

A MULTISITE CASE STUDY OF HIGH-PERFORMING CHARTER SCHOOL BOARDS IN
FLORIDA

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multisite case study was to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards. Through description of the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards, the impact of charter school board governance on charter school closures in Florida can be better understood. The theory guiding this study was Coleman's social capital theory, suggesting that the social capital of members of an organization working towards a common goal through bridging and bonding results in productivity and a positive impact on the organization; in this case study, the organization was the charter school governing board. The central research question for this study addressed the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school governing board members. Additional subquestions addressed how bonding practices impact charter school governance; how bridging practices impact charter school governance; and how governance training of board members impact charter school governance. A multisite case study design was used to collect data including documents, interviews, and observations. The targeted participants of the study were 16 members from three different high-performing charter school boards in Florida. The case study data were analyzed using Stake's approach to organization of data, data analysis and representation. Findings indicated common practices and behaviors were present among high-performing charter school boards in the areas of their characteristics and board and member role and responsibility. Further research on high-performing charter schools beyond central Florida and on boards of closed charter schools will help solve the problem of charter school closures in Florida.

Keywords: charter schools, charter school boards, charter school governance, high-performing charter school, school boards, school board governance, social capital.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my supportive husband, my best friend, who encouraged me every step of this dissertation journey. Thank you, Bryan, for always being there for me. I also dedicate this to my wonderful family whom I love dearly.

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Thank you to Dr. Tierce for the much-needed firm encouragement and continual guidance. Fear of failure and procrastination were challenges for me, and you helped me overcome those obstacles with gentle nudging.

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Thank you to all of the dedicated, caring educators who make a positive difference in this world.

Thank you to my Lord and Savior, who deserves all of the glory.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
List of Tables	12
List of Abbreviations	13
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	15
Overview.....	15
Background	16
Historical Context	16
Social Context.....	19
Theoretical Context.....	22
Situation to Self.....	23
Problem Statement	24
Purpose Statement.....	25
Significance of the Study	25
Research Questions.....	27
Central Research Question.....	27
Research Subquestions (SQs)	27
Definitions.....	29
Summary	31
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	32

Overview.....	32
Theoretical Framework.....	33
Characteristics of Social Capital.....	34
Related Literature.....	39
History of Charter Schools.....	39
Roles and Responsibilities of Traditional School Boards.....	55
Characteristics of Effective School Boards	59
Summary.....	63
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	65
Overview.....	65
Design	65
Research Questions.....	67
Central Research Question.....	67
Research Subquestions.....	67
Setting	67
Participants.....	71
Procedures.....	72
The Researcher’s Role	74
Data Collection	76
Documents	76
Interviews.....	77
Observations	81
Data Analysis	83

Trustworthiness.....	86
Credibility	86
Dependability and Confirmability	87
Transferability.....	88
Ethical Considerations	88
Summary.....	89
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	91
Overview.....	91
Participants.....	91
Adam.....	93
Delia.....	94
Jean	95
Ken.....	97
Marta.....	98
Michael	100
Steven.....	102
Angela.....	103
David.....	105
Harris.....	107
Maurice	108
Nelson	110
Wendy.....	112
Carla.....	113

	10
Jerry.....	116
Louis	118
Case Descriptions.....	119
Case 1: AC	119
Case 2: LA	122
Case 3: SP	124
Results.....	126
Cross-Case Analysis	127
Major Theme 1: Board Characteristics.....	129
Major Theme 2: Board Role and Responsibility	136
Major Theme 3: Member Role and Responsibility.....	145
Research Question Responses.....	150
Central Research Question.....	150
SQ1	152
SQ2	153
SQ3	154
Cross-Case Synthesis	155
Summary.....	157
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	158
Overview.....	158
Summary of Findings.....	158
Discussion.....	162
Theoretical Literature.....	162

Empirical Literature	167
Implications.....	171
Theoretical Implications	171
Empirical Implications.....	174
Practical Implications.....	176
Delimitations and Limitations.....	179
Recommendations for Future Research	180
Summary.....	182
REFERENCES	184
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PERMISSION LETTER	201
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	202
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM	203
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	206
APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL.....	207
APPENDIX F: MULTICASE STUDY THEME IDENTIFICATION WORKSHEET.....	208
APPENDIX G: CASE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET	209
APPENDIX H: ORDINARINESS AND MANIFESTATION ESTIMATE WORKSHEET	210
APPENDIX I: ASSERTIONS BY CASE WORKSHEET.....	211
APPENDIX J: MULTICASE ASSERTIONS WORKSHEET	212

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics..... 92

Table 2. Themes..... 128

List of Abbreviations

Achievement Charter (AC)

charter management organization (CMO)

Center for Education Reform (CER)

English Language Learners (ELLs)

education management organization (EMO)

end-of-course (EOC)

Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers (FACSA)

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)

Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools (FCPCS)

Florida Department of Education (FDOE)

Florida Standards Assessment (FSA)

Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB)

Leadership Academy (LA)

management organizations (MOs)

National Alliance of Public Charter Schools (NAPCS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Education Association (NEA)

National School Boards Association (NSBA)

National School Board Foundation (NSBF)

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

students with disabilities (SWD)

Success Preparatory (SP)

United States Department of Education (USDOE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

There has been a significant increase in the number of charter schools in the United States, driven by the need for an alternative educational choice from teachers, parents, lawmakers, and citizens (Cannata, Thomas, & Thombre, 2013). In addition, although the impact of school board governance on public school outcomes, specifically student achievement, is a largely researched topic (Asen, Gurke, Conners, Solomon, & Gumm, 2013; Delagardelle, 2008; Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Nkundabanyanga, Tauringana, & Muhwezi, 2015; Plough, 2014; Rhim, Quarles, & Wong, 2013; Roberts & Sampson, 2011; Saatcioglu, Moore, Sargut, & Bajaj, 2011), there is a need to research the impact of charter school governance on charter school outcomes. Although the characteristics of effective traditional school boards have been identified within literature, the characteristics of effective charter school boards have yet to be researched (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). By studying the effective practices of high-performing charter schools, those involved with charter education such as legislators, charter school authorizers, charter school boards, and charter school stakeholders will gain essential knowledge needed to improve charter school governance and, ultimately, the effective operation of the charter school. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS, 2016b), 14% of Florida's charter schools closed in 2015. The impact of charter school closures on families, the community, the entities authorizing the charter school, the surrounding schools, and on taxpayers is detrimental.

The focus of this multisite case study was the effective practices of charter school boards. Case studies are used to examine “contemporary events when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, by investigating the governance behaviors,

practices, and interactions of high-performing charter school boards bound within the same school district, effective practices can be identified, described, and understood.

Chapter One of this study includes the historical, social, and theoretical context for the investigation. In addition, my position within and potential impact on the study, is explained. Chapter One also includes the formal problem and purpose statements, an explanation of the significance of the study, the central research question and subquestions, and important definitions.

Background

Within public education, the history of traditional public schools spans a much longer time period than does the history of charter schools. Charter schools have existed for about 20 years in Florida and have developed a place in American education (Land, 2002; Ziebarth, 1999). Presently, charter schools are well-established in many states as a viable, quality option for public education and more research is needed on these public schools of choice (Land, 2002; Ford & Irhrke, 2015). Although the effective school board characteristics of traditional public school boards have been largely researched within the longstanding history of American public education, there is little research about charter school board governance (Asen et al., 2013; Ford & Irhrke, 2015; Johnson, 2013; Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2004; Maas & Lake; 2015). In addition to the exploration of the social context of traditional board governance and student outcomes, charter school governance in relation to social capital theory has been explored (Burt, 1997, 2005; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Lin, 1999).

Historical Context

According to the Florida Department of Education (FDOE, 2015a), charter schools began in Florida in 1996 to offer parental choice in education and are “among the fastest growing

school choice option in Florida” (para. 1). Furthermore, charter schools are free to be innovative with curriculum and instruction and have flexibility with how they operate within certain accountability measures (FDOE, 2015a; NAPCS, 2014b). Charter schools may specialize in serving specific populations such as students with varying exceptionalities or at-risk students and may have themed learning curricular programs such as a focus on the arts, sciences, technology, or college and career readiness (NAPCS, 2014c).

Since 1994, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) has spent nearly \$4 billion to support charter schools (USDOE, 2016a). The funding for charter schools will likely increase as enrollment increases and the number of charter schools increase. As of 2015, charter school students made up 6% of all public school enrollment, and by 2035, the USDOE (2016b) estimated that charter school students will make up 20–40% of all public school students. The rise of charter schools in Florida has been significant. Since 2010, Florida has increased from 459 charter schools serving 154,780 students to 646 charter schools serving 251,082 in 2015 (FDOE, 2015a). With 20 years of history for charter schools in Florida, charter schools are well established as a public school option and the growth continues.

Although charter school laws vary in states across the United States, charter schools are generally defined as public schools that are operated independently under a charter, or contract, with the authorizing entity (NAPCS, 2014c). The authorizing entity, also known as an “authorizer,” varies among states and may be a university, a municipality, or a school district (NAPCS, 2014c). Charter schools must abide by all federal and state regulations for health and safety as well as participate in the state’s accountability measures (NAPCS, 2014c). Nondiscrimination and equal rights policies apply to all charter schools and charter schools must execute a lottery when the number of eligible student applicants exceeds the number of student

spaces. In terms of funding, charter schools typically receive less per-pupil funding than do traditional public schools. According to the USDOE (2016b), charter schools receive 28% less funding than do their traditional public school counterparts. Charter schools must do more with less and governance plays a significant role in the responsible operation of the charter school, especially with fiscal oversight of public funds (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; NAPCS, 2014b).

Once a charter school has been granted a charter by the authorizer, it is up to the charter school board to successfully govern the school (Gewetz, 2008). Most of the literature on the topic of school governance is focused on traditional public school boards (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). For example, in a literature review on the role and effectiveness of school boards spanning 20 years, Land (2002) offered a comprehensive description of the history of school boards, school board reform, and characteristics of effective traditional public school boards. Land also observed that the major features of local school boards in the United States at that time included local control by democratically elected representatives to meet the needs of the resident population, reliance on a selected superintendent for management and execution of board policy, boards with between five and seven members, and structure similar to that of a corporate board of directors with a chairman. School board reform in the 21st century has been impacted by federal and state control, particularly the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which placed emphasis on student achievement (Land, 2002).

The creation of charter schools is one school reform governance measure meant to catalyze improvements to traditional district schools and to challenge traditional school governance (Collins, 1999; Land, 2002; Schwartz, 1996). The growing body of research on the impact of effective traditional school boards on schools will support school board reform and improvements for traditional schools within the public education system. While there is a

collection of literature specifically on the efficacy of traditional school boards spanning at least 20 years, there is little research on efficacy of charter school governing boards that would support charter school board reform and improvements for charter schools within the public education system.

Social Context

In the social context of education, effective school board governance has been linked to student achievement (Delagardelle, 2008; Goodman, Fulbright & Zimmeman, 1997; Johnson, 2013; Lamont & Delagardelle, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Murphy & Hallinger, 2001; Plough, 2014; Roberts & Sampson, 2011), and the characteristics of effective school boards have been identified throughout the body of existing research. In a seminal, comprehensive, mixed-methods study spanning more than 10 years, the Iowa Association of School Boards (ISBA, 2000) and the National School Board Association (NSBA, 2002) examined school governance roles and responsibilities impacting positive student learning outcomes. The IASB and NSBA produced key areas of board performance which include vision, standards, assessment, accountability, alignment, climate, collaborative relationships, and continuous improvement (IASB, 2016; NSBA, 2002).

Charter schools are growing rapidly with more than 400 new charter schools opening in the 2015–2016 school year alone (National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, 2016b). According to the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools (2016a), more than 6,800 charter schools in the United States were serving an estimated 2.9 million students in 2015. However, little is known about effective charter school governance. Because an increasing number of children and families are choosing charter schools, research must be conducted to discover the

key characteristics and practices of high-performing charter schools to guide authorizers, state law, federal law, and most importantly, the charter school governing board.

The growing number of charter schools opening corresponds with a high number of charter school closures. For example, in 2015, 404 charter schools opened in the United States, but 272 were closed (NAPCS, 2016a). In Florida, the third most populous charter school state in America behind California and Arizona, 38 charter schools opened in 2015 while 35 closed (NAPCS, 2016a). When a charter school closes, not only does it waste taxpayer dollars, the school closure can be devastating to a family when a child can no longer go to his or her school (Cavanagh, 2012) because the stability of the child's education is disrupted, and the family is left to find another school (Paino, Boylan, & Renzulli, 2016).

There are various reasons for a charter school closure, but the most common reasons given include low enrollment, financial issues, and low academic performance (NAPCS, 2014b). While charter school supporters argue that charter school closures are reflective of accountability measures being upheld, opponents and proponents of charter schools argue that any school closure is one too many (Carlson & Lavertu, 2016; Cavanagh, 2012). With charter school enrollment increasing, more research is necessary to determine how charter school governance impacts charter school closures. Research on the practices and behaviors of charter school boards can become valuable to guide the decisions of lawmakers, authorizers, parents, and charter school stakeholders.

The body of literature on charter school governance is limited and does not focus on the problem of charter school closures as it relates to charter school board governance. In a literature review on the role and effectiveness of local school boards on student academic achievement, Land (2002) discovered limited research on charter schools, with mixed evidence

to support the idea that traditional, noncharter schools provide better outcomes or higher academic achievement than do charter schools (Collins, 1999; Education Commission of the States, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). However, effective charter schools can be identified in order for their boards to be studied. In Florida, as determined by the state's accountability system, charters may earn a "high-performing status" when the school earns at least two A grades with no grade lower than a B during each of its previous 3 years and maintains a sound financial status with no emergency conditions (Florida Legislature, 2016). Florida public schools earn an A grade if the school has earned enough points in up to 11 components measuring student achievement, learning gains, middle-school acceleration, graduation rates, and college and career acceleration (FDOE, 2017c). The aim of this current research was that examination of the boards of high-performing charter schools will provide important insight and understanding of how the characteristics and practices of charter school governing boards impact charter schools.

Traditional public school boards typically govern several schools within a region or school district, whereas charter school boards typically govern a single school (Hooge & Honingh, 2014). The charter school governance structure allows for responsive decision-making freedom that meets specific school needs and more effectively enhances student performance, whereas traditional school governance inhibits decision-making due to constraints associated with overarching district policies and having to meet the different needs of various schools (Hooge & Honingh, 2014; Sell, 2006). Charter school boards are able to directly impact the schools they govern. The complexity of problems facing large school districts requires elected school board members to know the needs of many stakeholders and ample information to make the best decisions. The same complexity of problems is true for charter school boards, but on a

more manageable scale (Ford & Ihrke, 2016). The charter school board must establish the mission and vision for the school, create a budget and financial plan, create policies and procedures, ensure the school is being well operated by holding the school leader accountable, and ensure students are achieving (Forman, 2007). The direct impact a charter school board has on a school is unlike that of a traditional school board.

Theoretical Context

Charter school board members are recruited, selected, and voted into membership. Typically, charter school board members seek to be a part of education innovation and have similar goals for the school as those of the other board members who are currently serving (Johnson, 2013). When individuals come together for a common purpose and their united efforts help further attainment of the organization's goals and the productivity of the organization, social capital is achieved (Burt, 1997). Social capital, specifically from the work of Burt (1997), Coleman (1988), and Lin (1999), is the theoretical framework of this current study on charter school governance. The social capital within a high-performing governing board provides the school with new ideas, resources, and purposive actions that ensure the school's stability and success (Lin, 1999). The structure of charter school governing boards contributes to mobilizing resources and working towards a common purpose. Whereas traditional school boards are elected, charter school board members are recruited. When charter schools recruit board members to fulfill a need within the board, they will typically seek an individual who will be a valuable resource to the organization and to the school.

According to Burt (1997), bridging and bonding behaviors are important for social capital. Bridging, or building relationships outside of the organization, fosters additional resources for the good of the organization. Bonding, or building relationships within the

organization, fosters trust and a common purpose. Both bridging and bonding behaviors are key characteristics of a high-performing charter school board because highly effective groups and teams are motivated and committed to a clear goal: the mission and success of the school (McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, & Newcombe, 2006). Charter schools must be self-sufficient in many ways. For example, while traditional school boards have chief financial officers, attorneys, plant managers, and experts in various fields on staff at the district level to guide decision-making and to oversee those various areas, charter school governing boards must either recruit members with knowledge and experience in those areas, or hire or consult with individuals in those areas. The theoretical framework of bridging and bonding provides a lens by which to determine how the charter school boards operate to achieve high performance.

Situation to Self

I have 10 years of experience as an English language arts and math teacher in traditional public, private, and charter schools. For 4 years I was an administrator at a high-performing charter school. Currently and for the past 7 years, I have been a principal of a charter school that recently earned high-performing status. While employed at my first charter school, I had the opportunity to work with an effective charter school board. Despite instability with retaining the school principal, the school maintained high levels of performance and after a strong school principal was selected and then retained, the school flourished and achieved higher levels of academic performance and community support. My motivation to research charter school governance was initially due to a desire to discover the characteristics that effective charter school boards exhibit so that charter schools such as the high-performing one I first experienced could be replicated to better serve students and families in other regions of Florida. As I reflected on my experiences with the board members I worked with for the past 10 years, I began

to ponder how differences in charter school governance practices, behaviors, and belief systems impacted school outcomes. I received training to become an external review team member for school accreditation and served specifically as a reviewer of governance and leadership practices of charter schools. After reviewing several charter school boards, I observed what I interpreted to be a trend in charter school governance characteristics and school performance. Thus, I bring an ontological philosophical assumption to my study in wanting to relate “the nature of reality and its characteristics” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). I relied on the behaviors, practices, perspectives, and interactions of the participants as well as supporting board documents as multiple forms of evidence to determine themes. A constructivist paradigm was also used to guide this study of individuals that form a group holding similar experiences of membership as charter school governing board members (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The study was focused on the “global nature of the organization,” therefore, a holistic design was used (Creswell, 2013, p. 50).

Problem Statement

The problem of this multisite case study was the impact of charter school governance on charter school closures in Florida (NAPCS, 2014a). Scholars note the number of charter school closures impacted by board governance is a severe symptom of the charter school closure problem (NAPCS, 2016b). Additionally, while there is a large body of research on the impact of traditional public school board governance on school performance and student outcomes, there is little research on the impact of charter school governance on charter school closures (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Maas & Lake, 2015). Furthermore, while existing research describes the characteristics of effective traditional public school boards, there is a gap in the research identifying high-performing charter school board characteristics and practices (Lee & Eadens, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Saatcioglu et al., 2011).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multisite case study was to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards to understand the impact of charter school board governance on charter school closures in Florida. In this research, charter schools were generally defined as public schools of choice that must abide by all state assessment and federal accountability programs with some freedom and autonomy from some state and local regulations in exchange for an approved charter that must be reviewed every few years by an authorizing agency (Center for Public Education, 2014a). High-performing charter schools were generally defined as charter schools that have received at least two consecutive A grades with no grade lower than a B during each of its previous 3 years and no findings for financial audits (FDOE, 2015).

Significance of the Study

The literature clearly presents empirical evidence of school board governance on school outcomes and student achievement (Asen et al., 2013; Delagardelle, 2008; Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015; Plough, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Roberts & Sampson, 2011; Saatcioglu et al., 2011). In addition, the literature also includes the key effective characteristics of traditional school boards and the need to study charter school board characteristics (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Land, 2002).

The Lighthouse Study by the IASB (2000) is the seminal study on traditional public school board effectiveness and has become the basis for further research on school board characteristics (Delagardelle, 2008; Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Saatcioglu et al., 2011). However, there is no empirical research on the characteristics of high-performing charter school boards (Land, 2002). This study helps fill the gap in the research on

understanding the impact of charter school board governance on charter school closures in Florida and could potentially assist other states faced with the problem of charter school closures. For example, California and Texas have the first and second most charter school openings and closings, respectively (NAPCS, 2016a). As the number of charter schools continues to grow in the United States, one can assume that the proportionately increased number of charter school closures will also grow.

Discovering effective charter school governance characteristics could guide charter school authorizers, current and future charter school boards, parents, and stakeholders in ensuring positive school outcomes. Charter schools close because of low enrollment, low student achievement, financial difficulties, or compliance violations (NAPCS, 2014b). Although charter school authorizers are responsible for oversight, charter school boards have substantial autonomy (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; NAPCS, 2016a).

In addition, literature supports training beyond what is required as a positive board governance attribute (Ehren, Honingh, Hooge, & O'Hara, 2016; Land, 2002; Marino, 2011; Plough, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Similarly, training on effective charter school governance practices and characteristics in addition to mandatory governance training could improve charter school governance as a whole (Ehren et al., 2016; Land, 2002; Marino, 2011; Plough, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Reducing charter school closures by improving charter school board practices could save taxpayer dollars, improve the charter system as a whole, and most importantly, ensure children and families are not subjected to the experience of their school closing (Cavanagh, 2012; Paino et al., 2016).

Members of charter school boards are typically motivated to join a charter board because they are attracted to the idea of innovation in education, and they usually have similar ideologies

as the group they wish to join (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). With similar ideologies of charter school board members, the social aspect of this study was deeply rooted in social capital theory, which posits that members bring the value of their own individual human capital to join efforts for the common purpose of benefitting the school.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school governing board members?

There is much research on the characteristics of traditional school governing boards in the United States (Asen et al., 2013; Johnson, 2013; Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Marino, 2013; Maas & Lake, 2015; Plough, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Roberts & Sampson, 2011; Sheard & Avis, 2011). Although there is an abundance of research on governance practices and behaviors of successful traditional school governing boards, Land (2002) noted there is little research isolating the specific characteristics, practices, and behaviors contributing to their success (Hadderman, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). Research also does not address the practices and behaviors of charter school governing boards (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Johnson, 2013; Land, 2002). The central research question of the present study was used to identify the characteristics of effective charter school governing board practices and behaviors.

Research Subquestions (SQs)

SQ1. How do charter school governing board members perceive that bonding practices impact charter school governance? The research on traditional school governing boards identifies various effective practices and behaviors and is being applied to charter school governing boards. Effective practices include bonding practices (Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Lee

& Eadens, 2014; Saatcioglu et al., 2011), the governance perceptions of board members as it relates to their ability to work together (Asen et al., 2014; Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Plough, 2014), and their perceptions of charter school governance (Plough, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013). This first subquestion was also focused on the theoretical context of social capital as it relates to charter school governance. Bonding practices are embedded in the relationships formed by charter board members as a resource that furthers the purposive actions of the group (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). The first subquestion helped build an understanding of the governance perceptions of board members regarding their performance and interrelationships. The perception of board members about how they operate and how they work together are key factors in effective school board governance (Asen et al., 2014; Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Plough, 2014).

SQ2. How do charter school governing board members perceive that bridging practices impact charter school governance? Bridging behaviors are also an important component of the social capital theory as it relates to charter school boards (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). A board member's ability to develop relationships with various stakeholders and to use those relationships for the benefit of the charter school are valued (Asen et al., 2014; Saatcioglu et al., 2011). The second subquestion helped build the understanding of the governance perceptions of board members regarding the value each board member brings to the organization. The perception of board members about how board members work with stakeholders is a key factor in effective charter school board governance (Asen et al., 2014; Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Plough, 2014).

SQ3. How do charter school governing board members perceive that governance training impacts charter school governance? The last subquestion helped establish the level of training

each board member has attained and their perceptions of training. Training of board members adds value to the overall social capital of the board and fosters a sense of commitment (Plough, 2014; Roberts & Sampson, 2011). While there is mandatory governance training for charter school board members in the state of Florida, it was helpful to understand if board members found value in other trainings they had attended. By asking board members about their perceptions of training and the impact on charter school governance, a better understanding of charter school governance outcomes was discovered.

Definitions

1. *Authorizer*—The authorizer is the state-sanctioned entity responsible for approving a charter school to operate. The authorizer monitors the school’s performance and compliance of local, state, and federal requirements. The authorizer also is responsible for renewing or terminating the school’s charter (Finn, Manno, & Wright, 2017).
2. *Bonding*—Bonding is a concept within the social capital theory that describes individuals within the organization working together to advance the organization (Burt, 1997).
3. *Bridging*—Bridging is a concept within the social capital theory that describes individuals within the organization working with other entities to advance the organization (Burt, 1997).
4. *Charter*—The charter is the contract between the authorizer and the governing board. The charter describes the school’s program and includes all requirements of the authorizer to operate the school (Finn et al., 2017).
5. *Charter School*—A charter school is a public school of choice (FDOE, 2015a).
6. *Florida Department of Education (FDOE)*—The FDOE is the state education agency for Florida. The FDOE tracks student performance over time for school districts, state and

community colleges, universities, and independent postsecondary institutions (FDOE, 2016a).

7. *Governing Board*—The governing board is the school’s board of directors, responsible for oversight of the school as a nonprofit, corporate entity; for student achievement, for fiscal accountability, for following the law, and for hiring the school leader (Finn et al., 2017).
8. *High-Performing Charter School*—A charter school is named high-performing by the Florida Department of Education if the school has received at least two school grades of “A” and no school grade below “B” during each of the previous three school years and received an unqualified audit on each financial audit in the most recent three fiscal years with no financial emergency conditions (Florida Statute, 2016).
9. *Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB)*—The IASB is an organization that is committed to serving Iowa school boards and public schools through education, advocacy, and service. The IASB conducted the Lighthouse Study on school boards (IASB, 2016).
10. *Lighthouse Study*—This study on school boards and the impact on student achievement was conducted by the IASB. Eight characteristics of effective school boards were established from this seminal study on traditional school boards (Delagardelle, 2008).
11. *National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS)*—The NAPCS is the leading nonprofit organization committed to advancing the public charter school movement (NAPCS, 2016a).
12. *National School Boards Association (NSBA)*—The NSBA represents state school board associations and their more than 90,000 local school board members (NSBA, 2016).

13. *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*–The NCLB Act authorized several educational programs that are administered by the states. The law was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (USDOE, 2016a).
14. *Social Capital Theory*–The social capital theory describes how people work together toward a common goal and resources are embedded in the social structure (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999).
15. *United States Department of Education (USDOE)*–The USDOE is the governmental organization created in 1980 for the purpose of establishing policies on federal financial aid for education, distributing and monitoring financial aid funds, collecting and disseminating research about America’s schools, focusing national attention on key educational issues, and prohibiting discrimination, and ensuring equal access to education (USDOE, 2016a).

Summary

Chapter One included an overview and background for this study. My experiences with charter schools in Florida led me to research the impact of charter school governance on charter school outcomes. This investigation was a multisite case study, and the purpose of the study was to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards. The research from this study can help strengthen charter school governance in order to understand and help address the problem of the high rate of charter school closures in Florida. Chapter Two includes discussion of the theoretical framework of the study and a review of the literature to provide the context for the research and the need to fill the gap for the study problem.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The theoretical framework and related literature are presented in Chapter Two to provide a greater understanding of this research and to contextualize the research through a theoretical lens. The theory guiding this study was the social capital theory by Burt (1997), Coleman (1988), and Lin (1999). As one of the primary social capital theorist, Burt (1997) contended that social capital is a quality created between people in an organization where opportunities are provided because of the interdependent and trusting relationships. There is also an important aspect of individuals bonding within the organization and bridging with others outside of the organization for the ultimate good of the organization (Burt, 1997). Social capital, including bridging and bonding, from the perspective of these three major theorists, is further explained in this chapter.

Within this chapter, the roles and responsibilities of charter school boards are described to illustrate how the members fulfill a common purpose through governance using social capital. The goal of a charter school board is to govern the school effectively, advancing student achievement and maintaining financial stability while meeting all compliance requirements. Recent literature shows that boards void of collaborative, trusting relationships are dysfunctional and do not operate effectively (Asen et al., 2013; Austen, Swepson, & Marchant, 2011; Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Saatcioglu et al., 2011; Sheard & Avis, 2011). Chapter Two further elaborates on the importance of bridging and bonding on charter school boards that are “productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence” (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). Also explained is the theoretical standpoint of this study whereby the social capital of a charter school board is

demonstrated through practices and behaviors which promote productivity and contribute to the high performance of the charter school. Through the social capital theoretical lens, the members of the charter school board engage with each other and network to yield successful outcomes for the school.

Furthermore, the history of charter schools, specifically charter schools in Florida, is described as well as charter school law in Florida because charter school laws vary among the states. This multisite case study was focused on charter boards of high-performing charter schools because it is critical to understand charter school and board member accountability measures, roles and responsibilities of charter boards, and the landscape of charter school openings and closings in Florida. These topics are presented within the related literature.

Finally, Chapter Two includes literature pertaining to the characteristics of effective traditional public school boards, particularly as it relates to student achievement (Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015; Plough, 2014; Rhim et al., 2013; Saatcioglu et al., 2011). However, the literature regarding the characteristics of effective charter school governing boards is missing and must be examined. Therefore, an understanding of the research on effective characteristics of traditional school boards as well as the social capital theory is also presented in this literature review to guide the study.

Theoretical Framework

Social capital is the “engine of action” within an organization and is defined by its function (Coleman, 1988, p. 96). The separate members of the organization do not give each member purpose or direction. Rather, it is within the environment of the organization that “persons’ actions are shaped, redirected, constrained by the social context; norms, interpersonal trust, social networks, and social organization” (Coleman, 1988, p. 96). The relationships

between and among the members of the group are inherent in social capital (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999).

The three primary social capital theorists, Burt (1997), Coleman (1988), and Lin (1999), presented subtle differences of the social capital theory. The differences relate to the emphasis on various aspects of social capital; however, the common thread is the importance of relationships. One difference emphasized by Burt (1997) was that having the right people together increases the development of opportunities. The social capital is the value added as a result of identifying and developing the opportunities. On the other hand, Coleman (1988) emphasized the power of norms, expectations of a group, and the productivity dependent on the social structure. In addition, Coleman (1988) asserted that without social capital, productivity would be absent. As the third primary social capital theorist, Lin (1999) expanded on the theory by describing the importance of the social structure of the organization as a valuable resource. Simply stated, Lin (1999) defined social capital as an “investment in social relations with expected returns” (p. 30). In sum, the organization is strengthened through the social capital of its members.

Characteristics of Social Capital

Trust. Social capital is tangible and based on the relationships formed among the members of the group and, if extensive trust is present, the group is more effective (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1990) posited that trust is built when obligations are clear and met; therefore, members with higher obligations have a higher social capital when their usefulness and availability is a resource for the social structure. Lin (1999) furthered this notion of trustworthiness in social capital to when the members of the group endorse other individuals who can help the organization. When individuals fulfill their obligations, trust is fostered and the

organization strengthens. When individuals do not fulfill their obligations, mistrust may ensue, causing conflict. Conflict among school board members has a negative impact on the performance of the school board (Grissom, 2014). School boards that minimize negative conflict have stronger regenerative and collegial relationships, work more cooperatively, and perform better than school boards that do not minimize conflict (Ford & Ihrke, 2016). Jehn (1997, 1999) established that not all conflict is negative as it may be based on relationships, a task, or a process. If the school board can maintain trust through the conflict, the performance of the board continues.

In a charter school board, it is essential for individual members to satisfy their responsibilities, particularly those who are placed in key roles such as the president and treasurer. The leadership provided from the president of the board and the guidance provided on all financial matters from the treasurer strengthens the board as a whole. When all members fulfill their obligations to the board, trust is established and the board is strengthened (McKormick et al., 2006; Rhim et al., 2013).

Information channels. Within organizations, information provides the basis for action and is viewed as a valuable resource within social capital theory (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). The benefit of information includes access, timing, and referrals as well as the diversity of contacts which ultimately helps the organization (Burt, 1997). This flow of information is useful for broadening opportunities and choices which may not have been otherwise available (Lin, 1999). In the context of charter school boards, information sharing is critically important because decisions are made for various areas that require knowledge of the content or at least an understanding of the content. For example, if a charter school needed to purchase a new bus, it would be beneficial if a board member knew the owner of a bus company

to provide advice and guidance on purchasing a new bus in addition to researching options for the school. Similarly, as legislative changes are made impacting the charter school, having that information will help the board govern more effectively because they are equipped with the information needed to follow the law. Information sharing becomes invaluable for remaining in compliance with the law or when securing or expanding resources for the charter school.

Norms and effective sanctions. Norms and effective sanctions within an organization provide an important form of social capital (Coleman, 1988). When the interests of the collective organization are placed above the interest of the individual members, this type of intentionally established powerful norm contributes to the strength of the social capital. Conversely, the “social support, status, honor, and other rewards” of the collective group reinforces the norm of putting the group’s interests above self-interests (Coleman, 1988, p. 2014). The social relations provide emotional support and public acknowledgement of securing resources; these actions reinforce the identity of the organization while recognizing the individual (Lin, 1999). Members of the organization are likely to legitimize when good work is performed and because there is no competitive environment, value is placed on the productivity of the group (Burt, 1997).

When members of the group do not adhere to norms, conflict arises. When there is a lack of professionalism and adherence to goals, board effectiveness declines (Grissom, 2010). For example, if a norm is to arrive on time to school board meetings and a board member is consistently late, social capital dwindles. When a school board is focused on a common goal and works collaboratively, board effectiveness is more likely to be achieved (Delagardelle, 2008). When school board members put the interests of their own above the interests of the organization, social capital decreases.

Many charter schools have clear mission statements and charter school boards use this purpose-driven statement to collectively establish the norms of the board. If decisions of the board do not support and reflect the mission of the school, then those decisions are generally not supported. The board then, reinforces the norm of making decisions that support and further the mission of the school. Value is placed on individual members who perform work to help the school and on the collective group when good work has been accomplished for the school.

Bonding and bridging. Theorists recognize the importance of closed structural networks to create social capital (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993, 1995). Within a closed structure, trust, norms, sanctions, mobilization of resources, and flow of information may be strengthened and effectively utilized. This characteristic of social capital is bonding. When school board members do not bond effectively and have relational conflict, it may be a function of clashing personalities rather than the structure or dynamics of the organization (Ford & Ihrke, 2016). Bonding is diminished with relational conflict and as a result, the support for norms, sanctions, mobilization of resources, and flow of information suffers.

While closure of the network is beneficial, there is also benefit to networking outside of the organization to further the purpose of the group through bridging. Bridging, or accessing and obtaining resources outside of the network, is advantageous because it makes the network more useful (Lin, 1999). Therefore, if a member has a powerful social status and can secure resources through direct or indirect ties, the social capital of the group is strengthened. These types of embedded resources are a measure of social capital (Lin, 1999). Governing boards, then, should be viewed as open systems because individuals also have interdependent relationships with other stakeholders (McCormick et al., 2006). The importance of an interdependent relationship is

most critical between a school board and the school leader. A positive, collaborative relationship built with the school leader reduces conflict and improves board performance (Grissom, 2014).

Measuring social capital. Lin (1999) contended that social capital can be measured by examining the three necessary elements of social capital which are resources embedded within the social structure of the organization, the accessibility of resources embedded within the social structure of the organization, and the active use of the resources by the members of the organization. When observing the interactions, behaviors, and practices of charter school board members, these three elements of social capital became elements to look and listen for during board meetings, interviews, and within documents.

In essence, when there are benefits provided to the organization as a result of social relations and social structures, then social capital is in effect. All theorists of social capital “remain committed to the view that it is the interacting members who make the maintenance and reproduction of this social asset possible” (Lin, 1999, p. 32). Interestingly, Coleman (1988) stressed that social capital is not only present in social structures where resources are used for the benefit of the organization, social capital is public good. Social capital plays an important role in district governance and is positively associated with financial and academic outcomes (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). Effective school boards must have a shared sense of mission and vision to focus resources and to align goals for improved student outcomes (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). The shared common purpose and the board’s ability to work together are the bonding practices by members that will also allow them to examine performance and to hold the school accountable for outcomes (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). The bridging behaviors of a school board are characterized by members forging external ties to stakeholders so that resources can be secured, support can be fostered, and new ideas developed (Saatcioglu et al., 2011).

Charter school boards work toward the purpose of creating, sustaining, and elevating their schools for the benefit of children. The boards of the charter schools demonstrate both bonding and bridging behaviors where they must work together for the good of the school, and they must utilize resources outside of the organization for the good of the school. Within a governing board, social capital can be observed by identifying the practices and behaviors as well as the type of relationships formed among board members. If social capital is not present in an organization, then productivity is absent (Coleman, 1988). The research of this study will advance the social capital theory. Currently, there is a need for the study of charter school boards through investigations that will lead to a theoretical framework to guide future research in order to increase understanding of the effectiveness of independent school boards such as charter schools (McCormick et al., 2006). Similarly, the theory of social capital has not been applied to charter school board governance as it is currently absent in the literature.

Related Literature

The following review of related literature aims to establish the history of charter schools in Florida and to synthesize the findings about traditional school boards which will help inform an understanding of charter school boards and to establish the gap in the literature about charter school boards. With limited literature from research-based studies in existence related to charter school board effectiveness, the large body of literature on traditional public school boards became the primary focus.

History of Charter Schools

The first charter school was started in Minnesota in 1992 to provide parents a more innovative choice in education with the hope of improving education overall and advancing student achievement (FDOE, 2012; NAPCS, 2016a; National Education Association [NEA],

2016). Albert Shanker, former President of the American Federation of Teachers, presented the concept of charter schools in a 1988 article about school reform (Shanker, 1988). The school would be created by teachers, and teachers would operate the school on a charter for five to ten years (Shanker, 1988). The important element of school choice and self-governed schools free from strict oversight was later introduced by Chubb and Moe (1990). Today, charter schools are public schools that are privately managed and authorized by a school district, a state education entity, a university, or a municipality (NAPCS, 2014c; NEA, 2016). The authorizer provides oversight of the charter school, and the school must maintain fiscal responsibility, sufficient academic achievement, and compliance with all federal, state, and local requirements. Only seven states do not have charter schools: Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia (Center for Education Reform [CER], 2017).

The initial intent of the charter school movement was to advance student achievement and to meet the local needs of the community through independent, innovative schools (Roch & Sai, 2015). Those in the charter school movement also contend that charter schools offer a more efficient way to educate students with taxpayer dollars for public education by outsourcing functions to nonprofit entities (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Ford, 2013; Savas, 2000). By centralizing the control of the school to a site-based management structure such as a charter school, governance is brought closer to those served in the local community and the influence of special interest groups is decreased (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). However, educators sometimes found the complex, arduous task of running their schools was overwhelming, thus management organizations (MOs) that operate charter schools were developed (Wells, 2002). MOs oversee bookkeeping, payroll, facilities, operations, information management and instructional programs; they often create multiple schools with similar academic and curricular programs that can be

replicated quickly if successful (Bulkley, 2011; Roch & Sai, 2015; Scott & DiMartino, 2010). The MO may operate as a private education management organization (EMO) for profit or as a nonprofit charter management organization (CMO; Roch & Sai, 2015). The rise of EMOs has been criticized as diminishing the voice of the charter school's stakeholders because the EMO establishes the administrative structures and operations (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). Stand-alone, or independent, charter schools are not operated by an MO and are generally managed by local stakeholders, educators, or parents focused on the charter school and its needs (Roch & Sai, 2015). Charter schools driven by a mission focusing on low-income students, special education students, or English language learners (ELLs) operate with significant responsibility to serve these underrepresented student populations (Forman, 2007). Charter schools enroll a greater number of Black, Hispanic, and low-income students nationally in comparison to traditional public schools (29% compared to 16% for Black students; 27% compared to 23% for Hispanic students; 53% to 48% for low-income students; NAPCS, 2014b).

Typically, CMOs are a network of schools serving disadvantaged, minority students that started as single high-performing charter schools (Stetson, 2013). The CMOs tend to emphasize high expectations for student behavior through the requirement of parent and student contracts, an innovative curriculum and structure that may include longer school days, and intensive teacher coaching and monitoring with competitive salary and reward systems (Stetson, 2013). Students enter a charter school through an application process and when the number of applicants exceeds the number of student openings, the school holds a lottery. Charter schools are prohibited from selecting students for enrollment (Forman, 2007). Although there is much diversity of charter school laws among the 43 states and District of Columbia, most descriptions

of charter schools include the concepts of flexibility and autonomy (CER, 2017; Fuller, 2000; Shober et al., 2006).

Charter schools in Florida. The first charter school in Florida was opened in 1996 (FDOE, 2016a; NAPCS, 2014a). In the state of Florida, charter schools are authorized by the publicly elected school board within the school district where the charter school will operate (NAPCS, 2014c). In a report by the NAPCS (2016b), Florida ranked ninth in the United States among 43 states with charter school laws on 20 components of a strong charter school law. An area of weakness of Florida’s law was inequitable funding for charter schools (NAPCS, 2016b). The Florida Legislature now appropriates capital outlay funding to charter schools based on student counts and to charter schools that serve mostly low-income students or students with disabilities (SWD) for capital projects such as building and maintenance (Florida House of Representatives, 2017). This funding is a step toward equitable funding for charter schools. Some of the essential components of the NAPCS’s (2016c) *Model Law for Supporting the Growth of High-Quality Charter Schools* include “fiscally and legally autonomous schools with independent public charter school boards” and “comprehensive charter school monitoring and data collection processes” (pp. 8–9). These two essential components demonstrate the need for strong charter school governance and the need for research in the area of charter school governance. The state of Florida had strong rankings in comparison to other states with a three out of four score on both of these components within the state charter school law (NAPCS, 2016b). The charter law in Florida provides mechanisms from authorizers to monitor and collect data for various areas of oversight (NAPCS, 2016b). The authorizer has a responsibility to ensure the charter school is using public funds appropriately and is delivering educational opportunities with proof of student achievement to expand diversity of choice in public

education (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). Ultimately, the charter school governing board is responsible for building fiscally sound practices and positive results for student achievement.

As the number of charter schools continues to increase in the state of Florida, many opponents of charter schools fear funds are being diverted from traditional public schools to charter schools due to the growing enrollment among charter schools and citizens' lack of voice in how public funds are spent (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Forman, 2007). Opponents of charter schools also fear "cream-skimming," or attracting students from families "whose race, class, or educational background affords them a better position to navigate the market for schools" (Forman, 2007, p. 840). The fear of cream-skimming was fueled by evidence of the lack of diversity for race, socioeconomic status, and academic levels occurring in international programs and magnet programs in the United States (Forman, 2007; Smith, Wohlstetter, & Farrell, 2011). Evidence of cream-skimming is unfounded for charter schools when examining charter school demographic data (FDOE, 2012; FDOE, 2015b; FDOE, 2017a; Forman, 2007; NAPCS, 2014a, 2014b). A proportionate percentage of students among race and class within the communities they serve are represented in charter schools and traditional public schools (Forman, 2007). One area that remains to be determined due to lack of research is whether there is cream-skimming of parents who have higher levels of education and are more motivated to be engaged with their child's education (Forman, 2007). Proponents of charter schools argue that magnet programs in traditional public schools selectively admit students based academic criteria or ability and the selection of students who fit the high academic criteria for that particular academic program is counterintuitive to the notion of equity in public education (Forman, 2007; Smith et al., 2011).

High-performing. Charter schools in Florida may become eligible for high-performing status when they follow certain criteria; the school must earn two consecutive A grades and no

grade lower than a B from the FDOE under the state's school grading system and have no emergency condition findings in their financial audits (FDOE, 2016b). When a school earns high-performing status, quarterly financial records may be submitted to the district versus monthly financial records and the school's administrative fee to the school district decreases from 5% to 2% of funds received by the state based on per-pupil funding (FDOE, 2016b). When a charter school's contract is due for renewal, the charter school is eligible for a 15-year contract (FDOE, 2016b). In Florida, there are 183 high-performing charter schools across the state (FDOE, 2015a). For the purpose of this current study on effective charter school boards, high-performing schools were selected. The selected high-performing charter schools have demonstrated high levels of student performance as well as sound fiscal and legal responsibility by their boards.

Accountability in Florida. Charter schools have more autonomy in making curricular and instructional decisions to meet the needs of students than traditional public schools; however, charter schools are monitored closely for student achievement outcomes and financial responsibilities (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; FDOE, 2012; Forman, 2007). Once a contract has been approved by the authorizer, charter schools may be managed by an independent board or by an educational MO (FDOE, 2012). Charter schools may also be authorized as a conversion public school or by a university as a lab school (FDOE, 2012). Management of the charter school must uphold the charter contract, and in Florida, there are three guiding principles of accountability (FDOE, 2012). The first guiding principle is the expectation for high student achievement standards and parental choice with diverse educational opportunities within the public school system in which the charter school operates (FDOE, 2012). The second guiding principle is alignment of responsibility and accountability for academic success and financial

efficiency. Last of the guiding principles is for student learning gain information to be provided to parents annually (FDOE, 2012).

In Florida, charter school law allows one authorizer. Only having one authorizer is considered a weakness of the charter school law in Florida because fewer authorizers mean less growth of charter schools (NAPCS, 2016c). In Florida, the school district authorizes and monitors charter schools. Critics of this authorizing system contend that districts that are eager to hold onto students for enrollment for funding are less apt to grant a charter for a school that will potentially take funding from the schools they operate (Land, 2002). In other words, by authorizing charter schools, the school district is allowing charter schools that are competing for students to open. Proponents of charter schools believe that more authorizers would help minimize the type of conflict that can arise from school district authorizers who may bar charters from opening (NAPCS, 2014a). In most other states such as Ohio, there are 65 authorizers including state and local boards, universities, and nonprofit organizations that meet certain prerequisites (Finn et al., 2017; NAPCS, 2014b).

When best practices among authorizers were identified, authorizers with success rates among charter schools “maintain high standards for schools; uphold school autonomy; and protect student and public interest” (National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2015, para. 2). The authorizer monitors compliance with federal and state laws which includes areas such as finances, health and safety, Sunshine Laws, parent involvement, assessment, student achievement, data reporting, and teacher evaluation (Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers [FACSA], 2016). Authorizers typically require monthly financial statements and require comprehensive site reviews of all compliance areas in order for schools to renew their contracts. Charter schools who meet the requirements will have their contracts renewed, and the

school may request the number of years for the renewal. The contract is negotiated between the charter school board and the district authorizer and then must be approved by the school district board.

In addition to adhering to various accountability measures, charter school boards must also act responsibly (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). The parameter of responsibility is to the parents and students within the charter school and therefore is narrower than that of a traditional school board, which is responsible to the constituents of a much broader community (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). Traditional school boards, as elected officials, are responsible to represent their constituents, whereas charter school boards are selected to help further the ideologies of the charter school (Allen & Mintrom, 2010).

Charter schools are accountable to the authorizer, to the state, and to the federal government (NAPCS, 2014b). Charter school students take the same state assessments as traditional public students and specifically in Florida, charter schools follow the state's school accountability system for student performance, teacher value-added model rating system for teacher evaluation, and school grading system. All state and federal regulations must be followed, and authorizers have the autonomy to determine the frequency of financial audits in addition to the minimum requirement of an annual financial audit (NAPCS, 2014b).

Due to the authorizer's discretion on the frequency of requirements, conflict may arise between a charter school and the district authorizer if the district authorizer imposes requirements beyond the scope of what is statutorily required. Districts author the contract and may require the charter school to comply with district policies. A charter school board sets policies abiding by charter school law which may differ from laws for non-charter public schools. For example, the authorizing school district may require a specific test for student

progress monitoring. The authorizing school district may require the charter school to use the district's progress monitoring assessment, and the charter school may have to contact the FDOE to confirm the charter school's right to use a nondistrict progress monitoring tool that still meets the state's requirements. Conflicts between the authorizing school district and the charter school's governing board can be resolved through negotiations. If negotiations do not result in an agreeable resolution, the two entities may request for the FDOE to mediate the issue, or the two entities may enter into litigation (Florida Legislature, 2017).

Florida now offers a standard model contract and application for charter schools (FDOE, 2017e). The standard contract and application provides more consistency among district authorizers and helps ensure school districts are not imposing requirements that may inhibit the autonomy of the charter school permissible by law. The standard contract includes confirmation that the charter school application has been approved, the term of the charter; statutory citations for charter renewal, nonrenewal, and termination; review and evaluation of the charter, education and curricular requirements, academic accountability and assessment requirements, student-related requirements such as enrollment and record keeping, financial accountability requirements; facilities, transportation, food service, and insurance requirements; human resources and reporting requirements, and governance requirements (FDOE, 2017e).

Charter school openings in Florida. The number of charter schools has increased rapidly since 1996, and Florida ranks third in the nation for the number of charter school students (NAPCS, 2014a). In 2015, there were 653 charter schools in Florida with 250,583 students (FACSA, 2016). Much of this growth has occurred recently. There was a 10.5% average increase in opening of charter schools between 2010–2011 and 2014–2015, resulting in 344 additional charter schools. Consequently, the success of charter schools and the need for options

in school choice have been factors in the growth of charter schools (FDOE, 2012). In addition, charter schools serve more minority students and students in nonsuburban areas than do traditional public schools, indicating the need for school options (FACSA, 2016).

The FDOE (2012) reported the performance of students in charter schools compared to students in traditional public schools found that charter schools had higher student achievement in 55 out of 63 areas of grade grouping and subgrouping comparisons. In terms of demographics, a little over 15% of traditional public school students are Black and approximately 28% of charter school students are Black (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014). The achievement gap between White students and Black students and White students and Hispanic students in math, science, and reading was smaller in charter schools (FDOE, 2012). For learning gains by subject, grade level, and subgroup, charter schools had higher learning gains in 83 of 96 comparisons (FDOE, 2012). The NAPCS (2016b) listed Florida sixth in the health of the charter school movement rankings.

Charter school closures in Florida. Although the health of the charter school movement is stable, there is instability in the number of charter schools that do not remain open (Ziebarth, 2015). When charter schools fail to serve the public, the governmental authorizing entity can close them faster than traditional public schools that may fail generation after generation (NAPCS, 2014b). The authorizer would work first to try to correct the school's deficiencies and if ample results were not produced, the authorizer could close the charter school because it failed to meet the requirements of the contract to operate (NAPCS, 2014b). As noted, 344 charter schools opened from 2010 to 2015 (FACSA, 2016). Within those five years, 101 charter schools closed, a 3.2% closure rate (FACSA, 2016). The number of closures in Florida ranked second in the nation among all states with charter school closures (NAPCS, 2014a). The

closure of charter schools is evidence that charter school accountability measures are working because the schools that do not meet the needs of students are closed, unlike low-performing traditional public schools that persist for several years (NAPCS, 2014a; Paino et al., 2016).

Charter schools close for a variety of reasons including financial mismanagement, low enrollment, or poor academic performance (NAPCS, 2014a; Paino et al., 2016). Close to 42% of charter schools closed were because of finances, making fiscal mismanagement the top reason for charter school closures (CER, 2017). One problem with closing charter schools is that taxpayer money is wasted and students and families who were a part of the closed school are negatively impacted (Brummet, 2014; Carlson & Lavertu, 2016; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Engberg, Gill, Zamarro, & Zimmer, 2012; Paino et al., 2016; Young et al., 2009). Schools in high poverty areas with high populations of people of color in both traditional public schools and charter schools have the highest closure rates (Paino et al., 2016). Charter schools with large Black student populations are more likely to close than are charters with small Black student populations (Paino et al., 2016). Underrepresented students living in areas of high poverty are able to perform better academically only if there are better options for schools; unfortunately, with unequal access to quality schools, these students are suffering from educational instability (Paino et al., 2016).

Charter school governance. Charter school board members are recruited and screened, unlike the election process for traditional public school boards. In most states, governing boards must be established prior to granting a charter because the board is ultimately responsible for the financial, legal, and academic welfare of the school (NACSA, 2015). Typically, charter school boards are composed of five to nine members and charter school boards must operate in the “sunshine” which means there are public records laws requiring open records and public board

meetings (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Rhim et al., 2013). The Sunshine Laws are another name for school governance laws requiring all public school boards to operate in the open or sunshine.

Similar to traditional school boards, charter board members are “attracted to service on an education governance board” and share “a common interest in K-12 education” (Ford & Ihrke, 2015, p. 408). However, charter school board members may be attracted to the charter model, which promotes innovation resulting in charter board members being more ideologically homogeneous and having higher levels of cooperation than traditional school board members (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). The lack of cooperation and shared ideology may be due to the characteristic among traditional school board members of catering to the interests of special interest groups and the community when making board decisions (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Land, 2002).

Another unique characteristic among charter school boards is that they take more responsibility for governance in key areas and are less dependent on their chief educational officer than are traditional school boards (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). In a comparison of traditional public school board members and charter board members in three charter-abundant states, charter school board members were found to be an average of six years younger, more held advanced degrees, more were employed in the education sector, and more were female (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Stone et al., 2012). Both charter and traditional boards have little racial diversity (86.57% White in charters and 93.59% White in traditional; Ford & Ihrke, 2015).

While traditional school board members are elected and consider the views of special interest groups and the community when making decisions, charter school board members do not (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). Charter school board members recruit and recommend like-minded individuals who will work cooperatively to serve the school in cooperation (Ford & Ihrke, 2015).

Charter school board members generally focus on areas such as the mission statement, personnel, staff evaluations, building maintenance, budget, and policy development (Miron & Horn, 2003). Traditional school board members report having significantly higher levels of conflict in comparison to charter school board members (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). The difference in the type of conflict is also significant. The conflict among traditional school board members is personal in nature, whereas the conflict among charter school board members can be productive and related to a school issue (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). To foster cooperation, the founding board members of a charter school may contribute to keeping the central focus of the school's mission consistently at the forefront of the minds of any new incoming charter board members and the school's chief executive officer (Henig, Holyoke, Brown & Lacireno-Paquet, 2005; Miron & Horn, 2003).

In addition to the unique way in which charter schools recruit like-minded charter board members, charter governance training is an important component of charter school governance. Governance training is required for all charter school board members in Florida and new members must complete the training within 90 days of their appointment to the board (Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools, 2017). The governance training consists of a minimum of 4 hours covering various topics including government in the sunshine, conflicts of interest, ethics, and financial responsibility (FCPCS, 2017). Every 3 years after the initial 4-hour training, the charter school board member must complete a 2-hour refresher training to retain their position. If the charter school board member fails to complete the 2-hour refresher, then the member must complete the 4-hour training again to retain their status as a member (FCPCS, 2017).

Specifically, in Florida, the name of each board member must be disclosed and, under Florida statute, the charter board must (a) adopt and maintain an operating budget, (b) exercise

oversight of the school operations, (c) retain services of a certified public accountant or auditor, (d) participate in governance training, and (e) must report annual progress through an online annual accountability report (Florida Legislature, 2016). The annual accountability report includes student and staff demographic information, student performance data, facilities' information, and financial information. For charter school boards whose schools have earned a D or F grade, the board is responsible for submitting a school improvement plan (Florida Legislature, 2016).

Additional governance requirements for Florida charter school boards include publication of the school's academic performance, programs at the school, any management company and service provider affiliations, the annual budget, the annual audit, the school's grade, and the board meeting minutes (Florida Legislature, 2016). The board must also include a parent representative and must have at least two public meetings per year in the school district where the school is located (FDOE, 2017b). Parent representation to the board ensures input from those who are directly impacted by the board's decisions and fosters transparency to the stakeholders (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2014). Similar to traditional school board meetings, the meetings must be published, open, and accessible to the public (Florida Legislature, 2016). The principal or designee must be physically present at each meeting and board members may be present through telecommunication means or by physical presence (Florida Legislature, 2016).

The governance obligations outlined in Florida's model contract also include the requirement for charter schools to operate as non-profit organizations (FDOE, 2017e). Charter school board members must be fingerprinted and shall abide by the bylaws or other organizational documents as approved in the charter application (FDOE, 2017e). The charter

school board is also responsible for keeping records of all actions and corporate affairs (FDOE, 2017e). Similar to traditional public school boards, the charter school board is ultimately responsible for ensuring all officers and employees of the school are performing their duties (FDOE, 2017e). Furthermore, organizations such as Charter Board Partners, a nonprofit organization formulated to strengthen charter school governance, provides training and focuses on recruiting diverse board members reflecting the demographics of the communities the boards serve (Charter Board Partners, 2017). The organization helps boards set standards, assess progress, and reach goals, recognizing that “great schools need great boards” (Charter Board Partners, 2017, para. 1).

Charter school boards must also hire a chief executive officer to lead the school in fulfilling the mission and vision the board has set. The policies and adopted budget of the charter school board must be executed by the school leader and, similar to the third primary function of a traditional school board, the charter school board must ensure academic achievement for students. Accountability measures must be met as set by the federal, state, and local levels. The charter school board is responsible for being in compliance with the charter contract by its authorizer. A renewal process takes place in order for the charter school to continue to operate, and the authorizer conducts a thorough review of all accountability areas in addition to regularly scheduled compliance reporting. With autonomy comes greater responsibility to ensure charter school governing boards are not only aware of their fiscal and legal roles, but also the responsibility of student achievement (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). The charter school model fosters “a narrowing of understandings of responsibility” which causes charter school board members to “shape their actions entirely toward creating positive school

environments that will attract and maintain a strong student body” (Allen & Mintrom, 2010, p. 459).

An unanticipated aspect of charter school governance has been the need to tap into private philanthropy for funding to supplement public funding (Forman, 2007). Some charter school advocates have claimed charter schools can operate with less funding than traditional public schools and there is fear that this claim may reduce funding of public education by taxpayers (Forman, 2007). While charter schools typically receive less funding than traditional public schools do (i.e., \$1,800 on average nationwide less per pupil), some charter schools turn to private sources to support endeavors which result in positive student outcomes (Forman, 2007). Now that charter schools are well-established in many states with charter school growth and success, charter school advocates are less likely to claim charter schools can operate with less funding and are now advocating for equal charter school funding (Forman, 2007). For charter schools serving underrepresented populations, the lack of equitable funding does not allow these schools to serve students with the greatest needs (Forman, 2007).

Unfortunately, within the body of literature on charter schools, there is a lack of coherent understanding of charter governance (Smith et al., 2011). In a review of charter-related research from 2000–2010, less than 25 articles were about charter school governance and none determined the factors that accounted for the success of the charter school as it related to charter board governance (Smith et al., 2011). Most of the research on charter schools is on student achievement; therefore, many questions remain about how charter school governance accounts for the charter school’s success (Smith et al., 2011).

Roles and Responsibilities of Traditional School Boards

Public school boards comprise lay citizens who are entrusted to establish a vision and mission for the school district (Land, 2002). All governing behaviors and practices should further the vision and mission of the district. School board members must select, supervise, and evaluate the superintendent, the chief executive officer who leads the school district (Rhim et al., 2013). The school board also creates policies and makes budget decisions that must align with the mission and vision of the district, as well as ensures students are achieving (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Rhim et al., 2013).

Hiring of the chief executive officer. If the most critical of these roles had to be identified, it would be that of hiring and supervising the superintendent (Maeroff, 2011). An effective superintendent who makes student achievement a priority and can maintain a good working relationship with the school board is essential for effective governance (IASB, 2000; Land, 2002; Rhim et al., 2013). When school boards become too involved in administrative matters and step into areas of oversight by the superintendent, negative relationships between the superintendent and the school boards arise (Carol et al., 1986). Conversely, if there are signs of “respect, trust, confidence, support, and open communication” then positive working relationships can be established (Land, 2002, p. 254). Rhim et al. (2013) contended that even well-functioning school boards will experience tension with their superintendent because the superintendent is usually the best source of information on school board matters and has the greatest expertise, yet the school board is responsible for evaluating the superintendent’s performance. Low-performing school boards rely less on the superintendent than do high-performing school boards (Lee & Eadens, 2014). The reliance on the superintendent to inform,

to guide, and to advise the school board is great, thus the importance of maintaining a positive relationship is essential in order to work together.

Policies and budget. The next critical role of a school board is to set policies in line with federal and state statutes and to create a budget that will allow the operationalization of the needs and the goals of the district (Rhim et al., 2013). Board members must be able to make decisions even in areas that are out of their realm of experience or expertise and boards with requisite knowledge for operation and management performed better (Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015). The financial responsibilities of school boards may include negotiating contracts and oversight of food services, transportation, facilities, curricular programs, technology, and wages and benefits (Land, 2002). Some boards rely on committees or experts to inform decisions for areas that required in-depth knowledge (Rhim et al., 2013). Within a committee structure, a school board may have a committee for finance and for academics with clearly defined roles for the committee chair and the committee reports consistently to the full school board (Radakovich, 1999; Rhim et al., 2013). The use of a committee structure can help guide the school board by helping them make informed decisions and by keeping them apprised of needs and resources (Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015). Nkundabanyanga et al. (2015) found that the performance of the finance committee is crucial for the overall performance of the school.

Student achievement. Many school board associations proclaim that the primary goal of the school board must be to improve the academic achievement of students (IASB, 2000; NSBA, 2002; National School Board Foundation, 1999). The Lighthouse Inquiry Project, a seminal study by the IASB (2000), resulted in finding a correlation between student achievement and the practices and beliefs of school board members (Delagardelle, 2008). This study and others following it established that school boards make a difference in student achievement. Their

actions, decisions, and belief systems as well as their knowledge to make informed decisions, influences the quality of schools (Delagardelle, 2008; Marino, 2011; Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015; Rhim et al., 2013).

The FDOE is charged with comparing traditional public schools and charter schools in various student performance outcomes as required by Florida Statute 1002.33 §23 (FDOE, 2017a). The 2012 FDOE report used 8 years of reading, math, and science scores from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). In the 2010–2011 school year, there were 456 charter schools in 43 school districts and two state universities (FDOE, 2012). Among all schools in Florida in 2011, 157,000 students were enrolled in charter schools which was 6% of the public school population (FDOE, 2012). Of the charter schools, 58% earned an A grade in comparison to 42% of traditional public schools that earned an A grade. In terms of student demographics, 22.8% were Black or African American and 35% were Hispanic in charters and 22.9% were Black or African American and 27.5% were Hispanic in traditional schools (FDOE, 2012). Among these subgroups as well as for free and reduced lunch students, SWD, and ELLs, 169 comparisons were made for proficiency rates, achievement gaps, and learning gains (FDOE, 2012). For student achievement, charter schools outperformed traditional public schools in 50 out of 54 comparisons with one tie (FDOE, 2012). In 18 comparisons of longitudinal data on achievement gaps between White students and Black or African American students and between White students and Hispanic students in reading, math, and science, gaps were lower in 17 out of the 18 comparisons for charter schools. Charter schools had higher learning gains by subject, subgroups, and grade levels in 79 out of 96 comparisons with no difference in 10 out of 96 comparisons (FDOE, 2012).

The 2013–2014 FDOE (2015b) report comparing charter school student performance to traditional public school student performance accounted for 584 charter schools. Of charter schools, 46% earned an A grade from the FDOE, compared to 34% of traditional public schools that earned an A grade (FDOE, 2015b). There were 230,189 charter school students, comprising 10% of the public school population in Florida (FDOE, 2015a). The student demographics remained similar to that of the 2012 FDOE report with slightly fewer Black or African American students and a higher percentage of Hispanic students in charter schools. Among these subgroups, 177 comparisons were made in reading, math, science, and algebra end-of-course (EOC) exams in proficiency, achievement gaps, and learning gains (FDOE, 2015b). Charter school students had higher proficiency rates in 52 out of 63 comparisons. In 18 comparisons for achievement gaps, charter students had a lower gap in 16 out of 18 comparisons; and for learning gains by subject, grade level, and subgroups, 86 out of 96 comparisons were higher for charter school students with no difference in five out of 96 comparisons.

The most recent report from the FDOE comparing charter school student performance to traditional public school student performance showed similar findings. The 2015–2016 FDOE report used 4.2 million test scores in English language arts, math, science, and social science using the revised state assessment, the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA), and EOC exam (FDOE, 2017a). With 624 charter schools comprising 270,920 students included in the report, the demographics were similar to that of the 2011 and 2013–2014 reports. There were slightly fewer Black or African American students and a higher percentage of Hispanic students in charter schools, and 35% of charters earned an A grade in comparison to 21% of traditional public schools earning A grades. The 2015–2016 FDOE report made 77 comparisons of grade-level performance and charter school students rated higher in 65 of those comparisons. In 22

separate comparisons of achievement gaps, charter school students were lower in the gaps in 20 areas, and in 96 comparisons of learning gains by subject, subgroup, and grade level, charter school students rated higher in 82 out of 96 comparisons with no difference in four of the areas. The FDOE reports show higher performance in reading and math for Black or African American, Hispanic, free and reduced lunch, SWD, and ELLs among charter school students in elementary, middle, and high schools in comparison to traditional public school students (FDOE, 2012, 2015b, 2017a).

Characteristics of Effective School Boards

Extensive research has been conducted on the effectiveness of traditional public school boards (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; IASB, 2000; Carol et al., 1986; Forman, 2007; Hooge & Honingh, 2014; Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Maeroff, 2011; Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015; Plough, 2014; Radakovich, 1999; Rhim et al., 2013; Saatcioglu et al., 2011). Effective school boards are generally categorized as those governing schools that have satisfactorily met student achievement benchmarks. The standards for student achievement have been established through federal accountability measures such as the NCLB and, currently, the Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015 (USDOE, 2016c).

Improvement of student outcomes. Most recently, the seminal study linking the effectiveness of school boards to student achievement was conducted by the IASB from 1998-2000 (IASB, 2000). The Lighthouse Study compared high poverty, high-performing school districts to high poverty, low-performing school districts and found the following effective board characteristics: an elevated view of students, an attitude of continuous improvement of district outcomes; an understanding of improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and staff development; and beliefs and knowledge of the classroom and building levels (Johnson, 2013).

While these characteristics were exhibited to a much greater extent in high-performing districts in comparison to low-performing districts, “solid research linking these characteristics to more effective governance and, more specifically, positive academic outcomes is notably absent in the literature” (Land, 2002, p. 51). Land (2002) also concluded that school boards of education should be studied as a discrete unit of analysis.

In a rigorous qualitative study linking school board effectiveness to student achievement in the Netherlands, Hofman (1995) found those boards that included the school staff and the community in decisions had higher math and language scores. However, if the school board perception of the community is adversarial versus cooperative, this may impact the effectiveness of the board, specifically in relation to the use of research data to make decisions (Asen et al., 2013). Asen et al. (2013) found that high-performing school boards operated most comfortably emphasizing data, particularly student performance data, and that the way in which the research was presented, who presented the data, and the context in which the evidence was presented as well as the audience were all factors in how the research was received by the school board. Low-performing boards spent less time on student achievement (Lee & Eadens, 2014).

Board perception. The perception of school boards toward their work has impactful implications. When examining if school boards are aware of the quality of education their schools provide, Hooge and Honingh (2014) found those school boards that believe in the importance of their work in steering the quality of education and think they can contribute to the quality of education had more awareness of the true quality of the schools. While the governing style did not affect the school board knowing the quality of their schools, the adherence to school board roles and not overstepping the leader’s role did strongly affect school boards having a

picture of school quality (Hooge & Honingh, 2014). Furthermore, a board's collective belief about its efficacy influences performance (Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Plough, 2014).

In the context of board perceptions, there is a significant difference between high-achieving boards and low-achieving boards in terms of student outcomes (Land, 2002). Not only do board members in high-achieving districts demonstrate they understand their impact on the improvement of schools, but they also believe that they have a direct positive impact on student achievement (Land, 2002; Plough, 2014). Boards and school board heads that express high levels of efficacy have higher levels of performance (Krishnan & Barnett, 2015). High levels of motivation in setting and achieving goals may result in perceptions of high levels of efficacy expressed collectively by these effective boards (Bandura, 2000). As board members gained mastery of experiences, they gained a more elevated perception of self-efficacy beliefs and the individual self-efficacy beliefs were related to collective efficacy of the team (Krishnan & Barnett, 2015). High-performing boards also had belief in democratic practices and in being dedicated to equality, whereas low-performing boards were more focused on reform and informing the public about student-achievement (Plough, 2014).

Interrelationships. Board members' ability to work with each other and with the chief educational officer to accomplish the goals of the district is paramount (Rhim et al., 2013). In all of the high-achieving schools in the Lighthouse Study, the school boards had a harmonious relationship with their superintendents (IASB, 2000). Research confirms that dysfunctional school boards whose members operate as representatives of special interest groups rather than as trustees elected to further the collective values of the community do not govern effectively (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Land, 2002). The very essence of board efficacy relies on its ability to work together and to make collective decisions. Trust develops over time

and leads to open sharing and exchange of information, which improves effectiveness and collaboration to achieve results (Saatcioglu et al., 2011).

In a meta-analysis of 115 school board meetings, low-performing school district board meetings lacked respectful and attentive engagement among speakers, had board members who seemed to advance their own agenda, had a board member that stood out for taking excessive time during meetings, and had less effective working relationships than those of medium and high-performing boards (Lee & Eadens, 2014). Smaller boards outperformed larger member boards, and boards that met more frequently were lower performing (Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015). Individual board members cannot make decisions for the entire group, thus, functional collaboration is a necessity.

The school board's relationship with other agencies is also an important collaborative board role (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). One of the roles of the school board is to make decisions that further the mission and vision of the district, and a fundamental piece of its decisions support the well-being of children. Agencies that provide health and social services are critical to student achievement (NSBF, 1999). Many times, school districts are a primary employer within a region and the relationship a school board maintains and fosters with businesses in the community helps further the mission and vision of the district. Thus, the interrelationships of school board members—their social capital—play an important role in financial and academic outcomes (Saatcioglu et al., 2011).

Training. A common thread in the literature is the importance of training for school board members (Land, 2002; Rhim et al., 2013; Roberts & Sampson, 2011). School board members must clearly understand their roles and responsibilities, and be able to improve student achievement through the school improvement process and through governance practices such as

policy development and practice (Rhim et al., 2013). High-performing school boards place importance on training (Plough, 2014). Additionally, significant challenges face boards with a poor understanding of their role and a lack of relevant knowledge (Krishnan & Barnett, 2015).

Unfortunately, not all states require school board members to acquire training to become a school board member (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). In states that do require training, the training is typically focused on general board governance topics such as roles and responsibilities, Sunshine Laws, and compliance. While there are extensive board training opportunities and materials with some research supporting the positive impact of board member professional development on education ranking, further research is needed about what type of training board members should receive (Land, 2002; Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

The linkage of school board efficacy to the performance of student achievement among traditional public schools was used to guide this current study to identify the characteristics and practices of the charter school board. Charter school boards have the flexibility to create their own policies and budgets, yet are held accountable for meeting compliance requirements and student performance outcomes (Forman, 2007). With no research on the practices and behaviors of school board governance of high-performing charter schools, the volume of research on effective characteristics of traditional public school boards provided direction for this study. The perceptions of charter school board members, how they relate to one another and to the school leader, how they use data to drive decisions and monitor outcomes, and how they fulfill their roles and responsibilities were all areas of observation and analysis during this multicase study.

Summary

Chapter Two of this study outlined the substantial literature that exists about the characteristics of effective school governance of traditional public schools in relation to

improving student achievement. Recent literature defining charter schools and how they offer choice in education abounds; however, there is little empirical research about the governance of charter schools and the impact charter school boards have on their schools and the problem of charter school closures. The literature on traditional school boards links the effectiveness of school boards to student achievement. Effective traditional school boards have positive perceptions focusing on student outcomes, have strong interrelationships, and understand the importance of training. The literature that exists about the characteristics of effective school governance of charter schools is unsubstantial, and this study contributes to the understanding of what characteristics exist among high-performing charter schools. Similarly, the perception of charter board members about charter school closures in Florida was investigated.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this multisite case study was to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards to understand the problem of charter school closures. The study applied the theoretical lens of social capital and employed a multisite case study design. Social capital can be illustrated through a variety of ways including participant interactions, behaviors, practices, perceptions, and decisions. This chapter includes description of the research design and rationale for selecting the design as well as a restatement of the research questions. A description of the setting and participants are explicated and an explanation is provided of how the setting and participants were purposefully selected. All participants were from high-performing charter school boards. My role as the researcher, including biases and assumptions that I might have brought to the study are articulated. The data collection methods and strategies, and the order in which data collection occurred, are described and the analysis approach is explained. Finally, the chapter includes discussion of the strategies to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Design

I used a qualitative research design with a case study approach for this study to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school board members. Qualitative research “can refer to research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations” (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). This study was an examination of governance practices and behaviors, and thus the use of case studies to investigate relevant

practices and behaviors was used to describe the effective governance practices and characteristics of these boards (Yin, 2009).

An inherent challenge with multisite case study research is the loss of the depth of analysis of a single case. However, the objective of the present study was achieved by gathering data from multiple cases to identify common characteristics to describe effective board governance (Creswell, 2013). The case study method was best suited for this study because a variety of evidence—documents, interviews, and observations—was used to examine the board members as contemporary entities (Yin, 2009). The cases in this study were the contemporary entity—16 high-performing charter school board members—who were investigated “in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Further, the case study method allowed me to illuminate how high-performing charter school boards interact, behave, and make decisions (Schramm, 1971). A total of 16 board members, consisting of three, six, and seven board members from three different high-performing charter school boards, were interviewed, thus a multisite case study was employed because the “cases in the collection are categorically bound together” (Stake, 2006, pp. 4–5). Data were collected from the charter school board members and analyzed for significant statements to yield themes of textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013). Multisite case study research allows for examining the function and activities of a case and then allows for relating it to other cases to understand how the case accomplishes its purpose (Stake, 2006). By examining multiple cases, or high-performing charter school boards, an understanding of their practices and behaviors were related to one another to describe how they perform successfully.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school governing board members?

Research Subquestions

SQ1. How do charter school governing board members perceive that bonding practices impact charter school governance?

SQ2. How do charter school governing board members perceive that bridging practices impact charter school governance?

SQ3. How do charter school governing board members perceive that governance training impacts charter school governance?

Setting

The setting for this study was in Florida which is an area with numerous charter schools and, more specifically, high-performing charter schools (FDOE, 2017b, 2017c). In addition, I have a familiarity with the charter system in the district where I reside. Hillsborough County is the eighth largest school district in the nation and has eight high-performing charter schools among 41 total charter schools, which made the likelihood of obtaining participants favorable (FDOE, 2017c).

Hillsborough County is located in central Florida and has a total student population of 174,397 students (FDOE, 2015a). The district includes 35.6% White; 21% Black or African American; 35.2% Hispanic or Latino; 3.6% Asian; .1% Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; .2% American Indian or Alaskan Native; and 4.1% two or more races (FDOE, 2015a). The student enrollment by race in Hillsborough County is similar to that of the state of Florida: 39.4% White;

22.5% Black or African American; 31.5% Hispanic or Latino; 2.6% Asian; .1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; .3% American Indian or Alaska Native; and 3.4% two or more races (FDOE, 2015a). Florida has 9.8% of its students designated as ELLs while Hillsborough has a moderately higher percentage with 15% of its student population being ELL (FDOE, 2015a).

Similar to traditional public schools, charter schools are accountable to the Florida Department of Education and then to the school board of the district (FDOE, 2018). Specifically, the district school board approves or denies the charter application for charter schools to operate (FDOE, 2018). If a school board denies a charter application, the school board provides the reasons for the denial, and the applicants can amend the application and resubmit (FDOE, 2018). Once a charter application is approved, the applicants must establish a school board which then becomes responsible for the charter (FDOE, 2018). After the application is approved, the contract to operate the school may be approved for a variation of years but most typically is approved for an initial 5-year contract (FDOE, 2018). The charter school is monitored by the school district staff for various compliance areas, and many school districts have designated staff to monitor compliance for charter schools within a charter office (FDOE, 2018).

At the end of the charter school's contract period, the school undergoes a comprehensive site review in which all compliance areas are thoroughly reviewed (FDOE, 2018). Areas of review include governance, curriculum, assessment, finances, inventory, operations, exceptional student education, English language learners, parent communication, community partnerships, and instruction (FDOE, 2018). The site visit and compliance review may yield a recommendation for a renewal of the charter, and the charter school can request how many years they would like for the next contract period to be extended (FDOE, 2018). Typically, charter

schools are renewed for 5 years if all areas of compliance are in good standing (FDOE, 2018). Some charter schools are approved for 10-year renewals (FDOE, 2018). Charter schools may only receive a 1-year contract if there are areas of deficiencies needing to be corrected (FDOE, 2018). On the other hand, if a school has had two consecutive A grades as determined by the FDOE with no adverse financial findings showing mismanagement of funds, then the charter school may apply for a 15-year contract (FDOE, 2018).

Within Hillsborough County, there are 255 schools, among which there are 41 charter schools serving approximately 13,000 students (FDOE, 2016a). According to the FDOE (2015a), eight charter schools are high-performing, and they serve 5,300 students; five are combination schools serving kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8), one is an elementary program (K-5), one is a middle school serving sixth through eighth grades (6-8), and one is a high school serving grades 9 through 12. High-performing charter schools are defined by the state of Florida as schools with two consecutive A grades, no B grades, and no emergency adverse financial findings with indications of mismanagement of funds (FDOE, 2015a).

The three schools selected included one middle school, Achievement Charter (AC), and two K-8 programs, Success Preparatory (SP) and Leadership Academy (LA). Pseudonyms were used for these schools. I selected these particular charter schools because they consist of boards with at least seven members and within this criterion sample, these schools met the criteria for high performance among charter schools in Hillsborough County.

The demographic data for each school are provided within the setting description. It is important to note that if a subgroup category has fewer than 10 students, those data are not reported by the FDOE. SP is a K-8 program with 58% racial-ethnic minority students. SP is a suburban school with 42.3% White; 7.8% Black or African American; 44.7% Hispanic or Latino;

1.8% Asian; 2.8% two or more races; 8.5% SWD; 5.2% economically disadvantaged; and 5.2% ELLs. With 667 students, the school's focus is "to educate the whole child-intellectually, physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially." The Success Preparatory Board of Directors consists of 13 members and a nonvoting parent representative, and the school is an independent charter school, not managed by a management company. The school opened in 1999 and has earned 17 A grades.

The second high-performing charter school, LA, is a K-8 program with 28% racial-ethnic minority and 643 total students. LA has 72.6% White; less than 10% Black or African American; 11.8% Hispanic or Latino students; 5.2% Asian; 8.2% two or more races; 9% economically disadvantaged; and 2% ELLs. The school has 10 board members with a nonvoting parent liaison, and the school is independently operated. The school does not have a specialized focus and is a rural school. The school opened in 2011 and has earned three "A" grades.

Last, the third high-performing charter school, AC, is a middle school with a 57% racial-ethnic minority student population and 657 students. AC is a Grade 6-8 program in a rural location with a back-to-basics focus using the United States Department of Defense curriculum. AC has 43.8% White; 9.2% Black or African American; 15.8% Hispanic or Latino; 24.4% Asian; 6.2% two or more races; 2.3% SWD; 5.9% economically disadvantaged; and 2.6% ELLs. The independently operated school opened in 1998 and has earned 16 A grades. The governing board consists of 10 board members, a nonvoting parent representative, and a nonvoting faculty representative.

The charter school history is rich in the state of Florida and the school district of Hillsborough County, making this setting favorable for a multisite case study on effective charter school governing board behaviors and actions. With over 20 years of charter school history in

Hillsborough County and eight high-performing charter schools, the area was concentrated with prime participants for the study.

Participants

For this multisite case study, participants were purposefully selected using criterion sampling measures. The purpose of criterion sampling is that all cases meet some criterion and in this study, the criterion was sharing of the same phenomenon of high-performing charter school boards (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Specifically, all the school board members were currently serving on a charter school board of a high-performing charter school. High-performing charter schools in Florida must achieve at least two consecutive A grades from the FDOE as well as no adverse findings in their financial audits (FDOE, 2015a). Criterion sampling is also useful for assurance of quality (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Three to seven board members from three charter school boards for a total of 16 members, were selected as the sample size because it provided an ample representation of effective charter school board behaviors and practices (Yin, 2009). Creswell (2013) stated in terms of sample size, 12–15 participants are sufficient to reflect certainty of the results (Yin, 2009).

Interviews and observation of three to seven participants from each board yielded insight into behaviors, actions, and decisions and provided a rich description of the practices and perceptions of charter school governing board members about charter school governance. I chose independently governed school boards versus management company-operated charter schools because the charter schools operated by management companies typically have fewer than five school board members, which would have made it difficult to gather enough cases for the research. In addition, one of the characteristics of most school boards as found in the literature is that they typically are composed of five to nine members (Rhim et al., 2013).

Procedures

Following successful defense of this study, application for approval of the study was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. After I obtained IRB approval (Appendix A), I approached each of the school leaders at each of the high-performing charter schools, most of whom I know from a local professional organization of charter schools called Charter School Leaders. Through the initial request to the school leader, I was able to establish credibility with the board chairs. A letter of introduction and request to participate in the study was sent first to the board chair to request participation in the study (Appendix B). Once I received approval and consent from the board chair, I sent request for participation letters and consent agreements to all potential participants by email (Appendix C), including a description of the study as well as plans to interview, to observe a board meeting, and to review documents. Respondents who agreed to participate were asked to verify their participation via email or in person before the board meeting and interviews were scheduled. I collected signed participant consent forms prior to the interviews via email or in person while in attendance at their board meeting. Data were collected through document reviews, interviews, and observations of charter school board meetings and committee meetings.

Governance documents such as meeting minutes revealed practices and outcomes, relationships with other organizational entities and community partners, and the level of cooperation and collaboration to further the school's mission. Documents such as the board's bylaws, governance manuals, policies and procedures manual, board meeting agendas, committee meeting or workshop notes, financial reports, annual reports, professional development manuals, and the school's strategic plan reflected school board member practices. In addition, each school's website was reviewed to analyze governance documents.

The interview questions (Appendix D) were pilot tested on nonparticipant board members prior to conducting the interviews with research participants. I had experts in the field review the questions and then piloted the interview with the same small sample of nonparticipant board members who reviewed the interview questions initially. The pilot test helped ensure the questions and wording were clear. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the school board members and each interview was recorded with an audio recording device and an iPad. Descriptive notes were taken to record nonverbal responses. All interviews were transcribed and proofread within a few days of the interview so that there was recall of the atmosphere of the interview. The participant descriptions and portions of the transcriptions used as interview excerpts were sent to each participant for member checking and any documents mentioned within the interviews were reviewed to achieve triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). One interview of each board member took place at a location based on their selection for their convenience and a few interviews occurred before observing a school board meeting to build trust and rapport with the school board member. All interviews took place within the same academic school year as the board meeting and at least 30 days prior or after the board meeting.

During the observation of a school board meeting, a board workshop, or a committee meeting, I looked and listened for school board member actions, practices, and behaviors through the theoretical lens of social capital, specifically bridging and bonding behaviors as well as effective school board characteristics. An observation protocol (Appendix E) was used to record descriptive notes, the length of the activity, and reflective notes (Creswell, 2013). Careful attention was given to how the board members interacted with each other and with other stakeholders.

Attention was focused on identifying themes that emerged from the data. The data was analyzed using Stake's (2006) systematic approach to organize and analyze data. The data from the multisite case study yielded operational links that provided a description of the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards.

The Researcher's Role

I served as a nonparticipant observer in this study. I watched the school board meeting and took field notes without participating in the activity (Creswell, 2013). I also served as the key instrument in collecting data through observing behavior, interviewing participants, and examining documents (Creswell, 2013). I brought bias and assumptions on the effectiveness of charter board practices and behaviors to the study as I currently work as a principal in a charter school and have worked with two different high-performing charter school boards in my career. I served as the president of our professional association of charter school leaders and have developed a positive rapport with various charter school leaders and district leaders in Hillsborough County to foster continuous improvement and collaboration. I have worked as an educator in traditional public schools, in a private school, and in charter schools in Florida for more than 20 years. I believe that charter schools allow the freedom and flexibility to create caring, safe learning environments within a system of high accountability and expectations. I believe that in all areas of business or industry, including education, there are effective organizations and there are ineffective organizations, regardless of their designation as a traditional, charter, or public school. Thus, from experience as a student growing up in Hillsborough County schools, as an educator in Hillsborough County, and as a parent of students who attended schools in Hillsborough County, I believe school choice in any educational system is important for parents and students.

It is important to note that I was a former teacher and an assistant principal–building administrator at AC, a high-performing charter school that was one of the selected sites for this case study. I served there for 6 years as a teacher of English language arts and math and then 4 years as the assistant principal of curriculum and building level administrator. Currently, there are five board members that I worked under, and I forged a positive rapport with them. One of the five board members is also a parent at the school where I currently serve as principal. I avoided selecting this individual as a participant to avoid any conflict of interest.

As a committee member of several accreditation review teams, I have conducted reviews of charter schools and their boards for governance and leadership standards outside of Hillsborough County, but within Florida. I believe I have some knowledge as to why charter school boards operate effectively or ineffectively based on my experience and training in identifying evidence of governance standards through quality assurances according to the international accreditation organization. The experiences of reviewing charter school boards for accreditation presented some bias in my role as researcher because I have preconceived ideas about effective and ineffective board practices and behaviors.

Bracketing personal experiences and assumptions occurred so that interpretations of data were not influenced by bias and assumptions (Creswell, 2013). Although there is a realization and awareness of bias and assumptions, it is not possible to bracket oneself completely out of the study since assumptions influence decision-making. The focus was on blocking what I think I know about effective charter school governance behaviors from experience so that curiosity during the observations, interviews, and document reviews was cultivated (LeVasseur, 2003). As the human instrument of data collection in this study, I recognized my opinions about charter

schools; however, I bracketed my biases and assumptions as much as possible to identify the effective characteristics and practices of high-performing charter school boards.

The philosophical assumption that informed the choices in this study and guided the research was an ontological approach to inquiry. To foster curiosity and to help avoid bias, I gathered evidence of the reality of charter school governance using the words and observations of the behaviors and actions of the charter school board members to develop themes (Creswell, 2013). Themes emerged from collecting and analyzing the data from related documents.

Data Collection

Data collected for the study included documents, semistructured interviews, and observations. The use of these multiple data sources provided triangulation and increased study validity because the more sources of data that can be gathered and organized, the more evidence there is to provide a clear and meaningful picture free from bias (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2006). I reviewed the documents first to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the charter school board under review. Knowing about the school also helped in building trusting relationships with the participants when requesting interviews and when conducting the observation. The second data collection method was the interviews. By having the face-to-face time with board members, they felt more comfortable when the time came to observe a board meeting. Although board meetings are open to the public, I wanted participants to know who I was and the reason I was attending a board meeting.

Documents

Analysis of the school's documents was the first method of data collection to be used for the study. Documents included school board meeting agendas, school board meeting minutes, committee and workshop notes, the bylaws, the mission and vision, the strategic plan, the school

improvement plan, the school's accreditation report, financial reports, the annual report, professional development descriptions, governance manuals, policies and procedures, student achievement data, demographic reports and the school's website. These documents provided a picture of the dynamics of the school and its governance. All of these documents were archived on the school's website, on the FDOE website, or at the school. The documents provided a substantial description of the background of each school and helped inform me as interviewer as to what types of questions should be asked. Specifically, a review of the board's agendas and meeting minutes provided me with a preliminary view of how the board operates, what types of decisions they have made, and any other context that was helpful in better understanding the dynamics and interrelationships established on the board. Document reviews were a way of "constituting social processes and artifacts collaboratively (or conflictively)" (Kvale, 2008, p. xi).

Interviews

Interviews were the second method of data collection for the research study. Interviews provide insight into how participants construct what is happening around them, what they are doing, and what is happening to them which provide rich and meaningful constructs (Kvale, 2008). The purpose of the semistructured interview was to obtain the context of participant experiences relative to governance behaviors, actions, and decision-making. Open-ended, predetermined questions were used to allow for unexpected turns in the conversation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The interviews were conducted one-on-one at the convenience of the participant. The interviews of the participating board members for each of the three schools took place at the school site or at a convenient time and place for the participant. I used an interview protocol

similar to the guide provided by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) which allows for a standard template with the questions, a place to record notes and a place to display the closing statement thanking the individual for participating in the interview and to assure him or her of confidentiality. A portable electronic recording device was used to record the audio, and an iPad was used as a back-up to record the audio. Following are the standardized open-ended interview questions with the central research question (CRQ) and/or the research subquestion (SQ) noted in parentheses for each.

1. Please tell me a little about yourself. (CRQ)
2. How long have you served as a board member of this charter school? (CRQ, SQ1)
3. Why did you become a charter school board member? (CRQ, SQ1)
4. What do you believe the roles and responsibilities of your governing board are? (CRQ, SQ1)
5. How do you perceive your role and responsibility on your governing board? (CRQ)
6. Please describe the educational, career, and training experiences that you believe help you in your role as a charter school board member. (SQ3)
7. How would you describe your governing board? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
8. How do you believe the governance of your board impacts the school? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
9. Please describe how you believe board training beyond the required basic governance training impacts your ability to govern. (SQ3)
10. How would you describe the interrelationships of your governing board? (SQ1)
11. What do you believe the norms of your governing board are? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
12. How would you describe the relationships of governing board members outside of the governing board for the purpose of helping the school? (SQ2)

13. How would you describe your belief about charter school closures in Florida? (CRQ)

The purpose of Question 1 was to begin the interview with a nonthreatening question that would establish a rapport with the participant (Patton, 2002). Questions 2 and 3, pertaining to the length of service and the reason the participant became a board member, established the participant's motive for joining the board and established how much experience the board member had as a charter school board member. These questions also helped form a positive rapport and build trust. By learning more about the participant's length of service, an understanding was gained about the potential length of time bonding practices have occurred among the other board members and how the length of experience may shape practices and behaviors. Questions 2 and 3 served as main questions related to the central research question and to bonding practices. Main questions were tied to the research questions whereas probes elicited details and follow-up questions explored and tested ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Questions 4 and 5, pertaining to role and responsibility, provided insight as to the purpose of the charter school board. It is important for school board members to understand their roles and responsibilities (Land, 2002). These questions also allowed information to be gathered about similar or different ideologies and similar or different purposes for serving as a board member (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). Questions 4 and 5 served as main questions to learn more about the practices and behaviors of the board members. When board members have a common understanding of their role and responsibility as a norm, bridging and bonding behaviors are strengthened (Coleman, 1988).

Question 6 about the participant's experience, training, and career provided data to determine what type of individual resources the participant brought to the social capital of the board as well as allowed me to determine what kind of expertise the member brought to the

board in order to help fulfill the necessary roles and responsibilities of the board. Having the necessary expertise in areas of finance and education helps a school board effectively function (Rhim et al., 2013; Saatcioglu et al., 2011). The response to this question furthered an understanding of the resources that were embedded through experience and expertise (Lin, 1999).

Questions 7 and 8 established the participant's beliefs about the characteristics of their governing board and their impact on the school. School boards that believe their governance has a direct impact on student achievement and the quality of the school have higher levels of performance (Hooge & Honingh, 2014; Krishnan & Barnett, 2015; Plough, 2014). Furthermore, the responses to these questions shed light on norms, trust, information channels, and bridging and bonding behaviors (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). Responses to Question 9 supplied data on whether governance training, beyond what is minimally required, made an impact in governance behaviors or the performance of the school (Rhim et al., 2013).

Question 10 was designed within the framework of the social capital theory to determine how and to what extent board members employ bonding behaviors to further the positive outcomes for the school (Burt, 1997). The description of relationships formed among board members helped determine what characteristics of social capital exist and the identity of the organization (Lin, 1999). I was cognizant of the verbal and nonverbal responses of the participant to gauge if the relationship described was positive, neutral, or negative before proceeding to the next question about norms. If the relationship was deemed in a positive light, I proceeded to the next question.

Question 11, pertaining to norms, informed the collective interests of the board which contributes to the strength of social capital (Coleman, 1988). When norms and sanctions can be

identified, the identity of the organization is legitimized and value can be placed on productivity (Burt, 1988).

Question 12 served as a main question and prompted the participant to describe bridging behaviors. The relationships built with other stakeholders are an embedded resource that helps further the organization (Lin, 1999). This question served as a nonthreatening question allowing the participant to showcase and elaborate on positive ways the board has helped the school.

I included the last interview question, Question 13, to gain insight from board members on the problem of charter school closures in Florida. By prompting them to describe their beliefs about charter school closures in Florida, I was able to learn if board members perceived this problem to be related to governance. This question served as a follow-up question to explore and test ideas that may have been previously stated in the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

During the interview, I employed a responsive interview approach that allowed for probing questions to elicit more details and allowed a change in direction in order to gain greater insight (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The ultimate purpose was to gain a rich picture of the participant's distinct experience, knowledge, and perspective surrounding charter school governance (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Observations

I observed the proceedings of a school board meeting as a key tool for collecting data (Creswell, 2013). Observation is "the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer" (Creswell, 2018, p. 166). I observed the participants, activities, interactions, conversations, physical setting, and my own behaviors to note the phenomenon in the field (Creswell, 2018). I served as a nonparticipant observer primarily using sight and sound to watch and listen in order to take field notes without direct involvement with the board

proceedings or the people involved with the board proceedings. The board meeting duration was determined by the board members themselves. Typically, charter board meetings last from 90 minutes to 3 hours. The location of all of the charter school board meetings was at their respective schools. The observations were scheduled, and participants were informed that the study would include observations of board meetings. I observed one board meeting from each of the three schools.

I remained as unobtrusive as possible, taking the direction of the board chair who provided consent and approval for participation to introduce me as an observer at the start of the board meeting. After the board chair introduced me, I expressed appreciation to those from whom I had already received consent forms and shared that I had hard copy consent forms available for anyone who may want to complete one. Some board members asked if they could give me their completed consent forms at that time and some asked for a hard copy consent form to complete and return later. I passed the consent forms out to those who requested them and I collected the consent forms from those who had completed them. I thanked the board members for allowing me to observe and interview them, and I thanked the participants, informing them of the use of the data and their access to the data (Creswell, 2013). At the conclusion of the board meeting, a few members had completed their consent forms, and I collected them.

A two-column observation protocol (Appendix E) which includes descriptive notes in one column and reflective notes in the other column was used to record observations (Creswell, 2013, pp. 169–170). As shown in Figure 1, this protocol allowed for notes to record the event or activity in the left column and the reflective notes section allowed for a reflection of the activities as well as any conclusions that may be drawn in the right column. According to Creswell (2013), the length of the activity should be included within the protocol. I included additional

information for each observation: the name of the activity, time, date, duration, and location of the observation. Immediately after the observation of the board meeting, I provided in-depth reflective notes about “the process, reflections on activities, and summary conclusions about activities for later theme development” (Creswell, 2013, p. 169). Then, I prepared my full notes, giving thick and rich narrative descriptions of the board member behaviors, actions, and decisions (Creswell, 2013).

Observation Protocol		
Name of Activity:		
Date:	Time:	Duration of Activity:
Location:		
<i>Descriptive Notes</i>		<i>Reflective Notes</i>

Figure 1. Observation protocol.

Data Analysis

The most difficult aspect of case study research is the analysis of evidence, and investigations can be delayed because of challenges in not knowing what to do with the volume of evidence (Yin, 2009). Therefore, data analysis for this current study relied on the theoretical framework that helped guide the study (Yin, 2009). The social capital theory and the effective school board characteristics of traditional public schools found in the literature helped “focus attention on certain data and to ignore other data” (Yin, 2009, p. 130).

Within-case analysis was employed to analyze each case for themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Cross-case analysis was employed to examine themes across cases to discern common

themes and themes unique for each individual case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this multisite case study, each case was analyzed to develop a rich description where themes emerged and findings were aggregated across the individual cases (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). As the researcher, I have an obligation to provide interpretations of the themes as binding concepts across the cases (Stake, 2006). As field notes are taken, reflective passages were included either during the observation or immediately following the observation or interview. A summary sheet of the field notes was created and metaphors were discerned for each case. Codes and memos were implemented noting patterns and themes as the frequency of codes accrue. I developed a short list of 25–30 tentative codes that matched text segments based on Creswell’s (2013) recommendation to keep the categories of information at this range so that the categories can be combined into five or six themes for ease of writing a narrative. Relationships among factors and variables helped build a logical chain of evidence. In addition, similarities and differences were identified.

The study followed a systematic approach using the strategy of Stake (2006) to organize the data. Worksheet 2: Multicase Study Theme Identification Worksheet (Appendix F) from *Multiple Case Study Analysis* (Stake, 2006) was used to organize the research questions as themes. For example, research questions related to bridging, bonding, or board perception were organized as separate themes. When reading the data collected for the case, Worksheet 3: Case Analysis Worksheet (Stake, 2006; Appendix G) was employed to reduce the data to the prominence of themes and to provide commentary of “the most experiential knowledge” (Stake, 2006, p. 44). Then, Worksheet 4: Ordinarity and Manifestation Estimate Worksheet (Stake, 2006; Appendix H) was used to rate the utility of each case for each theme. Each theme was numbered and recorded into an electronic data sheet to help with tracking on Worksheets 4 and

5. Findings of the cases were merged and recorded in a matrix using Worksheet 5: Assertions by Case Worksheet (Stake, 2006; Appendix I). The purpose of Worksheet 5 was to reduce the number of findings to move toward generalization (Stake, 2006). Each finding was recorded and organized with the case identified and numbered. The purpose of this step was to determine cross-case assertions based on evidence from the case reports (Stake, 2006). The findings were then placed into clusters, or similar topics. Some findings did merge into clusters and a determination was made to include them as a special finding or to put them aside. The clusters became merged findings that were recorded on Worksheet 5. For each merged finding, the case numbers from which those findings were identified were also recorded on Worksheet 5. Additionally, the themes for each merged finding were identified. At this step in the process of data analysis, the merged findings were ranked as high, middling, or low for each theme in order of importance. Meaningful assertions emerged from this ranking. The assertions were recorded in Worksheet 6: Multicase Assertions Worksheet (Stake, 2006; Appendix J).

By immersing myself in the data through reading the transcripts of interviews, notes and memos of interviews, observations, and documents, I got a sense of the findings that emerged. Triangulation occurred along the way throughout the fieldwork, while organizing the data, when analyzing the data, and when writing the results so that the results create a clear and meaningful picture free from my bias (Stake, 2006). By using Stake's (2006) organized system of data analysis to categorize the data into findings that support or negate the themes, the overwhelming evidence from the various sources of data was reduced into meaningful assertions. The redundancy of working with the data allowed me to be "skeptical in seeing, hearing, coding, analyzing, and writing" so that the process of triangulation occurs (Stake, 2006, p. 77). This multisite case analysis led to a focus on the most important aspects of the data so the analysis

“will be less vulnerable to the possibility that the main issue was being avoided because of possibly negative findings” (Yin, 2009, p. 161).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, there should be “an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 249–250). The time spent in the field collecting data from participants through interviews, observations, and documents allowed a rich, thick description which added value to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The triangulation of the data sources and the methods by corroborating the evidence from various sources established trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To further establish the trustworthiness of the study, I put aside my assumptions and ensured that I remained open-minded when exploring each case. In addition to bracketing researcher bias, I reflected upon how I was positioned in the study and how it informed my interpretation of the study (Creswell, 2013). These considerations as well as other strategies helped increase credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Member checking was used for this study to establish credibility, the reality of the findings (Creswell, 2013). I solicited participant views of the findings and interpretations, specifically, my preliminary analyses of descriptions or themes (Creswell, 2013). “By taking the data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions” back to the board members who were interviewed, they were able to “judge accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Member checking is considered to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). The participants should play a role in checking the research to validate the accuracy of their accounts (Stake, 1995). Additionally, there were

multiple layers of data where recurring behaviors and actions were identified so that the weight of the evidence was persuasive (Eisner, 1991). The evidence consisted of viewing and seeing proof of recurring behaviors and actions through interviews, observations, and document reviews.

Dependability and Confirmability

A goal of the study was for the results to be stable and consistent through rich detail about the context and setting of the study (Creswell, 2013). To ensure dependability, I asked an expert in research to conduct an audit of the research process (Creswell, 2013). A systematic process of using multisite case study worksheets was used to organize themes, to synthesize data, and to analyze the data to determine assertions (Stake, 2006). It was also important to clarify my bias and how my experiences or ideas may impact inquiry during the study (Merriam, 1998). It was important for a peer to provide an external check of the research process knowing that possible distortions may enter into my “decisions about what is salient to study, relevant to the purpose of the study, and of interest for focus” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). To increase the level of objectivity of the study, the value of the data was established through an audit of the research process through peer review where the peer played the role of a “devils’ advocate” and critical friend (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The use of multiple and various sources of data and methods supported triangulation as a way to validate confirmability. This process involved “corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Direct quotes were used to provide exact ideas and perceptions of participants surrounding the phenomenon. By confirming or triangulating data from several sources such as participants and colleagues, I was able to confirm an accurate reflection of what was being said (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

participants were able to review and correct the data. I also relied on the expertise of my committee to debrief throughout the research process to increase dependability and confirmability.

Transferability

A rich, thick description is necessary to ensure the findings are transferable for the multisite case study on effective charter board governance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A thick description was gained from detailed field experiences, and the richness was gained from the variety of sources used to determine explicit patterns. Details of each participant, the setting, the actions, the behaviors, the interactions, and all other evidence allow the reader “to transfer the information to other settings to determine whether the findings can be transferred” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Transferability was established through an external audit review of the study by someone who had no connections to the study to determine if the auditor arrived at the same conclusions as those supported by the data (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are imperative when research involves human participants and must be examined during all phases of research (Creswell, 2013). Prior to conducting research, all approvals were gained through the IRB, the school board chairs, and through the selected site participants. When beginning the study, the purpose of the study was disclosed to all stakeholders, informed consent gained, and notice of voluntary participation given. Through the document analysis, I gained insight about norms and the culture and climate of the school so that I could be sensitive to those areas. During the data collection phase, it was important to gain the trust of participants through face-to-face interactions by conducting interviews before attending board meetings whenever possible. During the greeting phase of the interview, I thanked them

for participating in the study and re-explained the purpose of the study to gain support from the participant. I was as unobtrusive as possible by meeting at a location and time that was convenient for the participant, and I answered all questions that arose about the study. I refrained from sharing personal experiences with participants during the interview as this would minimize bracketing (Creswell, 2013). Participants were also informed that they could decline participation in the study or withdraw at any time (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995)

A strong ethical consideration during research was the confidentiality and the protection of information. The outcomes of this study are viewed as favorable for the participants because I observed actions, behaviors, and documents to identify effective characteristics of these high-performing charter school boards. I used pseudonyms for the participants and their schools. All data were password-protected and hard copy notes and documents were locked in a cabinet. A back-up copy was produced and also locked and secured. A master list of all types of information gathered was kept to help keep track of all sources of data. When analyzing the data, I was cognizant of refraining from “going native” and reported multiple perspectives including any contrary findings (Creswell, 2013). The participants had an opportunity to view the results. Composite descriptions were used so that no individual participant would be singled out in the study. By considering ethical standards throughout the entire process of the study, the integrity of the research and findings was upheld.

Summary

Chapter Three included description of the methods of data collection and analysis for research study. A qualitative approach is appropriate to provide a “complex, detailed understanding” for the purpose of seeking “to understand the context or settings of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 65). A multisite case study of 16 high-performing charter school board

members was utilized to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards. The research questions, setting, participants, and procedures were provided to establish the context of the research. My role as researcher as the human instrument in the study allowed for an in-depth exploration of charter school governance with caution to ensure bias and assumptions were bracketed. Data collection, including document analysis, interviews, and observations was used to provide a clear picture and meaning for the reader. Triangulation occurred throughout the process of collecting, organizing, analyzing, and reporting data. A rationale and explanation of the data analysis procedures which included the use of Stake's (2006) Worksheets 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were provided. The thick, rich data collection and analysis methods established trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Ethical considerations and implications of the research were discussed to ensure the integrity of the study and protection of the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this multisite case study was to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards to understand the problem of charter school closures. The study utilized the theoretical lens of social capital and employed a multisite case study design. Board members from three high-performing charter schools in Florida were interviewed individually and were also observed in their board meetings. Documents were collected and analyzed from each school site for triangulation of data. Each case was analyzed and coded individually and then cross-case analysis was conducted. Within Chapter Four is a description of participants, observations, results, and a summary of findings.

Participants

The participants for this study included 16 board members from three high-performing charter schools in Florida. Three board members had over 20 years of experience on their board, one board member had 12 years of experience on the board, and all other participants had 7 or less years of experience on their boards. Board members had a broad spectrum of career fields represented and three board members were founding board members. Interviews took place at their schools, over the phone, at the board member's place of business, at a coffee shop, and one took place at the interviewer's school. I emailed each board chair about an interview and to request attendance at a board meeting. I then emailed each board member to request an interview. My presence at the board meeting and introduction by the board chair helped secure individual board member interviews.

All participants were courteous and professional. We set mutually agreeable dates, times, and locations to meet. Table 1 shows a list of the participants using pseudonyms for their names

and schools, their career field, the number of years they have served on the board, and their current position on the board. The participants are grouped by school and are ordered alphabetically by their first names. Detailed descriptions of each participant in alphabetical order grouped by their school in the same order of the table follows Table 1. Board member descriptions in alphabetical order are described from AC, then LA, and then SP.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	School	Position on the board	Years on the board	Career field
Adam	AC	Member	4	Civil engineer
Delia	AC	Member	2	Postsecondary administration
Jean	AC	Member, academic chair	12	Public school administration
Ken	AC	Member, governance chair	20	Medical practice administration
Marta	AC	Chair	20	Civil engineering, landscape architect
Michael	AC	Member	2	Business, marketing
Steven	AC	Treasurer, finance chair	22	Management accounting
Angela	LA	Member	<1	Law, nonprofit management
David	LA	Member, advancement & communications chair	2	Marketing
Harris	LA	Chair	6	Business, military
Maurice	LA	Vice chair, treasurer	4	Pharmaceuticals, bio-technology
Nelson	LA	Secretary	7	Business, Finance
Wendy	LA	Member, incoming chair	2	Public school administration
Carla	SP	Chair	3	Business, law, accounting
Jerry	SP	Member, discipline chair	3	City management
Louis	SP	Vice chair	1	Business, finance

Adam

Adam has served as a member of the AC board for 3 and half years. He explained he initially was interested in the board position so that he could get his son into the school, but after his son was selected in the lottery, he still wanted to pursue the position: “I’ve never been on a volunteer board . . . and I just thought it would be one way, as a local person, as a small business man, to give back to my community.” He works within the construction industry, and the board was looking for someone with experience in this field.

He believed the role and responsibility of the board is to provide the principal with everything he or she needs to operate a successful school. He knows that board members have their own specific role and responsibility according to their profession and resources. His specific role and responsibility as a member of the construction and building committee is to assist with plant and facility issues. His experience in his career field for 30 years has been the most valuable experience in helping him in his role as a charter board member. Adam believed the governance training, which includes learning about how a board operates as well as the Sunshine Laws, is important, but his understanding of business has been the most impactful: “Being a business owner for 18 years has helped me to understand the importance of government, the importance of a board, of the structure that it provides, and the roles and responsibilities as they related to each other.”

Adam described the governing board as fun: “It’s a group of people who are passionately committed to academics.” They are a group that is committed to helping the school and they have identified roles based on their area of expertise. When a board vacancy becomes available, the governing board finds the person to fill that need. Adam explained the dynamics of the board by describing how there are a group of board members who hold onto the traditions that started

the school, and there is a group who joins the board to get their child into the school. When the board asked him to stay on the board after his 2-year commitment, he agreed because he enjoys working with them. He understands the expectations of the board to include regular attendance and participation in board meetings and in committee meetings to decide on and accomplish the business of the school. First and foremost, the expectation is for the school to have top test scores, the best possible facilities and sports teams, strong finances, and the “unspoken tenet is just to have a passionate commitment to being the best academically to give those kids everything that you can possibly give them to succeed.” Adam emphasized that board members work with their relationships outside of the school to assist the school in any area needed.

Delia

Delia is a university administrator who works in outreach and access for special populations and college programs. Delia has been a board member at AC for 2 years. She joined the board because she wanted her daughter to attend the school, and she wanted to help cultivate the students at the school for college readiness. As a new board member, Delia could identify clearly the interrelationships of the board and how members used their relationships outside of the school to make positive contributions. Each person brings a different skill set, and they have varying backgrounds.

According to Delia, the role and responsibility of the board is oversight with the primary responsibility to ensure the principal has the necessary tools and resources needed. She explained that the board provides solid financial structures to allow the school to obtain technology and to have the funds needed to fulfill the mission of the school, which is to provide a back-to-basics educational program. She believed her specific role on the board is to be a proponent of diversity and to work on grants or other revenue sources for the school. Delia

attributed her educational experience, including a master's in business administration and having worked at the college level, as giving her the acumen needed to work with the board, the administration, and the school community. Board governance training is helpful, but the real training comes through experience with the board. According to Delia, training is theoretical and interactions as a board member is practical application that prepares one to govern. Delia expressed that having a good administrator who communicates well with the board is key.

Delia described the board as, "passionate about the mission of [AC], excited about the opportunity for growth and dedicated to the school, the students, the community, the administration, and growth-focused." Delia believed the board has made a positive impact on the school as a top-down approach because the board provides leadership and has been progressive and knowledgeable with the ability to procure the necessary resources in order for the school to excel and accomplish the goals they have set.

Jean

Jean has served on the AC board for 12 years and as a former teacher and high school administrator, she serves as the chair of the academic committee. She joined the board because they recruited her to serve as the education expert after she retired.

Jean believed the role and responsibility of the board is oversight with an emphasis on the fine line between oversight and interference. The board approves general policy and if the faculty and administration is doing well, then the board has an easier job. She described her role as unique because as a former high school administrator and now chair of the academic committee, she was more involved with the academic processes at the school than were the other members. She meets regularly with the principal and sometimes with the teachers to sit in on meetings or to speak at faculty meetings. Jean felt strongly that her experience as a teacher first

and foremost gives her an understanding of student achievement, classroom management, and effective teaching. Secondly, as a former high school administrator, she has a good understanding of interactions between students and teachers and between teachers and parents. She did not believe that board training beyond what is required is necessary because the board is operating well. Her primary goal is to be a positive influence and to be helpful: “The more you can gently guide, the less confrontation there is. Confrontation tends to not yield the best results even if it gives the results that you need to happen, it’s never done willingly.”

Jean described the board as “eclectic” and “functioning really well” with “an amazing synergy.” She explained, “I’m fascinated by them because my joining the board was a natural fit but you realize as time goes on that every other person on the board has a different take be that professional or personal.” Jean has positive perceptions of the way board members work with each other and attributed this to the board members each having something to offer to the board and because there are founding members, namely Ken, Marta, and Steven, who have continued. Jean cautioned that the growth of the board can be stunted if the same members rotate in officer positions and also if there are members that only stay on the board for a couple of years. She felt that it is important to plan for the future of the board by having some newer members take on officer positions.

The impact on the school is positive, according to Jean. The biggest positive impact of the board is the board’s support of the school, ensuring the financial stability and plant operation through various efforts, including fundraising. Jean explained that an important norm of the governing board is to provide strong leadership for solving problems when they arise and to do so as a “cooperative, supportive body where your activities are kind of reactionary to whatever the schools needs as opposed to having your own agenda.” Each board member has a niche, and

the board is able to problem-solve due to the expertise of each board member and those skills being used as a resource. Jean gave the example of finding a location for the school at the city science museum as a result of a board member's help. The board member used his network to find the location and to work with other community and business leaders to make their new school home a reality.

Ken

Ken has lived in Florida for over 40 years and was the cofounder of the AC middle school with his ex-wife over 20 years ago. They started the school because they “felt children, not just our own children, but they were included, were not being challenged by the curriculum” in traditional public school. He has remained a board member and is proud of the success of the school. He attributed some of the innovation and improvements among the area traditional public schools to the competition fostered by the success of AC.

Ken's experience as a former Parent Teacher Association (PTA) president and working with other principals at the schools his children attended helped him to build knowledge for how schools should operate and how school principals conducted themselves. He believed board training is important and that it is crucial that board members follow the Florida Sunshine Law as well as understand their role on their board through deliberate and clear new member on-boarding orientation training conducted by members of AC's governance committee.

Ken believed the roles and responsibilities of the board are to set general policies and to supervise and hold the school leader accountable for the goals of the school. He emphasized that it is not the role of board members to be involved with the day-to-day operations of the school. As chair of the governance committee, Ken's role is to make the right selection of board members based on the skill set that is needed for the board. He described that it is critical to on-

board correctly, to set aside personality traits, and to look for members to include that will help the school based on their area of expertise. The board as a whole decides who needs to be included based on the set of skills needed and then they look for someone with that set of skills.

When describing the current board in general, Ken stated that they all are professional in conduct acting with adherence to the Sunshine Law and focused on their committee and board work. The collective goal of the board is to make the school better through continuous improvement. Each member is to use their specific skill set to help the school. An example he gave was to help provide better funding for the school. Ken reiterated the expectation to stay out of the day-to-day operations of the school, especially for members who are parents.

Marta

Similar to Ken and Steven, at the time of the study, Marta had served on the board for 20 years. She was friends with the female cofounder of the school, and during the time when their children were in elementary school together, Marta's daughter spent her entire fourth grade year with a teacher who tried to teach her daughter how to write to pass the fourth grade state writing benchmark assessment to the exclusion of other skills. That was when the female cofounder gathered a group of community members together to write a charter for the school, the year after charter schools became authorized in the state of Florida. All of these years later, Marta attributed her sense of commitment and responsibility to the school as the reason she has remained. As she saw members come and go as their children came and went, she saw the need to remain on with the other two long-time board members.

When asked about what the roles and responsibilities of the governing board are, Marta joked that when they first started the school, they had no clue. They experienced parents joining the board who would try to persuade the principal to make certain decisions and she stated from

those experiences, the board learned to set “the policy and we let the teachers to run the school and also the principal. And if we think the principal is doing something wrong then we’ll do something about the principal. But the teachers are her responsibility.” She explained that as board chair, it is very different than other officer positions she has held while on the board:

“When I have not been the president I’m more outspoken. But I had to have more sense of decorum and make sure the board has that sense of decorum when I’m running the board.”

Marta believed the most important experience that has helped her in her role as a board member has been her participation in the state-run water management district meetings which also follow Sunshine Laws and have a high sense of proper proceedings. She stated that she learned “what’s okay and not okay to do.”

Marta described that although the board has changed over time, the current board is diverse. She provided a few examples of the diversity: Steven, who has valuable experience with accounting; Jean, who is a former International Baccalaureate principal who has sensible educational and leadership experience; and others who have varied experience such as marketing. She believed that the board has a positive impact on the school as long as board members know their roles and do not interfere with what the principal or teachers are trying to accomplish. Although Marta did not think the board has had a lot of training beyond what is required, she believed that those who have served on the board for a while set the tone for the board. Each member is part of a subcommittee and that is one way they each do the work that needs to be accomplished. All members are amicable and understand their role. The board sets goals as to what role they are lacking, and at the time of each board member’s interview, the board communicates the board expectations.

Marta provided institutional knowledge of the history of the school in relationship to how board members used their personal and professional connections to help the school. The school's original location was in a strip mall center where they rented a space. Through a board member connection, the school was able to secure a space to rent in the city's science museum. Steven was integral in facilitating those business and financial processes. Marta was key in assisting with the design and with securing an engineering company that did the design work for free for their current location, a free-standing building owned by their nonprofit foundation.

Michael

Michael works in the field of business with experience in marketing and real estate. His brother and sister are teachers and as a first-generation college student, he values education and the opportunities it affords. Michael, his wife, and his two children moved to Florida in the last few years, and he began researching schools in the area. Michael shared that schools in Florida seemed to be underfunded and faced many issues. When AC posted a vacancy for a board position, he thought it would be a good way for him to make a positive contribution. He recalled that during his interview for the position, Ken explicitly asked him if he planned on his son attending the school and at that time Michael was unsure. He expressed to Ken that was not the reason why he was seeking the position. Michael has served on the board for 2 years and his son started at the school after he had served for 1 year. He is very pleased with the quality education the school offers.

Michael believed the board has multiple roles and responsibilities. He explained the board must ensure “the safety, the security, the longevity, to deliver a high quality product, to have fiscal responsibility, to support the administrator and the teachers in any way we can, to mitigate risks.” He believed that ultimately, the role of the board is “to be a sounding board to

promote the school and values of the school or the objectives of the school.” He thinks highly of the school leader and the board’s regard for and confidence in the principal. The board impacts the school in a positive way because of mutual respect and collaboration between the board and the school leader. He explained, “It’s never a top-down kind of structure.”

Michael’s perception of his role and responsibility of the board was explained to him clearly. The board determined the need for a marketing expert, and they found Michael to be someone who would deliver on that need. Ken explained to Michael that the school had never marketed before because most parents knew about the school from word of mouth and although they had a lengthy waiting list, they wanted to expand their presence in the community through strategic marketing approaches. Michael contacted the local university’s marketing class and made the school a marketing project. The project was mutually beneficial to the school and to the marketing students. As a result of Michael’s work in fostering the collaboration with marketing professionals, the board will hire freelance marketers to continue the marketing work and to promote the school as a brand. Additionally, the school is now taking part in a free pay-per-click Internet advertising program for nonprofit organizations and the school receives \$100 for their participation.

As a new board member, Michael received the required governance training and believed that any additional training to help board members govern better is favorable. Michael has a positive perception of the board, describing the board as “very collegial, very open, very wanting of people’s opinions. I never feel like there’s one person who closes off any communication. On the contrary, they encourage it.” He described the norms of the board as authentic: It is expected that members must attend meetings, participate, and follow through on fulfilling their commitments to assist the school. Michael’s commitment has been assisting the school with

marketing, and he believed that it takes a village or community to support the school. The external help is important for helping the school.

Steven

Steven, the board treasurer of AC, is retired and worked as an account manager for 25 years and was a business owner for 45 years. He is a founding board member who believed in giving back to his community:

My father always instilled in me that if you are satisfied in your lot in life you give back to your community . . . I know my fortes and it happens to be in organization and the back end of running of business.

As an experienced charter school governing board member, Steven believed the role of board members is to set the standards through policy and to provide the resources for the teachers. He believed his specific role as treasurer is to ensure the financial stability of the school so that the administrators can do their jobs and teachers can focus on teaching. Steven explained that his experience as an accountant helped him in his role as a charter school board member. His children, now grown adults, never attended AC, and his daughter is a teacher. He expressed a high regard for teachers and the work they do.

When describing the AC governing board, he stated they are diverse and effective. There are three long-time members that provide the institutional history and have allowed the board to avoid pitfalls of the past. He recognized that some board members do a lot of work and some board members do not do as much. He believed it is important to have a mix of members and not too many parents who may only be on the board for the purpose of getting their kids into the school. He believed that board members should be committed to serving on the board even when their children are no longer attending the school. Steven emphasized the importance of

various types of experts who can help govern the school, naming board members whose expertise is in education, management, marketing, and himself as the finance expert. He also described the norms of the board meeting as being structured and consistent. Listening to the experts and respecting their opinions and knowledge as well as that of the principal is the way they conduct board business. They are very rigid in observance of Sunshine Laws, which can be challenging to get work accomplished. When working outside of the board meetings to help the school, board members work on fundraisers, work with teachers, work with the parent organization, and one board member is working on a marketing project for the school.

The most important training to Steven is the Sunshine Law portion of the required governance training so that board member communication mistakes are not made. Steven does not believe additional training is necessary. He explained that understanding the needs of the students and the operation of the school is most important: “You’ve got to do what works for your clientele. You can take it back to like running a business. ‘Cause it is a business . . . our customers are the kids and the demands are the kids and their families.”

Angela

Angela was LA’s newest board member with 2 months of membership. She is an attorney who has a passion for children and education. She has served on other boards and joined LA’s board so that she could help improve the experience of students and make a positive contribution to the community. Angela is a founding member of a large charity event and has a good understanding of nonprofit organizations as well as the Sunshine Law. Her career experience has helped her understand all areas of company operations including human resources, public relations, claims, facilities, business plans, building expansions, and fundraising. All of these areas of expertise transfer well into discussions at the school for these

areas. She has recognized that she still has a lot to learn, and it will take time to understand the roles and responsibilities of the board members and how she will best fit to meet the needs of the school.

Angela explained that the role and responsibility of the board is to balance the budget, ensure appropriate facilities, make governance decisions, provide oversight of administration, and establish and add to the culture of the school. In the short time that she has been on the board, she has been able to formulate a description of the board. She described the board as passionate, charismatic, level-headed, smart, serious about their role on the board, and dedicated to putting “their heart and soul into the project.”

According to Angela, the board has made a tremendous impact on the fiscal health and growth of the school. She felt this is due to the board’s forward-thinking and the good relationship the board has with the administration. She also attributed involved parents as a positive impact. The collaboration and open discussion in which each person’s ideas are taken into consideration is another strength of the board. Angela described how board members focus on specific projects that are matched to their strengths, such as Maurice’s work on the budget and David’s work on a promotional video and materials for the school. There is respect for one another and good teamwork. It was apparent to Angela that an expectation is for board members to operate at a high level and represent the school well with all stakeholders.

Although Angela has extensive experience working on other boards and has a good understanding of Sunshine Laws, she felt that additional training is always helpful. She explained that a board retreat with an opportunity for questions and answers would be helpful and identified the biggest handicap of accomplishing work with other board members outside of board meetings is the Sunshine Law. She identified how board members are using their

connections and relationships with others outside of the board to help the school such as David's marketing presentation and another board member's connection with construction companies as they work on building projects. Angela was looking forward to learning how she can bring value to the board and the school.

David

David has served on the LA board for 2 years and was the chair for the advancement and communication committee. He works in marketing and communication for the local university and has been involved in various youth and education programs as a volunteer and through his previous job. When the opportunity to join the board came about, David accepted because he wanted school board experience. He has a daughter who is not yet in school, and he wanted to get involved with public education. Working at the university, he saw board membership as a way to become involved with academics as it relates to the university level. His experience in management and leadership and working with internal governance groups that set priorities and strategies for the organization has helped him in his role as a board member. David also attributed his work with youth as a coach and camp counselor as a vital experience that keeps his focus and lens on good governance that will have a positive impact on kids. He has an understanding of the maturity and development of children because he remains connected to youth and educational programs that have provided him with a good foundation to serve as a charter school board member.

David believed the role and responsibility of the board is to always put students first. The way the board does this is through budgeting, professional development for the staff, long-term strategic development, establishing policy and procedures, by being advocates and vested stakeholders who connect to the community for the purpose of helping the school, and also by

being connected to the school. David emphasized the importance of connecting with stakeholders outside of the school who will build a vested interest in the school and then want to become involved with the school.

As advancement and communication committee chair, he believed his specific role was to develop a brand that can elevate the profile of the school, which will lead to new and innovative partnerships and fundraising resources. He wanted to share the identity of the school and what makes the school special and unique. David believed the most valuable training he has received has been through the experience of learning about the school from long-time board members who have served since the founding of the school. He described the board as effective, efficient, and committed. He explained how each board member leads busy lives and although it is difficult to meet once a month and to get much accomplished, board members make it a priority to attend and to participate. David described the interrelationship of the board members as friendly and business-like. Board members hold themselves accountable, and they hold each other accountable. Members are not afraid to challenge one another's ideas to give varying perspectives.

The impact of the governing board on the school is difficult to quantify according to David. He explained that decisions may not always have visible, tangible, immediate results; and the impact may be seen over time. David provided an example of a leadership curriculum program the board decided to adopt. The implementation of the program has transformed the culture and identity of the school in a very positive way. The positive impact can now be seen after 2 years of implementation. A more immediate board decision that positively impacts the school was the decision to install a new security system for the school. There is more of a tangible impact with this type of board decision.

Harris

Harris is the chair of LA and has served on the board for 6 years. He is a husband and father of three children and worked in partnership with a large family entertainment company. He became involved with the board because he is a proponent of school choice and thought it would be a good way to be involved at his child's school and to have a positive influence on the direction of education. He believed the role of the board is to work toward the school's strategic priorities short- and long-term and to move the school in the right direction, accomplishing goals along the way. He believed establishing long-term sustainability is critical and stated the board should not interfere with the day-to-day operations of the school. He gave an example of how, in previous years, the board got involved with day-to-day operations of the school and it caused much conflict. When the board remains focused on strategic priorities and has a clear focus on its responsibilities, the board can have a positive impact on the school.

As board chair, Harris believed it is his role and responsibility to hold board members accountable and to hold the school leader accountable. He also provides mentorship to the principal by holding weekly "touch-base phone calls" to discuss any challenges and to provide a different perspective when needed. He attributed having a master's degree in education as helpful when having discussions about education-related topics, but does not believe board members are limited if they are not trained or have expertise in the area of education. The board recruits members by looking for a specific skill set and by assessing their talent and potential. Each member should have an understanding of governing within the Sunshine Laws and he thought that experience on other public boards is helpful to understand the laws as well as the roles of board members.

Harris believed there is a need for a board governance curricular roadmap that could help board members with the process of problem-solving. He said problems should be solved as a collective board and not by any one single person: “Not one person speaks for the board, even me, as the chair.” A strength in the way the board solves problems is through committees. The committees provide recommendations to the board with enough time to review the recommendations and to discuss them at the board meetings. When the process is not followed, the board loses its ability to govern effectively. Board members must trust in the expertise of the members or have their own experts join the committees. The committees bring back solutions and, although there may be disagreement, there should be implicit trust in the group that is making a recommendation and proposing a solution.

The LA board has been more strategic in selecting board members. Harris explained that in the past, the board was more concerned about coalescence of board members and their ability to work well together. Now, they select members who have specific areas of expertise and ties to the community. The board wants to build the brand of the school which will help with fundraising efforts. Harris explained that his commitment to the school and doing what is best for it is so strong that he had his child move to another school because he did not want anyone to perceive his votes were based on having a child at the school. Harris believed strongly in accountability. Charter schools should put the best policies in place and should be better than the current market. He believed the board at LA is truly vested in what they do as a governing body.

Maurice

Maurice, the vice chair and treasurer of LA, worked in the pharmaceutical industry for many years, retired, and is now working in the field of bio-technology. At the time of the study, he had served on the board for 4 years and answered the call to be a board member as a good

way to make a positive contribution to his grandchildren's school. He has had unique and varied experiences with education in a foreign country where he grew up, in the United States where he was an exchange student, as a parent with a severely learning disabled child, as a parent whose children attended many schools around the world, and as a director of an early childhood program. Maurice stated that he has always been involved with education in some capacity and has enjoyed his time on the board.

Maurice believed the role and responsibility of the board is to provide oversight, ensure there are policies and guidelines in place, and ensure the right principal is in place and that there is support for him or her. Additionally, he believed the board must ensure the school is achieving its goals and the board supports the school by making sure there are proper facilities, finances, and compliance of all legal requirements. Maurice's specific role and responsibility as chair of the finance committee is to work closely with the business manager to ensure financial policies and procedures are in place. He named three specific areas of oversight: planning and forecasting for viable revenue to meet expense needs in a 5-year plan; not overexpanding with long-term development as they plan to build a new middle school; and establishing internal control processes so that spending is appropriate. Maurice felt the board has a positive impact on the school because the board secures the needed resources, provides administration with a sounding board, is a face to the community, brings in community resources and insight, and supports and champions the staff. Maurice described the board as engaged and explained the board members have various career fields and they interact well with and like one another. He expressed there are differences of opinion on how actively involved the board should be, but that it is healthy to have varying opinions. Maurice also believes that it takes about a year for a board member to make a solid contribution to the board because new board members have so much to

learn about the culture of the school. From the perspective of the importance of building relationships in business, Maurice expressed that board members only spend an hour or two per month together and that he would prefer to be able to have more extensive discussions. In business, he stated that he can pick up the phone and call colleagues to get their thoughts and opinions on matters at hand. It is different with charter school governance because Sunshine Laws prohibit board members discussing matters outside of board meetings and Maurice believes this inhibits creativity and the ability to accomplish tasks.

Despite the challenges in collaboration and building of relationships, Maurice believed the relationships and resources the board members secure for the school are the strongest attributes of the board. Through his relationships and business contacts, Maurice has been able to secure investment bankers, bonding agencies, and insurance agents to help the school. Maurice has helped sustain and foster a strong business model for the school. When asked about his perception of charter school closures, Maurice stated that charter schools must have good fiscal management and a sustainable business model in order to succeed.

Maurice attributed board training to learning about charter school governance, which is different than in the corporate environment. When he has attended training he has been able to speak to board members from other schools and pick up ideas about how they govern. He has also learned much about how to deal with public interactions with various stakeholders such as the school district, the state, and children and their parents.

Nelson

At the time of the study, Nelson had served on the LA board for 7 years after joining the board in its first year of existence. He had two children at the school and worked in business and finance. He was asked to be on the board because the founders needed his help in starting the

school. Nelson believed the role and responsibility of the board is to establish and maintain financial stability, the safety of the school, a long-term vision, and to ensure the school leader is effective and is supported. Nelson's involvement with the board has evolved as the needs of the board and the school have evolved. He described how he did anything the school needed when the school was first being established. He worked on developing policies and procedures, dealt with a myriad of issues (board, school leader, plant, and facility), and helped with fundraising. He explained that he is less involved now that the school is more stable and is in the process of working on plans for the future of the school with the talent of new board members. Nelson went on to explain that he served his purpose on the board and while he wanted to continue to serve, if the board had someone who can serve better, he would not want to hold the school back.

Nelson attributed his ability to govern to a great mentor who taught him how to lead as well as from individuals who were not good leaders from whom he learned what not to do. He learned that showing appreciation and support for teachers is vital. If there is an issue, he believed the problem can be solved working together. According to Nelson, the board not only makes a big impact on the school through financial stability and by ensuring a safe learning environment, but also the school does not exist without the teachers, the board, and a great leader. Nelson reflected on the difficulty the school had faced when the right leader was not in place. He emphasized the importance of growing and developing together with the board being essential in that growth and development.

Nelson described the board as a diverse, caring group with many individual and unique skill sets. They work well together cooperatively to maintain finances, to create a vision and brand for the school, and they network effectively to help the school. Nelson gave an example of one board member who has construction contacts and was able to get proposals from architects

as well as other needed vendors for their building plans. He explained, “We use our professional and personal network to get expertise, a lot of times at a major discount or for free.” Nelson described how he has held fundraisers at his home and has contributed funds to help the school with its various needs.

The board meetings are professional and business-like. Board members are expected to come prepared to meetings and to have a basic knowledge of public education. Nelson believed operating charter schools is like running a business. The customers are the teachers, staff, students, and parents; the product is education. He joked that board members get paid zero and that it takes a village to support the school. When Nelson sees a need, he helps fill the need. For schools that manage the business of the school poorly, it is disheartening, but the school will not work. The customers cannot be properly served and the solid educational outcomes cannot be produced.

Wendy

At the time of the study, Wendy was preparing to serve as the new board chair for LA. She is a retired educator, principal, and district administrator who now consults to assist school leadership teams. She had served on the board for 2 years and became involved after being asked to join. She wanted to stay connected to education and had just retired. Wendy believed the role and responsibility of the board is to ensure policies, procedures, and the bylaws are being followed, regulated, monitored, and implemented. Her role as a member was to work with the principal on the school’s policies and procedures and to report to the board what progress was being made. She felt her experience as a former principal of 14 years had been the most valuable in contributing to the school as a board member. She explained the board has an impact because the board and the administration work together in partnership and the board does not interfere

with the daily operations of the school. Instead, the board monitors financials and state regulations.

The best training for Wendy has been the experience of being on the board. Her career and educational background had helped her, but she felt she could learn much more from the other board members if she were able to communicate with them about their areas of expertise. She felt the Sunshine Law makes it difficult for her to learn from the other board members. Wendy described the board as very strong, very active, very involved, and business-minded with a focus on planning for the future of the school. Their involvement is driven by their areas of expertise. She identified that she is the educational expert and there is a building and construction expert, a human resources expert, a charity foundation expert, and an accounting expert. The board members use their connections in these various areas and it brings strength to the school. The board's relationship with the LA school leader is strong and there is good communication with her.

Wendy believed that in order for charter schools to be successful, the right people must be in place. There must be those to help manage the business of the school and the right leader to "connect the dots." Wendy was unsure of the reasons for charter school closures, but knew from experience that it is a difficult situation when a charter school closes.

Carla

At the time of the study, Carla had served on the board of SP for 3 years and she had recently become the chair of the board. Carla is a business and tax lawyer and her two children have attended the school for several years. She became a board member because she is a strong believer in charter schools and she wanted to make a positive contribution to the school. She believed her skills and background could help the school. Carla believed the role and

responsibility of the board is to conform to the mission of the school by complying with governance principles and the charter. Additionally, the board is intended to support the administration of the school and monitor the financial and educational health of the school. As board chair, she believed her role was to serve as a good example for the other board members by ensuring all members are engaged and feel comfortable to share their opinions in an open and respectful environment where the discussion focuses on supporting the school.

Carla has extensive training and experience that has helped her in her role as a board member and new board chair. Her background as a lawyer and certified public accountant has been invaluable as a member of the finance committee. She also received board training when she served on another nonprofit board and a community foundation that she served with sponsored her to attend Harvard University for a board governance training. She explained the value of that training: “We did case studies and looked at different real-life situations and how as a board member you should react to those. And it was all very collaborative and interactive so it really helped a lot.” She went on to describe how the board training she received helped her understand how a board operates, the duties of board members, how board members should behave, and the importance of keeping the good of the organization at the forefront of all decisions. Carla emphasized that one should not make decisions based on the good of a particular group of people or the based on someone’s personal agenda.

Carla believed the combination of her professional experience and board training, including the required governance training, has helped her in her role as a board member and board president. The required governance training was invaluable to Carla because her service on other boards did not include operating within the Sunshine Law and also did not include areas that apply specifically to charter schools. Additionally, when she joined the board, she and other

new board members attended a special training session informing them of how the school's board operated, the bylaws, the board calendar, and a crash course from the chief financial officer on school financing and the school's finances. She felt that was very helpful and it was eye-opening because although she had been a parent at the school for many years, she had no idea about how the board operated and what the board did.

Carla described their board as a "great group of people" and embraced the diversity and varying backgrounds and skillsets. She believed each member provided resources that helped the school and felt the most positive attribute of their board is the freedom to give differing opinions in a respectful environment; however, Carla realized that not all boards operate this way. She explained, "I think every Board has its cycle, depending on who's on and who's the leader and what's happening at the time where people start to kind of get disengaged or they don't feel as enthusiastic." She went on to explain that the dynamics of their board are very good and all members are engaged. She believed the board sets the tone for the school and the board is accountable to the administration, while the school is accountable to the board. By keeping the mission in focus, all will remain on track. The committees work well and the board works together in a collegial way. Carla stated the board has a great composition and although all are friendly, it is better they are not personal friends because that can be unhealthy for a board. It is better for board members to be professional and when there is disagreement to get consensus or to recognize differences and make decisions based on the majority and then move on.

A norm is for all to understand the bylaws and mission of the school. Each board member signs a pledge about this. Attendance and reporting any conflict of interest is an expectation. Carla recognized the challenge in finding the balance of ensuring every opinion is

heard with strategic, thorough, discussions and the time it takes to accomplish this. Board members are expected to be ambassadors, spreading the word about the good works and accomplishments of the school and bringing in resources for the school. The diversity of the board is a strength and board members have networks at their jobs, churches, or communities that can ultimately help the school.

Jerry

At the time of the study, Jerry was a board member and cochair of the discipline committee for SP, in addition to working as a manager for the city public works department. He is a parent of two children who attend SP and he has served on the board for 3 years. Jerry explained that he was an involved parent and it made sense for him to become involved with the board as the next level of involvement. He believed the role and responsibility of the board is to oversee the administration from “a bird’s eye view” and to oversee budgeting and planning. He emphasized the importance between oversight and becoming involved with the daily operations of the school. He complimented the outstanding operational staff and stated there is good communication with them. As a manager of large groups, his specific role on the board is to provide oversight to determine what is working and what is not working and to provide guidance on ways to improve. As cochair of the discipline committee, which works to solve issues involving parents, his skills in managing groups of people when there is conflict helped him address issues and problems the school may face when dealing with difficult parents.

Jerry valued the importance of education and its long-term impact on students. He did not feel the education system in Washington, D.C., where he attended school, provided him with a strong educational background and the self-awareness of the challenges he faced allowed him to see the value in carefully choosing the best school for his children. He valued the strength of

the school and believed the board understands what the administration does well, the difficulty of what they do, and it is the board's job to empower and support the administration so they feel confident of the board's backing. The board's greatest impact is the support for the "outstanding administration."

Another strength of the board is its diversity in individual backgrounds, gender, and ethnicity. A common factor is that they are all dedicated parents who believe in continuous improvement. Jerry explained, "I think it was a labor of love, from the point of view that we have something special and if we work hard, we can make it even better. I think our board is dedicated, committed, and overwhelmingly positive." Jerry also described how members assist the school in various ways based on their profession; for example, board members who are attorneys, financial managers, or engineers have assisted the school based on needs.

The dedication of the board is enhanced by proper training. According to Jerry, training gives board members a better understanding of various areas in education, of how they can be involved and provide input and oversight to be well-functioning members. As a norm, he believed board members should be prepared for meetings. For example, board members have read, digested, and prepared comments on items of discussion so that members are ready to discuss the items at hand. He believed they have a great board that works well together because they keep each other in check, they each provide diverse perspectives, and they have "vigorous debates." For Jerry, it is crucial that board members be able to give their honest opinions and to never feel that they are pressured to only say what the group is saying. He explained that he works very hard to ensure everyone on the board speaks freely and through honest voices, there is an advantageous, rich diversity of individual expression.

Louis

At the time of the study, Louis had served as a board member at SP for a little over a year and had recently become the vice chair. He is a financial planner and business owner with four children at the school. He joined the board because he felt he could help make a positive impact by providing guidance, governance, and direction as he has on other boards he has served. He believed the role and responsibility of the board is to provide an outside perspective and feedback on the management of the school. For his specific role on the board as vice chair and as part of the finance committee, he provided assistance for the business side of school operations to execute the vision and direction of the school. He shared that it is important to have an understanding of the vision of the chief financial officer and the principal as the chief educational officer.

Louis described the board as being diverse, not only with board member backgrounds, but also in gender and ethnicity. He thought the diversity of the board helps provide a good perspective when decisions need to be made. He has attended board training provided by a grant for charter schools and gained a good perspective on how other charter school boards operate. One area of difference that he identified that is different from how other boards operate is that their board takes a hands-off approach with the school leader. The board provides input and there is good dialogue about topics, but ultimately, they leave the decision to the school leader. With other boards, he noticed that they made decisions and pressed the school leader to execute those decisions.

Louis explained that he felt the board worked together effectively, despite their busy schedules. He attributed the effectiveness of the interrelationship to good communication, the commitment of each board member to accomplish necessary tasks, and a clear understanding of

each member's role and responsibility. He said the board is highly organized, action-oriented, and there is great follow-through. These were the norms he identified for the board. When asked how board members use their relationships outside of the board to help the school, Louis explained that he focuses on being engaged with the school community and when he hears perceptions of the school or if issues arise, he is there to discuss those issues and perceptions to help support the school.

Case Descriptions

Case 1: AC

At the time of the interview, AC had 10 board members with three of those board members having served on the board for over 20 years. The three long-time board members were also involved with the founding of the school. The board has members with diverse career and professional backgrounds, as shown in Table 1. The institutional history has remained with the three long-time board members who were part of the group of local citizens who founded the school. This institutional knowledge has helped the school through financial challenges when educational funding was negatively impacted and with the selection of an effective school leader. Past mistakes helped guide successful decision-making.

The three long-time members emphasized the importance of recruiting board members who would fill a need for the school with the understanding that some of those members may be parents who are joining the board for the purpose of getting their child into the school. The balance of parents and non-parents on the board was important to these long-time board members. These veteran board members also thought it was important to find board members who would continue to serve even after the board member's child left the school. An example of recruitment to fill a need of the school was when the school building began to show signs of

aging, and they recruited a member who was in the construction industry. When the board determined they needed to brand the school better for development and fundraising purposes, they recruited a marketing expert.

All board members mentioned fiscal responsibility and policy oversight in the role of the board. Each board member was able to clearly describe their own individual role on the board as a member, an officer, or a committee chair. The board chair is the ceremonial host who fosters open dialogue and keeps the meetings on track. The treasurer, a CPA, is responsible for financial tracking and reporting. The governance chair recruits and interviews board members who will fill a need for the school and not use their position as a board member to influence matters regarding their child if they are a parent. The academic committee chair is a former educator and principal who works closely with the school leader and reports academic progress or concerns to the board. There are also experts in marketing, construction, and grant writing, and they use their skills to assist the board in these areas. Board members joined the board to give back to the community, and those parents currently serving whose initial reason for joining the board was to get their child in the school maintain their commitment to help the school.

The board members hold the school leader in high regard as an excellent principal whom they respect and support. They rely on the school leader to accomplish the goals of the school and to monitor the progress of the school for student achievement. Open communication among board members during board meetings was also important to them. During the AC board meeting, the board members communicated openly with one another in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The Board members described their board in positive terms, such as passionate, fun, collaborative, committed, dedicated, devoted, good, collegial, open, humorous, diverse, eclectic,

growth-focused, and skillful. When describing their board, they oftentimes described the skill and expertise of their fellow board members with high regard and admiration.

Board members had mixed opinions about board training. Although board members could describe how their educational or career experiences helped them in their role as a board member and all believed that an understanding of governance within the Sunshine Laws was imperative, in terms of formal board training, some thought it is beneficial and some thought the best training is by on-boarding and learning through experience on the board. When asked about their perception of charter school closures, the majority of board members believed that similar to a business that is not able to operate, if a charter school is not fulfilling the needs of the students or is not able to financially sustain itself, then it should close.

I observed the AC board meeting at the school site to collect more data on board member perceptions and interactions. All interview participants from AC were in attendance at the board meeting, which allowed me to hear and see how their board meetings operated, what board members said and did, and how they interacted with one another and other school stakeholders. The observation of the board meeting was consistent with the responses provided in the board member interviews.

The board meeting was held in the evening at the school site in a classroom and the meeting began on time with the chair bringing the meeting to order. The chair introduced me as an observer and interviewer conducting research on effective charter board governance. The board chair allowed me to introduce myself and I thanked them for their consideration to provide consent to be interviewed. Board members were cordial with one another and kept discussions focused on the agenda items. Each board member committee chair provided a committee report and other members listened attentively and asked related questions. After committee reports,

board members thanked the committee chair and others who assisted with accomplishing committee projects and tasks. The principal, teacher representative, and parent representative also provided school-related updates.

The board was seated in a horseshoe table configuration with the audience seated in rows facing the board. The board meeting lasted 45 minutes and all agenda items were presented efficiently and voted upon after presenting the necessary information and discussion. Committee chairs, the school leader, and the representatives were prepared to present. The environment was one of mutual respect with a sense of camaraderie. Board members interjected humor and seemed to enjoy their time at the board meeting. The observation of the board meeting and the behaviors and interactions of board members corroborated the perceptions among board members from interviews and provided data for the themes that emerged.

Case 2: LA

At the time of the study, LA had nine members with one member who had served for 7 years. When interviewed, all board members described the board's role to ensure fiscal responsibility and to oversee the policies of the school. The board was working on a building expansion project and many members mentioned long-term strategic planning as part of the board's role. Many board members emphasized the importance of staying out of the day-to-day operations of the school because it can cause conflict. A few board members who had served for more than 4 years recalled a time when the board had issues when the board became too involved in the operation of the school and with overstepping areas of principal oversight.

The Board members of LA stated the importance of supporting the principal and of having open communication at board meetings. The board members could easily and clearly describe their specific role on the board according to their skills and expertise. The board chair's

area of expertise is in business; he led the board in its strategic priorities and held the principal and other board members accountable. The treasurer and vice chair, a business owner, provided oversight and reporting of the school's finances and was heavily involved with the building expansion along with a board member who is in the construction industry. Additionally, there was an attorney, a marketer, and an educator who contributed to the board and school within their areas of expertise.

The board members described the other members of the board with admiration and respect for their expertise and what the individual board members have done for the school. The board members described the LA board as diverse, skillful, engaged, interactive, policy-focused, effective, contributive, passionate, smart, level-headed, charismatic, caring, productive, stable, and balanced. Members joined the board because they were parents or grandparents that wanted to help the school, or they were community members that wanted to make a positive contribution to education and the community.

Board members shared that it was sometimes difficult to accomplish tasks under the Sunshine Law because they cannot contact each other to discuss tasks or projects. Board members thought board training was good to foster continuous improvement, and the on-boarding training provided by the board and the experience of learning by being on the board was also valuable. When asked about charter school closures, the board members expressed that like a business, charter schools are accountable for meeting requirements and if those requirements are not met, the charter school must close in a manner similar to what happens with a failing business.

The LA board meeting took place in the evening at the school's library. The board members were seated at a table in a horseshoe configuration facing the audience who were

seated in rows. All but one board member arrived on time. Board members were cordial with one another and the environment was pleasant and comfortable. The board chair allowed me to introduce myself, to briefly describe my study as a follow up to the information they had already received, and to collect the remaining completed consent forms before the meeting began. The board chair began on time and followed the agenda. Committee chairs presented committee updates and made recommendations on various ongoing projects, including marketing and building projects. The school leader, teacher representative, and parent representative also provided school-related updates. Board members listened to each speaker attentively, asked questions, provided feedback, made recommendations, requested additional data, and expressed appreciation and compliments on progress made by individuals and groups who presented.

The board meeting lasted 43 minutes, and it was the last board meeting for the board chair who had served for 6 years. In closing the meeting, he stated how grateful he was for the other board members and for the opportunity to lead. He presented each board member and the school leader with a small gift. The school leader then surprised him with a piece of art created by the students at the school. It was a poignant moment in the board meeting, showing the admiration and respect among members and school leader for the board chair. The observation of the LA board meeting was consistent with the participants' interview descriptions of board meetings and the perceptions of the board characteristics as well as board and member roles and responsibilities.

Case 3: SP

SP has nine governing board members and although many of the board members have been involved with the school for several years as parents, all of the members interviewed had less than 4 years of experience on the board. The leader of the school is the founder of the

school and works very closely with the board on all governance matters. The board members believed their role was to oversee and support the administration of the school, to provide oversight of finances, and to execute the mission and vision of the school.

Board members were all involved with helping the school fundraise. The board was working on building expansion projects and there was an expectation for board members to participate in events and to engage in the community on behalf of the school. Each board member could easily identify their specific role on the board. The board chair served as a role model to other board members; set the tone for a comfortable, open, and respectful environment; and ensured there was ongoing support for the school. The vice chair oversaw the business aspects of governing a charter school. Other members provided expertise for the board in areas such as finance, accounting, business, and construction. Board members explained how board members helped the school by completing assigned tasks and by tapping into resources they have in the community or through professional connections.

An area of importance for this board was open communication among board members at meetings. All board members emphasized that in order to get to the best solution, there must be respectful, honest, and diverse dialogue. It was also an expectation that board members be in attendance and prepared to discuss agenda items. The board members described their board as diverse, dedicated, devoted, committed, overwhelmingly positive, skillful, effective, collegial, professional, friendly, respectful, active, supportive, and productive. One board member described their work as a labor of love. All of the board members interviewed from SP were parents at the school and they became board members to help the school.

All of the board members thought board training or experience serving on other boards was important and cited their personal or career experiences as helping them in their role as a

board member. The board chair has the unique experience of going through extensive board training as part of her service on another nonprofit board and described how invaluable it was in helping her in her role as chair of the SP board. All board members interviewed believed that if a charter school is mismanaged or is not meeting requirements to which it is accountable, then similar to what occurs in the business world, the school should close.

All interview participants were in attendance at their board meeting, which allowed me to hear and view how their board meetings operated, what board members said and did, and how they interacted with one another and other school stakeholders. The SP board meeting took place in the conference room of the school and all members, representatives, and guests and stakeholders were seated around a large conference table. Members and guests were jovial and displayed positive rapport. The board chair introduced me and referenced the description of my study from the information each board member received through email, began the meeting on time, and members followed the agenda. During committee meeting updates, discussion took place about the school's upcoming fundraiser and members talked about some of the details of the event and some of the final tasks that needed to be accomplished. The environment of the meeting was very comfortable and pleasant. Board members joked with one another and all members and stakeholders were engaged in the topic at hand. The meeting lasted 1 hour and 42 minutes. The board member actions and interactions as observed in the board meeting were consistent with the board member perceptions of their characteristics and board and member roles and responsibilities from participant interviews.

Results

The results of this qualitative multicase study are from data collected from each case and through themes identified through cross-case analysis. Data included individual interviews,

observation of meetings, and documents. The following sections describe the themes from a systematic analysis of each case individually and then across cases. Research question results and the cross-case synthesis are also provided under each heading.

Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case analysis was conducted to compare the governing boards of three high-performing charter schools in the state of Florida. Individual interviews provided the majority of the data on effective charter school governance. Each individual interview was transcribed, coded for analysis, and subthemes and themes were established using Stake's (2006) data analysis tools. Observation of each board's meeting and examination of documents added further data for identification of themes and subthemes. Documents included each school's website, governance documents, board agendas and meeting minutes, and school improvement plans or strategic plans. The transcribed words and observed behaviors in the board meetings corroborated participant statements and descriptions from the individual interviews and confirmed the themes that emerged. According to Stake (2006), "data from a multicase study usually will come mostly from the cases studied" (p. 8).

The present study was theoretically grounded in Coleman's (1988) social capital theory with a focus on bridging and bonding behaviors. The social capital is "captured from embedded resources in social networks" (Lin, 1999, p. 28). The resources embedded within the board members' social networks within the board and their ability to work together as well as the resources embedded in their ability to work with outside relationships to help the school were analyzed. The data were compared to Coleman's (1988) theory to determine if bridging and bonding was present across the cases. Three major themes emerged from 9 subthemes using 125 codes. Table 2 lists the themes, subthemes, and codes. An analysis of the themes and subthemes

revealed similarities and differences in board governance among the three cases. A summary of responses from participant interviews, a summary of board meeting observations, and a summary of documents based on each of the three themes is provided. The similarities and differences of each board are provided under each section.

Table 2

Themes

Subthemes	Codes
Theme 1: Board characteristics	
Positive perspective	Good (81), Great (27), Open (16), Positive (15), Strong (9), Passionate (7), Passion (5), Respectful (5), Love (5), Care (4), Nice (4), Open-minded (3), Friendly (2), Welcoming (2), Effectively (2), Respect (2), Caring (1), Excellent (1)
Action-oriented	Work (89), Involved (49), Impact (15), Commitment (9), Focus (9), Accomplish (8), Active (8), Purpose (8), Growth (7), Contribute (5), Dedicated (4), Engaged (4), Prepared (4), Committed (3), Make a difference (3), Productive (3), Engage (2), Focused (2), Contributing (1), Contribution (1), Involvement (1), Proactive (1)
Diversity	Different (53), Diverse (12), Vary (4), Variety (3), Diversity (2), Eclectic (1), Various (1)
Theme 2: Board Role and Responsibility	
Business-minded	Business (67), Training (34), Professional (22), Efficient (20), Accountable (12), Policy (11), Sunshine (11), Goals (10), Governance (8), Governing (7), Govern (4), Strategic priorities (3), Diplomacy (1), Ceremonial (1)
Finances	Financial (29), Resources (24), Finance (22), Building (21), Responsibility (17), Construction (12), Fundraising (12), Oversight (12), Accounting (8), Facilities (8), Facility (6), Financing (5), Technology (5), Financially (4), Funding (4), Fundraiser (4), Funds (3), Payroll (2), Procurement (2), Property (2), Plant (1), Fiscal (1)
Support for school and school leadership	Administration (33), Provide (30), Leadership (20), Support (26), Help (26), Principal (18), Leader (15), Administrator (14), Give (14), Administrative team (2)

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Theme 3: Member Role and Responsibility	
Committee expertise	Committee (30), Expertise (12), Committees (8), Skill set (8), Knowledge (8), Skills (6), Experts (6), Rely (3), Subcommittees (2), Knowledgeable (1), Recruit (1), Recruitment (1)
Relationships	Relationship (8), Communicate (8), Interact (8), Team (6), Communication (5), Friend (5), Set personalities aside (3), Collegial (2), Cooperative (2), Collaborative (2), On-boarding (2), Collaboration (1), Cooperating (1), Interaction (1), Interactive (1), Symbiosis (1)
Building the brand	Marketing (30), Market (2), Marketed (2)

Major Theme 1: Board Characteristics

The first major theme emerged from board member interviews and board meeting observations. Social capital is built upon resources embedded in the social networks of the organization and based on the premise because it is an “investment in social relations with expected returns” (Lin, 1999, p. 30). The environment, quality of social networks, and quality of social interactions of the members within the organization had distinct characteristics. The first major theme of board characteristics explains the attributes of each board which leads to shaping the environment, the perceptions, and the interactions of the board members.

Positive perspective. The subtheme of having a positive perspective was evident under the major theme of board characteristics. The bonding practices of social capital further the efficacy of the individual members. Board members described their perceptions of their boards as nice, welcoming, comfortable, friendly, good, and great. Many board members stated that being positive was a norm for their board. Jerry from SP described the board as, “overwhelmingly positive,” and Angela from LA explained the board has a positive impact on the school and board members should represent the school in a positive light. All board members believed the board had a positive impact on the school and were able to give specific

examples. Board members spoke very highly of their fellow members and board members were validated during board meetings for their work.

Carla, the board chair at SP, explained how the board can model and set a positive climate:

I do think it's important that the leaders of the board show a sort of a way of acting that is aspirational for the whole board to act and I think it kind of sets the tone for the rest of the board members in participating on the board.

Board members also stated the board is supposed to ensure the school is following its mission statement. The mission statement was a guide by which they would ensure their decisions followed. The mission statement and support for the school also translates into board members' perceptions of how they should represent the school in their communities. AC board member, Michael, expressed one of the board's roles is "to promote the school and the values of the school or the objectives of the school."

When the interests of the collective organization are placed above the interest of the individual members, social capital is strengthened (Coleman, 1988). Board members from all three cases described the passion they have for their work to benefit the school. Angela, the newest member of the LA board, explained,

I'm relatively new, but what I've picked up on very quickly is that they are very passionate about what they do and they take their position on the board very seriously. I do not feel like anybody is there just for a resume builder or just for any other reason but to truly have their heart and soul in to the project and to give back.

Similar perspectives were shared by Jerry, disciplinary chair at SP, when he described the board: "I think it was a labor of love from the point of view that we have something special and if we

work hard, we can make it even better.” Additionally, various members from AC commented on the passion of their board. Jean and Steven described it as a synergy, while Delia and Adam described a passionate commitment to the school and to its mission, and Marta described the board’s working relationships as energetic.

The words and actions of the board members corroborated the statements in their interviews. Board members were working on individual and collective projects to help the school. As volunteers, there was no indication of any of the board members’ participation being out of obligation or for self-gain.

During both the AC and the SP board meetings, members thanked fellow members and parents who were working on a fundraising event. If suggestions were given, they were given in a noncritical manner. During the LA and AC board meetings, members praised the efforts of those who were working on the marketing projects. Social capital was observed as positive working relationships among board members.

Action-oriented. Within the major theme of board characteristics, being action-oriented was the second subtheme revealed through participant interviews and observations of board meetings. When board members described their boards, they expressed the work they did because of a high level of commitment and dedication to the school. Board members explained how their work made a positive impact on the school and gave several specific examples. They described various ways in which they were involved with the school through serving at board meetings, through committee work, through attendance at events, and by using their expertise and professional networks to help the school. Most board members joined the board because they wanted to make a positive difference.

According to Burt (1988), when members of the organization legitimize that good work has been performed, value is placed on the productivity of the group. Board members across all three cases were efficient, productive, and able to accomplish various tasks. The veteran board members described the institutional history of their schools in terms of securing financing for their building projects and all boards are working on fundraising and marketing projects for their schools. Delia, an AC board member, posited, “Our normal way of conducting our business meetings are very effective, efficient, timely and the norm of making sure that we have representation from the parent committees as well as the faculty committees.”

The board chair was key in running efficient board meetings. Each chair began the meeting on time, followed the prescribed agenda, and deferred to each committee chair or school representative for their portion of reporting. Harris, LA board chair, emphasized the importance of following procedures to govern effectively:

When we get away from our process of working through committees to solve problems, and bringing those recommendations to the board, giving them ahead of time for their review, minimal full discussion at the board meeting and then a vote. . . . When we get away from that and we present an issue at the meeting, you have personality conflicts, although everybody may be trying to accomplish the same thing, you lose the ability to effectively govern and get to a solution because you did not follow the prescribed process.

One of the published norms at LA was, “Meetings will begin on time, and presenters will adhere to the window of time allocated (as requested in advance by Director) for discussion for which they are responsible.” The expectations from board chairs and by established procedures fostered the boards’ effectiveness.

Board members were dedicated to their schools and wanted to help the school sustain and improve. When board members were asked to describe their board, many stated their board was committed, dedicated, involved, focused, and active. Adam, a member from AC, described the members on the board who have expertise in education as “passionately committed to academics” and went on to explain how other members, based on their area of expertise are dedicated to helping the school in those areas. AC has three board members who have served for more than 20 years and one member who has served for 12 years. Their commitment to the board and the school is evident through their length of service and through the descriptions in interviews of how they have helped the school. Founding AC member and treasurer, Steven, a management accountant, was instrumental in securing bonds, property, and financing for the school. Founding member, Marta, AC board chair and civil engineer, used her contacts and connections to find architects and engineers for the school when they constructed their building. Ken, governance chair at AC, has been committed to recruiting board members who will best serve the school, and Jean, a former principal who has served on the academic committee for 12 years, supports the school leader and monitors student academic achievement.

The strength of the board members’ commitment to serving the school was also evident at LA and SP. LA is working on a building expansion project and the time and dedication of board members was validated in interviews with board members who described the work being done by other members and during the board meeting, the committee report of all the work being done was presented. Nelson, the secretary at LA, described the work he had done over the course of the 7 years he served, as well as the work of others. Nelson described how he has hosted fundraising events at his home, has contributed when there was a need, and helped the board when there was turmoil with one of its members. He spoke highly of Maurice, the vice

chair and treasurer, for the all of the work he has done with finances and the building project. Nelson also described the work of David on the marketing project for the school.

The commitment of members at SP was observed during their board meeting. Each member contributed in some way to the discussion and either volunteered to assist in some way with the donor event being planned or confirmed their attendance at the event.

An understanding of the collective purpose of the organization is essential for social capital. If individual members of the organization are working toward different goals, the strength of the group is diminished. All board members described their reason for joining the board and although the reasons varied, their purpose for serving was to help the school. The members of the SP board were all parents who had been actively involved at the school as parents and when a need arose with an open position for the board, they wanted to further their involvement through governance and believed their skills could help the school. The membership of the LA board was a mixture of parents, grandparents, and community members who believed strongly in school choice and in the power of education. Harris, board chair at LA, reflected on his reason for becoming a member:

I was looking for an opportunity to get involved in my kid's school, and I was a big proponent of school choice. I figured the best way to have influence over the direction of their education was to get involved.

When Harris became board chair, he wanted there to be no question whether his decisions were based on what may benefit his son, so he had his son attend a different charter school and remained in his position as chair. Maurice, vice chair and treasurer of LA, is a grandparent and after retiring, he wanted to contribute to the wellness of the school in a positive way and his

work on finances and expertise in that area has been invaluable. Nelson, the LA secretary, has continued to serve after his children have graduated from the school.

The membership of AC is a mixture of parents, former parents, and nonparents. Steven, board treasurer, never had children at the school and neither did Jean, academic committee chair. Ken and Marta continued to serve as members long after their children grew into adulthood. These long-standing board members have a strong commitment to education and to serving the community. Steven attributed his desire to serve from his father who instilled in him at an early age the importance of serving with one's gifts and talents if one is able to do so. Steven's financial expertise and work has been a cornerstone to the board's success and the school's sustainability. Marta explained that she has remained on the board for over 20 years because for her, it was a sense of responsibility that motivated her to help start a school that would serve the needs of children and offer a choice, and it was her sense of commitment that has kept her on the board for so long.

Various members described that they have a collective purpose, and they worked together for that purpose. Board members value education and believe in the good the school is doing for their children and the children in the community.

Diversity. The third subtheme that came from participant interviews within the major theme of board characteristics was diversity. Board members identified and explained that diversity is prevalent among their boards and it is valued. Members described the diversity of board member composition in terms of gender, ethnicity, backgrounds, experiences, career-fields, and perspectives. Diversity among members allows them to provide various opinions and promotes dynamic discussions. Jerry from SP explained, "We have vigorous debates among each other, and on occasion, whether we agree or disagree on how to proceed or whether we

agree or disagree to approve or disapprove whatever is being discussed, I think it makes us stronger.” Jerry believed that without diversity of thought, the solution may be quick or easy to get to, but may not be the best. Carla, board chair at SP stated, “We have people who come from different backgrounds who can add different skillsets, which I think is very important because if you have people who are all the same, you don’t get the different perspectives on different issues.”

Board members expressed the importance of diversity of career fields and areas of expertise to help solve problems, to help with planning, and to provide resources for the school. The boards comprised members from various fields, most of whom were strategically recruited. AC was focused on the diversity of parents and nonparents as members of the board because the long-time members were cautious of having too many parents on the board who would not stay long-term or may only be joining the board to get their child into the school without full commitment to serving as a board member. All board members interviewed from SP were parents; however, they embraced diversity among members to foster various perspectives to arrive to the best decisions.

Major Theme 2: Board Role and Responsibility

The second major theme is the board role and responsibility. The perception of boards and their work, and their perception of their collective beliefs has impactful implications (Hooge & Honingh, 2014). Charter school board members are recruited and volunteer to serve. Their belief about the role and responsibility of the board drives their purpose and forms a collective belief at the foundation of how they must operate. The board members explained similar perceptions of the board’s role and responsibility. They believed to run an effective board, it must be run similar to a business. In business, similar to governing a charter school, the board is

responsible for ensuring the school has stability with its building and finances. The board members also perceived that one of their main roles and responsibilities was to support the school and the leadership of the school.

Business-minded. The first subtheme within the second major theme of the board's role and responsibility is being business-minded. The board members described governing a charter school as similar to running a business. There must be training, professionalism among members, setting of policies, efficiency, accountability, and compliance to laws, specifically the governance within the Sunshine Law.

All board members complete the state required governance training which includes government in the Sunshine Laws. A few board members had experience serving on other government or nonprofit boards, and they explained their governance experience on previous boards helped them in their current position as board members or as officers. Carla, Jerry, and Louis from SP all had experience serving on other boards and they expressed how their previous board experience helped them as a charter board member. Carla had formal board training at Harvard University as part of her service on another board, and she stated she learned a lot through case studies. She explained how the training and experience helped her in her current board role as chair.

Marta, chair at AC, described how her experience attending board meetings of a governmental agency taught her a lot about governance within the Sunshine Laws and about proper board procedures:

For years I have attended those meetings which are appointed by the governor. They are very structured with a high sense of decorum and so that's where I have really learned

about boards and because of that I also know a lot about the process and I know what's okay and not okay to do.

The newest board members shared that the board's onboarding training has been helpful. SP conducted in-house training for new board members about the school's finances and how the Florida Educational Finance Program works. The training was conducted by the school's chief financial officer. At AC, the governance chair, Ken, described the importance of onboarding for new board members. Marta stated how board training helps set the tone and Jean thought board training was important so that members understand their role. David, a relatively new board member at LA, corroborated the structured onboarding training and learning from long-time board members helped him govern. Wendy, the newly elected board chair at LA, described onboarding as "on the job training."

A few board members felt that additional governance training is needed and is beneficial for growth and continuous improvement on best practices. On the other hand, a few board members did not feel that additional board training was necessary because the best learning occurs through the experience of serving and from life and career experiences that have helped them work collaboratively in organizations to achieve goals. Most of the new board members expressed they are still learning.

Charter school board members set policy to build organizational effectiveness, to ensure compliance with all federal, state, and local mandates, and to establish the position of the board on various matters. Board members expressed the important role of the board to set policies to help protect the school financially, legally, and educationally. Board chair of LA, Harris stated the board's role is "to ensure the school is not only here today, but it's here for the next five to 10 years and what are the policies and/or direction that we need to provide to accomplish those

goals.” Also from LA, Wendy, newly elected board chair, stated the board’s role is “to make sure the policies and procedures, bylaws, and laws of the state are being followed, regulated, monitored, and implemented.” One of the published norms at LA states the expectation for board members to know and follow the board’s grievance policy and to refrain from interjecting any type of opinion to the individual bringing in the grievance. The board members all have policies on conflict of interest, confidentiality, and adherence to the Sunshine Law.

Board members relayed the importance of not becoming involved in the day-to-day operations of the school. Nelson, a founding board member and current secretary at LA, recalled how he was much more involved in the daily operations of the school early in the school’s establishment and building stages because there were needs that he helped fill and challenges he helped resolve. He explained in one example how he paid the landscaping company he uses for his home to landscape the school before photographs had to be taken of the new building because the riding lawn mower of school’s landscaper was broken. Nelson had many examples of how he and other board members had to be more involved in some of the daily operations of the school in the early days, but now that the school is established, he and other board members can now focus on governance.

The board’s role is to govern and to plan strategically, but not to manage or interfere with the principal’s role. Jerry, discipline chair at SP, stated, “We work pretty hard to keep a distinction between oversight responsibility and operations and we’re blessed to have an outstanding professional operation staff and we have good communication. I think we’ve been very successful at that.” Marta, AC board chair and founding board member, recalled how there would be parents who joined the board to try to get the board or the principal to make decisions and reflected, “We’ve learned that for us to tell about the policies; we do the policy and we let

the teachers and the principal to run the school.” Ken, also a founding board member at AC and current governance chair, shared his perspective: “Our role is not to be involved in the day-to-day administration of the school.” Steven, founding member of AC and current finance chair, reflected, “You have to let the principal run the school. If you don’t, it’s guaranteed to fail in the long run.”

Through interviews, board members expressed the school is accountable to the state and to one another, and the school leader is accountable to the board for meeting the goals of the school and for ensuring students are achieving academically. Harris, the board chair at LA stated it simply, “I hold the board members accountable, and I also hold my director of the school accountable.” Carla, the board chair at SP stated, “It’s always important to be accountable to each other, really. I mean, the board needs to be accountable to the administration of the school and the school with the board.” Wendy, the newly elected board chair of LA, described the importance of being in compliance with all state laws and the bylaws of the board.

In reviewing board documents, board members are required to sign confidentiality agreements and conflict of interest agreements. Board members are also required to follow governance within the Sunshine Laws. Several members at AC mentioned their requirement to follow Sunshine Laws and members from LA did as well, but they expressed the challenges in not being able to meet regularly to get projects accomplished or to be able to contact one another to discuss topics related to board projects.

Social capital relies on the strength of the interrelationships of the members of the organization. Respectful and attentive engagement among members, fosters effective working relationships. The board chairs explained it was important to set an environment of respect and to set aside personalities to accomplish collective goals. Steven, treasurer at AC, described

Marta, the board chair, as a good ceremonial host. Marta explained that her role as board chair was to ensure there was a sense of decorum at board meetings and stated that an expectation among board members is professionalism. Carla, board chair at SP, also emphasized the importance of establishing a respectful, professional atmosphere.

Steven, treasurer at AC; Jean, academic chair at AC; and Ken, governance chair at AC, all discussed the importance of setting aside personalities and setting aside any personal agendas. Harris, board chair at LA, identified that conflict arises when personal differences or agendas are brought into discussions. One of LA's published norms describes how parliamentary procedures will be followed and "Opposing opinions should be regarded with dignity, and active listening behaviors should be practiced. Conversation should be open and focused on the topic at hand." Maurice, vice chair and treasurer at LA, also identified the importance of not taking disagreement as personal.

The board members also described the norms, or unspoken expectations for behavior, of their respective boards. The norms of LA are posted on the center of the board member table and establish a set of expectations which foster a respectful climate. One such board norm is the following:

Board members will be cognizant of the fact that use of cell phones, computers, and personal devices during meetings can be distracting to the group, and rude to the speaker holding the floor. During Board meetings, personal devices will be utilized for non-board activities only as absolutely necessary.

The board meeting observations corroborated the expectations for respectful behavior described by board members and as depicted in documents such as published norms, committee notes,

meeting minutes and agendas. The environment was pleasant and comfortable, yet purposeful and professional.

Members from all three boards emphasized accountability when explaining their perception of charter school closures. Most members stated that if a charter school was unable to be fiscally responsible or to meet the needs of the students academically, then the school would need to close similar to a business that was not able to sustain. Carla, SP chair, emphasized the accountability of charter schools and her perception of charter schools who are not able to meet the requirements:

I think accountability is a big part of that and the authorizing process is a very big part of that too. So unfortunately, you know, those are the ones that give all charter schools a bad name when there's a lot of charter schools that have very good success rates.

Steven, treasurer and finance chair at AC, asserted,

With the latitude that the charter schools have in developing their own academics and how they're doing it, as long as they can, if they can't cut it, they've got to go because they cast a bad shadow on everybody. A failing school that fails for academics, I'm sorry, you tried. Not all businesses make it. A school that fails financially. What happens? It becomes a case study for everybody. They're all case studies for everybody.

During each observed board meeting, the treasurer gave a financial report which further corroborated accountability and a business mindset for the school's finances and accounting.

Many of the members who were interviewed compared the running of a charter school to running a business and the board is accountable to the stakeholders of the school to run it correctly.

Finances. A subtheme emerging from the major theme of board roles and responsibilities is finances. All board members described the board's responsibility to ensure the school is fiscally sound whether it is through providing the necessary resources for the teachers and students, by ensuring the physical plant and technology is ample, by ensuring salaries are paid, and through funding of building expansion projects. Angela, LA member, stated, "We are going to make sure we are balancing the budget, we are making decisions about facilities." AC finance chair, Steven, believed the role of the board is "to provide the assets for the teachers to do their magic." Similarly, Delia of AC, believed in "making sure that they have the financial structures, they have the technology, they have the resources to maybe allow them to obtain those technologies."

Charter board members believe their role as a board is to safeguard the school from financial hardship as well as to ensure the school has the resources it needs to achieve academic success. They believe it is their responsibility to manage the school's budget and to work as a collective group towards financial stability and longevity. Many of the board members in this study had experience working on previous and current building and construction projects for the school. Long-time members from AC had assisted greatly with securing the property where the school is currently located. Some members were recruited because of their building and construction experience. All three boards were working on building projects for the school and with securing the finances needed to expand, maintain, and renovate their buildings. Many board members were cognizant about charter school closures as it related to fiscal responsibility. If a charter school did not manage its finances properly, then a school could close. The board members of these schools prioritize the management of finances as a collective role and responsibility.

Support for school and school leadership. The third subtheme within the major theme of board roles and responsibilities is support for the school and the leadership of the school. Members from each board believed the board's role is to hire a strong school leader, to hold the leader accountable for achieving the goals of the school, and to support the school and the administration. Nelson, a founding member at LA, recalled that the school did not always have a strong school leader like they do now, and those days were difficult because the board's involvement was forced to increase. Steven, finance chair at AC, believed the board sets the expectations for the school leader and this results in a positive trickle-down effect: "Then the administration will hire good grade level administrators or the next level of administrators and that will trickle down to the teachers and to the department heads." Ken, from AC, stated the role of the board as related to school leadership: "to supervise leadership" and "to hold our school leaders accountable for the goals of the school."

When board members talked about the school leader, they did so in a positive regard and they believe support for the school leader is important. Michael, a newer member at AC, highly complimented the principal when he talked about how the board impacts the school:

[The principal] has such a good grasp of what the issues are in this school that I think the vote of confidence she gets from the board about how well she does and her recommendations are always taken very, very seriously, I would say that helps because she's in charge of the teachers, in charge of disseminating of the education to the kids. . . . [The Board] believes highly that she's doing a fantastic job.

Nelson, LA board secretary, described how essential it is to provide support for the school leader and the teachers at the school. The board members believed that their role in appointing an

effective leader has a direct impact on the success of the school academically and operationally.

Maurice, LA vice chair and treasurer, asserted,

I mean, clearly from the education point of view, our responsibility is making sure that we've got the right principal in place. A very key responsibility, I think, for the board is supporting that principal to make sure that she runs the education side of the school to make sure that it's achieving its goals.

The board members believed they set the tone, expectations, and climate for the school through supervision of the school leader, through their decisions and interactions, and in how they represent the school in the community. Steven, board treasurer at AC, stated, "Since we set policy, the biggest impact, I believe, is on the administration. It sets the tone of the administration. It's almost like a moral compass. . . . We've got to set the right tenor for the principal."

Long-time serving board members had the added perspective of knowing it is challenging when the right principal is not in place in achieving the school's goals because they had gone through that experience. The board relies on the principal to provide the best education possible and to supervise and lead the teachers and staff effectively.

Major Theme 3: Member Role and Responsibility

The third major theme was board member role and responsibility. The efficacy of each individual of an organization helps the organization as a whole. The talent and skill of the individual in what they accomplish within the organization and outside of the organization are the bridging and bonding behaviors, perceptions, and actions identified through interviews and observation of board meetings. Most of the members of the board were recruited based on their area of expertise and work in committees to accomplish the work of the board. Within their

committees and within their work on the board and in the community, board members foster working relationships and build the brand of the school.

Committee expertise. Within the major theme of board member roles and responsibilities, the subtheme of committees emerged. The three boards have a committee structure according to the needs of their school. Committees among participant members included finance, governance, marketing, building, and discipline. Committee work involves the experts within the collective areas meeting to make recommendations, monitor and develop the area, or to solve problems. For example, the finance committee of each board actively monitors and develops the school's finances and presents the budget for board approval. SP and AC have a board member who is an expert in the field of marketing working in collaboration with other stakeholders in a marketing committee on projects that will tell the story of the school with the goal of developing partnerships for additional resources and potential funding partners.

There is a perception regarding the value of committee work. Louis, member at SP, believed their board is action-oriented with strong follow-through among board members of their assigned tasks. He expressed that even with full-time jobs and with family obligations, the board members who are volunteers find the time to do what needs to be done for the school in accordance with the board member's specific role and responsibility. According to Louis, at SP, one of their published board norms is "Detailed work will be done in Committee, chaired by a Director, and Board meetings will serve as forum for sharing the results of Committee work."

Each board member explained their specific role on the board in relation to their career field or experience. The most significant area of expertise described by members who were interviewed was that in the area of finance and business. Steven, a founding AC board member and current treasurer, was integral in establishing a solid fiscal foundation for the school through

bonds, budgeting, and ongoing oversight of the finances. Similarly, Maurice, LA vice chair and treasurer, works to ensure that revenue and expenses are monitored through internal control procedures. Maurice is also integral in long-term development planning and viability for the school. SP also has several members in business and accounting who oversee finances.

Another area of expertise within the boards is construction or physical plant. AC has an aging building and as maintenance challenges arise, Adam who has expertise in the construction business, has helped the school. SP also has members in the building and construction field and this has helped for their new building project.

An identified need at both SP and AC was to expand branding and marketing of the school. Both boards recruited and have within their board membership a marketing expert who is helping to market the school within the community with the goal of building relationships for fundraising and partnerships.

Most board members were strategically recruited based on the needs of the school. For example, Adam from AC, was recruited for his knowledge of building and facilities. Jean, academic chair at AC, was specifically recruited for her experience in the field of education as a former school administrator and teacher. AC governance chair, Ken, believed his role is to “make the right selection of new board members, which is a hard task.” At AC, the long-term board members try to recruit members who will commit to serving beyond the time their child may be at the school and for reasons beyond getting their child into the school.

Board members also recognized part of their responsibility and desire was to use their professional and personal networks to help the school. LA’s board is working on a building expansion project and board members who have the ability to use those personal connections and are able to help the school were strategically recruited. Harris, board chair at LA, explained,

If you're going to bring on somebody as a member of the board, the laws that are attached to operating as a public board is an absolute necessity from an educational standpoint. There are things that we need from an experience, a skillset, and a potential that we look at when we bring on board members that we assess their talent. So, it's not necessarily what they're capable of doing now, but what is their potential that is a need for the board.

Board perceptions of the efficacy of their work is a characteristic of high-achieving boards (Land, 2002). The board members expressed motivation in getting their committee work completed and board meeting observations validated the effectiveness of committees. Each member was able to define their specific role on the board based on their area of expertise and their work on a committee.

Relationships. Within the third major theme of board member role and responsibility was the subtheme of relationships. The board members' ability to work with each other, with the school and its principal, with community stakeholders, and with their networks outside of the school which can ultimately benefit emerged as a subtheme. Board members described the importance of their individual roles in open communication and how they must work as a team to accomplish the goals that have been set.

Carla, chair of SP, explained how collegial her board is because everyone gets along and there is no one who is abrasive. She also expressed that when recruiting someone to the board, one never really knows how they work with others until they start, and she was pleased about the composition of the current board. Harris, chair of LA, believed it is important to set aside personality differences and the ability to work together is dependent on adhering to procedures and norms for working together as a board.

Many board members have used their personal and professional relationships to help the school and several board members expressed the importance of building positive relationships with the school and community. They are encouraged to attend school events and to represent the school well in the community.

According to Burt (1997), “The value of social capital to an individual is contingent on the number of people doing the same work” (p. 339). In other words, social capital is a quality created between people and the relationships the board members have with other members to accomplish the work of the board is critical. Interviews, observations, and document reviews confirmed how board members worked with one another, with the school leader, with community stakeholders, and with members of their professional or personal networks to benefit the school.

Building the school’s brand. The last subtheme to emerge within the major theme of board member role and responsibility was expanding awareness of the school to the larger community. All three schools have individual board members working on improving marketing for the school. During interviews, board members explained the goal to share the story of their school and some of the wonderful reasons why so many families choose the school and have been so pleased with the education their child has received. The purpose of marketing the school was to expand opportunities for the school.

For example, at AC, the board voted to hire someone to assist with marketing the school. The board at AC would like to expand fundraising opportunities and business partnerships and by sharing the good news of their school through these marketing efforts, they hope to achieve their goals. Similarly, the board of LA identified that on their website, there was not information to the public about what makes the school so great so they made it a goal to improve how they

share their story and what story they will tell. At SP, they were working to market their school and its fundraising activities. The boards of these schools discussed their marketing efforts at their board meetings and it corroborated what board members expressed in their interviews about marketing their schools.

Research Question Responses

Central Research Question

The central research question of the study was as follows: What are the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school governing board members? The central research question was intended to identify the actions, beliefs, and perceptions of charter school governing board members at high-performing charter schools. Many similar practices and behaviors were identified within the major theme of board characteristics. All board members had positive perspectives of their boards and believed their work and action added value to their schools. The diversity of the board also added value of the board because members felt that diverse perspectives strengthened their decision-making. Board members expressed through interviews and at board meetings that they had a positive and professional environment. They behaved professionally and communicated respectfully with one another. The board members described how much they believed in the school and the quality education being provided to the children being served. Whether the board member was a parent or nonparent, the member was committed to serving the school and was a strong proponent of education.

The board members had a strong awareness of their role as a board to govern the school and not to become involved with the operations of the school because that would lead to conflict. Many of the board members had experience in business and responses from interviews revealed the business practices were used to govern effectively. They also demonstrated support for the

principal and the belief that the principal should be held accountable for the academic achievement and progress of the school in meeting school goals. This strong sense of accountability also translated to the board's responsibility to be fiscally accountable and to work together on the strategic priorities of the school, many of which involved building projects. Additionally, part of that accountability of the board ensuring the school was on solid financial ground and to have ample buildings, was the expectation for board members to attend meetings, to participate, to be prepared, and to complete the tasks that had been assigned to them.

Within the third major theme of member role and responsibility, the members of the board worked through committees to accomplish goals and tasks and members identified certain areas of expertise that were needed by the board. The areas of expertise included business, finances, construction, and education. All three boards described strong finance committees due to the expertise of individual board members. The established board members clearly described their individual value to the board based on their area of expertise and committee contributions while newer board members described their role and responsibility was emerging as they gained experience on their boards. Through observation of the board meeting, during the part of the meeting where committee chairs provided a report, each committee chair was prepared with providing their respective committee report and the board chair and members were attentive and appreciative of the work of their fellow members.

Interviews revealed recruitment by governance committees for specific areas of expertise and this was most evident at AC and LA. At SP, members were dedicated parents who were asked to join because they had shown a strong commitment to the school and a willingness to serve on the board. At AC, it was important in their strategic recruitment to strike a balance of parents and nonparents and, if members were parents, to ensure they would remain committed to

serving beyond the time of their child's time at the school. Common among all boards was the belief that board members should work toward the good of the school as a whole, and not for personal agendas. They identified the strength of their ability to work together to accomplish goals in committees, within the board, with the school and its leaders, and with the community. Their role included representing the school well in the community and all boards discussed how to best market the school and fundraising events.

SQ1

The first subquestion was as follows: How do charter school governing board members perceive that bonding practices impact charter school governance? SQ1 was focused on the bonding practices within the theoretical context of the social capital theory. The relationship among board members and their ability to work together toward a common goal is a resource in purposive action. All board members described their working relationship with the board in positive terms and the subtheme of positive perspective emerged as a subtheme from the first theme of board characteristics. David described the board of LA as friendly and business-like. He went on to say that members of their board challenge each other, and they hold each other accountable.

The board members' perception of their work is an indication of board performance (Hooge & Honingh, 2014). Board members perceived their work as important and impactful. Members believed their work positively impacted the financial stability, the quality of education and school leadership, the safety of students, the culture and climate, the growth, the securing of resources, and meeting the compliance requirements of the school. Boards that believed in the quality of their work were more effective (Krishnan & Barnett, 2015). Within the first major theme of board characteristics, the subtheme of being action-oriented emerged. The board

members perceived that there were strong bonds within the board and within committees.

Within the third major theme of member role and responsibility, the importance of committee work and working together were evident through interviews and observations. The participants also described how they thought the diversity of board member backgrounds and areas of expertise were valued within the board. Members described the variety in perspectives made the board, as a whole, stronger as they worked together. Bonding practices were strengthened because of the diversity within the boards.

SQ2

The second subquestion for this study was as follows: How do charter school governing board members perceive that bridging practices impact charter school governance? The purpose of SQ2 was to understand how board members develop relationships with various stakeholders and use those relationships to benefit the charter school. Did the board members perceive value in the relationships they had and the relationships other board members had that ultimately helped the school? The answer was undoubtedly yes. All board members described how they contributed to the board based on their area of expertise. All board members described how others contributed to the board based on the area of expertise. Members with accounting, business, construction, nonprofit organizations, education, and marketing expertise were present on the boards of AC and LA. SP had members who were experts in the areas of accounting, business, law, and nonprofit organizations. Members described specific examples of how someone on the board used their areas of expertise and relationships with individuals or organizations in their respective fields to help the school in progressing toward its goals. This was especially true in the areas of finance, building construction, and marketing at AC and SP. Within the second major theme of board role and responsibility, the subthemes of being

business-minded and ensuring they are strong in the areas of building and finances was evident in the context of members describing these areas of expertise to help the school.

Board members also perceived how they represented themselves in the community as important. If they had an opportunity to talk to community members about the school, they would do so and would share their passion and commitment to the school as well as reasons why they felt so passionate. In essence, they were ambassadors or representatives in the community. Board members explained how representing the school well to others could also help with fundraising efforts and with procuring resources for the school. The subtheme of building the brand of the school through marketing within the third major theme of member role and responsibility was a bridging practice benefitting the school.

SQ3

The third subquestion for this study was as follows: How do charter school governing board members perceive that governance training impacts charter school governance? SQ3 prompted members to explain if governance training helped them be more effective as a board member. The perceptions about board training varied greatly. Although board members expressed the importance of abiding by the Sunshine Law, there were different perspectives about the value and necessity of additional board governance training. Most board members felt the most important training was the experience they received through on-boarding training and through serving on the board. New board members, in particular, identified training they received on school finances and through their board's governance committee as valuable in understanding how the board operated. When asking members to describe their perceptions on board training, the importance of being knowledgeable on building and finances and running of

the charter school through effective governance practices emerged in the second major theme of board role and responsibility.

The board members that found value in additional board training believed that learning about how other boards operate helped them. The board members who had served on other boards explained how that experience helped them in their current role as a charter school board member, and board members who were indifferent to or did not believe additional training is helpful, believed the most valuable training is through the experience of serving and learning through serving. Harris, board chair, at LA explained the need for a “roadmap” for boards in their process for governance. He compared it to a curriculum by which a board could follow prescribed standards.

Cross-Case Synthesis

The purpose of this multisite site case study was to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards to understand the impact of charter school board governance on charter school closures in Florida. The three sites were selected because of their high-performing status. Identifying effective charter governing practices and behaviors can help guide charter governing board members be successful.

At AC and LA, there were board members who had served for several consecutive years and had experienced changes in the school’s leadership and board membership. At the time of the study four AC board members had over 12 years of experience on the board and three of those board members had served since the founding of the school over 20 years ago. Their practices and behaviors influenced the culture and climate of the rest of the board. They strategically recruited board members to meet the needs for areas of expertise and were very careful to recruit members who would continue to serve beyond the time their child was at the

school if he/she was a parent. They were also cautious about not having too many parents on the board, so that there was a balance of perspectives. AC had the most experienced board and used those board members to provide the institutional history and expertise in the areas of governance practices, sustainability of the school's finances, building and construction, and public education. AC's board operates efficiently, similar to LA and SP.

LA had board members who had experienced change in the school's leadership and long-standing members had experienced the negative effects of a board member becoming too involved with the day-to-day operations of the school. Similar to AC, the long-standing LA members recruit board members strategically and ensure that new members understand the institutional history of the school and follow processes that support effective governance. LA also has members who have expertise to provide financial stability, expertise with building and construction, and public education. The board at LA works on strategic priorities, especially the building projects.

SP has members who have been a part of the school for several years as parents, but are relatively new as board members. The school leader is the founder of the school and as observed during the board meeting, serves as the academic expert on the board. As the founder, she provided the institutional history and was involved with ensuring training, or on-boarding, of new board members. The school also has an effective chief financial officer who provides training to the board members as well as ongoing financial reports. SP's financial and academic stability comes from members of the school's leadership although there are members of the board who have expertise in the areas of accounting and finance, business, and governance.

All three boards were working on fundraising projects in their commitment to providing resources for the school. All three used a committee structure to get work completed in small

groups, to solve problems and to provide recommendations for the board. Similar to all three boards was their commitment to the school and the strong belief that their work helped the school sustain and progress. All board members described their contributions and the value of the contributions made by other members. The bridging and bonding practices were evident among all three boards. The perception of the need for training varied among board members from all three sites.

Summary

Chapter Four included detailed descriptions of the 16 participants from the three cases of high-performing charter school boards. The focus of this study was to assess the practices and behaviors of charter school boards through interviews, observations, and documents. The process for theme development and cross-case analysis followed Stake's (2006) data analysis tools. Analysis of the interview transcripts identified three major themes: characteristics, board role and responsibility, and member role and responsibility. Quotes from the interviews, summarized comments, summarized observations, and summarized board documents provided rich and thick descriptions illustrating the themes. Data discovered from the three information sources answered the central research question and three subquestions pertaining to charter school governance and social capital. The chapter concluded with a cross-case analysis describing the similarities and differences of charter school board practices and behaviors among the three cases.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this multisite case study was to discover the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards. This chapter includes a summary of the study findings, a review and explanation of how the central research question and three subquestions were answered, and a discussion of the theoretical and empirical foundations from the literature. Several theoretical, empirical, and practical implications from this study are presented and explained in detail. The delimitations bounding the study and limitations influencing the study are also discussed. Recommendations for future research are provided, followed by a review of important conclusions drawn from this research.

Summary of Findings

This study included data collected from individual interviews, observations, and documents. Each piece of datum created a rich, thick description of the cases and produced a thematic understanding of the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards. The primary source of data came from individual interviews. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Stake's (2006) method for multisite case analysis. The next greatest source came from observations of board meetings. The observation of the board members in a meeting added insight and confirmed the descriptions given by board members about how they operate and how they interact. The last source came from documents such as meeting agendas, meeting minutes, published norms, board descriptions and biographies on the school's website, strategic plans, and mission and vision statements, among others. The documents confirmed the process followed in board meetings as well as their collective purpose and productivity. What they had accomplished in meetings was validated in board meeting

minutes and their collective purpose was stated in various ways in board-related documents such as the mission statement and through their committee structures.

The data analysis for AC was completed first, followed by LA and then SP. A word table was made for each site with important words and phrases from participants categorized into themes using the “Multicase Study Theme Identification Worksheet” (Stake, 2006). To organize the themes emerging from each case, Stake’s (2006) “Case Analysis Worksheet” was used. To identify which themes were emerging in each case, Stake’s (2006), “Ordinariness and Manifestation Estimate Worksheet” was used to determine how prominent each theme was in each particular case. The “Assertions by Case Worksheet” and “Multicase Assertions Worksheet” were used to organize the relevance and prevalence of the theme to the cases (Stake, 2006). Using the worksheets, three overarching themes were discovered: board characteristics, board role and responsibility, and member role and responsibility. The research questions were used to determine the practices and behaviors of the charter board members, how the members perceived the bonding practices or relationships within their boards, how the members perceived bridging practices or external relationships outside of their boards, and how members perceived governance training.

The central research question guiding this study was as follows: What are the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school governing board members? The purpose of this question was to speak directly with governing school board members at high-performing charter schools to determine what actions they take to operate, how they interact, and what they value as board members. This question also helped to determine what actions and behaviors supported particular values. The participants’ answers centered on a commitment to serving the school through their desire to help the school using their time and area of experience to meet the needs

of the school. Their approaches to helping the school fit the bonding and bridging behaviors within the social capital theory. The practices and behaviors of the high-performing board members provided data about board characteristics (Major Theme 1), board role and responsibility (Major Theme 2), and member role and responsibility (Major Theme 3).

SQ1 was as follows: How do charter school governing board members perceive that bonding practices impact charter school governance? The participants described how each board members must make a commitment to attend and participate. Each participant also described how their specific role and responsibility helps fill a need for the school (Major Theme 3). Bonding within the social capital theory is embedded in the working relationship among the members as a resource (Major Theme 3, Subtheme 2). Their perception of their work is critical to the effectiveness of their work as an entity. The board members thought highly of their individual work and contribution to the board and spoke highly of the other individual board members' work (Major Theme 1, Subtheme 1). Most board members demonstrated commitment to the school through years of service, areas of expertise and time they have contributed, and through service on various sub-committees of the board (Major Theme 3, Subtheme 1). The majority of board members knew exactly how they fit into their board's structure. A few new board members explained that through experience, they would learn more about how they would serve best.

SQ2 was as follows: How do charter school governing board members perceive that bridging practices impact charter school governance? The fields of expertise and the diversity of board members helped each school in common ways. The majority of responses from participants were focused on the financial stability of the school due to the board members who had guided the school in the area of finance and accounting oversight (Major Theme 2,

Subtheme 2). All boards were also concerned with building projects and two of the schools, AC and SP, were focused on marketing projects for the school (Major Theme 3, Subtheme 3). All three schools were focused on fundraising to provide additional resources (Major Theme 2, Subtheme 2). Participants were able to describe how they were able to help the school based on their areas of expertise and networks outside of the school, whether it was a building project or a marketing campaign (Major Theme 2, Subtheme 2 and Major Theme 3, Subtheme 3). The bridging behaviors were evident among all three boards.

SQ3 was as follows: How do charter school governing board members perceive that governance training impacts charter school governance? Charter school board members are required to complete standard governance training. The purpose of this question was to seek if high-performing governing board members attributed their effectiveness to any additional or specific training. There were varied responses to this question. Some board members felt training was important for continuous improvement and that governance training would allow them to see best practices from other boards. Some board members felt the best training was learning through experience by serving on the board. Most board members felt that their experience working on other boards or working with other organizations related to their jobs or to education, helped them be a better board member. Most of them also indicated that on-boarding or in-house training was very helpful. New board member training provided by finance members or governance committee members helped new board members learn about the operation of the board, the history of the school, and the norms and expectations of the board. The responses of the participants provided support for Major Theme 1, Subtheme 2; and Major Theme 3, Subtheme 1. The new board members were action-oriented by actively learning about their boards through experience and experienced board members sought best practices and how

they could best serve their boards. In addition, they relied heavily on learning from key board members of the finance and governance committees to become better informed board members.

Discussion

The findings of this study closely align to the theoretical literature on social capital theory and empirical literature on board governance of traditional, noncharter school systems presented in Chapter Two. The theoretical foundation for this study was based on the social capital theory as presented by the three primary social capital theorists, Burt (1997), Coleman (1988), and Lin (1999). The data were matched to bonding and bridging practices as well as the characteristics of social capital. Past empirical research included in the literature review described characteristics of effective traditional school boards. The following sections include explanation of how this study relates to the theoretical and empirical foundation of the literature as well as additional information regarding charter school governance practices and behaviors.

Theoretical Literature

The grounding theoretical concept of this study was presented by three primary social capital theorists, Burt (1997), Coleman (1988), and Lin (1999). The theorists presented subtle differences in their theories; however, a common thread among their theories is the importance of relationships. Burt (1997) emphasized how putting the right people together increases the development of opportunities. All three boards benefitted from having a variety of experts on their boards. One theme emerging from this study was member role and responsibility. Each board member could define and articulate what other board members had done for the school based on their career field or areas of expertise and they could explain with clarity what they, as individual board members, could do or had done to serve the board. Strategic recruitment of individuals to the board to fulfill a need was highly evident in AC and LA. Both AC and LA had

strong financial experts and experts in the areas of building or construction, which increased opportunities for financial stability and assistance with various building projects. AC and LA also recruited marketing experts to help build awareness of the school's success in the community to develop partnership and fundraising opportunities. All three boards had at least one member who had worked with or on other nonprofit boards, which helped with governance practices.

Coleman (1988) emphasized the power of norms, expectations of a group, and the productivity dependent on the social structure. Another theme that was identified in the current study was board role and responsibility. The collective expectations of the board shaped their outcomes and supported productivity. The boards believed it was their role to make policy, ensure financial stability, govern without interfering with the day-to-day operations of the school, to hire and support a strong school leader, and to create a positive culture and climate at the school. Members were able to describe the norms and expectations of their boards. Board members are expected to attend and participate. Through their attendance and participation at board meetings and committee meetings, their collective purpose is to help the school meet its goals. Coleman (1988) also asserted that without social capital, productivity would be absent. All three boards were productive within their social structure. Board members knew their collective and individual roles and responsibilities and could explain the norms and expectations of their boards.

Lin (1999) expanded on the theory by describing the importance of the social structure of the organization as a valuable resource; in other words, the organization is strengthened through the social capital of its members. AC and LA had long-time serving board members which helped stabilize and communicate the norms and expectations of the board. The board chair at

AC had been a part of the board since the school's founding and the board chair at LA had been a part of the board since the beginning years of the founding of the school. Newer board members described how these long-time board members contributed greatly to the success of the school and helped establish the culture of the board. The newer board members looked to the long-time members to learn more about the governance structure of their board and for guidance to provide the institutional history as a valuable resource in decision-making. The board chair at SP had experience serving on another nonprofit board and had received formal governance training. She had also been a long-time actively involved parent who was a part of the school's history. The social structure of these boards were a valuable resource that helped serve the school well.

The characteristics of social capital include trust, information channels, norms and effective sanctions, and bonding and bridging. Coleman (1988) asserted that the group is more effective if trust is present and trust is built when obligations are clear and met. Lin (1999) furthered the importance of trustworthiness in social capital by stating that when members of the group endorse other individuals who can help the organization, trust is strengthened. Through participant interviews, members explained their individual and collective obligations to the board and they described how other members added value to the organization because of the obligations the other members had met. All of the members fulfilled their obligations. The most apparent endorsement among members was that of the financial expert on the boards, particularly for AC and LA. At SP, most board members were relatively new to the board and they endorsed the expertise of the school's chief financial officer who had served for several years and the chief education officer who was the founder of the school. Through the consistent

endorsement of other members based on satisfying their responsibilities, the characteristic of trustworthiness was present among all three boards.

Within social capital theory, information provides the basis for action and is viewed as a valuable resource in social capital theory (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). The flow of information within each charter school board was effective. Burt (1997) contended the benefit of information includes access, timing, and referrals as well as the diversity of contacts which ultimately helps the organization. Within the theme of board characteristics, descriptions of the board supporting the importance of the flow of information emerged. Board members described their boards as diverse, collegial, committed, and effective. It was important for many board members to have open communication with diverse points of view so that the best information could be presented and the best decisions could be made. Attendance and participation at meetings and committee meetings also emerged as subthemes which support access and timing to information. Not only did the information channels provide access to resources for the boards, the work in committees supported a focus on the critical information needed so that the board could be most efficient in making decisions. The committees presented recommendations for the board and the board had access to the best information possible to mobilize into action.

When the interests of the collective organization are placed above the individual members, social capital is strengthened through a powerful norm. According to Coleman (1988), norms and effective sanctions within an organization provide an important form of social capital. Several characteristics emerged from board member interviews including a commitment to serve the school, a passion for the school, and an individual and collective purpose for serving. The board members described their boards as positive and professional. It was important to many board members to put aside individual agendas and to make decisions based on the good of the

school. These types of characteristics provide the type of emotional support and public acknowledgement necessary to build strong social relations that reinforce the identity of the organization while recognizing the individual (Lin, 1999). Members of the group were able to legitimize when good work was performed and place value on the productivity of the group, an idea presented by Burt (1997) as an effective norm and sanction within social capital.

This study was focused on the bonding and bridging practices of social capital theory. School boards can be viewed as a closed structural network to create social capital through norms, sanctions, mobilization of resources, and flow of information (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993, 1995). These characteristics within the closed network of social capital is bonding. The charter school boards within this study had high bonding characteristics as explained in the previous sections. The charter school board members bonded successfully with evidence of positive relationships and, as a result, contributed to the effectiveness of both the boards' productiveness and governance of the school. In addition to the benefit of being a closed structural network, there is also benefit to networking outside of the organization to further the purpose of the group through bridging. Lin (1999) asserted bridging, or accessing and obtaining resources outside of the network is advantageous because it makes the network more useful. The members of the board used their social status to secure resources through direct and indirect ties and as a result, the social capital of the group was strengthened. The board members who were CPAs or in the construction or marketing business used their ties to help the school. These types of interdependent relationships with other stakeholders add value to the board's function and productivity in helping the school. The interdependent relationships are an open network which ultimately helps the organization (McCormick et al., 2006).

Lin (1999) contended that social capital can be measured by examining the three necessary elements of social capital which are resources embedded within the social structure of the organization, the accessibility of resources embedded within the social structure of the organization, and the active use of the resources by the members of the organization. The themes that emerged through interviews, observations, and documents confirmed all three of these elements are prevalent across all three cases. The strong, positive social structure through bonding and bridging, the expertise of board members and the expertise of their external networks, and the use of those internal and external resources were evident through the themes and subthemes. Within the theme of board role and responsibility, members contributed to oversight of policy, finances, governance, school leadership, and development of a positive culture and climate. Within the theme of member role and responsibility, members were recruited for their area of expertise and had a commitment to attending meetings and committee meetings. Resources of members were embedded in their areas of expertise, their board experience, and their external relationships with various stakeholders. Resources were also embedded in board member diversity and the positive collegial relationships they had with one another and with the school leader. All of these resources were utilized to help the school.

Empirical Literature

Most of the literature on school board governance within the last 20 years has come from the 384 years of history of traditional public schools. Literature on charter school board governance is scarce; charter schools have only been in existence for a little over 25 years. Charter school board members are recruited and screened, unlike the election process for traditional public school boards. Within the theme of board member role and responsibility, the subtheme of committee experts emerged. Similar to traditional school boards, charter board

members are “attracted to service on an education governance board” and share “a common interest in K-12 education” (Ford & Ihrke, 2015, p. 408). The recruitment efforts of charter school board members who would be able to add value to the organization and who would be dedicated to helping the school beyond personal reasons such as parents getting their child into the school was an important factor among many long-term board members. By recruiting like-minded individuals, the charter board members could generally focus on areas such as the mission, personnel, building maintenance, budget, policy development, and evaluations (Miron & Horn, 2003).

The conflict described among charter school board members arose because of differing opinions on school-related topics at hand. The difference in the type of conflict experienced among traditional school board members and charter school board members is significantly different (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). The conflict among traditional school board members is personal in nature, whereas the conflict among charter school board members was productive and related to a school issue (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). All three cases embraced diversity of thoughts and opinions to foster healthy discussion from different perspectives to make the best decisions. The subtheme of positive perspective also emerged which contributed to a collective purpose. Board members had a strong desire to make a positive contribution through service and many believed in school choice. Ford and Ihrke (2015) surmised charter school board members may be attracted to the charter model, which promotes innovation and more ideological homogeneity and higher levels of cooperation than does the traditional school model.

Charter school boards have greater autonomy, and with greater autonomy comes greater responsibility to ensure accountability for areas of fiscal obligations, legal compliance, and satisfactory student achievement (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). Within the theme of board role and

responsibility, the subtheme of being business-minded emerged. Members believed they were accountable to their board, to their school and community, and to the state as a public entity in the areas of finances, policy, and compliance. There was also data to support accountability of the school leader to meet the goals of the school. The majority of responses from members regarding closure of charter schools showed board members believed if a charter school was not meeting its goals with fidelity in similar fashion to what occurs in business, then the charter school should close. The members believed charter schools must be accountable to the state, to the community they are intended to serve, and to the taxpayers.

Due to the lack of empirical literature about charter school governance as it relates to the success of the school, the literature is focused on the characteristics of effective traditional school boards. The most critical role identified by school boards is the hiring and supervision of an effective superintendent. Similar to what emerged from the data about the relationship of the school leader with the charter board, it is essential for the board to have a good working relationship with the school leader and to avoid becoming too involved with administrative matters and step into areas of oversight by the superintendent (Carol et al., 1986).

The next critical role of the traditional school board which is similar to the critical role that emerged as a theme in the study on charter school boards is for members to know their role and responsibility. An important responsibility is to set policies in line with federal and state statutes and to create a budget that will meet the operational needs of the school (Rhim et al., 2013). Also similar to the role of charter school governance is the use of committees to help make informed decisions. Particularly critical is the performance of the finance committee for the overall performance of the school (Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015). The importance of

committees to manage fiscal responsibility and policy development arose as a subtheme within the study.

Among the few studies on charter school board governance, the focus is on the impact on student achievement, which is another primary role of traditional school boards. The seminal study, the Lighthouse Study, on public school board's impact on student achievement revealed a correlation between student achievement and the practices and beliefs of school board members (Delagardelle, 2008). The data collected in this study confirm the results of the Lighthouse Study as it relates to charter school board governance. The actions, decisions, and belief systems as well as school board members' knowledge to make informed decisions, influences the quality of schools (Delagardelle, 2008; Marino, 2011; Nkundabanyanga et al., 2015; Rhim et al., 2013). The school board's perception of their work, their ability to work with each other and with their chief educational officer, and the training they received were all key characteristics of effective school boards. The evidence of positive perception, being action-oriented, and training and experience from this study on charter school governance is consistent with the findings on effective characteristics on traditional school boards.

The lack of literature that existed on the practices and behaviors of effective charter school governance was multifaceted. The characteristics of high-performing charter school boards from the state of Florida was missing, and the perceptions of their collective role and responsibility as well as their individual role and responsibility was limited. Additionally, there were no studies that examined charter school board member perceptions about training and the problem of charter school closures.

Implications

Charter school closures have become an increasing problem throughout the country and especially in the state of Florida. Previous research regarding high-performing charter school boards has been insufficient in determining practices and behaviors for effective governance of charter schools to help solve this problem. This qualitative study attempts to fill the gap by adding to the literature on charter school board governance. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for this study are meant to discover best practices for sustaining charter schools through effective governance.

Theoretical Implications

Simply defined by Burt (1997), “Social capital is a quality created between people” (p. 339). Charter school boards, unlike traditional public school boards, recruit board members and interview them. If a charter school board is preparing to build additional buildings and there is a position vacancy, they may recruit a member with building and construction expertise. Through the interview process, board members will determine if the applicant has any personal agenda in wanting to be a member of the board and if the applicant will be able to effectively contribute to the strategic goals of the school. The members had established norms within the board and this provided an important form of social capital. The expectation of the board was to put the interest of the school above self-interests (Coleman, 1988). For some charter school boards, such as AC, it was important to have a balance of parent and nonparent board members in the hopes of establishing those who will serve longer than their child’s time at the school. The governance committee of each board determined what type of members would best suit the needs of the board. When individuals fulfilled their obligations, trust was fostered and the organization strengthened. School boards that minimize negative conflict have stronger collegial

relationships, work more cooperatively, and perform better than school boards that do not minimize conflict (Ford & Ihrke, 2016). All three charter school boards legitimized their good work and value was placed on the productivity of the group (Burt, 1997).

Charter school boards are able to vet and have a direct influence on the quality of the people serving on their boards, thereby fostering quality relationships among its members who will have a common purpose of helping the school. Additionally, because they are selective of members, the quality of members and their relationships with stakeholders is also a factor. The shared common purpose and the board's ability to work together also allows them to be accountable for meeting school outcomes (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). Channels of information provided the basis for action and is a valuable resource within the social capital theory (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). The flow of information from the selected members was useful for broadening opportunities and choices which may not have been otherwise available (Lin, 1999). The bridging behaviors of the charter board members were characterized by members forging external ties to stakeholders so that resources can be secured, support can be fostered, and new ideas developed (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). Bridging behaviors were encouraged through marketing and fundraising opportunities. Various examples of board members using their professional relationships to help the school were revealed through interviews, observations of board meetings, and through document reviews of board meeting notes and agendas. The quality of the relationships with stakeholders added value to the efficacy of the board. Board members with ties to construction companies, municipal entities, financial organizations, and marketing professionals helped the board reach its goals to benefit the school.

By the nature of their recruitment ability, social capital is supported among charter school boards who have productive, effective members from various backgrounds. Charter school

boards can be viewed as more closed social networks than those of traditional school boards because of the recruitment practices of charter school boards versus the election of traditional school board members by the citizens of the community. The importance of diversity emerged as a subtheme within the major theme of board characteristics. Both bridging and bonding practices were strengthened, according to the participants, because diversity added value to their work within the board and within the community.

The idea of having key foundational members who carry on the mission of the school as it was originally intended and then inculcate other members to serve the school while learning the institutional history of the school and its governance is inherent in the charter school board's social capital. The knowledge of the key foundational members is a valuable resource. These members had faced and overcome challenges, learned about what to do and what not to, and helped guide the board in decision making so the mistakes of the past would not be made. Their influence and knowledge was well-respected, particularly among newer board members who looked to them for guidance. The bonding practices were strengthened because the founding or long-term board members provided a valuable resource by preserving and sharing the institutional history of the school. The veteran members were in important positions either as chair, vice chair, or treasurer of the board and, with higher obligations, they have higher social capital because their usefulness and availability is a resource for the social structure (Coleman, 1988). Extensive trust was present because of the relationship formed among the members of the group and obligations were clear and met (Coleman, 1988). The social capital of these three high-performing charter school boards was high because the quality created between the people was high.

Empirical Implications

The related literature about effective school board governance focused on traditional public school governance. Lacking in the literature was research on the practices and behaviors of effective charter school board governance, particularly in Florida which has the third highest number of charter schools in the nation. Within the literature on charter school boards that does exist, the focus is on charter school board governance as it relates to student academic achievement. This study fills the gap on effective practices and behaviors of charter school boards as it relates to solving the problem of charter school closures.

Interviewing 16 participants from three high-performing charter schools provided mostly similar responses about board responsibility, their individual board member responsibility, and similar characteristics of their boards. There were a few differences in how the boards perceived parents serving on the board as well as various perspectives on board training as it related to the effectiveness of their governance. What was discovered about effective charter school practices and behaviors that was not identified in the literature is the importance of strategic recruitment of board members

- who are committed to helping the school,
- who are like-minded because they support school choice,
- who demonstrate high expectations and accountability of their board and themselves individually,
- who value diversity of membership,
- who are action-oriented and work through committees to accomplish goals,
- who value the ability to work well with others, and

- who focus on building the brand of the school for marketing and fundraising purposes.

The literature does suggest that boards having a positive perception of the quality of their work were more effective than boards that did not perceive the importance of their work as steering the quality of education (Hooge & Honingh, 2014). Furthermore, a board's collective belief about its efficacy influenced performance and positive beliefs were evident among effective governing boards (Krishnan & Bartlett, 2015). The outcomes of this study validated the literature about positive perceptions of the importance and value of the work of the board. The three charter school boards had positive perceptions of their work. Additionally, literature on traditional school boards established that among their main responsibilities, the board was to ensure financial stability, to develop policies, and to hire and hold accountable an effective leader of schools. Interestingly, a stark difference in the literature was the emphasis that traditional boards placed on student outcomes. Some of the charter school governing board members mentioned the importance of student achievement, but it did not emerge as a theme. It is important to note that all three charter schools were high-performing and their students achieved at high levels.

The research cited in the literature on school boards identified the importance of board members' abilities to work with each other and with the chief educational officer to accomplish the goals of the district (Rhim et al., 2013). This study revealed a similar finding with the theme of board member role and responsibility and the subtheme of relationships. Board member participants discussed the professional, working relationships they had established within their committees, on the board, and in the community or their professional networks when they speaking about their experience on the board. In the seminal study on high achieving schools, the Lighthouse Study, the IASB (Rice et al., 2001) determined the key characteristic of having a

harmonious relationship with their superintendents. Similarly, the three charter school boards in the current study expressed the importance of supporting their school leader and shared their high regard for the school leader.

The literature did not identify the importance of member expertise in various areas or the work board members do in committees so they can make recommendations to the board. The work of committees emerged as a subtheme under the theme of member role and responsibility of the high-performing charter school boards and this subtheme has not been revealed in the literature. An understanding of the behaviors and practices of charter school governing boards was revealed in this current study. More research needs to be done to include more effective charter school boards to gain further insight on charter school governance practices and behaviors.

Practical Implications

Finally, this study provided practical implications for stakeholders involved in charter school governance. The participants shared their perspectives about board governance as it related to the roles and responsibilities of their boards, the roles and responsibilities of individual members, their purpose in serving on the board, their impact on the school, and the problem of charter school closures. Charter school boards must be responsible for the sustainability and oversight of the school's finances, policies, leader of the school, and culture and climate. It was interesting that only a few board members mentioned the academic achievement of the students as an area of responsibility. Board members expressed it is the school leader's job to ensure the school is meeting school goals, including high student achievement. Being that all of these schools were high-performing schools with A grades, the board members felt the school leader was meeting those expectations and were cautious not to become involved in the operations of

the school and the areas of responsibility of the school leader who is viewed as the expert on education.

Charter school boards were able to strategically recruit members who would add value to their boards. If there was a vacancy, the board would assess what area of expertise the board lacked. For example, if the board wanted to market the school better in order to develop new community partnerships and increase the opportunity for funding through these partnerships, they recruited an individual who had expertise in the area of marketing or fundraising. A commonality among all of the charter school boards was the importance they placed on financial stability. All three boards had financial experts who were recognized and praised for their service and effectiveness.

The charter school boards had strict procedures and believed in high accountability for themselves and their board. The use of committees to gather experts to discuss various areas who then made recommendations to the board, and the value placed on diverse perspectives while putting personality differences aside, created an environment of mutual trust and respect. These attributes as well as strong norms helped minimize conflict and maximize efficiency. The board chairs and long-time serving members helped establish the norms and expectations for the board.

Training experiences and perspective about governance training varied among board members. Board members had such varied experiences as board members, yet the majority believed training was good for improvement and the most valuable training was through experience in serving on the board and learning from others on the board. The on-boarding training they received from the finance committee and the governance committee helped new board members in their institutional knowledge of the school and how the school and board

operates. Some board members had experience serving on other boards, which helped them in their current board membership roles. Additionally, their experience working in other organizations helped them apply what they felt were best practices within the social structure of their boards.

The implications of this study include the potential to benefit charter school stakeholders, particularly charter school boards and charter school authorizers. Examining the social capital of charter school boards will help them assess areas of strengths and weaknesses. Strategic recruitment will increase the social capital of the organization. Retaining long-time effective board members within the term limits permissible in the bylaws also helps the social capital of the organization. When on-boarding new board members, an assessment of their experience and level of training as it pertains to charter school board governance should be conducted and then a personalized training program could be developed to fill in the gaps. All board members who are unfamiliar with the finances of the school and the process for school financing and accounting should be required to learn it. Most charter schools in Florida fail due to financial mismanagement.

Board members from other schools could certainly learn a lot about best practices from these high-performing charter school boards. If start-up boards were able to shadow or be mentored by established, successful boards, then some of the pitfalls of charter school governance could be avoided. Furthermore, boards will benefit if they get connected to high-performing boards in their geographical area of schools that may be feeder schools. Board members who network with board members of other charter schools can do so without violating Sunshine Laws because they are not governing on the same board. Charter school boards would

be adding to their social capital by increasing their resources through the building of relationships.

Delimitations and Limitations

Purposeful decisions were made to provide parameters and delimitations for this study. A multicasestudy design was selected for this study because it allowed me to investigate three different high-performing charter schools in Florida and to compare findings. Yin (2009) posited the analytical benefits from having multiple cases is substantial and the findings arising from more than one case is more powerful than those coming from a single case. I was able to get multiple perspectives by using a multicasestudy design. In-depth descriptions and analysis of multiple cases allowed for cross-case themes (Creswell, 2013). One of the cases was a middle school and two were K-8 schools. Two of the case schools had been established for over 20 years and one case school had been established for 8 years. Each case provided a variety of participants with diverse backgrounds and years of experience on their boards.

Participant selection was a delimiting parameter. Participants were board members among the three selected high-performing charter schools. The high-performing charter school boards have members with “shared language, patterns of behavior, and attitudes” that merged into patterns, resulting in themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 94). The study included 16 charter board members. Three were board chairs, two were vice chairs, two were finance chairs, one was an academic chair, one was a secretary, one was a governance chair, one was an advancement and communications chair, one was a discipline chair, and the remaining were members. Seven were from AC Middle, six were from LA K-8, and three were from SP K-8. All board members from the three sites were contacted with requests to participate in the study. The board members who responded by agreeing to participate in an interview and an observation of their interactions at a

board meeting were included in the study. The various board member positions and years of experience as board members provided multiple perspectives on charter school governance.

This study included limitations. The research was focused on board members from three high-performing charter schools in central Florida. Florida has the third largest number of charter schools in the nation. Inclusion of more cases across the state would have provided further insight into charter school governance in various districts under different authorizers and geographical areas, to include rural and urban areas. I would have liked to have had at least five participants from each governing board. Unfortunately, I was only able to confirm interviews with three board members whom I could also observe at their board meeting from one school with seven and six board member interviews and observations from the other two boards. Having at least five would have provided richer descriptions and assertions for theme development.

Recommendations for Future Research

Charter school closures continue to occur in Florida. The study of high-performing charter school boards will help charter school boards and authorizers support charter schools as they are authorized so they can be sufficiently successful and self-sustaining. While it may be challenging to find participant board members of charter schools that have closed, a study for future research would be a multicase study on charter schools that have closed. By examining the perceptions and behaviors of charter school board members of the schools that closed, a greater understanding of charter school closures would be gained. The findings of a study on the perceptions and behaviors of charter school board members of schools that have closed could be compared to the findings of this study to determine if any of the characteristics are similar or if they are contrary. In taking some of the research findings from this study, it would be interesting

to see if their boards had similar characteristics, if they operated with committees of experts, if they supported the school leader, and if they focused on building and finances with a business mindset.

Three high-performing charter school boards from central Florida were studied and three major themes emerged: board characteristics, board role and responsibility, and member role and responsibility. Additional cases from across the state of Florida should be studied to provide a wider range of perspective on behaviors and perspectives of high-performing charter school boards. Gathering further insight into charter school board governance could add to the research to help other charter school boards in different areas of Florida. The three case studies were in suburban areas. Charter schools in rural and urban areas may assist charter school boards in similar areas. It would be interesting to determine if similar characteristics emerged among high-performing charter school boards in other geographical areas.

Additionally, a longitudinal study of charter schools in their first year of existence and of their boards over a period of time would add insight to the growth and development of governance practices. The long-time charter school board members in this study were able to lead other members and advise the board based on their experience with what worked and what did not work. The veteran board members were inherent in the social capital of their boards because they had built trust, provided valuable information, and had met clear obligations (Coleman, 1988). If boards were able to understand the stages of growth and development of their boards, it may assist them in avoiding some of the same mistakes in addition to avoiding closure.

One practice within this study that was identified within the theme of board member role and responsibility was committee expertise of charter school board members. Within the volume

of research on school boards of traditional public school boards, strategic recruitment of board members is nonexistent because those board members are elected. The practice of strategic recruitment of charter school board members and work in committees based on expertise, particularly in building and finance as it relates to charter school board effectiveness, should be furthered explored to help with the charter school closure problem. The benefit of diversity of expertise ultimately helps the charter school board because information provides the basis for action and is a valuable resource (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). By expanding the research to these additional areas, charter school boards could be better informed when making governance decisions and authorizers could better guide charter schools that are just starting up so they can establish strong board governance practices and behaviors.

Summary

Charter schools thrive when an effective governing board is in place. Charter school closures leave students with disruption to their education and the community with a negative financial impact. This is a problem for students, parents, teachers, schools, districts, charter school authorizers, taxpayers, and the community. The purpose of this multisite case study was to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards to better understand how effective charter school board governance could help with the problem of charter school closures. Participants from three different high-performing charter school boards were interviewed for their perspective on governing board practices and behaviors. Participants were also observed in their board meetings to gain insight on their practices and behaviors. The findings from this study align somewhat with the research on effective practices and behaviors on school boards of traditional public schools. However, the practices and behaviors of effective charter school boards are unique and different from that of traditional public school boards

because of the strategic recruitment of charter school board members with similar ideologies as it pertains to school choice and as it pertains to the idea of fulfilling a specific role and responsibility needed by the board. It is similar to the strategic recruitment of an employee applying for a position. The charter school governing board is able to identify a need, recruit members to fill that need, and then hold members accountable for fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

The problem of charter school closures is complex and includes many factors. The governing board is a large factor in the success or failure of the school. The governing board sets policy, ensures financial stability and student achievement, selects and supports the school leader, and is responsible for meeting all federal, state, and local requirements. The current literature on charter school board governance focused on student achievement. This study was focused on the practices and behaviors of charter school boards that were designated high-performing by the state of Florida due to their consistent success in student achievement, finances, and compliance.

The implications of this study can help address the problem of charter school closures in Florida. By emulating the effective practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards, boards can govern more effectively and avoid closure. While there may be additional factors contributing to charter school closures, the insights provided can help authorizers with tools to support governing board structures that will set the charter school on a pathway to success and sustainability. For members of the community who will become founding charter school members or for members of charter school boards who are struggling with the possibility of closure, there needs to be an understanding of effective practices and behaviors to foster success of the school.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PERMISSION LETTER

August 23, 2018

Kristine Bennett

IRB Approval 3337.082318: A Multisite Case Study of High Performing Charter School Boards in Florida

Dear Kristine Bennett,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER

March 20, 2018

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter boards, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, a charter school board member, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual semi-structured face-to-face interview that will be audio-recorded for the purpose of transcribing of data gained from the interview. The interview is comprised of 13 open-ended questions. It should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

You will also be asked to participate in your charter school's board meeting that will be audio-recorded for the purpose of transcribing of data gained from the meeting. The meeting duration is unknown. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

You may be asked to audit the data gathered to confirm it for accuracy. It should take approximately 60 minutes to complete an audit of the data.

To participate, click on the link provided [here](#) and contact me directly to schedule an interview at.

A consent document is provided as the first page you will see after you click on the survey link. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please click on the survey link at the end of the consent information to indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the research study. Please print and sign the consent form and return via email to

Sincerely,
Kristine Bennett
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

A MULTISITE CASE STUDY OF HIGH-PERFORMING CHARTER SCHOOL BOARDS IN FLORIDA

Kristine Lynn Bennett
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of a high-performing charter school board. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Kristine Bennett, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the practices and behaviors of high-performing charter school boards.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in one semi-structured face-to-face interview conducted in person that will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcribing of data gained from the interview. The interview is comprised of 13 open-ended questions and will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The location of the interview will be a mutually agreeable site.
2. Participate in a board meeting for an observation of the practices and behaviors during the board meeting. The meeting will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcribing of data gained from the board meeting. The duration of the board meeting is unknown. The location will be the site of the board meeting.
3. Consider participating in an audit of the data to confirm validity. The validation of the data will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The location of the audit will be a mutually agreeable site.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The only potential risk is if the data collected was stolen. Precautions to secure data through password protection of digital files and locked storage of hard copy files will be taken.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include improving charter school governance practices and behaviors.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Pseudonyms and composite profiles will be used to protect personal identities and the identity of the school site.
- Data will be stored digitally on a password protected device or stored in a locked desk. Data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. **Note:** Per federal regulations, data must be retained for three years upon completion of the study.
- Interviews and board meetings will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be securely stored on a password protected device or in a locked desk and then properly destroyed after 10 years. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings and transcriptions.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Kristine Bennett. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Randy Tierce at.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. How long have you served as a board member of this charter school?
3. Why did you become a charter school board member?
4. What do you believe the roles and responsibilities of your governing board are?
5. How do you perceive your role and responsibility on your governing board?
6. Please describe the educational, career, and training experiences that you believe help you in your role as a charter school board member.
7. How would you describe your governing board?
8. How do you believe the governance of your board impacts the school?
9. Please describe how you believe board training beyond the required basic governance training impacts your ability to govern.
10. How would you describe the interrelationships of your governing board?
11. What do you believe the norms of your governing board are?
12. How would you describe the relationships of governing board members outside of the governing board for the purpose of helping the school?
13. How would you describe your belief about charter school closures in Florida?

APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol	
Name of Activity:	
Date:	Time: Duration of Activity:
Location:	
<i>Descriptive Notes</i>	<i>Reflective Notes</i>

APPENDIX F: MULTICASE STUDY THEME IDENTIFICATION WORKSHEET

Worksheet 2. The research questions or Themes of the multicase study and Factors that might be used in a more quantitative study.

Theme 1: If more quantitative, Factors:
Theme 2: If more quantitative, Factors:
Theme 3: If more quantitative, Factors:
Theme 4: If more quantitative, Factors:
Theme 5: If more quantitative, Factors:
Theme 6: If more quantitative, Factors:

APPENDIX G: CASE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Worksheet 3. Analyst's Notes while reading a case report

Case ID _____

Synopsis of case:	Case Findings: I. II. III. IV.
Uniqueness of case situation for program/phenomenon:	
Relevance of case for cross-case Themes: Theme 1 _____ Theme 2 _____ Theme 3 _____ Theme 4 _____ Theme 5 _____ Theme 6 _____	Possible excerpts for cross-case report: Page Page Page
General influences (optional):	Situational Factors (optional)
Commentary:	

APPENDIX H: ORDINARINESS AND MANIFESTATION ESTIMATE WORKSHEET

Worksheet 4. Estimates of Ordinariness of the Situation of Each Case and Estimates of Manifestation of Multicase Themes in Each Case

W = highly unusual situation, **u** = somewhat unusual situation, blank = ordinary situation
M = high manifestation, **m** = some manifestation, blank = almost no manifestation

	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D	Case E
Ordinariness of this Case's situation:					
Original Multicase Themes					
Theme 1					
Theme 2					
Theme 3					
Theme 4					
Theme 5					
Theme 6					
Added Multicase Themes					
Theme 7					
Theme 8					

High manifestation means that the Theme is prominent in this particular case study.
 A highly unusual situation (far from ordinary) is one that is expected to challenge the generality of themes.
 As indicated, the original themes can be augmented by additional themes even as late as the beginning of the cross-case analysis. The paragraphs on each Theme should be attached to the matrix so that the basis for estimates can be readily examined.

APPENDIX I: ASSERTIONS BY CASE WORKSHEET

Worksheet 5. A Map on which to make Assertions for the Final Report

	Themes							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Case A								
Finding I								
Finding II								
Finding III								
Finding IV								
Case B								
Finding I								
Finding II								
Finding III								
Case C								
Finding I								
Finding II								
Finding III								
Finding IV								
Finding V								
And so on for the remaining Cases								

A High mark means that the Theme is an important part of this particular case study and relevant to the theme.

APPENDIX J: MULTICASE ASSERTIONS WORKSHEET

Worksheet 6. Multi-case Assertions for the Final Report

#	Assertion	Evidence in Which Cases
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		