to turn around students from a failing public school district within a year. At both Riverview Scholars and MSM, students in the lower grades tend to achieve higher scores (per their grade level) than students in higher grades. This suggests that charter schools may be more successful in educating newer, younger students than in reeducating older students who have transferred from other schools. Further, the charter schools often enroll the lowest performing students by attracting families who blame their child's failure on the public schools and by providing an alternative to which public schools can refer hard-to-educate students. Further studies can test these hypotheses. Longitudinal studies, following the same students year after year, can help explore issues of "value added" by charter schools. Unfortunately, we did not obtain data in a form usable for conducting longitudinal analyses for the third year of the study.

Though it may be too soon to assess the impact of charter schools on scholastic outcomes, there was evidence that these four schools were providing new learning opportunities for Cleveland's

children. Chapter 4 details a number of the specialized educational approaches, many of which were unique to the Cleveland area. For example, Lifelong Learners & Leaders utilized a nontraditional assessment system that demonstrated that its students had made considerable progress in reading each year (See Table 15:2). Some of the schools' educational approaches were developed in response to unanticipated needs, such as the high proportion of students with behavioral problems at Riverview Scholars.

Table 15:2 Charter Schools' Strengths and Weaknesses Regarding Performance and Market Accountability

<i>School</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
Main Street Montessori	OPT scores are usually higher than that of CMSD Waiting list of students High parent, student, & staff satisfaction with instruction WRAT scores improved over time	Most OPT test scores still do not meet state standards
Riverview Scholars	High parental satisfaction with curriculum and instruction Some indications of good student performance at lower grade levels Waiting list of students Numerous innovations to address students' behavior problems that impact student learning	Standardized test scores below state standards Relatively lower staff satisfaction with the curriculum and instruction Staff satisfaction with discipline is still relatively low but improving
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	Innovative teaching and assessment methods Strong indications that they are meeting their unique academic and citizenship goals High parental satisfaction with curriculum and instruction Low student turnover Effective at uniting senior citizens, younger adults, and children in learning	Evidence of student achievement may not satisfy those who prefer traditional methods
Essentials Academy	Technology integrated into curricula High level of teacher satisfaction with curriculum and instruction	Relatively low level of parent & student satisfaction with instruction Behavior problems among students Relatively high student turnover; enrollments below goals OPT test scores well below state standards

Because the charter school theory was meant to influence not only the individuals who attended the school but public schools in general, we now explore the impact of charter schools on public school reform.

15.3 Public Education Reform

Although the logic model (see Figure 15:1) depicts positive educational impacts on district schools as a downstream goal of the charter school movement, in reality it may be a longer-term goal, not to be expected until the charter school movement has impacted its more immediate constituents.

Currently, there is not much evidence of educational impact, either positive or negative, on the CMSD or first ring districts. As of the 2002-03 school year, there were only 17 charter schools in Cleveland, most of which are quite small, compared with 121 schools in CMSD. The magnitude of CMSD and the entrenchment of its problems make it unlikely that the charter schools can have much of an impact upon it. Further, the various recent improvements in the CMSD have been attributed to reforms unrelated to the charter schools.

In addition, the inimical attitudes toward charter schools, in Cleveland and throughout Ohio, are another barrier to charter schools' impact on school reform. Charter schools are seen as diverting considerable per-pupil funds from the public school system, and LOEO (2003a) found evidence to confirm these fears. Theoretically, traditional public schools should respond to the threat of student attrition and subsequent loss of funding by improving their own educational approaches. While there is little evidence of this, one possible impact of Ohio charter schools is that many districts are sponsoring charter and/or online schools of their own. The phenomena appears to be "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em." On the other hand, traditional public school advocates are attempting to discredit rather than compete with the charter school movement, both in the media and through the legal system.

According to one local education expert, if there has been any educational impact of charter schools on CSMD, it most likely has been due to tiny, incremental, grass-roots changes on an interpersonal level. For example, a teacher in a charter school might share ideas with a teacher in the CMSD. Such diffusions of innovation are potentially powerful but difficult to assess. While our study found a couple of examples that could catalyze such impacts, we did find a few somewhat *larger* scale examples of cooperation among charter/noncharter schools in Cleveland. Riverview Scholars has partnered with public high schools; LLL has partnered with a private school. Further instances of cooperation between charter and noncharter schools may promote more positive attitudes toward charter schools throughout the Cleveland area. Once attitudes toward charter schools improve, more educational impact may be possible.

Further, the number of charter schools in Cleveland more than quadrupled between the movement's inception in 1998 and the 2002-03 school year and is expected to continue to rise. The more charter schools that exist in Cleveland, the greater the opportunities for educational, financial, and administrative impacts on the district. Indeed, in 2003-04 CMSD sponsored its own charter school. Charter schools have the potential to spur CMSD to continue to improve its education system, perhaps by adopting techniques that have been successful in charter schools. Educational impacts are possible if the charter schools provide educational approaches that are unique to the surrounding district, as each of the four schools in our study appear to be doing. As long as the more restrictive regulations of the district do not forbid their implementation of the charter school's methods, these innovations can be adopted by district schools. However, this will happen only if the hostile attitudes toward charter schools do not continue to impede potential impact.

It is not realistic to expect a single charter school or even a composite of four to have a noticeable impact on a large metropolitan school district and/or the surrounding districts. Nevertheless, Table 15:3 lists the strengths of a school's potential for impacting the district in a minor way. Because impacting the district is not a goal of an individual charter school, we did not

include a “weaknesses” column this year. These criteria include partnerships with other public schools and innovative educational approaches that other schools can emulate.

Although it may be too much to expect these 4 charter schools, or even the 136 charter schools throughout the vast state of Ohio, to have enormous impact on their surrounding communities, it should not be too much to ask that schools hold themselves accountable to fiscal, regulatory, and performance expectations that they state in their own contracts. We now revisit these various types of accountability, including self-evaluation, as well as barriers to meeting them.

Table 15:3 Charter Schools’ Strengths Regarding Potential for Impact on District

<i>School</i>	<i>Strengths</i>
Main Street Montessori	Offers a hybrid of Montessori and traditional instruction Reported to have a much greater Montessori focus than other public Montessori schools in the district
Riverview Scholars	Numerous innovative programs such as the Before and After School Enrichment Program and Kidspace Partnerships with district high school and university Program to help matriculating students find appropriate middle schools in district and elsewhere
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	Partnership with private school Innovative methods of instruction Innovative focus on multigenerational learning (School was presented on local television for this reason) Staff helped matriculating students find appropriate middle schools in district and elsewhere
Essentials Academy	Unique advisory committees for middle school students Partnership with local university Presentations at local district school

15.4 Accountability and Self-Evaluation

Charter schools EVALUATE—can take time and look at mistakes, see what will work.
– *Parent from Lifelong Learners & Leaders*

Accountability in the charter school movement is seen as a change in the very structure of how school systems are designed. It is designed to lead to changes in not only the opportunity spaces, but ultimately in performance and market accountability and even school reform as a whole. The question is, is the accountability aspect being implemented as intended? If not, what are the potential consequences?

While fiscal, regulatory, and performance accountability to outside agencies are crucial to a charter school, accountability ideally involves plans for continuous improvement as well as simply

reporting on one's status. A program that continually assesses and evaluates itself in order to strive toward improvement embodies the concept of a "learning organization" (Awsumb-Nelson, 2002; Davidson, 2001). All four schools emphasized continual assessment and self-improvement, although much of this was on an informal level. This informal method of solving problems through deliberation and consensus-building is more feasible and effective in a small, homogeneous setting than in large, multifaceted ones (Greene, 1994, 2000; Sullins, 2001). At times, it is more appropriate than complex, systematic data gathering and analyses. Therefore, in this section we not only look at how well each school reports on its fiscal, regulatory, and student achievement data, but also at whether and how it uses this information to assess and improve itself.

At all four schools, the board was said to be a part of this continuous self-improvement. However, the boards often spent their first year or so in crisis management, with less emphasis on planning and making improvements for the future. Staff at both Riverview Scholars and MSM stated that as their schools became more settled and stabilized, the boards focused less and less on day-to-day functions and more on long-term planning. Riverview Scholars created a strategic planning committee during its second year in order to set reasonable goals and measure progress toward them.

Table 15:4 describes the strengths and weaknesses of various types of self-evaluation and accountability that were conducted at each school. Informal evaluation was not included, since it was not feasible to identify or accurately assess the effectiveness of these processes. Although other conduits for evaluation are listed, most of the focus in this section is on the central components of self-evaluation and accountability: the contract and the annual reports.

The annual report is an important component of each school's continuous evaluation. As Chapter 13 describes, schools were to elaborate the goals in their contracts with their sponsor and then show the progress toward these goals in their annual reports. This was not always done as planned, for various reasons. Lifelong Learners & Leaders' goals as stated in its contract included nine rubrics of detailed goals, objectives, and benchmarks. Most of them, plus many other goals, objectives, and corresponding benchmarks and progress on them, were detailed in its annual report. MSM's contract listed more than 220 pages of specific Montessori-based goals and benchmarks among a wide range of subjects and grades, including grades that the school did not include. However, its annual report was quite process-oriented and had little to say about progress toward the Montessori-based goals as stated in its contract. It did, however, include standardized test scores and plans to improve them for the following year. Riverview Scholars' contract provided few concrete benchmarks for its numerous objectives. However, its annual report did list some concrete indicators of academic progress, such as passing rates on the ITBS and off grade proficiency tests. Further, it listed barriers to school achievement and steps taken to ameliorate them.

We did not receive annual reports from Essentials Academy. In addition, Essentials Academy was late with its EMIS data and was fined more than \$40,000 for this shortcoming. There was no financial report on the State Auditor's Web site, and sources at LOEO stated that Essentials Academy did not provide auditable reports. This makes one seriously question its accountability practices.

Table 15:4 Charter Schools' Strengths and Weaknesses Regarding Accountability and Self-Evaluation

<i>School</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
Main Street Montessori	Annual reports that include measures of parental satisfaction and outcomes of standardized tests	Annual reports do not include progress reports on Montessori-based outcomes as outlined in its contract. Contract includes a number of irrelevant outcomes (e.g., expectations for grade levels that the school does not include) Apparent errors in reporting the OPT and OPGT tests in 2002-03
Riverview Scholars	Annual reports that include measures of parental satisfaction, outcomes of standardized tests, and identified areas of weakness and how to improve them Strategic planning that includes board members, teachers, and parents Various stakeholders involved in democratic decision making Strong financial accountability and organization Innovative Student Information System	Contract does not include clear benchmarks on objectives Annual report describes progress, but does not always include clear objectives or benchmarks
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	Contract clear and well organized, including detailed rubrics of benchmarks for each developmental level for each of nine areas Both behavioral and academic progress clearly indicated in annual report Areas of weakness and plans for improving them described in 2000-01 annual report Used data from the WMU evaluation to make improvements in their school-parent communications 2001-02 and 2002-03 annual report clearly listed goals, objectives, benchmarks, and progress. ODE considered it to be a model annual report With some help from The Evaluation Center, the school is developing a database for recording and reporting progress using authentic assessment methods	Not all academic areas described in contract are fully covered in every annual report
Essentials Academy	Very thorough Performance Management System was developed	Performance Management System was not used Annual reports were not available Late in reporting EMIS data No auditable financial reports

A major barrier to meeting some schools' stated goals or even accurately recording and reporting progress on them was developing large quantities of detailed goals and benchmarks in

a broad range of areas, including areas that were not relevant to the school. The staff may have underestimated the difficulty with which progress on these goals could be accurately assessed.

We recommend that charter school sponsors provide more assistance in developing the goals, objectives, and benchmarks at each charter school. We also advise each charter school to revise its contract to reflect what it can reasonably accomplish. This way, the charter schools can have realistic expectations toward which to strive, and the authorizers can hold the schools accountable for them and impose reasonable consequences for failure to meet the goals.

There were barriers to conducting ongoing formal evaluations at the charter schools, despite all the benefits described in the manual prepared for the project, *Becoming a Learning Organization: Incorporating Evaluation into Schools* (Awsumb-Nelson, 2002). This manual states that “Rather than seeing evaluation as a **weapon** that will be used against them, everyone in the school needs to truly believe that evaluation is a **tool** that can be useful to them” (p. 7). Unfortunately, the schools had seen too many examples of evaluation-related activities that appeared to be unhelpful and time-consuming at best, a potentially devastating weapon at worst. Data collection and documentation were often seen as a matter of self-defense, rather than self-improvement for a charter school. The demands for documentation from the statewide lawsuit were especially burdensome; as one charter associate complained, “We’ve been harassed for every piece of paper we’ve ever printed.”

These requisitions were anxiety-provoking; the staff knew that the plaintiffs could use any lack of documentation or negative finding to justify their opposition to charter schools. The schools expressed concern that these demands left little time, energy, or motivation to formally evaluate their own programs.

According to the directors at each of the four schools, ongoing evaluations were continuously conducted, but mainly in the form of informal discussions among staff and administrators or, in some cases, more formally in staff or board meetings. This is consistent with the findings of Greene (2000) and Sullins (2001), who found that grass-roots community organizations often preferred to discuss matters, obtain consensus, and take action on them rather than spend considerable time collecting and analyzing data. Furthermore, the fear of repercussions was sometimes a factor for avoiding formal evaluation activities. One school administrator was concerned that if their evaluation procedures were more systematized and publicized, they could come under more scrutiny from their adversaries.

In spite of these barriers, there was evidence that some schools were taking steps toward systematic self-assessment and decision making. The executive director of Riverview Scholars explained the importance of systematized self-evaluation and subsequent decision making at his school. He described how this type of systematic assessment and decision making had been hampered during the school’s start-up years, because much time and effort went into crisis management. Now that the school had gained some stability, there was more time and energy for self-evaluation and planning. “We’re learning as we go. We haven’t formalized quality improvement as much as we’d like, but we always focus on what we can do better . . . We are very committed to ongoing improvement. We’re not systematic, but moving toward it.”

Using a team of board members, staff, and parents, Riverview Scholars spent months developing a strategic plan. “We discussed what data to collect and how to collect it. It may take two more years to implement.” The executive director emphasized the importance of actively using the data to make decisions, not simply collecting it for its own sake. “We need to use this strategic plan as a blueprint on a daily basis. The danger is just putting it on the shelf. It should be the basis upon which a lot of decisions will be made.”

Evaluation and strategic planning were utilized in various ways on a regular basis at Riverview Scholars. The principal sought evaluative feedback regarding the professional development workshops and how to improve them in the future. Case studies written on each child who utilized Kidspace helped evaluate not only each child, but also the needs and resources to serve them. Chapter 8 details how staff and administrators were evaluated on their performance. Various stakeholder groups in the school collaborated to assess the drawbacks and benefits of remaining a K-5 school instead of expanding to K-6 or K-8. Subsequent steps were then developed to minimize the negative impact of their final decision to remain at K-5. For example, a woman was hired to help matriculating students find appropriate middle schools.

As part of its commitment to continuously improving practice, Essentials Academy had a nine page "Performance Management System" that incorporated an ongoing, collaborative evaluation of both process and outcome. Details on this performance management system are in Chapter 8. Although this system was geared mainly toward personnel evaluation, it was designed for "bringing out the best efforts of employees and directing those efforts towards meeting organizational goals" (p. 1). Because of the emphasis on accomplishment as an entire school as well as by each individual, to some extent this can be seen as a form of ongoing program evaluation. This was consistent with Essentials Academy's focus on community. However, the director reported that at least during the school's turbulent first year, this highly developed plan was not utilized. Evidently, Essentials Academy was strong in developing but weak in implementing accountability plans.

Lifelong Learners & Leaders not only provided exemplary annual reports, but provided examples also in 2000-01 of how evaluation was used to improve important aspects of their school. In 2000-01, the results of the Parent School Climate Surveys produced scores for the Student Academic Orientation scale that were below the national average. According to the director, "LLL staff reflected on the possible reasons for this. It was thought that our hands-on, non-traditional approach with its absence of the usual signs of the 'work' done at school (e.g., workbook pages) might be misunderstood by parents. We determined that better parent education needed to be an important goal for the 2001-02 year." As the results shown in Chapter 9 indicate, the score on this particular scale improved between the first and second years of operation. In 2002-03 spelling was indicated as a weakness, and plans were made to strengthen this for the following year. LLL even worked with The Evaluation Center staff to design a database for concisely recording and reporting on student progress using authentic assessment.

MSM experienced some polarization concerning its accountability. The expectations of the EMO, as well as the required state standards, appeared to clash with its original Montessori philosophy. However, attempts were made to mesh these two philosophies. According to the director

There has been a push on accountability—a need to mesh Montessori with State standards. Some Montessori matters had to be dropped in order to cover the state standards. Last year it was easier because it was just language and math. Now we also need science and social studies. The multiage classrooms make this more problematic. But we went to the Montessori conference—the board went too. The "correlations" book on aligning Montessori curriculum with traditional standards really helped! The book is custom made to standards that you have to meet. But sometimes it's unrealistic.

However, the "correlating" at times seemed to become a means to an end, shaping the Montessori curriculum in order to meet state standards. There was little evidence of Montessori-

based achievement in the annual reports. Classroom observations yielded rich examples of student-centered learning activities that reflected the Montessori philosophies. A method for concisely reporting on such progress remains a challenge to MSM.

While there is still much room for improvement in the use and application of evaluation by the schools, the demands for accountability coupled with the need for improvement are likely to lead to greater use of evaluation in these schools. As one charter school teacher reminded us, “We have to be accountable. We’re under a microscope.”

15.5 Conclusions

Charter schools do have the potential of living up to the ideals of their founders—the founders of the individual school and the founders of the charter movement in general. However, success is not guaranteed (nor is the closing of failing schools), and there are numerous barriers to carrying out the visions.

For starters, there are various challenges to implementation. Financial and facility barriers are often formidable; effective partnerships and fund-raising may help in these regards. Governance and management can save money and time, but efficiency may come at the price of autonomy. School leadership should provide opportunities for parents to participate meaningfully, and for teachers to have a proper balance of guidance and autonomy.

School achievement, as measured by traditional standardized tests, still appears to be quite weak. This is even the case when comparisons with neighboring schools are taken into account. Charter schools often offer explanations for this, ranging from a high proportion of at-risk students to an educational philosophy that is counter to standardized tests. However, schools that choose alternative education philosophies must also choose appropriate assessment tools and benchmarks. One school in our study did a remarkable job of rising to this challenge and has been heralded as a role model for other schools. Other schools verbally reported doing well and by our observations appeared to have well-functioning educational processes. However, they provided little solid evidence of achievement in their annual reports.

Clearly demonstrating school achievement (or lack of it) is part of the promise of charter school reform. However, it is an area that many charter schools lack. Many schools have difficulty naming reasonable, measurable goals in their contract and reporting on them in their annual reports. Yet, there are rarely consequences for inadequate or even missing annual reports, let alone failure to live up to the terms in their contracts. More assistance should be provided both in developing reasonable contracts and in assuring that progress on these contracts is reported correctly. Then truly promising schools can be differentiated from struggling ones, and failing schools can be closed. If meaningful data regarding each charter school’s success or failure are made public to parents, they can make more informed choices as to the schools in which they enroll their children. Thus, improved accountability can realize the goal of school choice.

Ultimately, the charter school movement is expected to impact the entire public school system. At this point, there are few indicators that charter schools are impacting their surrounding districts. Perhaps when charter schools can be implemented more effectively, when they are forced to demonstrate scholastic progress (or lack of it), then their true impact can be determined. If they are determined to be an effective alternative to traditional public schools, perhaps this will stiffen the competition or provide role models and compel the public schools to change as well. In the meantime, much can be done on the part of the charter schools, the sponsors, and state policy to implement the vision of charter school theory.

Appendix A

Detailed Description of Methods for Collecting and Analyzing Data

This appendix contains a detailed description of methodological aspects of the study which is intended to complement the information on methods contained in Chapter 2 of this report. The methods of data collection in this multi-method study included interviews, observations, document review, and several types of surveys. These methods are detailed in the sections that follow. Also contained in this appendix are tables that provide illustrations of the general strategies for collecting information (Table A:1) and a matrix of the evaluation questions and sources of data/information for each question (Table A:2). As one can see, we sought a variety of data sources for each evaluation question we address in the study.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews were among the primary sources of data for this year's study. Between November 2002 and June 2003, each school was visited approximately once every six weeks. During these site visits, we conducted interviews with numerous stakeholders, as available, including the school principal and/or director, teachers, and other staff members. We also had the opportunity to interview some parents and volunteers, as well as local and state policymakers and experts in the charter school field. The purpose of the interviews was to collect information relevant to the evaluation questions pertaining to start-up and program implementation, governance, parental involvement, student learning, teachers' experiences, and development of internal evaluation processes. The interviews also explored the wide variety of challenges and rewards of being involved with a charter school.

In conforming to the standards of propriety and feasibility (Joint Committee, 1994) our intention was to disturb the schools' functioning as little as possible. Our aim was to schedule our interviews around the needs of the staff and other stakeholders, rather than expecting the interviewees to conform to our schedules and formats (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Sullins & Alawy, 1999).

Teachers. The different sizes and structures of the schools necessitated different interviewing formats in order not to disrupt the flow of the teacher's workday nor the students' instruction. At Riverview Scholars and MSM, our 2 larger schools, teachers were interviewed in focus groups of 2-11 teachers during their free periods; there were some individual interviews as well. At Essentials Academy, 6 staff were available to interview during a weekly professional development meeting. In addition, several of Essentials Academy's other teachers and staff met with us one-on-one to discuss various issues related to the school. At Lifelong Learners & Leaders (LLL), the smallest school in our study, teachers were interviewed individually; however, not all teachers were available to be interviewed.

Table A:1. Data Collection Strategies and Information Sources

Strategy/ Source	Charter School Surveys (Grades 5 or above)	School Climate Survey	Interview	Focus Group	Test Data	Personal Observation	Work Sample	Document Review
Students	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Teachers/Staff	X	X	X	X		X		
School Directors/ Administrators	X	X	X			X		
Parents/Guardians	X	X	X	X				
School Records								X
Schools								X
Community Members			X					
Local School District and Local Public Schools			X					X
Ohio Dept. of Education and LOEO Personnel			X		X			X

Table A:2. Matrix of Study Objectives and Sources of Information

Data Collection	Charter School Surveys (for staff, students, & parents)	School Climate Survey (for staff, students, & parents)	Inter-views (staff, students, & parents)	Inter-views (ODE, LOEO, other authorities)	Focus Group (for staff, students, & parents)	Test Data (OGPT and tests used by schools)	School Report Cards/Annual Reports	Personal Observation (from students)	Work Samples (from students)	Document Review
Evaluation Questions										
IMPLEMENTATION										
1. What has been the process of developing and implementing these schools?	X		X	X	X		X	X		X
2. What factors influenced the effectiveness of the schools' development and implementation?	X		X	X	X		X	X		X
3. How are these schools similar to or different from other public schools?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
STUDENT LEARNING										
4. What impacts are the charter schools having on student learning?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5. What conditions improve (or do not improve) student learning?	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM										
6. How do the charter schools affect other Cleveland public schools and the district as a whole?			X	X	X	X	X	X		X
7. Similarly, what are the effects in the first-ring districts?			X	X	X	X	X	X		X
8. How have these schools served as models for other public schools?			X	X	X	X	X	X		X
9. How have they provided an incentive for other public schools to reform?			X	X	X		X	X		X
ADDED BY EVALUATION CENTER										
10. To what extent are charter schools using program and personnel evaluation?	X		X	X	X		X	X		X

Parents. While staff at all four schools actively encouraged parental participation in their schools, they were also concerned about making excessive demands on them. We scheduled the parent interviews based on what was feasible for the schools and the parents. This led to small and probably unrepresentative groups of parents at each school. At MSM, parents were interviewed as a small focus group in 2001-02 and individually in 2002-03. At Riverview Scholars, parents were interviewed individually in both 2001-02 and 2002-03. At LLL, a few parents were available for individual interviews in 2001-02 only. No parents were available for interviews at Essentials Academy, except for two who were also staff members. Even though the scope of parent interviews and focus groups was far less than hoped for, we found that the information we collected nicely supplemented the more representative data from the parent surveys.

Students. Student interviews were limited because of the age and developmental level of most of the students in the 4 schools that participated in the study. No students were interviewed during the first year of the evaluation. In the second year, a series of brief group interviews were conducted with volunteering fourth through sixth graders at MSM during their lunch break. In keeping with a natural setting, the students were interviewed at their regular lunch tables, which seated 2-5 students each. The questions we asked each group covered such topics as the students' likes and dislikes regarding the school. A similar format was used for MSM's sixth and seventh graders in 2003. In the third year, fifth through eighth grade students at Essentials Academy were interviewed with similar questions during their lunch breaks, in groups of 2-5.

Local and state experts, school administrators, and policy specialists. We met one-on-one with a number of charter school policymakers and experts in Cleveland and Columbus to ask them various questions regarding charter schools in Cleveland and throughout the state. Primarily, we were interested in their opinions regarding the impact of the charter schools on the public school districts. In Cleveland, we conducted interviews with district administrators and with principals and staff in a number of nearby public schools.

Personal Observations

In addition to interviews, personal observations were an important method of data collection used at each school. Team members recorded observations from classroom lessons, professional development meetings, board meetings, and other day-to-day activities inside and outside the schools. We were interested in observing phenomena such as student-teacher interactions, discipline issues and how they were addressed, and cooperation among staff. Barriers to effective teaching and learning were also noted. At professional development meetings, observations were for the purposes of exploring not only the content of the lessons, but also the level of staff participation. Evaluations of professional development were also noted. Observations at board meetings explored the dynamics in charter school governance and decision making. Personal observations also helped us better understand the culture and climate of each participating school. Participant observation was also used, for example, when schools incorporated visitors into their community meetings and the evaluation team members participated in such meetings instead of observing from the sidelines. Evaluation team members refrained from any activities or discussions that could influence instruction.

Surveys

Four different surveys were used during the course of the study.¹ Three separate charter school surveys, developed by The Evaluation Center, were administered to teachers/staff, students, and parents/guardians, respectively. In the third year of the study, we revised the surveys for Lifelong Learners & Leaders, at their request. Some items were deleted, while a few were added. These modified surveys did not differ dramatically from the other charter school surveys. However, they precluded direct between-school comparison for some items.

A school climate survey from the National Association of Secondary School Principals was also used during the first two years of the study. While the questions in the charter school surveys were targeted to each group (i.e., parents, students, and charter school staff), the same school climate survey was administered to all informant groups in the charter schools. Below we have included a brief description of the questionnaires and targeted informant groups as well as information about the timing of administering the questionnaires and the actual data collection process.

Teachers/staff charter school survey. Each year, around January or February, all teachers and school personnel who worked more than 20 hours per week and who were involved with instruction, including administrative and professional support personnel, were asked to complete this questionnaire. The respondents were asked to enclose it in an envelope and return it to a designated person at the school. Teachers were instructed not to place their names on the questionnaire, although they were asked to check their name off a list so that we could trace and follow up with missing respondents. Since the completed forms were to be collected, sealed, and mailed to the external evaluator by a designated person at each school, ample assurance was given that the responses would be confidential. A cover letter explained the purpose of the survey, and each teacher received an envelope in which to enclose the survey.

Student charter school survey. This questionnaire is designed to be used with students in grades 5-12. This limited the number of eligible students, especially during the first year of the study. As each of the schools in our study added older grades to its student body, more students became eligible to take the charter school survey each year.

During the first year of the study, only MSM had eligible students—a total of 9 fifth graders. The information from these 9 students was provided to the schools, but excluded from the overall report. During the second year, MSM's fourth through sixth graders were given this survey because their multigrade classrooms included grades 4 through 6 and it seemed improper to exclude the fourth graders. At this time Essentials Academy's student body included grades K-1 and 5-7; only grades 5 through 7 were surveyed. In January 2003, the third year of the study, all the fifth through seventh graders at MSM, three classes of fifth through eighth graders at Essentials Academy, and all the fifth grade students at Riverview Scholars were administered the charter school surveys.

The student questionnaire was administered by a member of the evaluation team, and all of the students in the selected classrooms were asked to complete it. The purpose of the survey and the manner in which the results would be used were explained to the students before they began completing the forms; time was allotted to answer the students' questions about the purpose of the survey. During the first two years of the study, the students read the questions themselves, with the evaluation team member providing additional instructions for individual items as needed.

¹ Copies of the charter school surveys and a lengthy description of the School Climate Survey can be seen on the project Web site: <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/charter/cleveland/>.

Some staff expressed concerns that some of the students still had difficulty understanding the survey. Therefore, during the third year of the study all the questions were read aloud to all the students, except for one classroom of relatively older, more advanced students.

Parent/guardian charter school survey. Each year of the study between 25 and 35 families at each school were selected to complete the survey. Families were randomly selected from a roster of all students by a member of the evaluation team; the number of selected families was proportional to the size of the school's student body. A colorful postcard with information about the parent survey was also sent to each family a few days before the actual survey package was received. Each survey package contained (i) a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey; (ii) the actual survey that takes about 15 minutes to complete; (iii) a self-addressed, stamped return envelope in which to enclose the survey; and (iv) two dollars, which served as a token of appreciation for the time parents devoted to completing and returning the survey. Completed Surveys were mailed directly to The Evaluation Center.

School climate survey for teachers/staff, students, and parents/guardians . This is a commercial instrument copyrighted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. One advantage of the school climate survey is that national norms are available so that charter schools can be compared with other public schools across the nation. This survey was administered only during years one and two of the evaluation. It was not administered in year three, due to limitations in its applicability to elementary charter schools as well as concerns about the burden of multiple surveys.

The process of sampling and administering the School Climate Survey was virtually identical to the process used to administer the three types of charter school surveys to each respective group of stakeholders. During year two, separate samples of parents were selected to take either the charter school survey or the school climate survey, but both samples were mailed their surveys around the same time.

Response rates on surveys. The purpose of our sampling was to build an accurate composite picture of the target population of staff, students, and parents across the four participating charter schools. We pieced together this picture by sampling representative groups of informants at each school. We included all eligible participating staff and teachers and essentially all students in grade 5 or higher.

Since a key purpose of the charter school reform is parental choice, parents are clearly one of the most important informant groups. Unfortunately, parents are also the most difficult group from which to collect information. Many other studies invest time and effort into sampling all parents, but then invest little effort into follow-up. In order to achieve a representative sample, our strategy was to sample a smaller group of parents at each school and then work hard to obtain a high response rate from this randomly selected group. Either of the two approaches would likely have yielded a similar number of returned surveys, but from our experience we find that the parents who initially respond are either extremely critical or extremely positive about the school. In other words, a small, well-drawn sample is better than a large, poorly drawn sample, since the former is more likely to be representative of the target population. Table A:3 illustrates the overall sample and response rate by informant group.

The parent surveys were mailed directly from and returned directly to The Evaluation Center. Various efforts were made to maximize the response rate. First, our surveying efforts were coordinated with each school so staff at the school would be available to assist with follow-up to those parents who did not return the survey within a designated period. At each of the three schools with lower initial response rates, the surveys were sent to the schools and distributed to

the families by the children's teachers, rather than mailed directly to the parents. Subsequent follow-up surveys were sent directly from The Evaluation Center. In the course of efforts to obtain high response rates, we sent as many as four follow-up surveys to some of the sampled parents.

The summarized results from each set of surveys were returned to each school for its own planning purposes. Additionally, a short report containing the responses to the open-ended questions on all the surveys were returned to the schools. We also provided the schools with a primer to help them understand and interpret the results for their school.

Table A:3. Sample Size and Response Rates on Surveys

	2000-2001			2001-2002			2002-2003		
	Target Pop.	Achieved Sample	Response Rate	Target Pop.	Achieved Sample	Response Rate	Target Pop.	Achieved Sample	Response Rate
Teacher/Staff Charter School Survey	48	46	95.8%	66	64	97.0%	85	81	95.3%
Student Charter School Survey	9	9	100.0%	81	73	90.1%	109	100	91.7%
Parent/Guardian Charter School Survey	81	73	90.1%	115	82	71.3%	108	81	75.0%
Teacher/Staff School Climate Survey	51	47	92.2%	67	55	82.1%	--	--	--
Student School Climate Survey	--	--	--	81	31	38.3%*	--	--	--
Parent/Guardian School Climate Survey	77	45	58.4%	111	70	63.1%	--	--	--

* This includes all the students in grades 4-6 at MSM. All the students at Essentials Academy were unavailable to take the school climate survey as scheduled in June.

Document and Literature Review

Wishing to be as unobtrusive as possible, we requested documentation already produced by the schools that would likely contain the information we wished to collect regarding each individual charter school. This documentation included available staff, parent or student handbooks, annual reports prepared for the state Office of School Options, minutes and documents from board meetings, brochures and other materials used for marketing the school, school newsletters, etc. During site visits, we asked for descriptive information/evidence about a school's success and its ability to fulfill its mission as well as any innovative or unique aspects of the school in terms of curriculum, instructional methods, or governance/administrative/operational aspects. We also asked for forms and instructions used for evaluating staff performance, professional development activities, and other instruction-related matters.

A wide range of other documents and literature were reviewed in the process of this study. For example, we consulted newspaper archives, pertinent magazines and newsletters, and relevant

research and literature. Documents of particular importance for this report were the *Charter School Student Report* prepared for the Ohio Department of Education Office of School Finance; evaluation reports prepared by the Legislative Office of Education Oversight; legislative documents such as Amended Substitute House Bill HB-364; and documents pertaining to the lawsuit against all Ohio charter schools. We also obtained pertinent documents from the CMSD administration office.

Analysis of Test Score Data

In our Year One Report, we analyzed and mapped out baseline results on the Ohio Proficiency Test for all charter schools in the state with available data, first-ring districts, Cleveland Municipal School District, and the three charter schools in Cleveland with available data (one of these three schools was participating in our study). Where possible, we aggregated results for these subgroups for the previous three years. Unfortunately, this analysis yielded very little relevant information for our study. Therefore, during the following two years we have focused solely on analyzing all available test results from each participating school and, where possible, made longitudinal comparisons or comparisons with other similar schools.

During the 2001-02 year, Main Street Montessori and Riverview Scholars provided us with results from two or more different tests, while Essentials Academy, which was in its first year, provided baseline results from the Ohio proficiency test. At Lifelong Learners & Leaders, only four students were at the grade level at which standardized tests were administered. This school has mainly focused on authentic assessment and is using a number of classroom-based instruments to systematically collect data on the progress of its students. Some of these data are presented in the report.

As comparisons between similar schools in CMSD is a focus of this year's report, we also downloaded the school-building level 2003 Local Report Cards from the ODE website <<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/>>. These report cards provided the 2001-02 fourth and sixth grade proficiency test scores for matched schools in our study.

The data provided by the schools are presented in three cases, where the results from each school are displayed and discussed. Where possible, we have traced change scores over time for individual students or from same groups of students.

Fiscal Data

To analyze data regarding school revenues and expenditures, we downloaded charter school data from the ODE Web site <<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/>> and CMSD data from the Cleveland Municipal School District Interactive Data Source. The 2003 CMSD district report card, available on the ODE Web site, also provided data on expenditures. We also downloaded the audits from the auditor general's Web site <<http://www.auditor.state.oh.us/>>. Unfortunately, there were numerous limitations. No data were available for charter schools less than two years old, making comparisons among Cleveland charter schools limited. The CMSD Interactive Data Source Web site provided more detailed fiscal data than the 2003 district report card, but only included data for 2000. On the ODE and auditor general Web sites, much data was unavailable for Essentials Academy; staff at LOEO had reported verbally to us that their records were "unauditable." Other fiscal information was gleaned from each school's respective annual reports and budget reports to the respective charter school boards.

Data Processing, Analysis, and Reporting

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed according to professionally acceptable standards of practice. Below we describe some of the processes involved. Further details are reported as needed in each subsequent chapter.

Quantitative survey data. The survey results were scanned by machine in order to enter the quantitative responses to closed-item questions. After processing and scanning the surveys, the data were disaggregated and sorted by school. Initially, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data (i.e., largely frequencies, means, standard deviations) by school. Later we used correlational and multivariate analyses as we further explored the data and tested tentative conclusions from our qualitative analysis. In the text of the report, the quantitative results are summarized in tables with appropriate explanatory narratives.

Because there was considerable variance among the four schools on a number of important variables, much of the data in this report displays separate statistics for each school. This is not for the purposes of comparing the merit of one school with another. Rather, it is to describe the differences and, based on other data sources, make inferences regarding possible explanations for them.

Qualitative survey and interview data. As the surveys were collected and returned to The Evaluation Center, all of the open-ended responses from both the charter school surveys and school climate surveys were typed up and recorded in a separate database, with responses linked to school ID, role of informant, and question number. Comments were then coded and sorted for analysis. Qualitative data obtained from interviews and personal observations were written on paper on site, using the process of member checking whenever possible (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The resulting notes were then typed into electronic files, either directly by the original interviewer/observer or by student research assistants and then edited by the interviewer/observer. The resulting files were analyzed for themes with the assistance of the qualitative software NUD*IST 4 and N*Vivo.

State level data. The Ohio State Department of Education (ODE) Web site provided access to data on all Ohio schools from 1996 to 2002 on a variety of dimensions such as finance, student achievement, and school outcome variables. Thus, in cases where data were available, we compared the four Cleveland charter schools, all other Cleveland charter schools, all CMSD schools, and matched CMSD schools.

District level data. District level analyses of financial and test score data were based on data available from the Cleveland Municipal School District's Website (available at <http://www.cmsdnet.net/OREA/reports/interactive/IDS/>). Unfortunately, there were no data for years beyond 2000-01.

School level test score data. We analyzed test score data for the four case schools that provided us with individual student data. We ran some comparisons with the elementary schools in the Cleveland Municipal School District that were matched to each charter school in our study on geography and demographics. We obtained the demographic data from state data-sets downloaded from the Ohio Department of Education's Web site and test score data from the individual school report cards that are available on ODE's Web site.

In recognition of the various stakeholder groups, decision makers, and interested parties, special efforts were made to communicate the procedures, findings, conclusions, and recommendations in understandable formats to the key stakeholders. In order to provide evaluative information to the various stakeholders, a Web site

<<http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/charter/cleveland/>> was established that contains information about the evaluation as well as copies of the data collection instruments and other fieldwork-related documentation.

All schools and The Cleveland Foundation received school-level reports for each survey we administered. Templates were developed for reporting the results back to each school. After compiling profiles from the surveys, the results were formatted and printed. A summative report of the written comments from teachers/staff, parents, and students were also prepared for each school. All comments were stripped of identifying information and then put in random order to assure the anonymity of the respondents. The first two years the quotes were combined across all three informant groups. The third year we created separate quote reports for teachers/staff, parent/guardians, and students.

Appendix B Details on the Comparisons Schools in Terms of Location and Demographics

	Avg Enrollment	Ltd English Proficient	Migrant	Students w/ Disabilities	Asian	American Indian	Hispanic	Multi-Racial	White	African American
Main Street Montessori	219	NC	NC	11.1%	NC	NC	5.7%	5.5%	77.3%	7.5%
Riverview Scholars	293	NC	NC	8.4%	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	96.0%
Lifelong Learners & Leaders	77	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	85.7%
Public Elementary School A	447	NC	NC	24.8%	NC	NC	3.5%	NC	6.3%	89.9%
Public Elementary School B	450	NC	NC	8.3%	NC	NC	NC	NC	2.6%	97.1%
Public Elementary School C	538	NC	NC	15.1%	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	97.8%
Public Elementary School D	395	NC	NC	10.6%	NC	NC	6.5%	NC	85.8%	5.2%
Public Elementary School E	699	NC	NC	16.4%	NC	NC	11.7%	1.6%	71.9%	14.4%
Public Elementary School F	652	45.9%	NC	13.3%	NC	NC	39.9%	2.0%	31.0%	26.5%
Public Elementary School G	425	NC	NC	11.0%	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	99.1%
Public Middle School H	930	1.3%	NC	15.8%	NC	NC	14.3%	2.3%	65.5%	17.5%
Public Elementary School I	410	NC	NC	19.2%	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	99.4%
Public Elementary School J	517	35.1%	NC	8.2%	NC	NC	58.2%	NC	19.5%	20.2%
CMSD	69,534	4.2%	NC	14.8%	0.7%	0.3%	9.1%	1.0%	18.3%	70.6%

NC refers to not counted.

Appendix C

Survey Results Regarding Charter School Missions

Table C:1 Satisfaction with Mission and School's Ability to Fulfill its Mission, Teachers and Staff at Main Street Montessori

<i>MSM</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
Satisfaction with mission	2000-01	10	4.5 (0.7)
	2001-02	14	4.8 (0.4)
	2002-03	19	4.7 (0.5)
Satisfaction with school's ability to fulfill mission	2000-01	10	4.0 (0.9)
	2001-02	14	4.4 (0.6)
	2002-03	20	4.2 (0.8)

Table C:2 The Extent to Which the Mission is Being Followed by the School, Responses From Teachers and Parents from Main Street Montessori

<i>MSM</i>	<i>Not very well</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Well</i>	<i>Very well</i>	
Teachers	2000-01 (N=10)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (80%)	2 (20%)
	2001-02 (N=15)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (47%)	8 (53%)
	2002-03 (N=20)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	12 (60%)	7 (35%)
Parents	2000-01 (N=24)	0 (0%)	3 (13%)	11 (46%)	10 (42%)
	2001-02 (N=27)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (22%)	21 (78%)
	2002-03 (N=27)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	8 (30%)	18 (66%)

Table C:3 Satisfaction with Mission and School's Ability to Fulfill its Mission, Teachers and Staff at Riverview Scholars

<i>Riverview Scholars</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
Satisfaction with mission	2000-01	28	4.0 (0.9)
	2001-02	27	3.4 (0.9)
	2002-03	32	4.0 (0.8)
Satisfaction with school's ability to fulfill mission	2000-01	27	3.3 (0.9)
	2001-02	28	2.7 (1.1)
	2002-03	31	3.0 (1.0)

Table C:4 The Extent to Which the Mission is Being Followed by the School, Responses From Teachers and Parents at Riverview Scholars

	<i>Riverview Scholars</i>	<i>Not very well</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Well</i>	<i>Very well</i>
Teachers	2000-01 (N=26)	0 (0%)	11 (42%)	13 (50%)	2 (8%)
	2001-02 (N=29)	5 (17%)	16 (55%)	6 (21%)	2 (7%)
	2002-03 (N=32)	3 (9%)	11 (34%)	16 (50%)	2 (6%)
Parents	2000-01 (N=23)	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	6 (26%)	14 (61%)
	2001-02 (N=24)	1 (4%)	5 (21%)	8 (33%)	10 (42%)
	2002-03 (N=23)	1 (4%)	4 (17%)	9 (39%)	9 (39%)

Table C:5 Satisfaction with Mission and School's Ability to Fulfill its Mission, Teachers and Staff

<i>Lifelong Learners & Leaders</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
Satisfaction with mission	2000-01	7	4.7 (0.5)
	2001-02	6	4.7 (0.5)
	2002-03	11	4.8 (0.4)
Satisfaction with school's ability to fulfill mission	2000-01	7	4.6 (0.5)
	2001-02	6	4.7 (0.5)
	2002-03	11	4.8 (0.4)

Table C:6 The Extent to Which the Mission is Being Followed by the School, Responses From Teachers and Parents at Lifelong Learners & Leaders

	<i>LLL</i>	<i>Not very well</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Well</i>	<i>Very well</i>
Teachers	2000-01 (N=7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (57%)	3 (43%)
	2001-02 (N=7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)	4 (57%)
	2002-03 (N=11)	0 (0%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	9 (82%)
Parents	2000-01 (N=22)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (55%)	10 (45%)
	2001-02 (N=16)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (50%)	8 (50%)
	2002-03 (N=17)	0 (0%)	4 (24%)	8 (47%)	5 (29%)

Table C:7 Satisfaction with Mission and School's Ability to Fulfill its Mission, Teachers and Staff

<i>Essentials Academy</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
Satisfaction with mission	2001-02	13	4.3 (0.8)
	2002-03	16	4.6 (0.7)
Satisfaction with school's ability to fulfill mission	2001-02	12	3.6 (1.2)
	2002-03	16	4.5 (0.7)

Table C:8 The Extent to Which the Mission is Being Followed by the School, Responses From Teachers and Parents at Essentials Academy

<i>Essentials Academy</i>		<i>Not very well</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Well</i>	<i>Very well</i>
Teachers	2000-01 (N=)	--	--	--	--
	2001-02 (N=12)	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	6 (50%)	5 (42%)
	2002-03 (N=17)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (29%)	12 (71%)
Parents	2000-01 (N=)	--	--	--	--
	2001-02 (N=11)	2 (18%)	7 (64%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)
	2002-03 (N= 9)	3 (33%)	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)

Table C:9 The Extent to Which the Mission is Being Followed by the School, Responses from Parents 2002-03

	<i>N</i>	<i>Not very well</i>		<i>Fair</i>		<i>Well</i>		<i>Very well</i>	
MSM	27	0	0%	1	4%	8	30%	18	67%
Riverview Scholars	23	1	4%	4	17%	9	39%	9	39%
LLL	17	0	0%	4	24%	8	47%	5	29%
Essentials Academy	9	3	33%	3	33%	2	22%	1	11%

Table C:10 The Extent to Which the Mission is Being Followed by the School, Responses From Teachers

<i>MSM</i>	<i>1 Not very well</i>	<i>2 Fair</i>	<i>3 Well</i>	<i>4 Very well</i>
2000-01	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (80%)	2 (20%)
2001-02	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (47%)	8 (53%)
2002-03	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	12 (60%)	7 (35%)
<i>RS</i>				
2000-01	0 (0%)	11 (42%)	13 (50%)	2 (8%)
2001-02	5 (17%)	16 (55%)	6 (21%)	2 (7%)
2002-03	3 (9%)	11 (34%)	16 (50%)	2 (6%)
<i>LLL</i>				
2000-01	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (57%)	3 (43%)
2001-02	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)	4 (57%)
2002-03	0 (0%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	9 (82%)
<i>EA</i>				
2000-01	--	--	--	--
2001-02	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	6 (50%)	5 (42%)
2002-03	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (29%)	12 (71%)

Table C:11 The Extent to Which the Mission is Being Followed by the School, Responses From Parents

<i>MSM</i>	<i>1 Not very well</i>	<i>2 Fair</i>	<i>3 Well</i>	<i>4 Very well</i>
2000-01	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	11 (46%)	10 (42%)
2001-02	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (22%)	21 (78%)
2002-03	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	8 (30%)	18 (67%)
<i>RS</i>				
2000-01	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	6 (26%)	14 (61%)
2001-02	1 (4%)	5 (21%)	8 (33%)	10 (42%)
2002-03	1 (5%)	4 (17%)	9 (39%)	9 (39%)
<i>LLL</i>				
2000-01	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (55%)	10 (45%)
2001-02	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (50%)	8 (50%)
2002-03	0 (0%)	4 (24%)	8 (47%)	5 (29%)
<i>EA</i>				
2000-01	--	--	--	--
2001-02	2 (18%)	7 (64%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)
2002-03	3 (33%)	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	1 (12%)

Staff's Perceptions of "Unique or Innovative" Features of the School (Note: redundant answers have been eliminated)

Main Street Montessori

- Two certified teachers in every classroom.
- Everything, as I worked in a public school system before here.
- Implementation of the Montessori teaching philosophy and how well the children respond.
- In the Montessori setting, first through third grades are combined to learn from each other. Teachers volunteer to tutor reading before or after school.
- Montessori as well as traditional.
- Montessori education.
- Montessori educational process
- Montessori environment, dedicated and professional staff.
- Montessori philosophy combined with state standards.
- Montessori philosophy. Two trained teachers in every classroom.
- Teachers are very hardworking and come up with new curriculum that integrates Montessori curriculum with state curriculum.

- The combination of the curriculums (traditional/Montessori). We are able to integrate the best of each curriculum to meet each child's needs.
- The Montessori way of using manipulation, allowing children freedom of movement, etc.
- True Montessori school with well-trained teachers.
- We allow the children to work at their own pace. Children are allowed to talk and move about the classroom during work time. There are two certified teachers in every classroom.

Riverview Scholars

- All teachers have real high expectations of our students.
- The focus is not only on academics, but also on appropriate behavior, character development, and being a responsible/productive person.
- Parents willingness to stay involved.
- I appreciate the school's desire to stress literacy.
- Reduced class size in Kindergarten and 1st grade.
- Support of ideas and plans I have and try to make things work when I ask for something or help.
- Literacy Block is creative and helpful to students in the area of language arts. Excellent parent organization and concerned with interest of parents.
- The Literacy block is a special attraction for our school. Also the monthly citizenship assemblies have proved to be somewhat effective.
- We work in a non-union, where in theory we should all be equal while engaged in different jobs.
- Literacy Block— although I'm pretty sure other schools are doing something similar—we don't really do anything that has not been done elsewhere

Lifelong Learners & Leaders

- Being such a small school, I can walk into the principal's office anytime and address my concerns. Since there are only 5 teachers, we all can walk within 20 seconds and share ideas.
- The emphasis on reading and writing.
- The size and how well teachers support and help students.
- The individual choice the student has in learning. Our students choose their own writing projects. The process is extremely important in teaching children how to do something, so the next time they can do it themselves or teach someone else.
- Foster intergenerational exchanges through cross-age programs
- The teaching methods used here are focused on student learning. Each teacher takes a constructivist approach to teaching. The students do the learning and the teachers facilitate the process. Our assessment methods are authentic and though we give some standardized tests and proficiency tests to fourth graders, we don't rely heavily on standardized testing.

- ❑ The reading mentor program is a wonderful experience for the students. Even though we have small class sizes, the students still crave one-on-one attention. When the reading mentors are visiting, it gives each child a chance to choose a story they would like to hear again and converse with a new person.
- ❑ While not a new idea of thinking, the manner in which our mentoring program is implemented is very innovative. Mentors are made to feel an integral part of the program, trained by Dr. Whitehouse in order to feel confident and competent in helping the students, embraced by staff and students for the contribution they make to our program.

Essentials Academy

- ❑ Advisors meet with advisees daily
- ❑ Our approach to teaching and how we start our day seeking student input (unity circle) and project-based learning.
- ❑ Our school believes in educating our children academically and culturally. We are trying to reinforce the arts as part of the curriculum that had been eliminated in many schools. Our school is small, and all of our staff are responsible to educate and mentor all of our students.
- ❑ Our school offers students a chance for one on one tutoring in all subjects year long. This school also offers students the chance to learn African dance and music. The students here have a voice in the school. Things are discussed and all information is weighed evenly.
- ❑ Our school is small and very much in tune to individual student needs and consists of excellence for every student. This excellence takes place in small classrooms during each class. Teachers are imparting rounded curriculum to educate the total student.
- ❑ Our unity circle, because all staff and students are assembled at 8:15 every morning. It is here where announcements are said. Both staff, parents, and students are encouraged to interact within the circle.
- ❑ The curriculum and the very dedicated administration.
- ❑ The love and interest of the teachers and administration in the life of the staff and students and the project-based curriculum.
- ❑ The openness and harmony of the staff. Once the students become acclimated to this, it will produce a caring, empathetic, and secure family environment.
- ❑ Very high standards and expectations for students, qualified teaching staff, and administration.

Appendix D

List of Each Charter School’s Partnerships and Funding Sources

Sources: Annual reports, board meeting minutes, personal communication.

MSM: Partnerships with Other Organizations

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Benefits or Nature of Partnership</i>
Cleveland MetroParks Zoo	2000 - 2003	Provided transportation to and from the zoo
YMCA	2000 - 2003	Provided transportation for after-school care; held swim lessons for the students
United Methodist Church (Cleveland)	2000 - 2001	Provided a gym for students
FirStar Bank	2000 - 2002	Let students open savings account; collected money for these accounts and taught them the necessity of saving; allowed overflow parking
Key Bank Volunteers	2001 - 2002	Read to students during “Key Bank’s Neighbors Make A Difference Day”
ParkWorks	2001 - 2003	Provided environmental lessons for students
Local Library	2002 - 2003	Students could conduct research, improve reading skills, enjoy books, attend various reading programs, and receive direct library instruction from library personnel .
Councilman Mike O’Malley	2002 - 2003	Supported MSM in relocating to new building, participated in fundraisers, brainstormed ideas for smoother dismissal, assisted with ground maintenance, and secured money for playground and garden.
Nature’s Classroom	2002 - 2003	Students attended classes on geology, weather, decomposition, and map making.
Centerville Mills YMCA	2002 - 2003	Students went on an overnight camping trip to interact with the world studied in class.

Riverview Scholars: Partnerships with Other Organizations

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Benefits or Nature of Partnership</i>
Applewood Centers	1999 - 2000	Provided social worker for assessment and individual counseling for half day each week
Art on Wheels	1999 - 2000	Assisted in creating a curriculum for the after-school program
Bohn Senior Center	1999 - 2000	Preformed several projects for and with residents of the senior center
Calfee, Halter & Griswold	1999 - 2000	Served as corporate sponsor
CityYear-Cleveland	1999 - 2003	Provided tutors and assisted with after-school programs
Cleveland State University (America READS; College of Education)	1999 - 2003	Provided tutors to work with 1st and 2nd grade students during and after school
Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Science; Bellfaire JCB	2001-2003	Provided Social Work Interns
Rainbow Play	2002-2003	Provided yoga instruction for students

A number of other partners were also mentioned in the school's annual report.

Likelong Learners and Leaders: Partnerships with Other Organizations

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Benefits or Nature of Partnership</i>
Local center, including Intergenerational Resource Center	2000 - 2003	Painting and setting up classrooms; intergenerational garden; mentoring
National Advisory Board (created by LLL; includes top staff of Weatherhead School of Management; ElderHostel, International Longevity Center,, Oberlin College's Dept of Environmental Sciences; Civic Ventures)	2000-2003	"provides expert consultation on broad conceptual issues related to forming a public school with the infusion of intergenerational relationships as a core part of the curriculum and operation of the school."

Lifelong Learners and Leaders: Partnerships with Other Organizations
(continued)

Case Western Reserve University School of Nursing	2002 - 2003	School based community nursing experience
Youth in Philanthropy and Service	2001-2002	Provided a service learning workshop for teachers
Kethley House Nursing Home; Menorah Park Nursing Home; plus 3 other organizations that serve senior citizens	2001-2003	Provided regular intergenerational learning experiences for respective clients and LLL students
National Council of Jewish Women	2001-2003	Provided parent workshop on gun safety; presented "reading theater" to students

Essentials Academy: Partnerships with Other Organizations

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Benefits or Nature of Partnership</i>
YMCA	2001-02	Provided a gymnasium for gym class, plus a temporary building
Cleveland State University Black Studies Dept.	2002-03	Partner for professional development
Business Volunteers Unlimited	2002-03	Trained board members; helped with fiscal matters
Youth Opportunities Unlimited	2002-03	Helped youth find jobs as part of their paid service learning

MSM: Grants, Donations, and Other Funding Sources

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Cleveland Foundation	1999 - 2000	\$73,000 grant
Hershey Foundation	1999 - 2000	\$5,500 grant
Cleveland Foundation	2000 - 2001	(unspecified)
Hershey Foundation	2000 - 2001	(unspecified)
Non-specified interest and contributions	2001 - 2002	\$20,014
Cleveland Foundation	2002 - 2003	(unspecified)
Hershey Foundation	2002 - 2003	(unspecified)
Non-specified interest and contributions	2002 - 2003	\$28, 595

Riverview Scholars: Grants, Donations, and Other Funding Sources

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount</i>
The Cleveland Foundation	1999 - 2003	\$100,000 and higher
Ohio Dpt of Education	1999 - 2000	\$100,000 and higher
Lennon Trust; Wean Foundation	2000-2001	\$100,000 and higher
Martha Holding Jennings Foundation, Samuel Rosenthal Foundation	1999 - 2000	\$50,000 - \$99,999
Abington Foundation, Mandel Family Foundation	1999-2001	\$50,000 - \$99,999
The Wortzman Company	2001 - 2002	\$50,000 - \$99,999
Bruening Foundation	2002-2003	\$50,000 to \$100,000 in 1999-00 & 2002-03; \$100,000+ in 2000-01

Riverview Scholars: Grants, Donations, and Other Funding Sources (Continued)

Note: These are in addition to the grants on the previous page.

During the 1999 - 2000 school year:

- Six charities/foundations each donated \$25,000-\$49,999
- Eight foundations along with an anonymous donor each contributed \$15,000-\$25,000
- Seven foundations and three individuals each donated \$10,000-\$15,000
- Nine foundations and six individuals each gave \$5,000-\$10,000
- Seven foundations and sixteen individuals each contributed anywhere from \$500-\$5,000

During the 2000-2001 school year:

- Eight sources each donated \$25,000-\$49,999
- Four foundations each contributed \$15,000-\$24, 999
- Three foundations each donated \$10,000-\$15,000
- Three sources each gave \$5,000-\$9,999
- Twenty sources each contributed anywhere from \$500-\$5,000

During the 2001 - 2002 school year:

- One charity and three individuals each contributed \$25,000-\$49,999
- Three foundations and one individual each donated \$10,000-\$24,999
- Eight foundations and one individual each gave \$2,000-\$9,999
- Nine foundations/banks and ten individuals each donated \$500-\$1,999

During the 2002-2003 school year:

- Two foundations each contributed \$25,000-\$49,999
- Four foundations each donated \$10,000-\$24,999
- Nineteen sources each gave \$2,500-\$9,999
- Twenty nine sources each donated \$500-\$2,499

Lifelong Learners and Leaders: Grants, Donations, and Other Funding Sources

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount</i>
The Cleveland Foundation	2000 - 2001	\$50,000 grant
Ohio Charter Schools	2000 - 2001	\$50,000 grant
The St. Ann Foundation	2000 - 2001	\$15,000 grant
The Murphy Family Foundation	2000 - 2001	\$10,000 grant
The Cleveland Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$66,440 grant
The St. Ann Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$23,250 grant
The Ginn Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$15,000 grant
The Murphy Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$9,500 grant
The Cleveland Browns Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$5,000 grant
The Fox Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$3,000 grant
The Richman Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$3,000 grant
Private Donations	2001 - 2002	\$3,510 donation

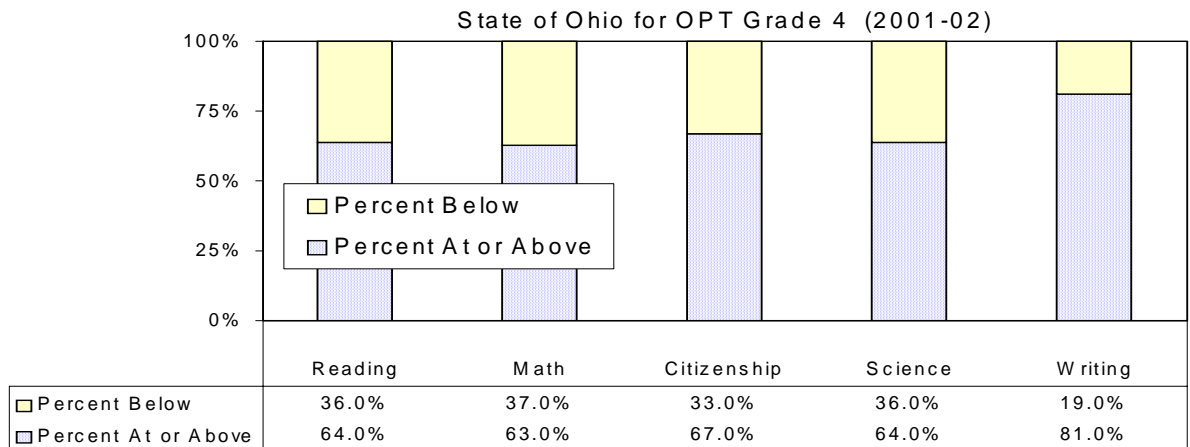
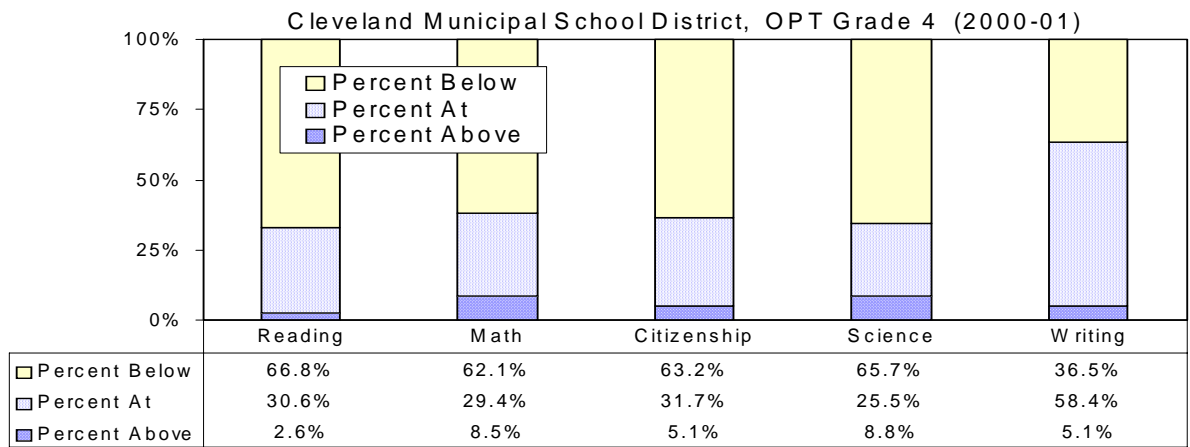
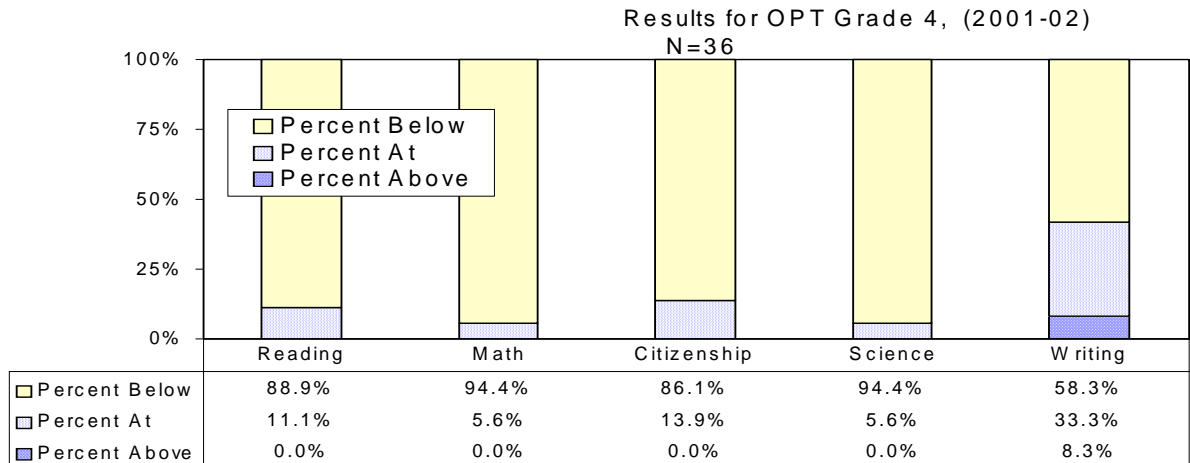
Essentials Academy: Grants, Donations, and Other Funding Sources

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount</i>
The Cleveland Foundation	2001 - 2002	\$97,500
General contributions	2001 - 2002	\$10,000
Charter One Bank, 5/3 Bank	2002 - 2003	\$12,000
General contributions	2002 - 2003	\$2,212

Appendix E

Supplemental Results Regarding Academic Performance

Exhibit E:1 Grade 4 Ohio Proficiency Test Results for Riverview Scholars, CMSD and State



Regarding Exhibit E:1, note that the CMSD data are from 2000-01 instead of 2001-02. Also note that a complete breakout of state results for 2001-02 was not available, only the percent below or percent at or above.

Exhibit E:2 Results on the Ohio Proficiency Test for Main Street Montessori

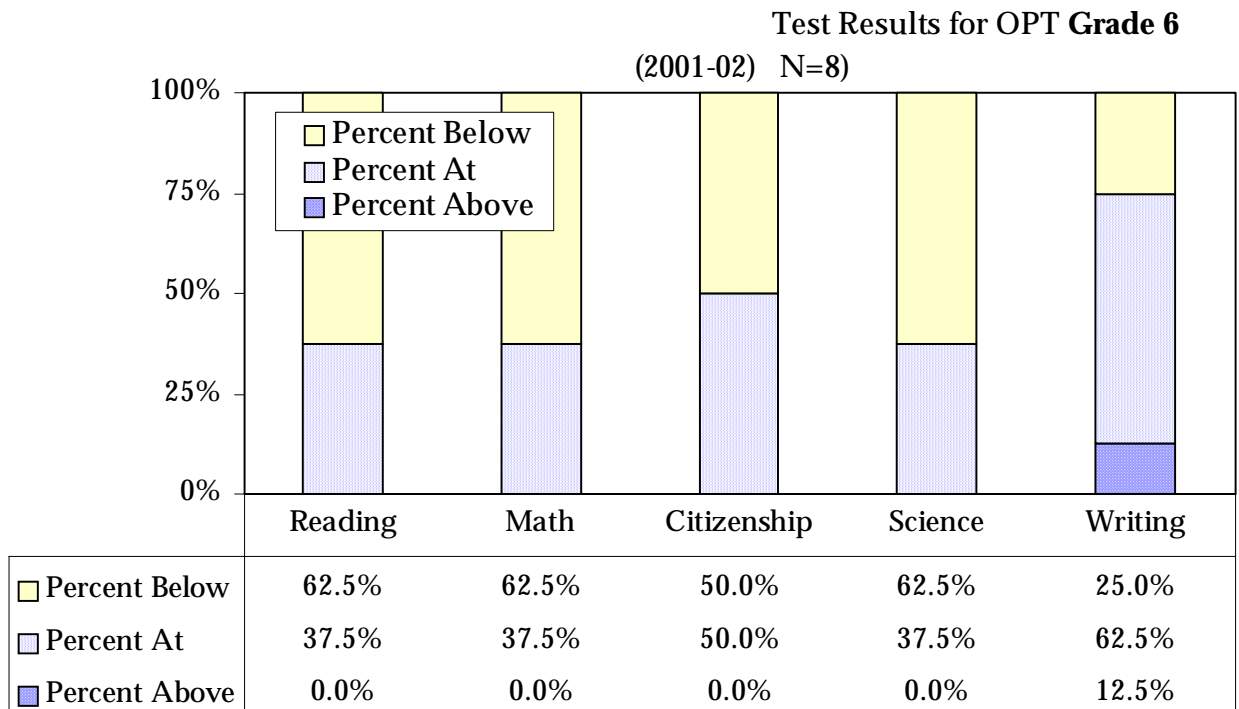
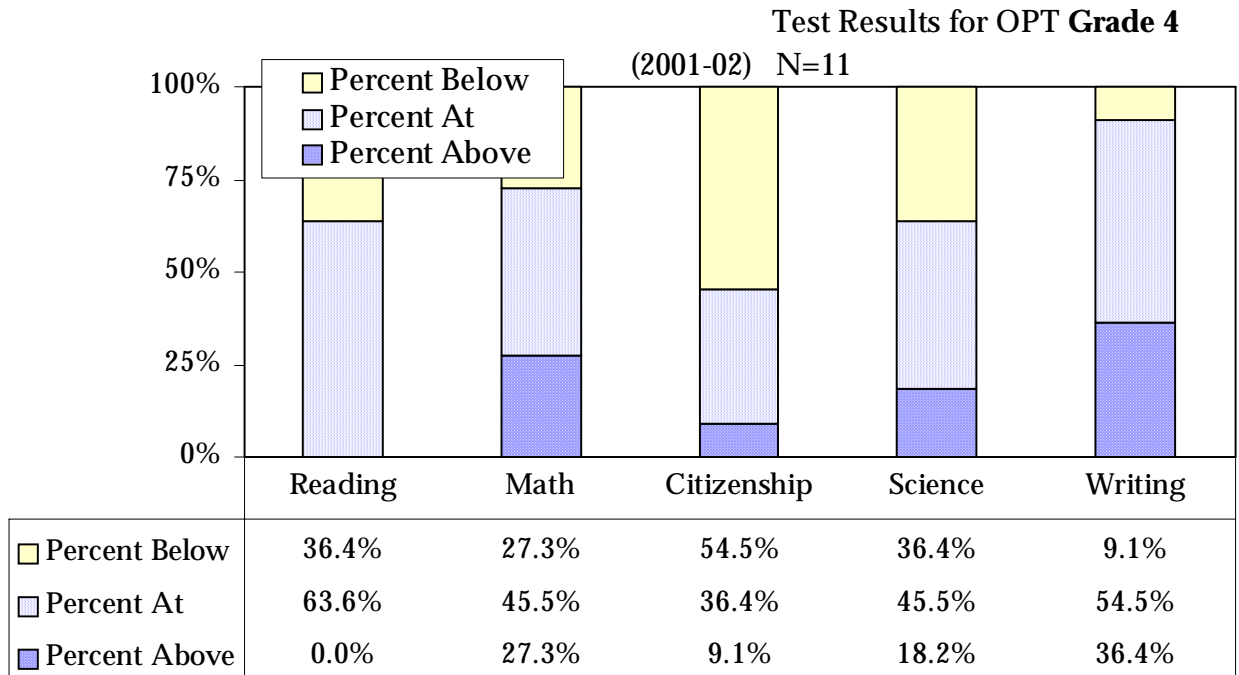


Exhibit E:3 MSM Results on the Wide Range Achievement Test for 1999-00 and 2000-01

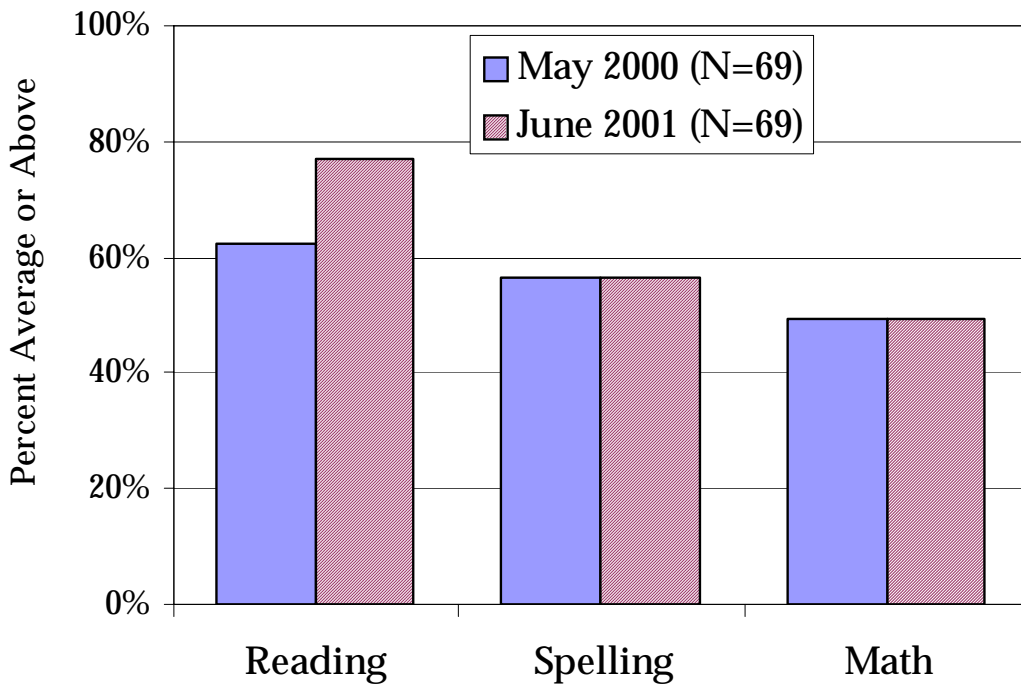
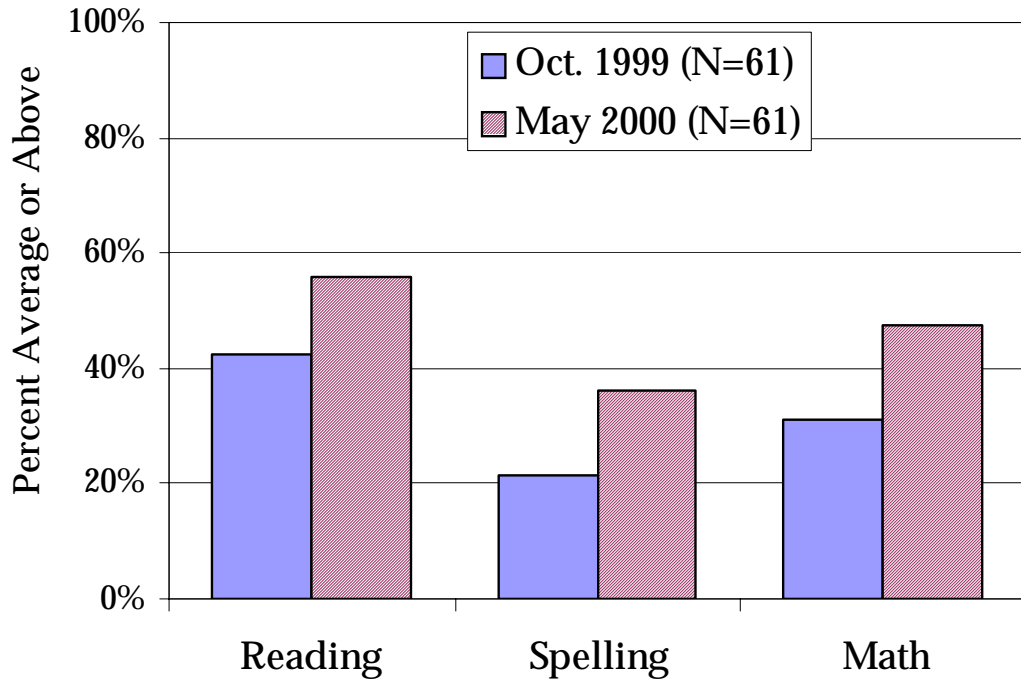


Exhibit E:4 MSM Results on the WRAT by Grade Level and Subject Area

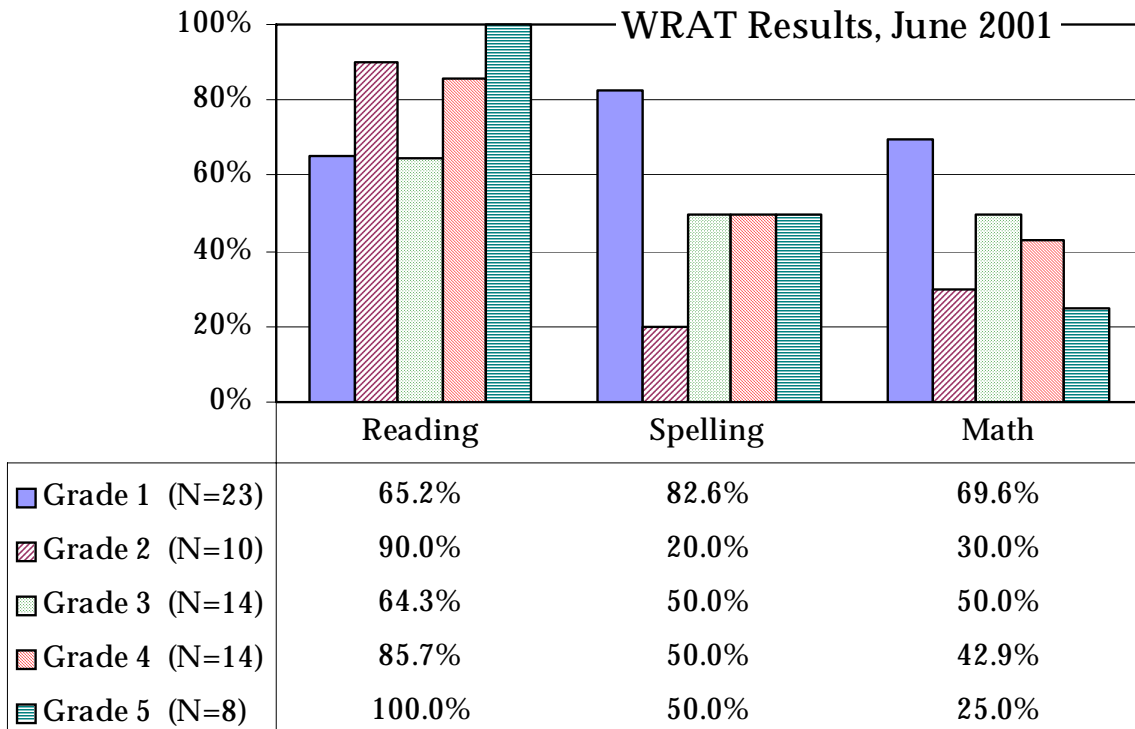
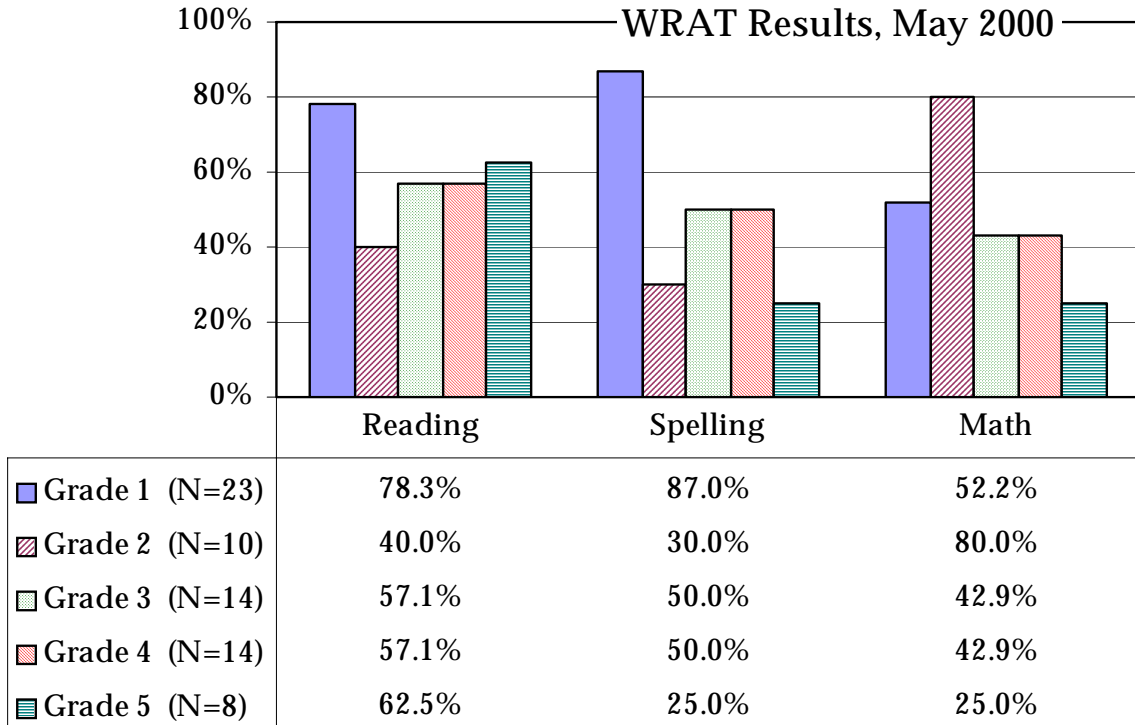


Exhibit E:5 Progress of Students Between the First and Second Trimesters of the 2001-02 School Year, Language Arts.

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Description of Progress Made</i>
Letter Recognition	Half of the students could recognize all 26 letters, both upper and lower case, by the end of the second trimester. Another 30 percent were very close to mastery. All students demonstrated some progress in terms of the numbers of letters they could recognize.
Reading and Writing	All the students except 1 made progress over the first 2 trimesters. The gains ranged from as little as a 3 point gain in reading (scale from 0-19, with 19 required for mastery) to as much as a 14 point gain in writing (scale from 0-22, with 22 required for mastery). By the end of the second trimester, 16 percent of the students demonstrated mastery in reading, but none had reached mastery in writing (although about 15 percent of the students were close to mastery).
Concept of Word	Thirty-four percent of the students had reached mastery by the end of the second trimester, and 41 percent had at least reached the developing stage. The remainder (25 percent) were still at the "no evidence shown" stage. Of those students who had not demonstrated mastery in the first trimester, only about one-third actually demonstrated growth according to the rubric between the first and second trimesters.
Spelling	On the spelling assessment, three-quarters of the students demonstrated growth between the first and second trimesters, although the remaining quarter received the same rating.

Note: These results include only students in the emergent to beginning stages of development.

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