

ABSTRACT

SWINSON, LISA SESSOMS. Exploring Charter School Administrators' Perceptions of the Support of Their Authorizer: A Mixed Methods Study. (Under the direction of Dr. Timothy Drake and Dr. Lance Fusarelli.)

Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools often have little contact with a local education agency and must handle administrative tasks typically completed at the district level, including financial management, recruitment and hiring of personnel, data collection and reporting, and various recordkeeping and support functions (Bickmore & Dowell, 2011; Campbell & Gross, 2008). Leadership at the level of the school has been shown to influence student achievement and school organizational factors, including the learning climate of the school and the professional capacity of staff (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In order for the school to succeed, the charter school must run a successful school that delivers the goals outlined in its charter and the authorizer must provide oversight and assistance to help ensure that the school delivers.

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to investigate the extent to which charter school administrators perceive that their authorizer, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), supports their efforts to be compliant in academic, governance, operation, and finance laws. Data were collected from individual interviews and a survey document. The findings from this study evidence that charter school administrators perceive the support that they receive differently than NCDPI employees perceive the support that is provided. These findings have implications for state departments of instruction and charter schools.

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Exploring Charter School Administrators' Perceptions of the Support of Their Authorizer: A
Mixed Methods Study

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Lisa Swinson has been an educator for over 20 years. She began her career as an elementary teacher in Pitt County. After obtaining her Master's Degree in Elementary Education and becoming a Nationally Board Certified Teacher, Lisa decided to leave the classroom after 9 enjoyable years of classroom teaching. Then for one year, she aided teachers at one of the state's lowest performing schools as a Team Reviewer with the NC Department of Public Instruction State Assistance Team. Lisa then worked as curriculum director at a Title I school in Wilson County. After obtaining her K-12 Administrators Certification, Lisa continued to work at that Title I school, but switched roles as the principal. After 6 years, she yearned to be a change agent at the state level and became an education consultant for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Currently, Lisa is pursuing her Doctorate in Educational Leadership at NCSU.

Lisa and her husband, James, have two children, Amiya and Avery.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my husband and children who understood that Sundays were my day to work in the library. I also dedicate this to my mom and sister who encouraged me throughout the process. Finally, to my classmates and colleagues who were great accountability partners.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is the vehicle by which Congress sets federal policies for public K-12 schools, each state creates laws and policies that govern charter schools. Experience with public charter schools across the country suggests that there are five primary ingredients of a successful public charter school environment in a state, as demonstrated by strong student results: (a) supportive laws and regulations, including both the types of laws and regulations and how they are implemented; (b) quality authorizers; (c) effective charter support organizations, such as state charter associations and resource centers; (d) outstanding school leaders and teachers; and (e) engaged parents and community members (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools [NAPCS], 2017). For this study, I focused on the second primary ingredient—the quality of one state authorizer, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI)—based on how charter school administrators perceive the level of support that NCDPI provides them.

Charter schools are publicly funded schools that are exempt from many government regulations. Individual charter schools are considered part of the public school landscape; indeed, most of their fiscal base derives from tax-levy dollars (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Fusarelli, 2002; Hays, 2013; Lockwood, 2004). Charter schools are typically operated by private entities, including nonprofit organizations or for-profit corporations. Since the first charter school law was adopted by the state of Minnesota in 1991, charter school laws have steadily expanded to other states (Buckley & Fisler, 2002; Center for Education Reform, 2000; Gleason, 2016; Lockwood, 2004). Although state charter laws vary, all share a common set of assumptions: (a) that accountability for

outcomes will improve school performance; and (b) that high levels of autonomy will allow schools to better meet student needs and, as a result, improve performance (Gleason, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). According to the U.S. Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement:

The promise charter schools hold for public school innovation and reform lies in an unprecedented combination of freedom and accountability. Underwritten with public funds but run independently, charter schools are free from a range of state laws and district policies stipulating what and how they teach, where they can spend their money, and who they can hire and fire. In return, they are held strictly responsible for their academic and financial performance. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 1)

The charter establishing a school is a contract that details the school's mission, its program and goals, the population it serves, and the ways it will assess success or failure (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; NCDPI, 2017). As outlined in state charter laws, charters are granted for fixed lengths of time and renewal is contingent upon a review by the authorizer.

When the charter school movement began in the early 1990s, one key set of players received little attention: the public entities that "sponsor" or "authorize" these unconventional schools (Finnigan et al., 2004; NAPCS, 2015; Palmer & Gau, 2003). Charter school authorizers are legal entities approved by state law that legally sanction new charter schools, oversee and evaluate their ongoing performance, and oversee their accountability in the face of the law (Chen, 2016; Weil, 2009; Welner, 2010). Authorizers also uphold the performance agreement each school signs and should protect the public interest by exercising oversight, transparency, and regulatory functions. Authorizers are established through charter laws within each state. In several states, authorizers are responsible for approving new

schools, monitoring schools' compliance with applicable laws, providing technical assistance, and evaluating schools' performance (Palmer & Gau, 2003; Vergari, 2001). Among the various states, different entities can authorize charter schools. Depending on state law, the range of authorizer organizations varies. In the United States, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) made up the largest group of authorizers in the country, followed by, in order from greatest to least, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), State Education Agencies (SEAs), nonprofit organizations (NFPs), Independent Chartering Boards (ICBs), and non-educational government entities (NEGs; Chen, 2016; National Association of Charter School Authorizers [NACSA], 2015; Weil, 2009; Ziebarth, Palmer, & Shutz, 2016). The role of the authorizer is believed to be pivotal to the success of the charter school movement (Palmer & Gau, 2005; Vergari, 2000).

Although there is much debate about the proper roles and responsibilities of “quality” authorizing (NACSA, 2015; Palmer & Gau, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2007), the research literature varies regarding what constitutes a “quality” authorizer. The U.S. Department of Education, for example, established six practices of quality authorizers: (a) build a strong organization; (b) develop strong talent pool; (c) select for quality; (d) support new school operators; (e) provide meaningful and transparent oversight; and (f) hold schools accountable for meeting performance goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In contrast, the NACSA outlined only three core practices for quality authorizers: (a) maintain high standards, (b) uphold school autonomy, and (c) protect student and public interests (NACSA, 2015). Finally, The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) offers the following promising models for quality charter school authorizers: (a) Quality authorizers invest resources to know their schools well, (b) Authorizers should set high standards for

applicant schools, (c) Authorizers can work closely with schools without becoming beholden to them, (d) Authorizers must consider both individual school and system performance when deciding whether to cancel a contract, and (e) Authorizers must actively recruit a diverse set of providers (Lake & Hill, 2006).

In addition to this variation in the definition of a “quality” authorizer, there has been little research done on the relationship between the authorizer and the charter schools themselves, especially as it relates to the building leader. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 created a more tightly coupled educational policy system that emphasized aligned accountability systems and curriculum frameworks as a means of improving student achievement, which increased demand for coordinated communication and distribution of resources across the system (Firestone, 2009; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). This need for coordination has placed the district at the forefront because federal and state accountability mandates hold districts increasingly responsible for improving teaching and learning (Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). After 30 years of focus on schools as the unit of change, policymakers now recognize that schools are embedded in systems and that the relationship between a district and its sites may be crucial to improvement (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2010; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

Unlike traditional public schools, however, charter schools and charter school administrators often have little contact with a LEA and must handle administrative tasks typically completed at the district level, including governance, academic, operational, and financial compliance laws (Bickmore & Dowell, 2011; Campbell & Gross, 2008). As the building leader, charter school administrators, in particular, often take on additional management responsibilities typically dedicated to district office personnel (Campbell &

Gross, 2008; Dressler, 2001). An important question that has not been addressed in the research literature, however, is the extent to which a charter school authorizer might support charter schools and their administrators in following the law and completing these additional management responsibilities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine charter school administrators' perceptions regarding the support that its authorizer, NCDPI, provides, paying particular attention to governance, academic, operational, and financial compliance laws. North Carolina offers a unique context in which to study the relationship between authorizer and charter school. Unlike other states, North Carolina has a single authorizer (NCDPI, 2017). Additionally, North Carolina has been rated as a quality authorizer by NACSA, scoring a perfect 12 out of 12 on their rating scale (NACSA, 2015). North Carolina also delegates charter school management to the NCDPI. After a recent election, NCDPI is now led by new state superintendent Mark Johnson who, the *News and Observer* reported, "favors [the] expansion of charter schools" (Editorial Board, 2016, "State Superintendent," para. 1). Additionally, a new director of charter schools was hired, Dave Machado, who expressed in an Office of Charter Schools Weekly Newsletter "an effort to better serve charter schools" (NCDPI, 2016).

To examine the relationship between charter school authorizer and charter schools, I used an "explanatory sequential mixed methods design" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 81), which involved analyzing quantitative data first and then explaining results with in-depth qualitative data. In the first (quantitative) phase of the study, I analyzed an electronic survey that was completed by 71 ($n=71$) administrators who are currently leading charter

schools in North Carolina. In the second phase of the analysis, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample of 12 ($n=12$) charter school administrators and six ($n=6$) NCDPI staff to help explain the quantitative results. More specifically, I explored the perceptions of charter school administrators by conducting individual interviews at various charter schools throughout the state. Data from individual interviews, fieldnotes, and documents were analyzed to discover patterns, themes, and categories using the research questions as a framework (Patton, 2002). Additionally, I interviewed NCDPI staff to explore their perceptions of the level of support that they provide to charter school administrators. The focus of this study was the relationship between charter school administrators and their authorizer, but because there is little written on this topic I drew upon the research literature that examines the relationship between traditional public school administrators and central office leadership to inform this analysis plan (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. To what extent do charter school administrators perceive that NCDPI supports their efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?
2. To what extent does NCDPI perceive that they support charter schools' efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?

I chose to use a mixed methods approach to examine these research questions because the fundamental principle of mixed methods research is to combine methods in a manner that considers the strengths and weaknesses of each individual method (DeCuir-Gunby, 2008).

This study was designed to contribute to the literature regarding the development of support for charter school administrators, specifically working with charter schools in the

state of North Carolina. A desired outcome of this study was to assess charter school administrators' perceptions of the support that they receive from their authorizer, NCDPI.

Subjectivity Statement

I am a licensed principal who was an administrator at a charter school in North Carolina for 6 years. I often attended professional development sessions and conferences that NCDPI sponsored and perceived the support that I was provided as adequate. My school employed an outside vendor for support in finances and academics. Another source of support that I utilized was the NCDPI website. I was familiar with the website because I worked on the NCDPI State Assistance Team a year prior to becoming an administrator.

I was also a consultant at the NCDPI's Office of Charter Schools. I worked closely with administrators in regions 1, 2, and 4. During the NC State Board of Education monthly meetings, I presented data to assist the board in making decisions regarding charter school renewals, requests to expand grade levels, or increase student enrollment and amendments to the school's charter. One of my roles in the office was to conduct charter renewal site visits to schools across the state. In this role, I interacted with and visited over 100 charter schools. Moreover, as a former employee at NCDPI, I was familiar with which divisions/offices worked closely with charter schools and was able to connect with those employees because of my previous position at the department.

Currently, I conduct weekly consultations with two low-performing charter schools in North Carolina. Because of my experiences I am well aware of the importance of charter school administrators receiving support from their authorizer. I am also aware of the types of services NCDPI offers administrators in charter schools, as well as local school districts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated in the introduction, this study aims to help inform the practices of charter school authorizers by comparing the support that charter school administrators perceive they are receiving from the authorizer with the support that the authorizer perceives they are providing to the charter school administrator. Missing from the current charter school literature is an explanation of the relationship between charter school administrators, charter school authorizers, and charter school performance. This review of literature focuses on the relationship between charter school administrators and their authorizer, charter school leadership, and charter school authorizers.

Charter School Administrators

It is helpful to review charter school administrators to understand the uniqueness of their role. Studies of traditional public schools catalogue an array of critical leadership tasks for principals, but few focus specifically on area of leaderships that are amplified and extended in the charter context (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Portin, 2001). Though few researchers have focused on charter school administrators as their unit of analysis, they and other charter school stakeholders agree that strong leadership is crucial for charter school success (Chen, 2016; Coelli & Green, 2012; Vergari, 2000; Zimmer, Gill, Attridge, & Obenauf, 2014). Strong charter school leaders are necessary to establish and achieve a clear school mission; to recruit, develop, and retain effective educators; and to provide teachers the leadership support they need to deliver high-quality instruction (Campbell & Gross, 2008). From authorization to opening day, the unexpected complications, unforeseen circumstances, and tough regulations charter school administrators are required to abide by are similar to what a regular public school administrator encounters daily in the district. Given the multiple

unique responsibilities involved in the administration and management, it has been clear that these schools require experienced, highly skilled leaders.

The autonomy of charter schools allows for a variety of leadership structures. Most charter schools are led by a principal or director. Most states do not require charter school leaders to be licensed or require any specific qualifications such as a bachelor's degree. Charter leaders may be called principals, deans, headmasters, directors, or heads of schools. Surveys of directors and founders of charter schools cite several major reasons for establishing charter schools, including (a) autonomy in educational programming, (b) a desire to serve a special student population, (c) realization of an educational vision, (d) a desire to provide a better teaching and learning environment, (e) instructional innovation, (f) a desire to involve parents, and (g) the autonomy to develop nontraditional relationships with the community (Fusarelli, 2002).

Unlike their district school counterparts, charter school administrators not only serve as the instructional leader of their school, but they manage the budget, recruit board members, hire and train staff, recruit and orient families, and work with the governing board (Palmer & Gau, 2003). Although charter school leadership needs vary according to school type, operational status, and experience of founders, leadership is extremely important to the success and maintenance of charter schools, and many of these schools depend heavily upon strong, well-connected leaders (Luekens, 2004). Traditional public school principals report to a superintendent, who in turn reports to a board of education. In contrast, charter school leaders report directly to the charter school board and the state education agencies or non-district authorizer. They must overcome startup obstacles like securing funding and a facility, attracting students and teachers, and building community support (Luekens, 2004).

Principals of charter schools may or may not emerge from traditional educational leadership programs and theoretically may not be adequately prepared to successfully perform the tasks associated with the principal (Deal, Hentschke, & Kecker, 2005; Dressler, 2001). Traditional school leadership training programs are not designed to prepare charter leaders for the responsibilities that go beyond those of a district school principal (Hess & Kelly, 2005). Most states lack a formal or systematic strategy to develop a talent pipeline or management system for the next generation of charter leaders (Bloomberg & Nathan, 2008). Leadership development can entail tremendous sacrifice and be an expensive and time-consuming endeavor (Bloomberg & Nathan, 2008). For example, one nationally recognized charter school leadership preparation program, Building Excellent Schools, requires participants to relocate to another city for a year or be away from home for as many as 100 nights during a year-long training period (Fellowship Calendar, 2017).

Research findings show that leaders who have gone through traditional principal training programs lack confidence in financial management, while those who have backgrounds in financial management lack confidence in core educational leadership (Hays, 2013; Palmer & Gau, 2003). Campbell and Gross (2008) suggest expanding specialized charter leadership training programs because they are more carefully tailored to the needs of charter school directors. The authors also suggest creating more local mentoring and problem-solving opportunities for leaders from different types of schools (Campbell & Gross, 2008).

Charter school administrators, on average, have significantly less experience at their current schools, and are less likely to hold a master's degree (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015). Seventy-four percent of charter school principals holds degrees from traditional education

programs and approximately 60% is former public school principals, while 13% has non-education backgrounds (Campbell & Gross, 2008). Charter leaders are much more likely than traditional principals to be women, and on average, more racially and ethnically diverse (Luekens, 2004). Finally, charter school principals earned much less than traditional public school administrators, with annual salaries of \$54,000 in charter schools compared to \$69,000 in traditional public schools (Luekens, 2004).

In short, this review suggests that the autonomy of charter schools allows for a variety of leadership structures and charter school leaders are not often prepared in their trainings. What has not been studied is the relationship between charter school leaders and their authorizer. In the next section, I review the roles of charter authorizers, the differences in practices of authorizers, and the types of charter authorizers.

Charter School Authorizers

The original vision for charter schools came in 1988 from Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, in which he outlined a new kind of public school where teachers could experiment with fresh and innovative ways of reaching students (Kahlenburg & Potter, 2014). Like all public schools, charter schools are publicly funded, but are independent from local school boards. The rules and terms for the amount of autonomy and flexibility each school enjoys in controlling its curriculum, instruction, staffing, budget, organization, and calendar, as well as the results schools must achieve to remain open, are stipulated in their contract, or charter (Chen, 2016). A charter is understood as a contract between the charter school board and the authorizer. In order for the school to succeed, the charter school must run a successful school that delivers the goals outlined in its charter and the authorizer must provide oversight and assistance to help ensure that the school delivers.

In 2014-2015, there were 1,050 authorizers that oversaw 6,716 charter schools serving more than 2.5 million students (NACSA, 2015).

Researchers have been paying an increasing amount of attention to the role of charter authorizers (NACSA, 2015; NAPCS, 2017; Palmer & Gau, 2003, 2005). In 2003, the first national study of authorizers concluded that, except for those sponsoring only a few schools (typically local school boards), many were doing an adequate job (Palmer & Gau, 2003). In 2006, a national study examined authorizer type and found great variability among authorizers, with some doing their jobs well and others exercising less oversight. This study also found that independent state charter boards and nonprofit organizations generally did a better job than other authorizers (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

The differences in authorizing practices and authorizing capacity are crucial in the authorizers' priority and ability to hold their schools accountable for the flexibility and freedom they are given over traditional public schools (Chen, 2016). There is a debate about which types of authorizing agencies have the proper incentives to fulfill their roles of granting and monitoring of charters schools, as well as being accountability gatekeepers (Zimmer et al., 2014). Charter school authorizers have three main responsibilities: (a) review applications for new charter schools and determine whether the proposed schools will be granted a charter; (b) monitor approved charter schools based upon the content of their charter, as well as state and federal laws; and (c) make decisions regarding the renewal or revocation of charter schools.

Each type of authorizer presents pros and cons in terms of the growth of the charter school movement and the quality of charter school accountability processes (Vergari, 2001). The capacity of authorizers may be limited by the fact that the authorizing function is often

quite different from their core activities: universities and nonprofit agencies, for example, may have no prior experience relevant to the tasks of authorizing, overseeing, and supporting charter schools; school districts may be more likely to have relevant expertise (Zimmer et al., 2014). The most effective authorizers are often state-level groups, universities, or larger school districts that have been able to create an adequate infrastructure, including staff dedicated to charter issues (Palmer & Gau, 2005).

Charter laws vary across a number of dimensions, including the type of agencies that can authorize charter schools (Zimmer et al., 2014). Across the United States and the District of Columbia, legislatures have permitted six different types of public entities to serve as charter school authorizers: (a) school districts (LEAs); (b) state boards of departments of education (SEAs); (c) non-educational government entities (NEGs); (d) colleges and universities (HEIs); (e) separate state-level public boards (ICBs); and (f) not-for-profit organizations (NFPs) (Palmer, 2007; Vergari, 2001; Zimmer et al., 2014). Table 1 highlights the breakdown of charter authorizers across the nation.

Table 1

Number of Charter School Authorizers by Type 2011-2015

Authorizer Type	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	% change 2011-2015
HEI	49	46	43	47	45	-8%
ICB	8	10	14	15	17	113%
LEA	857	859	882	944	950	11%
NEG	2	2	3	3	3	50%
NFP	20	20	19	19	17	-15%
SEA	19	20	18	18	18	-5%
Total	955	957	979	1,046	1,050	10%

Note. Adapted from “State of Charter Authorizing: 2015 State of Charter Authoring Report,” by National Association of Charter School Authorizers (2015). HEI (Higher Education Institutions), ICB (Independent Charter Boards), LEA (Local Education Agencies), NEG (Non-educational Government Entities), NFP (Nonprofit Organization), and SEA (State Education Agencies).

NACSA's latest national annual survey found that 90% of more than 1,000 active authorizers were LEAs, 4.4% of authorizers were HEIs, and fewer than 2% fell in the 'other' authorizing categories (NACSA, 2015). School districts have the most direct experience with the day-to-day operation of public schools and all that it entails. Some district authorizers have embraced charter schools an integral component of their school improvement plans while others use them to handle "problem" students or to relieve overcrowding (Palmer, 2007). Moreover, school districts that have embraced the charter school reform view charter schools as a distraction from other reform initiatives and as an unreasonable burden on school district budgets and personnel (Vergari, 2001). In a 2015 national survey, NACSA reported that many districts have not developed the capacity to effectively oversee charter schools in addition to their other duties. Contrarily, Denver's district officials have partnered with charter schools and have created a School Performance Framework that measures tests scores, academic growth, student engagement, enrollment rates, and parental satisfaction (Osborne, 2016).

Non-educational government entities, which include local and state governmental entities that are not local school systems, have recognized a need to offer an improved school system for their residents, and have begun to embrace the charter movement through the use of innovative local partnerships (Brown, 2006). Although their offices may lack hands-on expertise with schools, they are experts at delivering and monitoring other important social services and can find talented individuals to help them create high-quality charter authorizing systems. Charter schools are attractive to municipal government because they can be built more quickly and allow some local control over the services offered.

Colleges and universities are permitted to authorize charter schools in nine states. They may face political pressures from the governor and/or state legislature to assume an active role in the charter school arena (Brown, 2006). In Michigan, public HEIs were slow to embrace charters because of pressure from unions and local boards, but pressure from their governor was a key factor in their decision to become authorizers (Palmer, 2007). On the other hand, some public universities have entered chartering for educational reasons. For example, survey data revealed that Ball State University in Indiana was motivated in part by political pressure, but also by the belief that chartering would advance its mission and create research opportunities (Palmer, 2007).

Separate state-level charter boards, which are appointed by one or more public government officials, authorize charter schools in six states and the District of Columbia: the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, the Colorado Charter School Institute, the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, the Florida School of Excellence Commission, the Idaho Public Charter School Commission, the South Carolina Public Charter School District, and the Utah State Charter Board (Palmer, 2007). Additionally, the Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Texas state boards of education are considered strong state level charter school authorizers (Palmer, 2007). Some believe they are more likely than other authorizers to have the interest, knowledge, and “will” to take chartering seriously and can focus exclusively on high-quality authorizing practices and decisions (Palmer, 2007). The board members have the sole mission of authorizing schools under the supervision of their appointing entities (Chen, 2016).

State boards or departments of education oversee the public education system of their states, providing information, resources, and technical assistance on educational matters to

schools and to the public. They, like local school districts, bring extensive experience and understand the day-to-day operations of schools. State Boards and departments of education may be less than enthusiastic about charter schools based on philosophical and political reasons (Vergari, 2001). Board and staff members often view charter schools with a skeptical eye because they are not often familiar and are sometimes skeptical of the flexibilities that charter schools have with regard to education policies (Weil, 2009). Moreover, charter schools place new burdens on state departments of education, frequently without a commensurate increase in capacity for meeting the new obligations (Vergari, 2001). For example, in 2011, North Carolina Senate Bill 8 removed the provision that previously limited the number of charter schools operating at any given time to 100 schools. During an interview with a local news station, Senator Richard Stevens, a supporter of the bill, expressed that “the lifting of the cap would offer more options to more students who aren’t being served well in existing schools” (Leslie, 2011, para. 4).

NACSA, the CRPE, and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) have each established their own research-based criteria for “quality” authorizing, but there is still policy debate about the best types of authorizers (Palmer & Gau, 2003; Zimmer et al., 2014). Rebeca Gau (2006) examined all previous research related to authorizers and extracted four criteria that appear essential for authorizers to do their jobs well:

1. Data-driven decision making and rigorous, objective selection, and renewal processes.
2. Sound working relations between authorizer and school.
3. Skilled personnel.
4. Adequate resources and autonomy.

Central Office Support

In this dissertation, I focus on the second of these criteria: sound working relations between authorizer and school. To date, there is little research on the relationship between charter school authorizers and their charter schools, particularly with respect to the support authorizers might provide those schools. In the research literature, support often refers to aid or assistance or the addition of strength to that which cannot stand on its own (Lee, Smith Perry, & Smylie, 1999). Sustained, job-embedded supports may be fundamental to helping administrators build their capacity for instructional leadership (Honig, 2012). Unlike charter school administrators, traditional public school leaders have the support of central office staff who provide support through online resources, school site visits, and workshops. In exchange for greater autonomy from various state and district policies and greater flexibility in decision making (Bickmore & Dowell, 2011), charter schools usually have no contact with local central office education agencies and must handle administrative tasks typically completed at the district level, including financial management, recruitment and hiring of personnel, data collection and reporting, and various recordkeeping and support functions (Luekens, 2004).

Importantly, there is little research pertaining to the support that charter school authorizers provide to charter school leaders to prepare them to be effective instructional leaders. The efforts of school district central office leaders to support administrators' instructional leadership reflect several specific developments in research and practice that suggest the promise of these efforts for strengthening systems of support for improved classroom instruction and results for students (Honig, 2012). A recent analysis of more than 175 central office staff and school leaders' interviews suggests that the central office

provides school leaders support with professional development, connecting administrators to sources of expertise, creating new structure or tools, and building a data use culture (Grissom et al., 2017). In addition, district-provided professional development, which was almost always job-embedded, had a statistically significant relationship with principal's time spent on such instructional leadership tasks such as observing classroom instruction and engaging with teachers outside of the classroom to improve instruction (McAdamis, 2010).

Instructional leadership represents a set of work practices that administrators come to integrate into their ongoing work through sustained support for each integration over time; arrangements such as on-site coaches and other professional development that takes place in schools as a part of principal's regular day seem fundamental to administrators learning such practices (Honig, 2012).

In this dissertation, I build upon this research on the relationship between public school administrators and central offices to examine the relationship between charter school authorizers and charter school leaders. North Carolina offers a unique context in which to study this relationship because it has a single authorizer, NCDPI, with a focus on supporting school leaders. In the next section I briefly review North Carolina's charter legislation.

North Carolina's Charter Authorizer

North Carolina passed legislation in 1996 that specified goals to improve student learning and learning opportunities, as well as encourage new teaching methods, new professional opportunities for teachers, and parent choice of schooling options (NCDPI, 2017). The legislation held charters accountable for measurable student achievement results. Furthermore, the legislation stated that within a year of opening, the population of the school would reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the community in which it is

located. The ultimate authorizing power for all charters was given to the State Board of Education (SBE). Charter schools are accountable to the SBE for ensuring compliance with all charter laws and policies. After the SBE approval process has concluded, it signs a charter agreement with each charter nonprofit board that outlines the responsibilities and expectations of the charter school (Appendix A). According to the NCDPI website, the following outlines the work of the department:

NCDPI is charged with implementing the state's public school laws and the SBE's policies and procedures governing pre-kindergarten through 12th grade public education. The elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction leads the Department and functions under the policy direction of the State Board of Education. The areas of support include curriculum and instruction, accountability, finance, teacher and administrator preparation and licensing, professional development and school business support and operations. (NCDPI, 2017)

Since, 1996, North Carolina's legislation has evolved. In 2015, an advisory board to the SBE, the North Carolina Charter School Advisory (NCCSAB) board, was established. The NCCSAB's powers and duties are to make recommendations to the SBE on the adoption of rules regarding all aspects of charter school operation; review applications and make recommendations to the SBE for final approval of charter applications; make recommendations to the SBE on actions regarding renewals, non-renewals, and revocations; and undertake any duties and responsibilities as assigned by the SBE (Charter Schools Advisory Board, 2017).

Since 2011, the number of charter schools has increased from 98 to 174. However, the number of staff that oversees has not been consistent with the growing number of charter

schools (Table 2), causing the office to limit the support provided. In the September 17, 2015 edition of the *Weekly Office of Charter Schools Newsletter*, Adam Levinson, the interim director, explained,

OCS will no longer assign consultants to be the single point of contact for each charter school; instead, OCS will provide services to the charter community based on areas of work with a lead/primary contact for each. OCS also will no longer visit each school annually; as part of our new work stream focused on ‘Risk Assessment,’ schools will only receive site visits as needed to address high risk issues or if required by the Renewal process. (NCDPI, 2015)

The Weekly Office of Charter Schools Newsletter is the primary source of communication from NCDPI to charter school administrators. Each charter school designates one person, usually the lead administrator, employed at the school to receive the newsletter. The newsletter contains updates, action items, information, and celebrations that are pertinent to charter school leaders. Archived newsletters can be found on the OCS website.

During its June 2016 monthly meeting, the NCSBE named Dave Machado the OCS Executive Director. Although he was the lead administrator of a North Carolina charter school for 11 years, “Machado has no education degrees and no experience in political posts . . . But he says he brings a record of leading a successful team” (Helms, 2016, para. 29). According to the OCS website, the office consists of an executive director, assistant director and two consultants (Office of Charter Schools, 2018).

North Carolina’s charter school laws are positively rated, relative to those of other states. For example, NACSA established 12 essential practices that they feel helped pave the way for quality authorizers. The standards were first published in 2004 and are regularly

updated as the charter movement evolves (National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2017). NACSA’s practices are often cited in research and are used in many states as legislators discuss charter school policy (Palmer, 2007). Members of the NCCSAB refer to NACSA practices as they make recommendations to the SBE to amend North Carolina charter policies. In 2015, North Carolina received a score of 12 out of a possible 12 points for adhering to the Essential Practices of Quality Authorizers (NACSA, 2015).

Table 2

North Carolina Office of Charter School Staff Data 1996-2018

Fiscal Year	Number of Charter School Consultants	Number of Charter Schools	Charter School Director
1996	0	0	Director 1
1997-1998	4	33	
1998-1999	5	56	
1999-2000	5	75	
2000-2001	5	86	Director 2
2001-2002	5	91	
2002-2003	5	93	
2003-2004	5	93	Director 3
2004-2005	5	97	
2005-2006	6	96	
2006-2007	7	93	
2007-2008	7	98	
2008-2009	6	97	
2009-2010	5	96	
2010-2011	4	99	Director 4
2011-2012	3	100	
2012-2013	5	107	
2013-2014	5	127	
2014-2015	5	148	Interim Director
2015-2016	5	159	
2016-2017	5	162	Director 5
2017-2018	4	174	

Note. Adapted from “Report to the North Carolina General Assembly Annual Charter Schools report G.S. 115C-218.110(b),” North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017.

The NAPSC established 17 criteria for quality authorizers. *Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter Public School Laws* (NAPSC, 2015) is the first report to measure each state's charter school law and focus on strengthening authorizers. Ranked 14th out of the 44 states that have charter schools, North Carolina's positive score was based on there not being a cap for charter growth and that there is a fair amount of autonomy, having a virtual school application, and accountability to charter schools. NAPSC highlighted potential areas of improvement that include ensuring equitable operation funding and access to capital funding and facilities (NASPC, 2015).

Non-profit boards seeking to open a charter school choose the organizational structure of their school. Seventy-six percent of charter schools (131 out of 174) in North Carolina have an independent structure in which the non-profit board did not employ the assistance of an Educational Management Organization (EMO) or Charter Management Organization (CMO). EMOs are for-profit and have corporate staffs outside the school building making decisions for individual schools in the day-to-day operations of these schools (Buckley & Schneider, 2009). CMOs are nonprofit organizations that operate a network of charter schools with a common mission or instructional design and shared central office support (Farrell, Wohlstetter, & Smith, 2012). In 2015, two unique EMOs began operation in North Carolina after the NCSBE approved two virtual charter schools to begin operation in 2015. EMOs and CMOs provide schools with funding and other resources.

North Carolina law requires the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) to review and evaluate the educational effectiveness of charter schools and the effect of charter schools on the public schools in the local school administrative unit (LEA) in which the charter schools are located. In 2014, the SBE commissioned the North Carolina Office of

Charter Schools (NCOCS) to implement an annual Performance Framework (Appendix B) to capture each charter school's operational, financial, governance, and academic data trends over time. In 2016, the NCSBE's Strategic Plan showed the following results from the Performance Framework: 76.9% of North Carolina charter schools met or exceeded all operational goals, 88.5% met expected financial standards, and 84.6% of all charter schools met expected operational standards (NCSBE, 20176). NCOCS defines the Performance Framework:

The performance framework focuses on Goal 2.4 of the North Carolina State Board's Strategic Plan to "Increase the number of charter schools meeting academic, operational, and financial goals." The Performance Framework, an annual assessment of charter schools, serves as the standard mechanism for reporting on progress toward achievement of these goals. The Framework provides a consolidated view of each charter school's performance relative to a list of academic, operational, and financial requirements. The academic elements of the Framework are all standard indicators provided by the State accountability system. The operational and financial elements of the Framework are all required by statute, State Board policy, or the Charter Agreement. (NCDPI, 2017)

The NCSBE has set a goal of increasing the number of charter schools that meet or exceed all operational, financial, and academic performance expectations. Through the various divisions under the NCSBE, a broad range of services are provided to charter schools to help ensure that they understand how to meet all state and federal laws and policies and adhere to the information that is written in their charter. The services are offered through consultants conducting school site visits, conducting webinars, telephone consultations, and

state and local conferences. In an effort to provide charter school specific professional development, regional huddles were established to deliver periodic refresher training for charter school leaders and their staff on topics such as lotteries, teacher evaluation, and updates to charter school laws. In 2014, a mandatory planning year was implemented for newly approved charter school boards.

In 2015, legislation established the NCOCS to be administratively located in the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) subject to the supervision, direction, and control of the SBE (Charter Schools, 2016). Although NCOCS was established and located at DPI, the legislation specifically established that NCOCS would serve as staff to NCCSAB and provide technical assistance and guidance to charter schools, and nonprofit corporations seeking to operate charter schools. In light of the legislation, NCOCS began to provide weekly electronic newsletter communications to charter school leaders and stakeholders. Additionally, in 2014, the NCCSAB began to invite continually low-performing charter school boards and the school administrators to their meetings to provide support (NCDPI, 2015).

In 2014, the NCOCS created a planning year for all newly approved charter school boards to prepare for their first school year. NCOCS provides trainings on information that is relevant to opening a successful charter school. Throughout the planning year, the boards are assigned very specific tasks whose aim is to strengthen the governing board. The tasks may include creating policies, a school calendar, board self-assessments and plans for enrollment.

Sometimes the supports that NCOCS and NCCSAB provide are not enough for schools to remain open. Between 1997 and 2017, 60 charter schools closed (NCDPI, 2017). This total number includes schools that were not able to open, schools that relinquished their

charters, and schools that either had their charters revoked or not renewed by the State Board of Education. Most of charter school closures have been the result of financially-related issues. Figure 1 shows the percentage and reasons for charter school closure.

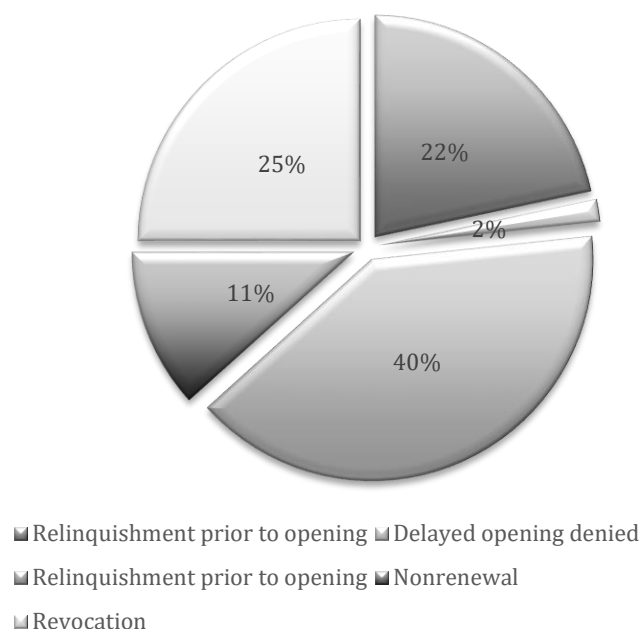


Figure 1. Reasons for charter school closure 1997-2017. Adapted from “Report to the North Carolina General Assembly Annual Charter Schools” Report G.S. 115C-218.110(b), North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2017).

Importantly, charter school leaders have expressed mixed reviews regarding the support that they receive from the SBE. During its May 2017 monthly board meeting, Union Academy Charter School’s principal referred to her school as a sports team, referring to the SBE as the “team owners” and the staff of the various divisions as the “head coaches.” She explained that “head coaches” always provided great information for schools and parents through site visits, phone calls, the SBE website, and weekly newsletters (NCSBE, 2017).

Conversely, Black Led Schools of Choice, an organization founded by African American charter school leaders, desire better communication with the SBE and NCSAB because of what they feel is the constant encroachment of the freedom on charter schools (Smith, 2016).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Mixed methods research is defined as research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry (DeCuir-Gunby & Shutz, 2016). I chose to use a mixed methods approach to examine these research questions because the fundamental principle of mixed methods research is to combine methods in a manner that considers the strengths and weaknesses of each individual method (DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Mixing both kinds of data within one study is grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation. When used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for a more robust analysis, taking advantage of the strengths of each (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). There are five reasons for conducting mixed methods research: triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion (Greene et al., 1989). For this research, I focused on development, which involved using quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially, with one method informing the development of the other.

This research study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (quan→QUAL). The mixed methods sequential explanatory design consists of two distinct phases: quantitative, followed by qualitative (Creswell, 2003). A multistage format of the mixed methods research, which typically includes two or more stages, may be difficult to comprehend without graphically representing the mixed methods procedures used in the study (Creswell, 2003). A graphical representation of the mixed methods procedures helps a

researcher visualize the sequence of the data collection, the priority of either method, and the connecting and mixing points of the two approaches within a study (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). The visual representation portrays the sequence of the research activities in the study and indicates that the quantitative phase, the term QUALITATIVE is capitalized, of the study informed the qualitative phase. The visual also shows the connecting points between the quantitative and qualitative phases and the related products, as well as specifies the place in the research process where the integration or mixing of the results of both quantitative and qualitative phases occurs (Ivankova et al., 2006). The visual representation for this study can be found in Appendix C.

In this study, I first analyzed quantitative data from the North Carolina Office of Charter Schools Satisfaction Survey. Next, I collected the qualitative data through individual semi-structured interviews with charter school administrators and DPI employees. In this second phase, the qualitative data were analyzed to help elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Creswell, 2003; Ivankova et al., 2006).

Conceptual Framework

I drew on sociocultural learning theory to ground my research. According to this approach, learning is inherently a social phenomenon by which individuals make sense of information and construct new knowledge based on prior knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, and through activity and social interactions in everyday contexts (Honig, 2012; Knapp, 2008; Marsh & Farrell, 2015). The work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky provided the foundation for the application of sociocultural learning theory. Vygotsky's work

emphasized three major themes: (a) cognitive development is rooted in social interactions and mediated by abstract symbols, which he referred to as tools; (b) the tools are not created in isolation but rather are products of the sociocultural evolution of an actively involved individual; and (c) learning is viewed as a developmental or genetic process (Peer & McClendon, 2002).

From Vygotsky's original writings, a teacher or "more knowledgeable other" played a key role in supporting learning, where he or she assists, models, discusses, and supports an activity to increase the learner's understanding and independent performance (Knapp, 2008; Marsh & Farrell, 2015). Other scholars further developed this idea of a mentor-apprentice relationship as a "model of instruction that works to make thinking visible . . . [by] showing the apprentice how to do a task and helping the apprentice to do it" (Marsh & Farrell, 2015, p. 273). A mentor offers not only specific domain knowledge—the concepts, facts, and routines within a content area—but also strategies ("tricks of the trade") and meta-cognitive strategies (Marsh & Farrell, 2015).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a major concept in Vygotsky's work. This zone is defined as the distance between what one can achieve alone and what one can achieve with help (Knapp, 2008). This idea emphasized that humans develop higher cognitive levels when the gaps in their thinking and problem solving are supported by adults, peers, or more capable others (Peer & McClendon, 2002). This support, called scaffolding, supports development in such a way that what can be done collaboratively now will be accomplished independently at a later date (Peter & McClendon, 2002).

The findings across several sociocultural learning theory studies generate a list of practices important as understood by sociocultural learning theory: brokering, modeling,

authentic practice, and dialogue; opportunities for joint work; and development and use of tools (Gallucci, 2008; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008; Knapp, 2008). This study focused on the following dimensions: opportunities for joint work and development and use of tools. These dimensions were used to frame my understanding of the charter school administrator's perception of the support that they receive and the perception of the support that NCDPI consultants perceive they are providing. NCDPI consultants help monitor each charter school's financial, academic, and operational performance annually, and does a comprehensive review as part of considering whether to grant charter renewals or determine what level of support is needed. Thus, NCDPI consultants serve as mentors in providing professional development and technical assistance to assist administrators with the state's financial, academic, and operational laws and policies.

Setting and Participants

There were three key groups of participants in this study. The first group consisted of North Carolina charter school administrators in the 2016-2017 school year who completed an OCS Satisfaction Survey. In the *Weekly Office of Charter Schools Newsletter*, Executive Director Dave Machado requested that all charter school administrators complete a survey that would be used to inform NCOCS as to whether their needs were being met and what improvements were needed (NCDPI, 2016). Seventy-one out of 162 administrators (44%) completed the survey. Leaders in these schools commonly report directly to a charter board or, in the case of networks of charter schools, to a chief executive officer, and are given significant latitude in the operation of the school (Bickmore & Dowell, 2011; Ni et al., 2015). Each individual charter application provides qualification requirements for its administrator.

The *Weekly Office of Charter Schools Newsletter* is the primary source of communications from NCDPI to North Carolina charter school administrators.

The second group in this study consisted of charter school administrators in the 2017-2018 school year. Because the results of the survey were anonymous, the administrator may or may not have completed the 2016 satisfaction survey. One hundred seventy-four charter school administrators were invited, through email, to participate in the study. Twelve (12) North Carolina charter school administrators were chosen based on their years of experience, school's geographical location, organization of school, and student demographics. Semi-structured interviews took place at the administrators' school site to discuss their perceptions of the support that they receive from the NCDPI.

An overview of the charter administrators that participated in the semi-structured interviews can be found in Table 3. The number of years of experience leading a charter school in North Carolina varied among the charter school administrators. The number of years ranged from 1–5 years of experience to 20-25 years of experience. The NCSBE has eight education regions that are categorized by geographical location. Regions 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8 were represented in this study (see Appendix D).

James: James is an administrator of a K-12 school in District 3 serving approximately 1,300 students. His ethnicity is White and his years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina range from 1 to 5 years. He has a Master's Degree in Education. Eighteen percent of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. He added that the school does not offer transportation for his students.

Table 3

Profiles of Charter School Administrator Participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	Years of Experience	Race	SBE Geographical Location of the School	Organization of the School
James	1-5	White	District 3	Independent
Timothy	1-5	White	District 3	Independent
Micah	1-5	White	District 1	Independent
Mary	1-5	African-American	District 3	EMO/CMO
Sarah	16-20	White	District 3	Independent
Christian	21-25	African-American	District 6	Independent
Allen	21-25	White	District 4	Independent
Gina	6-10	African-American	District 3	Independent
Torrie	1-5	African-American	District 3	Independent
Samuel	1-5	White	District 6	Independent
Lorraine	1-5	White	District 3	Independent
Jackson	21-25	White	District 8	EMO/CMO

Timothy: Timothy is an administrator of a K-8 school in District 3 serving approximately 350 students. His ethnicity is White and his years of experience as a charter school administrator in North Carolina ranges from 1 to 5 years. Prior to becoming a charter school administrator, he spent 12 years in an elementary classroom. Three percent of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. He explained that his students bring their lunches and parents provide transportation.

Micah: Micah is an administrator at a K-7 school in District 1 serving approximately 250 students. His ethnicity is White and his years of experience as a charter school

administrator in North Carolina ranges from 1 to 5 years. He has a Master's degree in Education. Seventy percent of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. He noted that the school provides bus transportation as well as lunches to students who qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Mary: Mary is an administrator of a K-8 school in District 3 serving approximately 700 students. Her ethnicity is African American and her years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina range from 1 to 5 years. She has a Master's Degree in Education and 67% of her students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Her school provides lunch to students who qualify for free or reduced lunches and her board uses the services of an Educational Management Organization.

Sarah: Sarah is an administrator of a K-12 school in District 3 serving approximately 1,100 students. Her ethnicity is White and her years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina ranges from 15 to 20 years. She has a Master's Degree in Education and 16% of her students qualify for free or reduced lunch. She noted that although the school is beginning to receive applications from diverse population, the board, as well as administrative staff, would like for the student population to be more diverse. The school does not offer transportation or meals.

Christian: Christian is an administrator of a K-12 school in District 5 serving approximately 1,500 students. His ethnicity is African-American and her years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina ranges from 20 to 25 years. He has a Master's Degree in Education. Ninety-five percent of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. He added that his school is a Title I school.

Allen: Allen is an administrator of a K-6 school in District 4 serving approximately 300 students. His ethnicity is White and his years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina ranges from 20 to 25 years. He has a Master's Degree in Education and 52% of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Students who qualify for free and reduced lunch also received a voucher to purchase school uniforms.

Gina: Gina is an administrator of a K-5 school in District 4 serving approximately 130 students. Her ethnicity is African-American and her years of experience as charter administrator in North Carolina range from 6 to 10 years. She has a Master's Degree in Education and 95% of her students qualify for free or reduced lunch. She noted that her school's demographics are not reflective of the neighborhood in which the school is located. The school offers transportation and meals to all of their students.

Torrie: Torrie is an administrator of a K-12 school in District 3 serving approximately 1,200 students. Her ethnicity is African American and her years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina ranges from 1 to 5 years. She has a Master's Degree in Education and 72% of her students qualify for free or reduced lunch. She added that when she joined the school it was noncompliant in many areas. Transportation and meals are provided for her students.

Samuel: Samuel is an administrator of a K-2 school in District 6 serving approximately 300 students. His ethnicity is White and his years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina range from 1 to 5 years. He has a Master's Degree in Education and 98% of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. His school's demographics are reflective of the community in which the school is located. Transportation and meals are provided to the students.

Lorraine: Lorraine is an administrator of a K-8 school in District 3 serving approximately 500 students. Her ethnicity is White and her years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina range from 1 to 5 years. She has a Doctorate Degree in Education and 5% of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. She further noted that there is at least one college educated parent in each of her students' households.

Jackson: Jackson is an administrator of a K-12 school in District 8 serving approximately 1,300 students. His ethnicity is Caucasian and his years of experience as a charter administrator in North Carolina ranges from 20 to 25 years. He has a Master's Degree in Business and 14% of his students qualify for free or reduced lunch. He explained that his school's demographics were reflective of the local school districts.

The third group consisted of staff from NCDPI (Table 4). The staff members support all public schools in North Carolina; help the NCDPI monitor each charter school's financial, academic, and operational performance annually; and conduct a comprehensive review as part of considering whether to grant charter renewals or determine what level of support is needed. Policies and guidelines that guide the support that is provided are discussed in monthly state school board meetings. Support is provided through emails, webinars, school site visits, phone calls, and workshops.

Table 4

Profiles of 6 NCDPI Employee Participants

Ethnicity (<i>n</i>)	Gender (<i>n</i>)	Range of Years of Experience at NCDPI
White (6)	Male (2) Female (4)	2-9 years

Six NCDPI employees were interviewed to discuss the perceptions of the support that they provide to charter administrators. These employees work in the six departments that provide support to charter school administrators and who also attend quarterly risk assessment meetings with OCS to provide assessments of all charter schools. At these meetings, each department shares updates regarding reports and data that is specific to their area of support. If a school is deficient in any area OCS and that department creates a plan for support that may include a site visit, email, or phone call.

Theodore: Theodore has over 20 years of experience in his profession. He has been employed with NCDPI for 4 years. He noted that his division/office works with charter schools in the area of finances. Prior to working a NCDPI, he worked at another government state government agency.

Claire: Claire has 12 years of experience in her profession. She has been employed with NCDPI for 2 years. She explained that her division/office works with charter schools in the area of academics. Prior to working a NCDPI, she worked at a school in another state.

Denise: Denise has 12 years of experience in her profession. She has been employed with NCDPI for 6 years. She explained that her division/office works with charter schools in the area of academics. Prior to working at NCDPI, she worked in two local school districts.

Vanessa: Vanessa has 25 years of experience in his profession. She has been employed at DPI for 2 years. She noted that his division/office works with charter schools in the area of academics. Prior to working at NCDPI, she worked a local school district and another state government agency.

Clifford: Clifford has 15 years of experience in his profession. He has been employed at DPI for 9 years. He noted that his division/office works with charter schools in

the area of academics. Prior to working at NCDPI, he worked in a corporation in another state.

Rudy: Rudy has 15 years of experience in his profession. She has been employed at DPI for 2 years. She noted that her division/office works with charter schools in academics, governance, and operations. Prior to working at NCDPI, she worked at a charter school.

Data Collection

Instrumentation

There were two instruments used in this study. In the fall of 2016, a 10-item Office of Charter Schools Satisfaction Survey (see Appendix E) was sent to all 174 NC charter school administrators. A link was sent by NCOCS to all North Carolina charter school administrators on October 21, 2016 soliciting their participation in the Satisfaction Survey. NCOCS collected the data anonymously. The survey and survey data are both public documents. At a response rate of 41%, 71 charter school administrators completed the survey. The survey questions were designed to capture the areas in which charter school administrator needs were being met and areas that needed to be improved. For the qualitative component, a semi-structured interview schedule featuring broad, open-ended questions was used. This approach allowed me to ask each charter school administrator and NCDPI employee the same questions but remain flexible in order to cater to their individual experiences (DeCuir-Gunby & Shutz, 2016). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. See Appendices F and G for the interview questions.

Semi-structured Interview

The individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the charter school administrator's school location and NCDPI consultant locations. The questions were broad,

open-ended, and were informed by a sociocultural perspective (Honig, 2012; Knapp, Marsh, & Farrell, 2015). Interviews provide “in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). The researcher conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with study participants to gather information regarding the perception that charter school administrators have regarding the support that they receive from their authorizer. Additionally, employees of the authorizer were interviewed regarding their perception of the support that they provide charter school administrators. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Interview Protocol Development

The content of the interview protocol was grounded in the quantitative results from the first phase of the study. The goal of the qualitative phase was to explore and elaborate on the results of the survey (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Because the NCSBE Performance Framework is an annual report card for all charter schools, I wanted to explore what areas of the framework charter school administrators perceived that they received support in from NCDPI. Additionally, I wanted to explore the administrators’ overall perception of support and discover whether they utilized outside support. Ten open-ended questions explored the topic of support.

Procedures

This research study employed an explanatory mixed methods design (qual→QUAN) in that the methods were implemented sequentially, starting with quantitative data collection and analysis and followed by qualitative data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). After obtaining IRB approval, I obtained the results of the North Carolina Office of Charter Schools Satisfaction Survey by submitting a public records request to the

NCDPI. After analyzing the results, I determined that there was a need to conduct individual interviews with charter administrators, as well as NCDPI employees, to get a better understanding of their perception of support.

In terms of process, I sent an email to all 174 North Carolina charter school administrators informing them of the research project and soliciting their participation in the study. The email briefly described the study, including its goals, purpose, and design. After receiving interest from 22 charter administrators, a purposeful sample of 12 administrators were chosen based on the following public information: their years of experience, school's geographical location, type of school, and student demographics. This is public information that is housed on the NCDPI website as well as the individual school websites of the administrators. The demographic information was used in an effort to obtain a diverse sample which includes varied years of experience, varied demographic locations, and varied governance structures of the schools (independent governing board, educational management organization, etc.). Selected participants were emailed a consent form in which they were asked if they would be interested in participating in the research project. The consent forms were signed on the day of the interview and later stored in a secure, locked cabinet. Although given the option of face-to-face or teleconference, all interviews were completed face-to-face.

NCDPI provides the names and email addresses for all of its employees on its website. I selected the divisions/offices that provide support to charter administrators and send emails to the employees soliciting their participation in the study. NCDPI employees were chosen based on the area of support that the employee provides to charter school administrators. The aim was to have a representative from six different areas.

Data Analysis

I engaged in a multistage data collection approach. First, I analyzed the results of the North Carolina Office of Charter Schools survey that was sent in August 2016 to all charter school leaders. The analysis provided evidence of the degree to which the charter school administrators perceived support from NCDPI consultants and supported the need for this study. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the features of the data from the survey. Data charts were created to represent the results of the analysis in summary form and to provide a visual representation of the summary. The chart outlines the questions from the survey, as well as how the participants responded to each question. Percentages, as well as the number of respondents, are provided.

The analysis for the qualitative portion of the study was done by coding the interviews. The process suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) for coding was used. All information pertaining to support from the interviews was identified and then categorized. This process was completed by reading the transcriptions to get an overall sense of the participants' responses. Next, for each line or paragraph that was related to support, a label was created to reflect an initial coding. Next, themes were identified by sorting initial schemes into concrete categories and subcategories. Six out of 12 participants had to identify an initial theme for the theme to be included. Finally, the responses were reread and placed into one of the themes.

All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital device and were transcribed verbatim. The interviews were coded and data were organized into themes using a qualitative software package to help analyze and sort the data. Thematic content analysis was used to find common as well as uncommon themes through the process of coding (DeCuir-Gunby,

2008). Data from individual interviews were analyzed to discover patterns, themes, and categories using the research questions as a framework (Patton, 2002). The first initial coding generated an array of individual codes associated with their respective data chunks (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The second cycle was a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs (Miles et al., 2014).

The research questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. To what extent do charter school administrators perceive that NCDPI supports their efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?
2. To what extent does NCDPI perceive that they support charter schools' efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?

Reliability and Validity

In order to address reliability for the quantitative component, a reliability analysis was conducted on the survey utilizing Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's alpha measures the internal consistency of a group of items by measuring the homogeneity of the group of items (Clark & Watson, 1995). Cronbach's alpha ranges in value between zero and one in which values closer to one indicate a higher internal consistency; values closer to zero indicate a lower internal consistency. Criteria for a good reliability scale is greater than or equal to .70. The Office of Charter Schools Satisfaction Survey was found to be reliable (3 items; $\alpha = .81$). For the qualitative interviews, charter administrators and NCDPI consultants were asked to read their transcript to ensure that the information was accurate and valid. Member checking is a process that allows the researcher to obtain feedback from the participants of the study regarding the data and the conclusions made from data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Limitations

One major feature of well-collected qualitative data is that it focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that there is a strong handle on what real life is like (Miles et al., 2014). Although I was able to capture the participants' body language and voice intonations as I conducted the semi-structured interviews, other methods, including structured observations, could have provided a better indication of the support that NCDPI provides charter schools.

One of the limitations of this study was that there were a limited number of participants. The response rate for the Office of Charter Schools Satisfaction Survey, the quantitative portion of the study, was 41%. The limited number of participants could have been a result of how the survey was communicated to the charter school administrators. A link was provided in a weekly newsletter that also included several announcements, updates, and due dates from other NCDPI divisions/offices. Administrators could have overlooked the request to complete the survey. Additionally, these 69% of charter school administrators who did not complete the survey may not have done so because of a lack of trust. Moreover, there may be administrators who do not look at the newsletter and would not have taken the survey. This group of administrators not only missed out on the opportunity to complete the survey, but they also missed several important communications that are included in the newsletter. This is another group of administrators whose voices were missing from the survey that could have provided more insight on their perception of support.

Because 69% of the charter school administrators did not complete the survey, some perceptions could be missing. It is possible that missing from the quantitative survey results are the perceptions of the administrators who are compliant in all areas and do not use the

support of NCDPI. These administrators may have added a neutral perspective to the survey data and provided more a balance to the mixed results. Also missing, perhaps, are charter administrators who have had unfavorable experiences with NCDPI and did not trust that their identity would be anonymous. These perceptions would have provided more insight, particularly on questions regarding who the charter school administrator's first point of contact would be and their perception of support. Finally, missing from the survey data could have been those administrators who are overwhelmed with running the school and completing a survey was seen as "one more task" that had to be completed. Having this perception would had provided more insight on the unique needs by getting their input on the best ways that support could be provided, given their hectic schedule. These could also be the same administrators who are not taking advantage of NCDPI sponsored trainings because they are overwhelmed with running their charter school.

Second, there were limitations in regards to sampling for the qualitative portion of the study. Thirty-seven out of 174 charter school administrators expressed interest in participating in the qualitative portion of the study. These 37 administrators represented a range of charter school administrators with regard to their years of experience, ethnicity, school structure, and student demographics. Overall, these 37 charter administrators attend NCDPI trainings. However, there were no administrators from regions two and seven who expressed interest in participating in the study. Their lack of participation could be a result of their geographical location, a 2- to 5-hour drive from NCDPI, which resulted in a limited number of school site visits and face-to-face interactions.

Additionally, neither of the two virtual charter schools expressed an interest in participating in the study. This could have been a result of both schools' ongoing media

coverage regarding low state accountability results, as well as high student attrition. During the time of the interview request, both virtual schools were asked to present data to the NCSBE, as well as to the state legislators, to determine the fate of their 3-year pilot program. Out of the 37, 12 charter school administrators were chosen to participate in the study. This sample size was problematic because it did not include charter administrators from other states. Each state has established its own charter school policies, and unlike North Carolina, many states utilize a variety of authorizer types (NAPCS, 2017). The participant base could be expanded by including additional authorizers and charter school administrators from other states.

A further limitation is that I am a former consultant at NCDPI, which could have influenced the number of participants, as well as the responses given during the interview. Although I am no longer employed and am not connected with NCDPI, administrators may have been reluctant to participate in the study or chose not to be transparent during the interview. Being a former consultant at NCDPI may have had an impact on which 37 administrators agreed to be interviewed. While employed at the department, one of my assigned regions was Region 2. Their lack of participation could have been based on their perception that I was still connected to NCDPI and the results of their interview may somehow be used in their school's evaluation. Because I used nested sampling, it was difficult to ensure that the administrators selected were heterogeneous, reflecting varying years of administrative experience in North Carolina, varying races, varying perceptions, and varying state test results.

Significance

This project has important programmatic, methodological, and substantive implications for the field of education leadership. This study was designed to contribute to the literature regarding the development of support for charter school administrators working in North Carolina charter schools. Through this research, my aim is to help inform the practices of charter authorizers by examining the support that charter school administrators perceive they are receiving. Policymakers may want to consider amending charter laws and policies to allow authorizers to tailor their services to increase the number of charter schools that are compliant in all areas of charter laws. A desired outcome of this study is to test the hypothesis that in schools that perceive a high level of support from its authorizer, the charter school is more likely to be compliant in the areas of academics, finances, operations, and governance as defined by North Carolina charter laws and NCSBE Strategic Goals.

This work will begin to shed light on the needs of charter school administrators and inform the practices of NCDPI consultants. With the recent election of a new state superintendent, NCDPI may soon be reorganized (Ball, 2017). In particular, the questionnaire items allowed for the development of specific measures that may then be used in future analyses linking the support of NCDPI consultants with the experience with charter school administrator effectiveness. Along with these implications, this work forms part of a larger effort to reform charter school administrator support.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine charter school administrators' perceptions regarding the support that its authorizer, NCDPI, provides, paying particular attention to governance, academic, operational, and financial compliance laws. The Performance Framework is a tool in which NCSBE uses to assess charter school in the four aforementioned areas. The Framework provides a consolidated view of each charter school's performance relative to a list of academic, governance operational, and financial requirements. The academic elements of the Framework are all standard indicators provided by the State accountability system. The operational, governance and financial elements of the Framework are all required by statute, State Board policy, or the Charter Agreement (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017).

The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. To what extent do charter school administrators perceive that NCDPI supports their efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?
2. To what extent does NCDPI perceive that they support charter schools' efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed methods design consisting of two distinct phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this design, the quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, while the qualitative data were collected and analyzed second and helped to elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. The priority (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) in the study was given to the qualitative approach because it focused on in-depth explanations of the results obtained in the first, quantitative phase. The

results of the quantitative and qualitative phases were integrated during the discussion of the outcomes of the study.

I used purposeful sampling of current charter school administrators, as well as current NCDPI employees. I conducted a series of 12 semi-structured individual interviews with current charter school administrators. The 30- to 45-minute interviews were conducted at the site of the administrators' choosing. Ten of the interviews were conducted at the administrators' school site and two were conducted in public places away from the administrators' school site. I also conducted six interviews with current NCDPI employees. Each of the 30- to 45-minute interviews were conducted in the NCDPI office building. Throughout the interviews, I took notes and audio recorded the entire interview. After all of the interviews were conducted and the data were reviewed, clear themes emerged in relation to the study's research questions. The participants were at various stages of their career as administrators in a North Carolina charter school and NCDPI employees.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were gathered through an OCS Satisfaction Survey. During the 2016-2017 school year, North Carolina charter school administrators were requested to complete the survey so that the newly appointed Executive Director, Dave Machado, could use the results to inform OCS as to whether the needs of the administrators were being met and what improvements needed to be made (NCDPI, 2016). Seventy-one out of 162 administrators (44%) completed the survey. Results from the survey were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, a reliability statistical analysis. The results of the survey supported the need for this study. This section details the findings of the survey to better understand the results.

The 7-item survey, which featured Likert-type questions, was created by staff at OCS for the purpose of capturing charter school administrators' perceptions of support provided by OCS and other NCDPI offices (Appendix E). The survey items were related to how well charter administrators perceived the needs and interactions with NCDPI ranging from: "OCS helping to meet the needs of charter schools," "characterization and rating of OCS interactions with charter administrators," "responsiveness to questions or concerns," "usefulness of OCS website design," and "a ranking of who administrators would turn to for a major concern." Likert surveys are the most widely used means for assessing survey respondents' personal attitudes and it consists of a series of stem statements followed by an odd or even number of ordered, bipolar-named categories (Willits, Theodori, & Luloff, 2016). The survey included a balance of positive and negative items.

On October 21, 2016, through the *OCS Weekly Newsletter*, a link was sent to the OCS Satisfaction Survey to all North Carolina charter school administrators and was connected to an anonymous survey that was created in Survey Monkey. Administrators completed the survey online. The data were collected during the months of October and November of 2016. There was no information collected in the survey that could directly link the administrator or their school. Seventy-one out of 162 (44%) completed the online survey.

Table 5 shows the results of the first question from the survey. A majority (55%) of the participants answered "Somewhat well" or "Not well" when asked if OCS helped to meet the needs of their charter school. Only 14% of the administrators responded that their needs were being met "extremely well." Zero respondents answered, "Not at all."

Table 5

Perception of Charter Administrators Needs Being Met

Answer Choices	<i>n</i> (%)
Extremely well	10 (14)
Very well	22 (31)
Somewhat well	25 (35)
Not very well	14 (20)
Not at all	0 (0)

Note. Question 1 Survey Results from the OCS Satisfaction Survey: How well does OCS help to meet the needs of your charter school?

When participants were asked to choose which statements best characterized the majority of interactions the administrators had with OCS staff, there was a mixture of responses (Table 6). Administrators responded that OCS provided them with support (60%) and that they were professional in their interactions (65%). Contrarily, some administrators responded that OCS was not able to assist them (11%), did not provide them with support (12%) and was not professional in their interactions with them (7%). Less than half (38%) of charter administrators felt that they were contacted in a timely fashion and that OCS was knowledgeable and able to assist them (47%).

In general, the respondents had mixed reactions to how they rated OCS responsiveness to their questions or concerns (Table 7). The majority of the respondents (27%) responded that OCS was somewhat responsive or very responsive (26%). Twenty-two percent of responders chose extremely responsive and 1% responded that they were not at all responsive. There were two respondents who chose not applicable and three who chose to skip the question and not answer it.

Table 6

Characterization of Interactions with OCS Staff

Answer Choices	<i>n</i> (%)
OCS contacted me a timely fashion.	27 (39)
OCS was knowledgeable and able to assist me.	32 (46)
OCS provided me with support.	42 (60)
OCS is professional in their interactions with me.	46 (66)
OCS did not contact me in a timely fashion.	16 (23)
OCS was not able to assist me.	8 (11)
OCS did not provide me with support.	9 (13)
OCS is not professional with their interactions with me.	5 (7)

Note. Question 2 Survey Results from the OCS Satisfaction Survey: When you think about all of your interactions with OCS staff in the past 2 years, select the statement or statements that best characterize the majority of those interactions.

Table 7

OCS Responsiveness to Questions/Concerns

Answer Choices	<i>n</i> (%)
Extremely responsive	16 (22)
Very responsive	18 (26)
Somewhat responsive	19 (28)
Not very responsive	13 (19)
Not at all responsive	1 (2)
Not applicable	2 (3)

Note. Question 4 Survey Results from the OCS Satisfaction Survey: In general, how responsive is OCS to your school's questions or concerns?

The respondents had different opinions on who they would turn to if they had a major concern (Table 8). When asked to rank from first to last who they would turn to if they had a

major concern, 38% of the respondents replied that they would turn to a colleague at their school and 27% replied that they would turn to their board of directors. The rest of the responses for the rankings were under 10% (in order from greatest to least): Office of Charter Schools (9%), another charter school (7%), board attorney (6%), someone at NCDDPI (6%), colleague in my community (4%) and EMO (3%). The data indicated that there were mixed perceptions regarding the support that the administrators received from NCDPI. Additionally, the data revealed that administrators would not choose their authorizer as the first point of contact if they had a major concern.

Table 8

Ranking of Who Charter Administrators Would Turn to with a Major Concern

Answer Choices	<i>n</i> (%)
OCS	6 (9)
NCDPI	4 (6)
Colleague at my school	25 (38)
Colleague in my community	3 (5)
Another charter school	5 (8)
EMO	2 (3)
Board of Directors	19 (28)
Board attorney	4 (6)

Note. Question 7 Survey Results from the OCS Satisfaction Survey: Who would you turn to if you have a major concern about your charter school? Please rank from first to last, with 1 being the first person you would contact and 8 being the last.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Experiences Working with NCDPI Employees

When examining the first interview question in the study, participant responses regarding the support that they receive from NCDPI Employees were analyzed. Although not consistent, participants in the study discussed the names of specific people that work in various divisions/offices at the department. The division/office that was mentioned the most often was OCS. Participants explained that when they chose to call OCS, the staff is usually able to talk through their issue and can direct them to the correct division/office. Participant responses also generated three themes regarding their experiences with working with NCDPI Employees. The following themes emerged: (a) inconsistency with NCDPI employees' knowledge of charter school policies and laws; (b) uncertainty of who to contact at NCDPI; (c) fear of being reprimanded; and (d) OCS as a different entity than NCDPI. Through each individual interview, these themes consistently emerged.

Inconsistency with NCDPI employees' knowledge of charter laws and policies.

The overwhelming perceptions that participants expressed regarding the lack of knowledge that each division/office had concerning the policies and laws of charter schools were negative. The participants explained that some divisions/offices often transferred them back to OCS after OCS had transferred them to get answers to specific questions. James explained, "Nobody would answer a question. I'd call DPI and then they would tell me to call the Office of Charter Schools. That's my overall boomerang experience." Samuel expressed his frustration with the inconsistency by stating,

There is one common thread, though, that has always been frustrating to me, is they don't understand charter schools. So, a lot of times, they don't know how to answer

the question because they don't know what applies to charter schools and what doesn't. So, you get bounced around a lot until they find someone who can answer your question. They will get back to you and answer your question, but it's usually never a direct email or pick up the phone and talk to someone. It's you need to talk to so-and-so, you need to talk to so-and-so, until you get to the right person.

In contrast, Christian explained that the perception of charter schools has changed tremendously since the first charter schools were opened in 1996. He explained,

Who I reach out to depends on the subject. I often reach out to OCS. In the beginning, it used to be nobody would talk to us. But now, I will email who I need to get in contact with. I reached out to [says the name of a division director] and she actually called me, that blew my mind. I go where I need to go to get the information I need. Now, that's doable. That has not always been the case . . . with the exception of one division/office, I haven't had any issues with anybody.

Uncertainty of who to contact at DPI. The next theme that emerged was the uncertainty of who to contact at DPI when a question emerged. Many of the participants noted that the NCDPI website was not user-friendly and they often found it difficult to find out whom to contact when they had a question. Rather than go to the NCDPI website, James explained that he would “frantically research questions on Google.” Seven of the 12 administrators noted that charter schools used to have assigned OCS consultants who would conduct annual site visits and be the direct contact for questions and concerns that the school might have had. In 2015, OCS moved to a new model of support in which schools would not have assigned consultants, but rather OCS staff would provide support based on specific topics such as “Performance Framework” or “Charter Renewals.” Gina explained,

As an administrator, I realized that they're here to support us. So I had people who were actually supporting me. At that time, there was someone who would come and that I could call that I was free to speak with and assist me. Now, no one supports us.

Sarah commented,

I think the biggest issues that I have when it comes to DPI is there's no road map to who you're supposed to talk to. There's a lot of this, I guess, the concept of, "You should just know." I've never been a superintendent, so I don't know all the ins and outs of certain things.

Contrarily, although five of the participants did not know the contact information for each person in the various departments, they discussed the relationship that they had established with the Director of Charter Schools. Each of them explained how he had given them his cell phone and office number and encouraged them to call him.

Sarah stated,

They're [OCS] very good and very thorough about follow up and follow through, especially Dave. I'll email him. We've had this trouble with Title III, LEP stuff, and he reached out to them for me. After several emails and phone calls from me, nothing happened, but he called and said, "Hey, look, this guy needs help," and got the ball rolling. Same thing with PowerSchool. I actually just could not get an answer, could not get an answer, could not get an answer. I finally said, "I'm gonna email Dave Machado." I sent him an email with everything in it, and I heard from four people within a couple of days.

Fear of being reprimanded. Several of the participants expressed concerns about the negative repercussions they might occur if they reached out to DPI for support. Samuel

explained that he had heard horror stories of opening your email and finding out that you were out of compliance.

I'm like, "Ah." It's those kind of things, because what happens is when we're being proactive, trying to find the answers, and we don't get the answers or we don't get something fixed, somebody else comes along with compliance and says, "Well, you're out of compliance here" [motions handing a letter to someone].

A few of the participants spoke about a specific charter school, Kestrel Heights, whose administrator contacted OCS. The purpose of the administrator's call was to seek support from OCS on how to remedy the situation. In turn the school, which served grades kindergarten through 12th grade, was asked to close its high school for a minimum of 3 years. The board and administrators were never provided any support. The State Board of Education voted to order Kestrel Heights Charter School to close its high school program after the school determined that 160 of 395 students since 2008 had been given diplomas they had not earned (Hui, 2017). Sarah explained,

I call it the Kestrel effect. See what happened to Kestrel? Not one thing has come out [from OCS]. Nothing's come out that says, you know, this is what happened, these are things you need to look for, these are things we suggest that you do at your school to prevent this from happening to you.

She further explained that she and several other charter school administrators began to audit their student files after receiving no direction or feedback from NCDPI. Timothy stated, "but I guess a perception I have is when DPI calls, it's always a bit of an alarm. So, I have a little bit more of a fear perception than a helpful perception."

OCS as a different entity than NCDPI. Oftentimes the participants spoke of OCS as if it were a separate entity from NCDPI. Torrie, who was overly pleased with the support she received from NCDPI, stated, “I start with the Office of Charter Schools first and then go to DPI or whatever department I gotta go to for support.” Samuel stated a similar comment: “I call OCS and then DPI.” James commented,

I’d say the departments within DPI, as well as Office of Charter Schools doesn’t always know . . . they might give me an answer, but if I were to call DPI with the same question, I might get a totally different answer. I don’t know where the state board falls in to that or not. I’ve never had to really, I guess, go that far. I just don’t know that everybody even knows the same, or speaks the same, language. Or, has the same rules or expectations.

Micah noted that charter school administrators felt supported by the majority of the offices/divisions at NCDPI. Micah further commented,

When I look at it, it’s almost as if there’s two different departments. There’s the Department of Public Instruction, and then there’s the Office of Charter Schools. They’re kind of two separate entities in my mind, because the Office of Charter Schools has been fantastic. I mean, they have done a lot of good things for us. They have helped us in a lot of good way.

Support in Academics

There were mixed perceptions among the participants regarding the support that they receive from NCDPI regarding academics. The overarching theme was that there was little to no support and that most of the support came from listservs and newsletters. After being asked if NCDPI was supportive in academics, Samuel responded,

From DPI? This sounds terrible but the most support we really have received is just emails about updated standards, and that's only because I've subscribed to a listserv somewhere. But look, I haven't spoken to anyone directly or seen any professional development offered that's helped me in any areas of that we need.

Timothy explained that it would be difficult for NCDPI to support his school in academics because it was not an expectation that charter schools follow the North Carolina State Curriculum. He noted,

Other than the opportunity to hear the perspectives and the information provided by various departments during the planning year or maybe at conferences, and the opportunity for our teachers to attend DPI sponsored conferences, which there are a few, I wouldn't say that I feel particularly supported academically. Especially related to what we're doing. I think DPI would be responsive, but I would call DPI more that they would be responsive if I were to reach out as opposed to support. I guess the word supported is nuanced. But I do, I have signed up for and received the newsletters from various departments.

Contrarily, some of the participants were satisfied with the academic support that they received from NCDPI. Overwhelming, the participants referenced NCDPI employees from the Testing and Accountability Division, the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Exceptional Children's Division (EC), and K-3 Literacy Division as the divisions/offices that were the most supportive. Each of these divisions/offices have created positions in their employees only work directly with charter schools. Sarah noted,

They are including charters now, low performing charters in school transformation. So and they're getting a lot of support. And so I think that DPI is being more

supportive in terms of academics. In terms of supporting us, mostly it's just making sure we get information. And they're very good about that.

Mary stated,

We get a lot of support from testing . . . and a lot of support from the EC department. So I would say yes on those two fronts. He gives us what we need. I mean, he's just been a really, really great support in terms of testing and the same thing with the EC folks. A lot of the support that we receive is filtered through our [EMO] service center.

Jackson explained that charter schools do not have to "follow all education laws and policies." He added,

It's very rare that I would go to DPI to ask about DPI resources regarding curriculum because we are not bound to certain things that the LEAs are. Lots of our charter schools are non-traditional and we should be supported to think outside of the box.

Support in Finances

In total, all 12 of the participants in the individual interviews stated that they use an outside source to support them with their school's finances. Each of them also referenced a helpful weekly newsletter that the NCDPI finance division sends out to charter school administrators and an annual finance conference. Although not every one of the administrators had tried to reach out to the finance division, the ones who had each recalled situations in which it was difficult to receive a return call or email in a timely manner.

Lorraine recalled,

I guess I would say, DPI in terms of finances is a little more difficult to get questions answered sometimes. We just had a recent thing for example where the way in which

our funding had been broken down changed, and we were like, “Why did this change?” We finally did get the right person. They finally got ahold of our question and replied, and the reply made perfect sense but we just didn’t know about that policy. And the first few people we contacted at DPI apparently didn’t know it either because they couldn’t tell us.

Timothy explained,

So, financial business service sends out a weekly email with links that is very useful and timely. So, that’s where I go. I read that weekly news, that is my source and then it will direct me where I need to go if I need more information about something.

Allen added,

Because I look at my budget often. And I have a business analyst who goes over my budget with me. So really any budget questions are directed to my business analyst from the EMO. So never really had to reach out to the state for much on that front.

Four participants referenced an annual conference that the finance division sponsors.

Four participants referenced an annual conference that the finance division sponsors.

James stated, “I’ve never successfully gotten financial support there. I think that there’s the one state conference, the FBS Conference. I don’t know if DPI does that, though? I did think that that was helpful because they had a charter school specific day.” James, along with seven other participants, expressed appreciation for the finance division labeling action items “For LEAs” or “For LEAs and charter schools. They’re really good about identifying for us what’s us and what’s not.” Allen, Christian, and Jackson, each with over 20 years of NC charter school administrator experience, explained that because of an established relationship

that they had with employees in the finance department, they were usually able to get questions answered. They also noted that the turnaround time may not be immediate.

Support in School Operations

Unanimously, the charter school administrators referenced a weekly newsletter as a helpful resource. There were mixed opinions regarding whether the newsletter was supportive. In addition, charter administrators whose boards completed a planning year noted the training as a support. When asked about the support that NCDPI provides to charter school administrators in the area of school operations, Torrie stated,

The most of that is filtered through the service center. I mean we would appreciate the support. And I'm not saying anything negative. But it's just we haven't had to, you know. So organizationally I think we get the support from DPI. It just goes through the service center mostly.

Gina explained that if you have fostered a relationship with people in the different divisions/offices, "you will get help if you reach the right people." Gina continued to add, "But, if you're new or you're blindly calling, nobody knows. It is a dark hole of how to find who to call for help for anything."

In 2014, the NCOCS established a mandatory planning year for all NCSBE approved charter school boards. Consistently, participants whose boards completed a mandatory planning year referenced the planning year when answering this question. Additionally, each of the participants referenced a specific employee in the NCOCS when discussing who they reach out to regarding specific questions regarding school operations. Four out of the 12 participants had school boards that completed the planning year. Timothy commented,

So during the startup phase, that [various presentations on school operations] was super helpful to make sure that we had the proper things in place and the right amount of time. Like making sure the document to occupy the facility was in place and all that. Since that time, we haven't . . . I don't recall really needing to communicate all that much about that to DPI.

Samuel provided this comment:

So, our support for school operations was the Ready to Open process. Beyond that, you know, we can always call the Office of Charter Schools with specific operations questions, and they're usually pretty responsive, that someone will respond back to you fairly quickly. Or direct you in the right direction.

Micah, whose board completed the planning year, had a different perspective. He provided the following:

For instance, right now, I'm sending home my first report cards today. In an official setting, you have the school report card that goes home, and there's a letter. Well, there's nothing. Nobody's said anything, and I'm like, "I know I'm supposed to send this out, but where do I find it?" Those kinds of operations come into question a lot, like making sure we're in compliance with different things and those kinds of things. I think the Charter School Office doesn't always know everything. They've gotta find the answers for you, because there's only eight people in our office, and they can't possibly know all the ins and outs. I know what you're supposed to have and that kind of thing. They are a good resource of saying, "Hey, this person will help you." The problem that I find, sometimes, is, though, in other departments of DPI is the person that they refer you to isn't always the most knowledgeable either, or isn't—

every once in a while, you do get this attitude of, “Well, you’re a school, you should know these things.”

Timothy, who attended the planning year sessions, explained that although the information that was provided during the planning year was helpful, he did not see it as being supportive: “What I’m saying is, supported to me is it’s more than just a PowerPoint, and it’s more than answering your question when you come up with a question. So they are not supportive but responsive.”

All of the participants referenced the *OCS Weekly Newsletter* as a source that they rely on for information. Lorraine referenced it is “my other go-to” for support because several of the divisions placed reminders in the newsletter. She explained, “I’ll see things there that I had no knowledge was due.” Micah noted, “The weekly newsletter has been fantastic. . . a major tool for me. I read it every Friday. I know what I’m supposed to do. It’s there, I got it, I turn it in, that kind of thing.” While recalling a conversation he had with a fellow administrator who was complaining about not being aware of NCDPI deadlines, Christian recalled, “I was thinking, ‘Well, It’s in the newsletter every week. That’s all I could say. No excuse!’”

In conclusion, charter school administrators whose school structure includes an EMO or CMO were satisfied with the support that they received from their headquarters. Curriculum materials, as well as training, are continuously provided to them. All participants referred to the weekly newsletter that OCS provided.

Support in Governance

When asked about the support that the participants receive from NCDPI in the area of governance, 10 out of 12 participants noted that there was little to no support. Lorraine noted

that governance was the biggest area that her school needed in support. She and her board submitted policies to NCOCS and the policies were rejected:

I think that's probably the biggest area that independent schools need more guidance in. We've discussed it many times in our school board meetings. We know that we've pulled somebody else's policy manual but understanding what the basic policies a school should have in place and what should be required, so that we're not on the tail end of things in the performance framework, and talked about a nepotism policy, and some other things. We had those, but they didn't match what they were wanting over here.

Additionally, 8 out of the 12 participants stated that their school pays an outside vendor for governance support. With the exception of one participant, they each used the same vendor. Sarah explained, "DPI doesn't offer any support in governance. That's why [outside consultant] has a niche with his organization." James explained, "I have paid for that [support]. I actually have my board signed up for a training tonight."

Having to appear before the North Carolina Charter School Advisory Board (NCCSAB) because of academic noncompliance, Gina noted that the NCCSAB was a source of support for governance. It was explained that after their school appeared before the board, several of the NCCSAB members were open to school visits and advice. "I was lucky to have one of the board members to come and visit me and I believe when she came and visited me, she had a different perception than what she heard sitting at the large conference table and them grilling me."

Several participants explained that their boards received feedback on their monthly board minutes from NCOCS. The feedback goes directly to the board chair. The views on the

feedback was mixed. Allen noted, “the board minute feedback was not supportive . . . but responsive.” Contrarily, Torrie discussed how the board minute feedback “saved my board.” She discussed how her board was “dinged for academics and governance and after reading out to NCDPI we received the support we needed.” Micah, whose board completed the NCOCS planning year, shared this concerning receiving feedback on board minutes:

So, one thing they’ve started doing is they assigned someone to review our board minutes and see what’s going on and to provide feedback and support. That goes directly to the Board Chair, though, so I guess while it’s providing the school support, but it doesn’t always get down to school level where I know the feedback. We talk about it in board meetings, but I don’t specifically see . . . but that’s a new service. But up until that, we did have to do board strengthening exercises as part of our Ready to Open process and submit those documents. Which were helpful, but now that we’re up and running, beyond reviewing our minutes and giving feedback, there’s no additional support that I’m aware of from them.

Two unique responses were from the participants whose boards use the services of an Education Management Organization (EMO) and Charter Management Organization (CMO). Jackson, whose school uses a CMO, stated, “We have a great relationship with [states name of CMO] and they do a great job providing that training to us. NCDPI needs to provide training that will strengthen boards.” Mary explained, “My board chair attends quite a few meetings at NCDPI. She’s everywhere. Additionally, a lot of our information is funneled down from our service center.”

Other Sources of Support

An additional source of support that several participants discussed was the support of a consultant. The participants explained that there was a consortium in which charter administrators joined in which they tour and hear about best practices of high performing schools. The consortium builds network so that the charter administrators will have other leaders to collaborate with. In addition, the consultant provides leadership training to the charter administrators. Gina explained that because of a “lack of support and not knowing who to call,” their school hired an outside consultant to “assist them with academics and operations because it seemed like no one from OCS was willing to assist us.” The administrator further explained that emails and phone calls were not always returned and some OCS staff were “rude.” Finally, several of the participants discussed the support of financial organizations. Jackson explained that although the cost of using such services may be expensive, it provides “checks and balances in our finance office and preparation of the annual audit.”

When asked about other sources of support, all but Gina stated they called other charter school administrators for support. James explained, “I think that I, and most charter school leaders that I know, we call each other . . . I’ll call any other school that’s like mine. In any part of the state.” Because there is no central office, charter administrators stated that they attend a variety of state and national conferences. Sarah noted that “they see the same charter leaders attending conferences and meetings, and that is how the relationships begin.”

Overall Perception of Support from NCDPI

The participants were asked to provide their thoughts about the overall support that they received from NCDPI. The two themes that emerged were: (a) a need for more face-to-face interactions, and (b) communication amongst DPI employees needs improvement.

More face-to-face interactions with NCDPI employees. The first theme that emerged was that the administrators want more face-to-face interactions with NCDPI. Because charter schools do not have a central office, they often have to reach out to others outside of their school for support, but they desire opportunities to interact with other charter school administrators. James suggested that NCDPI provide trainings that are mandatory for charter school administrators to attend so that “everyone can be engaged in one room. At the beginning of a school year . . . everyone will be able to understand what is expected and how to get something if you need it.” The administrator further suggested that there be monthly or quarterly charter school meetings. Mary provided similar comments: “The Office of Charter Schools needs some type of development just for the charter schools where we can come together and be ourselves.” Finally, Lorraine explained, “I still don’t know a lot of the people in the Office of Charter Schools. I just wish that there was a stronger relationship and we did more as a group.”

Samuel explained,

My overall perception is very mixed. I feel like the Office of Charter Schools themselves is really trying to wrap around and become more of a support to schools, but then now there’s a travel ban that’s preventing them from getting out. And I think it’s very hard to be a support if you’re not out in the environment and meeting face-to-face with people.

Communication amongst DPI employees need improvement. The second theme that emerged was that communication amongst DPI employees needed improvement.

Timothy explained,

I think the biggest thing that would be helpful is that either the departments need to be a little bit more knowledgeable of charter schools, or there needs to be a person at Office of Charter Schools who has that knowledge within the department. Because that's where the biggest downfall is, is just trying to get information from a variety of sources and, to me, it feels like they're not ever communicating with each other, so you get conflicting stories, or conflicting advice.

Samuel found that everyone at NCDPI was willing to help, but they "found it very frustrating finding the right person to help and having the time on the phones. They're kind of my last stop if I can't solve it myself through research because I get conflicting answers amongst the departments."

Experiences Working with Charter Administrators

The following sections present the findings from the perspective of the NCDPI employees. The various offices in the department are called divisions. Within the various divisions are sections (Appendix H). In this study, divisions/offices such as school nutrition, career and technical education, and transportation were not invited to participate in the study because it is optional for charter schools to provide these services to their students. The question guiding this inquiry was, "To what extent does NCDPI perceive that they support charter schools' efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?"

The experiences that were discussed in the individual interviews varied among the participants. Only one of the participants had had prior experience working at a charter

school. The other participants prior work experience included working in school districts or a corporation. During the individual interviews, five out of six of participants acknowledged that charter schools need different supports than local school districts because of the way charter schools are constructed.

Theodore. When asked about his experiences with working with charter school administrators, Theodore responded, “Typically, my direct communication with them or my interaction is going to be limited to electronic communication and mostly written correspondence such as, ‘This is your fiscal monitoring report, this is when it’s due. We’ve accepted your audit resolution.’” He added that charter schools don’t usually focus on “the business requirements” which is why the “number one reason charter schools close in the nation is because of finances.” His division/office provides fiscal training to charter schools within the first few months prior to the school opening. Additional trainings are provided at state-wide conferences and through webinars. He added, “I think we provide as much technical assistance as we can, especially when asked. There’s a fine line, you can’t cross over into telling someone how to manage because there is that autonomy and it does create liability for the agency.” He commented that charter schools often hire outside companies to manage their finances and those companies are welcome to attend the trainings. “I’ve noticed that more and more of the third-party staff attend our trainings.”

Theodore noted that some of the sections in his division are understaffed. Although there are not dedicated staff that have been assigned to charter schools, the divisions have “implemented several online systems over the past years” that are specifically for charter schools. One specific system is the Charter School Average Daily Membership System

(CSADMS). This is an “annual request from schools to inform our office of their anticipated enrollment for the next school year.”

Theodore explained that his division recently “ramped up their website and sends a weekly finance newsletter to all central office finance directors and charter school administrators.” He added that presentations and webinars are housed on their webpage so that administrators can “view them if they were not able to be present.” He noted,

I think what they would say they’d like to see is more financial training except what I think they’re talking about, it’s not something we can provide. It’s more that they need to have a consultant, a professional in the industry that’s got strong experience with operating charter schools, the financial side. We can’t necessarily give them guidance on that.

Claire. Claire, whose area of support is academics, explained that because of a “state department travel ban” her office did not conduct any school site visits. This ban was a result of the North Carolina General Assembly mandated \$2.5 million reduction in the NCSBE budget. Rather, she “answers a lot of phone calls, answer questions through emails and conducts webinars. I received feedback that they want more webinars.” She further noted that the supports that her office provides to charter schools is the same that is provided to local school systems. Her office/division conducts monthly meetings to discuss updates to testing and to provide support in regional meetings, as well as statewide conferences. She explained that her preferred mode of communication is by telephone.

Usually if I get an email I prefer a phone call because what is being written is not what needs to be said and just prefer to handle that way. I train the RACs [Regional

Accountability Coordinator] and then we do the train the trainer model. I'm sure that that's helpful.

Throughout the school year, Claire explained that she receives input from local school systems, as well as charter schools regarding errors or clarifications that need to be made to the NC State Testing Manuals. Although her section doesn't have specific employees assigned to charter schools, there is one section that has two employees that are assigned to work exclusively with charter schools. She added, "I know that geography has a part to do with it. Just trying to get [charter schools] all covered."

When asked to give her overall perception of the support that she provides to charter school administrators, she replied, "I would say the most popular but least liked answer that I have to give is that it depends because we are working with individual students [with Individual Education Plans] . . . what I do is based on policy and I can't change the policy."

Denise. After being asked to give her perspective of the support that her division provides to charter schools, she explained,

We keep getting requests from our staff to go out and work with charter schools. I take that as a soft piece of data in a positive way that we grapple with. . . . We had a meeting the other day. We spent over two hours talking about the best way to support our charter school community across the state, especially in regions three and six, making sure that my staff members who serve three and six aren't getting so taxed because that's where the highest population is of charter schools that then would dilute the support.

Denise's division/office has created a charter specific cohort after receiving feedback from charter schools. She explained that after the first year of conducting the training state-

wide she noticed that she had a “low number of charter schools.” Her office understood that charter schools needs are “different than the LEA.” She noted that the creation of the charter school only cohort increased cohort enrollment from 50 to 95 charter schools. She added,

I like that they keep asking for help. But the fact that we have that many electing to come in . . . I go back and I really just commend my staff in building relationships.

They are very good at building relationships; and I think that level of connection, and also just genuine education work together helps.

She further explained that she communicates with OCS so that announcement can be included in the *OCS Weekly Newsletter*.

Vanessa. When asked how he supported charter school administrators, Vanessa explained that there were “multiple sections” in her division. She added, “There’s a policy monitoring and audit section, a behavioral support section, a program improvement and professional development section, a section called the STARS and Regional Administrative Support section.” She explained that her “division supported operations and finance in the Performance Framework.” She added, “But it’s my understanding that our division went and asked for positions and of course got the support to look at six positions within the division to work directly with charter schools.” She explained that she doesn’t push herself on anyone but she makes it clear by communicating, “I’m here if you need me. Just like their federal grants, I remind folks and I send them reminders with due dates and I ask them if they need any help.”

Vanessa provided this detail for the specific academic and financial support that her section provides charter schools: “Well for us to support academics, depending on what their needs are, we have program improvement, professional development, Reading and Math

Foundations, the math foundations . . . We support them in all that. We offer trainings all across the states.” She added that her division also works closely with MTSS. In terms of finance, she stated,

Financially of course, within each state you have your December and your April child counts and you get also your federal money through your federal grants. All charter schools have to do the federal grant There’s the PRC 60, the 6B IDEA grant. They have to submit that just as a traditional LEA would. We actually review their grants and we send it back and forth sometimes and sometimes I have to go sit with them to talk about how they’re gonna spend their money and how they’re using it. We support them that way.

In closing she stated, “I think we provide a great deal of support. For the most part, I would say, they want it, and they welcome it.”

Clifford. Clifford is employed in the Federal Programs Division of NCDPI. He provides support through statewide and regional conferences. He also provides one-on-one assistance to local school districts, as well as charter schools. He explains, “Low performing schools are required to use [our tools] and that’s where most of the charter school users come from.” When he receives requests from districts and charter schools, he “settles on how we can bring more people to training so his travel gets paid.”

When asked about his experience with working with charter school administrators, he added, “I mean my experience working with charter schools . . . is that they’re lonely. Most schools, most traditional public schools have a district that they can sort of have support from.” He further added,

In the charter school world, charter school administrators their only “support” comes from their governing boards. And, unfortunately my experience has been in working with charter schools that governing boards don’t really understand curriculum and instruction. So, they understand finance and money management and stuff like that and make sure that they’re being compliant to the law cause that’s a big worry always with governing boards is the compliance piece but in terms of improvement of instruction or curriculum there’s little support besides whatever knowledge the administrator comes with to the job. And, that’s been my biggest observation of trying to help charter schools out . . . I try to provide face-to-face support.

Clifford stated that after he trains administrators and their staff, he is always available by cell phone or email. “Anyone can call me at any time.” When asked about which areas of the performance framework is supported by his division, he replied, “definitely academics, operations and also governance.” He expounded by stating, “Governance, slightly, because the leadership teams usually include members of the board and administration.” He further explained how he supported charter schools, “We look at everything. We look at from team structures in the building to scheduling to professional development plans. I mean everything that really has to do with operating a school system or school building in this case.”

When asked about his perception of the overall support that he provides charter schools, he stated,

I think for the most part schools whether it be traditional or charter or even district individuals are satisfied with the support I give. I hate the fact that they say that I’m one of the few people that responds to emails quickly. That seems to be a problem in

the state agency and that's just from me hearing what they say in the field. They know that they can count on me.

Rudy. Rudy is the only participant who has had prior experience working in a charter school. She stated that her division's biggest strengths are "the training that we offer through our professional development and Ready to Open [planning year] programs. I think we've really done a really nice job stepping up the opportunities." She then discussed how there are at least four camps offered for low performing schools:

We try and do two in the fall and two in the spring. And we will go to one of our successful charter schools and they'll put on a day workshop on what they're doing successfully so the other schools can see that in action.

She further added that her division recently implemented monthly webinars with topics that range from "character building to BTs [beginning teachers]." In addition, "regional huddles" are held "where we go to certain areas in the state, so they don't always have to come to Raleigh." When asked how her division chose the topics for the webinars, she replied that they receive "feedback from the agency saying charter schools don't seem to understand, for example, the career and tech program. Okay, let's do some workshops on it."

Rudy feels like the role of her division is "to give them good advice. And good examples of best practices. And try to set up a safe zone where they are comfortable asking questions. And I want them to feel comfortable calling here." She added that she wanted to be an advocate for charter schools. Her division supports charter schools in all the areas of the Performance Framework. In academics, "our role is to either host or facilitate or partner with the different agencies to help our leaders through professional development." Her division hosts "regional huddles" which are "kind of like mini-leadership conferences" and

“camps for low performing schools.” In finance and governance, she explained, “We’ve done quite a bit of board training this year on how a board should be involved in the budgeting . . . making the boards and the leaders more aware that is probably the number one reason schools fail.” She added, “More and more schools are asking for board training.”

When asked about the overall perception that she had regarding the support that her division provides to charter school administrators, she explained,

I think it’s emerging. We’re not proficient but I think we’re getting better. And I think our schools are starting to feel comfortable calling here. I was surprised that when I got here there was in some schools a perception that they didn’t want to call [our office].

In order to change the perception, she discussed the importance of relationships: “I might put too much emphasis on customer service. That’s how you build relationships. And you have relationships with people and you mess up, well they give you the benefit of the doubt.” She added her division was doing a “decent job” but there was “still room for improvement.”

In his closing comments, Rudy stated,

And I want them to look at us as their partner in getting things done. Even when it comes to laws that are at the general assembly. We’re not a lobbyist group, but we have a very good relationship with the state board political liaison . . . So again, I just want to continue to increase the willingness of leaders to call here.

Summary of the Findings

This section restates the research questions that guided the study and summarizes findings from the data analysis of this research study. Refer to Table 9 for a summary of the findings.

Table 9

Summary of Findings

	Perception of Support	
	Administrators	NCDPI Employees
Academics	Mixed perceptions: 15 years of experience and EMO/CMO felt supported.	All divisions/offices perceived the support that they provided as supportive.
Finances	All 12 administrators perceived the support that they received as not supportive.	NCDPI perceived the support that they provided as not supportive.
Operations	Mixed perceptions: Administrators with large student populations and who had another administrator at their school felt supported.	NCDPI perceived the support that they provided as supportive.
Governance	All 12 administrators perceived the support that they received as little to no support.	NCDPI perceived the support that they provided as an area in need of improvement.

Research Question 1. To what extent do charter school administrators perceive that NCDPI supports their efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?

Support in academics. There were mixed perceptions among the participants regarding the support that they receive from NCDPI regarding academics. The school's geographic location was a factor for one of the participants. It was noted that the time it took to travel to Raleigh and spend the night [because of travel time] was not worth missing two days of school. The participants with 15 or more years of experience were satisfied with the support that they receive in academics. Each of them spoke of how the amount of support has increased as charter schools move out of an unknown area within NCDPI. Many offices/divisions were not aware of the unique needs of charter schools and were not able to support

them during the inception of charter schools. Although they each stated that they did not take advantage of all them, they each were aware of the many opportunities for professional development and networking.

Overall, participants with less than 15 years of experience had mixed feelings regarding the support that they received from NCDPI. Not being aware of who to contact was the biggest barrier. These participants did reference listservs and newsletters and saw them as informational. Finally, each of these participants named specific employees in certain offices/divisions in which they had established a relationship with. The participants referenced these employees as being supportive and helpful.

Overall, participants with 1-5 years of experience as charter school administrators were unsure of who to turn to get support in the area of academics. Furthermore, these administrators spoke of individual consultants in various divisions/offices and stressed the importance of fostering relationships in order to get questions answered in a timely manner.

Only one participant referenced the school's student demographics as a reason for not being supported. The administrator noted that the school's population was less than 150 students, over 95% received free or reduced lunch, and they were all minority. She perceived her student demographics as the top reason in which she did not receive support from NCDPI.

Finally, charter school administrators who had the academic support of an EMO or CMO felt supported by the management company. Both of the administrators in this study explained that a majority of their academic support was provided to them and they mainly contacted NCDPI with questions pertaining to exceptional children or accountability.

Support in finances. Overall, the participants did not feel supported in the area of finances. Each of the 12 participants stated that they pay an outside source for financial support. Further, they noted that although it was difficult to get in contact with someone at the department about finances, there was an electronic newsletter that they all found to be helpful. Consistently, the participants discussed their satisfaction with the topics including whether the items in the newsletter pertained to “charters” or “LEAs and charters.” Several of the participants referenced an annual finance conference that is helpful because there is one day set aside for charter schools. The charter school administrators with over 15 years of experience each spoke of the relationship that they had formed with the director of the finance division. Although the response time could sometimes be lengthy, they each explained that they were able to contact the director to get questions answered. Geographic location or student demographics did not have an impact on the administrators’ perception of support in relation to finances.

Support in school operations. There were mixed perceptions on whether or not administrators felt supported in operations. Participants whose boards completed the OCS planning year mentioned the training as the only opportunity that they had been provided to receive support in operations. Other participants stated that they call or email OCS to get support in school operations. Some participants mentioned that after reaching out to OCS they were often transferred to other divisions/offices who were not able to provide them with support. Unanimously, each participant stated that they referred to the *OCS Weekly Newsletter* to stay abreast of deadlines such as the Performance Framework submission. The newsletter was also their “go to” place to get updates from other divisions/offices. Charter school administrators with a student population of over 300 students and over 5 years of

administrative experience spoke of attending various workshops, conferences, and trainings to stay abreast of charter school operations. These administrators were able to leave campus to attend professional development because there was at least one other administrator at the school. School geographical location did not affect administrators' perceptions.

Support in governance. The majority of the participants stated that there was little or no support from NCDPI in governance. Eight out of 12 of the participants pay an outside vendor to provide board training. Several participants mentioned that OCS reviews their board's monthly meeting minutes and provides feedback. The views on whether this was supportive or helpful were mixed. Three participants were aware that OCS provided board training, but their boards did not take advantage of the trainings. Charter school administrators who had an EMO or CMO explained that their management company provided governance training to them in the area of governance. They further noted that someone from the management company sat on their board. Years of experience, race, and geographical location of the school affected the charter school administrator's perception of support in the areas of governance.

Research Question 2. To what extent does NCDPI perceive that they support charter schools' efforts to be compliant in academics, governance, operations, and finances?

Support in academics. Overall, the employees who stated that their division/office provided support in the area of academics provided information that charter school administrators seemed satisfied with the support that they provide. Each of them spoke of feedback that they use to provide better customer service. All but one of the employees discussed how their division/office either had designated employees that work with charter schools or had created charter specific software or guidebooks to support charter schools.

Although one of the employees stated that she received feedback that charter schools were satisfied with the support that her division/office offered, she desires to do more to support charter schools.

Support in governance. Overall, there were two divisions/offices that stated that they provide supports to charter schools in the area of governance. One of the employees stated that this was an area that his division needed improvement. His division/office recently began to add board training to their support services. The other division that provided support stated that board governance was an area that he is aware that charter schools need more support in.

Support in operations. Monthly webinars, quarterly huddles and annual conferences are evidences that the NCDPI employees discussed as ways that they support charter administrators in the area of charter school operations. The planning year is the initial introduction in which various divisions/offices present to new charter schools. Five of the employees stated that their division/office provides training during the planning year. Charter school administrators are encouraged to call OCS if they have questions regarding operations. If OCS is not able to answer the question, they direct them to the correct division/office. Five of the employees stated that they encourage administrators to reach out to them for support. Each of them preferred a phone call and/or school site visit.

Support in finances. The division/office that stated that their area of support for charter schools was finance was clear that charter schools are encouraged to hire staff or outside agencies to provide fiscal support for their schools. Although her division has improved their website, hosts webinars and presents at conferences the employee stated that she welcomed outside support and noticed that there was an increase in the number of vendors that had been attending NCDPI finance meetings and conferences. The employee

noted that because her division/office was understaffed, administrators may not be able to get an answer to their questions in a timely manner.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented the results of this mixed methods study. The quantitative results presented show that there was a need for this study because there were mixed perceptions regarding the support that charter school administrators received. Furthermore, although an invitation to complete the Office of Charter Schools Satisfaction Survey was provided to 168 participants, only 74 responded.

The results of the survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. A Likert-type scale survey provided an equal number of positive and negative comments that were related to how well charter administrators perceived the needs and interactions with NCDPI. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results of selected individual questions in survey. Data charts were created to represent the results of the analysis in summary form and to provide a visual representation of the summary.

The study yielded context-rich descriptions and explanations regarding the perceptions of a select group of charter school administrators about the support they had received from NCDPI. The study also yielded context-rich descriptions and explanation regarding the perception of a select group of NCDPI employees that provide support to charter school administrators. The findings of the study were organized and presented according to the principal participants' responses to each of the research questions that guided the study.

Study participants responses also generated three themes regarding support. The following themes emerged from the interviews with charter school administrators: (a)

inconsistency with NCDPI employees' knowledge of charter school policies and laws; (b) uncertainty of who to contact at NCDPI; (c) fear of being reprimanded; and (d) OCS as a different entity than NCDPI. Through each individual interview, these themes consistently emerged.

Based on the responses of the interviewees:

- It was clear that charter school administrators did not feel supported in finance. Moreover, it was clear that NCDPI did not support charter schools in finance. Additionally, NCDPI encourages charter schools to hire someone to support them in this area.
- It was clear that charter school administrators did not feel supported in governance. Additionally, it was clear that NCDPI identified “governance” as an area that they needed to increase their support.
- There were mixed perceptions on whether charter school administrators felt supported in operations. Contrarily, NCDPI identified “operations” as an area that they provided adequate support.
- There were mixed perceptions on whether charter school administrators felt supported in academics. NCDPI employees identified this as an area in which they provided charter school administrators with a variety of support.

Chapter 5 will discuss the major findings of this research study, relate the findings to previous research and present the implications of the findings for research and practice.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate the extent to which charter school administrators perceive that their authorizer, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), supports their efforts to be compliant in academic, governance, operation, and finance laws. There has been little research done on the relationship between the authorizer and the charter schools themselves, especially as it relates to the building leader. This study is relevant because of the growing number of charter schools in North Carolina and the United States, the limited research on principal preparation programs that are geared specifically for charter school administrators, and the limited research on the relationship between the authorizer and the charter school's administrator.

I conducted a series of 12 semi-structured individual interviews with current charter school administrators. The 30- to 45-minute interviews were conducted at the site of the administrators choosing. Ten of the interviews were conducted at the administrators' school sites and two were conducted in public places away from the administrators' school sites. I also conducted six interviews with current NCDPI employees. Each of the 30- to 45-minute interviews was conducted in the NCDPI office building.

In 2014, the SBE commissioned the North Carolina Office of Charter Schools (NCOCS) to implement an annual Performance Framework (Appendix B) to capture each charter school's operational, financial, governance, and academic data trends over time. In 2016, the NCSBE's Strategic Plan showed the following results from the Performance Framework: 76.9% of North Carolina charter schools met or exceeded all operational goals, 88.5% met expected financial standards, and 84.6% of all charter schools met expected operational standards (NCSBE, 2017).

The focus of this study was the relationship between charter school administrators and their authorizer, drawing upon the research literature that examines the relationship between traditional public school administrators and central office leadership to inform this analysis (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). To date, there is little research on the relationship between charter school authorizers and their charter schools, particularly with respect to the support authorizers might provide those schools

A recent analysis of more than 175 central office staff and school leaders' interviews suggests that the central office provides school leaders support with professional development, connecting administrators to sources of expertise, creating new structure or tools, and building a data use culture (Grissom et al., 2017). Unlike charter school administrators, traditional public school leaders have the support of central office staff who provide support through online resources, school site visits, and workshops. In addition, district-provided professional development, which was almost always job-embedded, had a statistically significant relationship with principal's time spent on such instructional leadership tasks such as observing classroom instruction and engaging with teachers outside of the classroom to improve instruction (McAdamis, 2010). Consistently, the charter administrator participants in this study noted that because annual site visits are no longer conducted and there is no longer a direct contact for questions, they are often juggled around at NCDPI. One participant described it as the "boomerang experience." Another stated, "there was someone who would come that I could call that I was freely about to speak with and assist me. Now, no one supports us."

Through the interviews, the charter school administrator and NCDPI employee participants provided clear insights into their perceptions of the support. This chapter

provides a discussion of those findings beginning with an interpretation of the findings of this study, a discussion of the research findings in the context of a review of the literature, and implications for future research and implications for future practice. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Findings and Conclusions

In a mixed methods study, reporting on findings is complex because of the vast amount of data collected (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Two research questions guided the methodology and analysis of this study. The two questions inquired about (a) the perception of support that charter school administrators received from NCDPI specifically in the areas of academic, governance, operations, and finances; and (b) the perception of support that NCDPI provided to charter school administrators specifically in the areas of academic, governance, operations, and finances. In this study, quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the charter school administrators in this study and the NCDPI employees have different perceptions regarding the support that is provided to charter school administrators. Overall, charter school administrators do not feel supported in the areas of finance and governance. NCDPI employees perceive that they support charter school administrators in operation and academics but need improvement in finances and governance. This section discusses the data analyzed.

Finding 1: Charter School Administrators Have Unique Needs

NCDPI employees felt that they were meeting the needs of charter school administrators, especially in the areas of academics and operations. From the employees' perspective, they recognized that the needs of charter school administrators were unique. Throughout the interviews, the participants noted that the needs of charter school

administrators were unique. NCDPI employees discussed providing planning sessions for all newly approved charter schools. Five out of the six NCDPI employees explained that they provided regional training sessions. Additionally, two NCDPI employees noted that their division/office provided specific training for low performing charter schools. In an effort to provide differentiated supports, divisions/offices provided employees that work specifically with charter school administrators, presented “charter school only” trainings, and labeled email correspondences such as “LEA” and “LEA and Charter Schools.” Some employees provided charter school specific webinars, while others provided charter school specific resources on their websites. One NCDPI employee stated, “There are three people in my division that serve charter schools. This was created after we saw there was a need to provide more tailored support.” Charter school administrators with 5 years or less experience spoke highly of this divisions effort to provide them with support. These administrators appreciated having the direct contact information for someone who could provide them with resources and answer their questions in a timely manner and without being forwarded another division/office. The other administrators in the study had already established relationships but appreciated the resources and information on the website.

Regardless of the individual characteristics of the charter administrators, they each appreciated that divisions/offices labeled email correspondences. Prior to NCDPI using this strategy, charter school administrators were often confused about which correspondence pertained to them and which did not. Participants noted that the confusion was mostly in the areas of academics and finances. Additionally, administrators who had attended “charter school only” trainings were satisfied with the opportunity to participate in trainings that were geared specifically to the needs of charter schools. One NCDPI employee noted that over

80% of charter schools were registered to participate in the “charter school only” cohort. She further noted that she received positive feedback from participants expressing that they enjoyed having an opportunity to collaborate with other charter school leaders. One administrator, who participated in two different cohorts, explained that there were differences between the “charter school only” cohort and the “general” cohort. She explained that the information in the latter cohort did not align to the needs of charter school administrators because there was a constant conversation regarding whether the information pertained to charter schools or not. The “charter school only” cohort met her needs.

Both participant groups agreed that charter school administrator needs were not being met in the area of finances and governance. During the interview, the NCDPI discussed ways in which the division had implemented strategies such as labeling emails and creating charter specific software. The employee also suggested that all charter schools hire a person to assist them with their school’s financial needs. Twelve out of the 12 administrators who participated in this study discussed how they had hired outside financial consultants to assist them with their school’s finances. One administrator explained that it was costly but it was necessary. Four administrators, all with 15 years of experience or more, explained that it was very difficult to get answers to questions in the finance division because of shortage of staff. This division does not have charter school specific staff members. Moreover, this division/office overall has employees who have had no prior experience working in a school.

The literature examining charter school leaders describes that a leader, unlike their district school counterparts, not only serve as the instructional leader of their school, but they manage the budget, recruit board members, hire and train staff, recruit and orient families, and work with the governing board (Palmer & Gau, 2003). They have a variety of needs

according to the school's structure, mission, student demographics, and the administrative background of the charter school leader. Moreover, this study examined that the number of years of experience, student demographics, geographical location, organization of the school, and race impacted the administrators' perception of support. This argument seems to be reflected in the findings presented.

Finding 2: Need for More Face-to-Face Interactions

In exchange for greater autonomy from various state and district policies and greater flexibility in decision making (Bickmore & Dowell, 2011), charter schools usually have no contact with local central office education agencies and must handle administrative tasks typically completed at the district level, including financial management, recruitment and hiring of personnel, data collection and reporting, and various recordkeeping and support functions (Luekens, 2004). Four of the six NCDPI employees referenced the NCDPI charter school planning year as the first opportunity for charter school leaders to receive an overview of the different divisions/offices at NCDPI. They further noted that provided them the opportunity to introduce themselves and provide contact information for future questions or concerns. Charter school administrators who completed the NCDPI new charter school planning year commented that the training provided a good overview of expectations but was offered at a time in which they were not able to fully understand how to apply the concepts that were discussed during the training. Moreover, many of the charter school administrators were not hired during the time of the training; therefore, they were not given the opportunity to participate in the training.

The 12 charter school administrators in this study expressed a desire to either have NCDPI consultants conduct site visits at their school and/or attend NCDPI trainings that

were designed for charter school administrators. One charter school administrator noted that she always felt supported when she would receive face-to-face site visits from NCDPI. She noted that having a NCDPI employee visit her school and work along with her staff was the best support that she received as a charter school administrator. The two charter school administrators whose board contracts with an EMO or CMO also expressed a desire to have more face-to-face interactions with other charter leaders. Both of the management companies provide regional as well as national training opportunities. Additionally, they also have periodic site visits which allows opportunities for them to work alongside experts from the management organization. Throughout the interviews, these two administrators spoke positively regarding the support that they received from NCDPI, which is indirect because it was provided through the management company's headquarters, as well as the support from their management company.

Research evidences that sustained, job-embedded supports may be fundamental to helping administrators build their capacity for instructional leadership (Honig, 2012). Traditional public school leaders have the support of central office staff who provide support through online resources, school site visits, and workshops. Four of the six NCDPI employees agreed with the research as evidenced by them preferring to provide face-to-face site visits, as well as charter-specific professional development. One NCDPI employee noted that he delivers all of his support face-to-face because the needs of each school, especially charter schools, are always unique. The charter school administrators and the NCDPI employees were aligned with this finding.

Finding 3: A Desire to Improve Practices

The literature evidences that charter schools place new burdens on state departments of education without an increase in capacity for meeting new obligations (Vergari, 2001). The charter administrators who were interviewed in this study had varying experiences with NCDPI employees. Charter school administrators who had developed a relationship with directors at NCDPI reported that they were able to get questions answered because they knew whom to contact. However, others expressed frustration because they had not established a relationship with a NCDPI employee and continued not to get their questions answered or be forwarded to the correct division/office that could assist them. In this study, this mainly affected charter school administrators with less than 15 years of experience and who had student populations less than 300. They discussed the difficulty of knowing whom to reach out to when they had questions or concerns. They noted that when OCS directed them to certain division/offices, they were often sent back to OCS, frequently with no resolution. Contrarily, five out of six NCDPI employees expressed that they readily provided administrators with their contact information and encouraged them to reach out to them if they had any concerns. The disconnect regarding the charter school administrators' desire to contact NCDPI and the NCDPI employees' willingness to connect with them could be a result of the findings of this study that some charter school administrators were reluctant to contact NCDPI for fear of being reprimanded. One charter school administrator provided a clear example of school that was reprimanded, instead of supported, when his school contacted NCDPI for support. One NCDPI employee acknowledged that charter school administrators were reluctant to contact his office/division out of fear. He further explained

that NCDPI has a dual role in which it provides support but it also monitors to make sure that schools are in compliance.

Finding 4: The EMO/CMO Advantage

CMOs and EMOs play an important part in the scalability of the charter school movement by enabling the replication of models that work, encouraging collaboration between similar schools, and building support structures for schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010). The two charter school administrators who were interviewed for this study were satisfied with the support that they received from NCDPI because it was funneled through the EMO/CMO headquarters. In addition, these schools were connected to other schools with similar missions and academic plans so that natural supports were embedded and available at any time through EMO/CMO. These administrators benefit from knowing who to call to get questions answered. Neither of the two administrators in this study discussed ever experiencing “the boomerang effect” that other charter administrators felt when they called NCDPI and were transferred to other divisions/sections without getting their questions answered. Finally, they receive additional support through site visits, professional development and conference calls to ensure they are in compliance with charter laws and policies. They have the advantage of having full support in all areas.

Overall, the findings of this study show that the charter school administrators in this study and the NCDPI employees have different perceptions regarding the support that is provided to charter school administrators. The charter school administrators provided instances in which they were not able to get answers to their questions. One administrator explained that after not being able to get a question answered, an email was sent to her notifying her that she was out of compliance. The administrators and their boards were still

held accountable, even though they were not able to get the support that they needed. Moreover, after notifying OCS of a mistake that his school made, Kestrel Heights was reprimanded and received no support from NCDPI. They were, however, directed to close their high school for 3 years as a result of their actions. Again, even when there is no support, charter school administrators are still held accountable.

The employees explained that they provide satisfaction surveys at the conclusion of trainings, workshops, and conferences to find out how they can better support charter schools. Because all charter schools do not attend these trainings for reasons such a distance, lack of trust, and no knowledge of the training, there are many voices that are not being heard regarding how support could be provided. As evidenced by the results of this study, the employees perceive the support that they provide differently than the administrators perceived the support that they received.

Implications

The implications of this study impact the field of charter school administration and charter school authorizing. The research from this study uncovered that employees of NCDPI, the charter authorizer, have different perceptions regarding the support that they provide charter administrators compared with the support that administrators perceive that they receive. This misalignment of perception resulted in charter school administrators being unsure of whom to reach out to when they had questions or concerns. In addition, administrators expressed having feelings of isolation because of a lack of face-to-face interaction with their authorizer. Although charter administrators acknowledged the new charter school planning year as well as regional meetings, there was a consensus that the administrators desired to have more interaction with one another and with the NCDPI

employees. That is, while the planning year provided an overview, it was not enough to help with the day-to-day operation of running a charter school. Moreover, both charter school administrators and NCDPI employees acknowledged that financial support was an area that needed improvement. This should be of high importance since finances is the number one reason charter schools in North Carolina and across the nation are closed (NCDPI, 2017).

The field of research is very limited in terms of the relationship that charter school authorizers have with charter school administrators. A majority of the related research (Brown, 2006; Bulkley, 2005; Chen, 2016; Dressler, 2001; Gau, 2006; Palmer & Gau, 2003; Vergari, 2000, 2001) includes the impact that charter leaders have on student accountability, trends in authorizing, and the role of the authorizing. This study directly targeted the perception that charter school administrators had on the support that they receive from their authorizer. The results revealed that these administrators have unique needs that did not vary based upon their student demographics, number of years of experience as a charter administrator, size of student population, and relationships that have been established with the authorizer. However, the current study revealed that charter school administrators who had the support of a management organization reported that they felt supported in all areas because NCDPI support was filtered through the management office. Additionally, one charter school administrator stated that she did not feel supported and stated that the demographic makeup of her student population, as well as the small size of the school, were major factors.

Implications for Charter School Authorizers

The findings from this study have specific implications for charter school authorizers. This current study evidences the need for charter school administrators to receive unique

supports from their authorizer. Charter school administrators, regardless of their backgrounds, need continuous individual face-to-face support. Annual site visits to schools and/or one-on-one webinars that provide specific support to individual administrators would provide the needed support that the charter school administrators discussed. Additionally, a charter school mentor program could be established so that charter administrators would have specific people in the field whom they could contact. Specifically, state department authorizers have the resources and understand some of the unique needs of charter schools. Staff and specific resources should be provided by each division to support charter schools.

NCDPI fulfills the role of support, as well as oversight. One of the NCDPI employees in this study acknowledged the dual role that the department plays. Additionally, the charter administrators acknowledged this dual role as they discussed the Kestrel Height School situation. In order to provide optimal support and to help alleviate the fear of being reprimanded, there should be staff that is dedicated to supporting charter school administrators. Their role would be to assist charter school administrators by conducting periodic school site visits, as well as to be available to answer any questions and provide unbiased assistance. Additionally, there should be staff that is dedicated to oversight and evaluation. These staff members would provide oversight by focusing on charter laws and policies that align with the Performance Framework. Additionally, they would identify schools that are out of compliance.

The charter school administrators in this study employ an outside consultant to oversee their finances. Eight out of the 12 employ an outside consultant to provide governance training to their board. The funds that are used to pay for these outside consultants are being taken away from improving student academics. Because authorizers

may not have adequate staff to support charter school administrators in these areas, additional funds could be provided to them to provide the needed services to keep them compliant with charter laws and policies. Additionally, the authorizer can provide training to these consultants to ensure that they are providing them with accurate information.

Implications for Institutions of Higher Learning

Principal preparation programs are beginning to provide more opportunities for students to be exposed to charter schools. However, the limited experiences are not providing them with the necessary training they need to handle school finances and board governance, as evidenced by the comments from the participants in this current study. Traditional school leadership training programs are not designed to prepare charter leaders for the responsibilities that go beyond those of a district school principal (Hess & Kelly, 2005). NCDPI provides a variety of information sessions to boards eight months prior to their school opening and to the school administrator two months prior to the school opening. Again, these are information sessions and not in-depth training to prepare them for the two areas that the charter school administrators and NCDPI employees noted as areas that need more support. A support infrastructure, similar to district central offices, should be in place to assist charter school administrators. Such an infrastructure should include all possible services that the administrators would encounter during their first 2 years of operation.

Implications for Legislators

It is important for legislators to understand the unique needs of charter schools. Each year they have decreased the NCDPI budget, decreasing the number of staff that are available to support charter schools, as well as district schools. They have the opportunity to reexamine budget reductions as well as charter school policies to provide the supports that the

administrators need. In making a final comment regarding their overall perception of support, one of the charter school administrators commented that he would like the legislators to be more aware of the needs of charter school administrators. He added that each school year there are new policies and laws. Since lifting the cap, which allowed for more than 74 new charter schools to be approved, the number of employees at NCDPI, specifically in OCS, has decreased (Table 2). An increase in the number of charter schools and a decrease in the number of employees has had an impact on the support that is provided to school administrators. This is evidenced by one of the participants in the study referred to the number of NCDPI employees that she was able to reach out to that would conduct site visits prior to the cap being lifted. The number of staff that is dedicated to supporting charter schools is small compared to the number of charter schools that need support (Table 2).

Future Research

For future research, it would be very beneficial to expand the satisfaction survey used in this study to more charter school administrators in the United States. There were 71 charter administrators who represented the quantitative portion of the study, which is a very small sample of the 7,013 nationwide charter school administrators (NAPCS, 2017). This would also expand the research to other states and other authorizer types overseeing charter schools. North Carolina is single-authorizer state with the State Board of Education as its authorizer. Much value could be learned about the various strategies that the authorizers use to provide support to charter administrators.

This study focused on the four areas of the Performance Framework upon which North Carolina Charter Schools are assessed and receive feedback. Although the Performance Framework data is public, the individual school results were not included in this

study. A comparison of the perception of support compared to the results of the Performance Framework would provide additional insight as to what additional supports were needed and to which schools.

This study extends the discussion of the positive impact that central office support has on administrators in local school districts. Arrangements such as on-site coaches and other professional development that takes place in schools as a part of a principal's regular day seem fundamental to administrators learning (Honig, 2012). Because of budget cuts and lack of personnel, charter school administrators do not receive the same opportunities to on-site coaching and site visits. This study confirms that this is a component of support that is currently missing. Charter school administrators may begin to trust their authorizer if they had more face-to-face interactions with them. This support could have a great impact on the individual results of a school's Performance Framework.

Summary

The findings of this study examined the perception that charter school administrators have on the support that they receive from their authorizer, as well as the perception that the authorizer has on the support that they provide to charter school authorizers. The perceptions of each group were discussed. The administrators in this study had mixed perceptions regarding the support that they received in governance and operations. The NCDPI employees were clear that governance and finances were areas in which they needed to provide additional support to charter school administrators. The researcher suggested expanding the research area and areas of future research. Implications to the current field were summarized.

The number of charter schools across the nation continues to increase each school year. The research on authorizer and charter school administrator relationships is lacking. This research could decrease the number of charter school closings—since finances is the number one reasons that charters close—and increase the number of charter schools that are proficient on their Performance Framework.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Charter Agreement

CHARTER AGREEMENT

Pursuant to G.S. 115C-218 et seq. the North Carolina State Board of Education (hereinafter referred to as “SBE”) grants this license to _____ (hereinafter referred to as “the Nonprofit”) to operate _____, a Public Charter School.

1. Term

- 1.1 The Charter is effective on July 1, 2017 through June 30, _____. It shall terminate June 30 of the last year without further notice from or action by the SBE.
- 1.2 In accordance with 115C-218.6, the SBE shall review the operations of each charter school at least once prior to the expiration of its charter to ensure that the school is meeting expected academic, financial, and governance standards; provided, the SBE may at its discretion review the operations of a charter school at any time the SBE deems it necessary and appropriate.
- 1.3 The Nonprofit may apply to renew the Charter pursuant to SBE policies and procedures; however, this agreement, in no way, binds the SBE to renew the Charter for an additional term. The SBE shall make renewal decisions consistent with State law, SBE policies, and the terms of this agreement.
- 1.4 If the Public Charter School ceases operating in accordance with its Charter and terminates instruction, without prior permission from the SBE, it will be deemed to have surrendered its charter and all rights thereunder.

2. Charter School a North Carolina Public School

- 2.1 Pursuant to Article IX, Section 2, of the North Carolina Constitution and Part 6A of Article 16 of Chapter 115C of the North Carolina General Statute, a Charter School is a public school and shall be accessible to all North Carolina students eligible to attend public schools under G.S. 115C-366.

3. Application Binding

- 3.1 The SBE has reviewed the Application submitted by the Nonprofit and has approved it subject to adherence to all requirements set forth in this Charter and in

the Charter School Act. The Application is fully incorporated in this Charter and all representations and conditions contained in the Application are binding on the charter school.

- 3.2** The Nonprofit shall immediately submit in writing to the Office of Charter Schools and the SBE any proposed substantial changes to the Application. No proposed amendment is valid until the SBE approves that modification.

4. Charter School Governing Board

- 4.1** The Public Charter School shall at all times be operated by the board of directors of the non-profit corporation in accordance with G.S. 115C-218-et seq. and all other applicable laws and regulations. The majority of board members and 50% or greater of the board officers for a charter school must have their primary residence in NC.
- 4.2** The members of the governing board of the nonprofit shall receive no compensation other than reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred while fulfilling duties as a member of the board.
- 4.3** The Nonprofit board of directors shall adopt and ensure compliance with a conflict of interest and anti-nepotism policy. This policy shall include, at a minimum, the following provisions:
1. No voting member of the governing board shall be an employee of a for-profit company that provides substantial services to the charter school for a fee.
 2. (a) Prior to employing any immediate family, as defined in G.S. 115C-12.2, of any member of the board of directors or a charter school employee with supervisory authority shall be employed or engaged as an employee, independent contractor, or otherwise by the board of directors in any capacity, such proposed employment or engagement shall be:
 - (i) disclosed to the board of directors and
 - (ii) approved by the board of directors in a duly called open-session meeting.(b) The burden of disclosure of such a conflict of interest shall be on the applicable board member or employee with supervisory authority. If the requirements of this subsection are complied with, the charter school may employ immediate family of any member of the board of directors or a charter school employee with supervisory authority.
 3. A requirement that a person shall not be disqualified from serving as a member of a charter school's board of directors because of the existence of a conflict of interest, so long as the person's actions comply with:

- a. the school's conflict of interest policy established as provided in this subsection; and
 - b. applicable law
4. No teacher or staff member that is immediate family of the chief administrator shall be hired without the board of directors evaluating their credentials, establishing a structure to prevent conflicts of interest, and notifying the Department, with evidence, that this process has occurred.
 5. The requirements of Chapter 55A of the General Statutes related to conflicts of interest.

4.4 The Nonprofit shall have ultimate responsibility for employment, management, dismissal and discipline of its employees. In no event shall the governing board delegate or assign its responsibility for fulfilling terms of this charter.

- a. The Nonprofit shall not enter into or terminate an agreement for comprehensive management services without the prior, explicit approval of the SBE.
- b. The Nonprofit shall comply with all SBE requests regarding the management agreement that are reasonably related to compliance with all provisions of this charter agreement and the charter school statute.

5. Compliance with Other Laws

5.1 The Nonprofit shall ensure that the Public Charter School complies with the Federal and State Constitutions and all applicable federal laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, such laws and regulations governing employment, environment, disabilities, civil rights, children with special needs, transportation, and student records.

5.2 The Nonprofit shall ensure that its operation of the Public Charter School complies with all applicable health and safety laws and regulations, whether federal, state, or local.

5.3 Neither the SBE nor the local board of education assumes the duty to oversee the operations of the Public Charter School except as may otherwise be provided by law or separate contract.

5.4 Neither the SBE nor the local board is required to monitor the Public Charter School for compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

6. Tax-Exempt Status

Pursuant to G.S. 115C-218.15(b) the Nonprofit shall obtain federal tax-exempt status no later than twenty-four months from the date the SBE gives final approval of its

Application. The loss of federal tax-exempt status shall result in the revocation of the charter.

7. Enrollment

- 7.1** Admission and enrollment of students shall be as prescribed by the Charter School Act. Failure to adhere to the lottery requirements set forth in G.S. 115C-218.45 is grounds for termination of this Charter.
- 7.2** Student recruitment and enrollment decisions shall be made in a nondiscriminatory manner and without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, sex, religion, ancestry, disability or need for special education services.
- 7.3** The Nonprofit shall ensure that the Public Charter School reports the names, addresses, names of the legal custodian of the students, addresses of the legal custodian of the students, and Student ID number of all students enrolled, as required by the SBE. On September 1 of each year or following the 20th day Average Daily Membership (hereinafter referred to as “ADM”) headcount, whichever is later, the Public Charter School will provide to the local boards of education from which it is entitled to receive local funds the above information with regard to any students from those districts enrolled in the School. This information will be provided electronically in a Uniform Education Reporting System approved software or system. When a student withdraws, the Public Charter School shall promptly notify the local board of education responsible for the attendance area in which the student resides so that the local board may fulfill its legal obligation to verify the student’s compliance with compulsory attendance laws.
- 7.4** Enrollment numbers in the application are projections, or estimates, and do not bind the State to fund the Public Charter School at a particular level.
- a. For the first two years of the initial charter the State will fund the school up to the maximum projected enrollment for each of those years as set forth in the application. However, in subsequent years, the School may increase its enrollment only as permitted by the charter school statute.
 - b. After three years of operation, G.S. 115C-218.5(f)(3) permits a charter school to expand to offer one grade higher or lower than the charter school currently offers if the charter school has not been identified as having inadequate performance as defined in statute and has been in financial compliance as required by the State Board of Education.
 - c. Any increase above 20% must be submitted to the Office of Charter Schools and approved by the State Board of Education in accordance with G.S. 115C-218.5(e).

8. Financial and Governance Warnings

This Charter incorporates by reference, and the Nonprofit is subject to, State Board Policy for Schools on Financial and Governance Noncompliance, and any subsequent amendments to such Policy.

9. Children with Special Needs

- 9.1** As prescribed by the SBE and in accordance with state and federal laws, the Nonprofit shall provide to the SBE the total number of children with special needs, identified in accordance with state and federal laws, enrolled in the Public Charter School.
- 9.2** The Nonprofit accepts and understands that for purposes of federal and state law, it is obligated to provide free and appropriate education and related services to children with special needs.
- 9.3** The Nonprofit shall be designated a local education agency (LEA) solely for purposes of meeting special education requirements pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- 9.4** The Nonprofit shall be responsible for meeting the needs of English language learners in compliance with State and Federal law.

10. Reports

The Nonprofit shall ensure the Public Charter School submits such reports as required by the SBE. Failure to submit such reports may be grounds for revocation of the Charter.

11. Notifications

- 11.1** The Nonprofit shall notify the SBE immediately of any conditions that it knows are likely to cause it to violate the terms of this Charter or applicable law.
- 11.2** The Nonprofit shall notify the SBE immediately of any circumstance requiring the closure of the Public Charter School, including but not limited to a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, storm, flood or other weather-related event, other extraordinary emergency, or destruction of or damage to the school facility.
- 11.3** The Nonprofit shall immediately notify the SBE of the arrest or charge of any members of the governing board or of a Public Charter School employee for a crime punishable as a felony, any crime related to the misappropriation of funds or theft, and any crime or misdemeanor constituting an act against a minor child or student. The Nonprofit shall also notify the SBE of the investigation of a member of the governing board or of any Public Charter School employee for child abuse.

- 11.4** The Nonprofit shall notify the SBE immediately of any change in its corporate status with the North Carolina Secretary of State's Office.
- 11.5** The Nonprofit shall notify the SBE immediately of a default on any obligation, which shall include debts that are past due by sixty (60) days or more.
- 11.6** The Nonprofit shall notify the SBE immediately if, at any time, student enrollment decreases by twenty percent (20%) or more compared to the most recent pupil count submitted to the SBE and/or DPI.
- 11.7** Failure by the Public Charter School to provide the above-stated notifications may be deemed a violation of this Charter and may be grounds for revocation.

12. Records

- 12.1** Subject to state and federal laws, the SBE, its agents, and the State Auditor shall have the right to examine and copy all records, reports, documents, and files relating to any activity, program, employee or student of the Public Charter School.
- 12.2** The Nonprofit is subject to the Public Records Law, Chapter 132 of the General Statutes. This provision is effective upon the SBE's approval of the Charter Application.
- 12.3** The Public Charter School is subject to all the provisions of Article 29 of Chapter 115C, entitled "Protective Provisions and Maintenance of Student Records."
- 12.4** The Nonprofit shall ensure compliance with the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act 42U.S.C. §1232g.

13. Insurance

- 13.1** The Nonprofit shall name the SBE as an Additional Named Insured to their liability coverage for operation of a charter school while obtaining and maintaining insurance at a minimum in the following amounts:
- a. Errors and Omissions: one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per occurrence;
 - b. General Liability: one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per occurrence;
 - c. Property Insurance: For owned building and contents, including boiler and machinery coverage, if owned;
 - d. Crime Coverage: no less than two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to cover employee theft and dishonesty;
 - e. Automobile Liability: one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per occurrence; and
 - f. Workers' Compensation: as specified by Chapter 97 of NC General Statute, Workers' Compensation Law.
- 13.2** These provisions shall not preclude the Nonprofit from obtaining liability insurance coverage in addition to or in excess of the requirements stated in this section.

14. Health, Safety, Welfare

- 14.1** The Nonprofit shall ensure that the Public Charter School adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local health and safety laws and regulations.
- 14.2** The Nonprofit shall grant access to local health and fire department officials for inspection of premises or operations of the charter school for purposes of ensuring the health, safety and welfare of students and employees.

15. Facilities

- 15.1** Prior to commencing operation, the Nonprofit shall provide to the SBE a description of any facility it intends to use, the financing for the facility and evidence from local government inspection authorities that the School's facilities are currently safe (e.g., Certificate of Occupancy for Educational Use).
- 15.2** Any change in location requires immediate notification by the Nonprofit to the SBE, and the Public Charter School must comply with the following conditions:
 - a. Notification to the SBE;
 - b. Submission of a valid Certificate of Occupancy or Temporary Certificate of Occupancy for the new Facilities prior to the first day of occupancy by students; and
 - c. Modified insurance binder to show the Public Charter School coverage is still valid for the new location.
- 15.3** Relocation into a different county and/or LEA shall constitute a material revision to this Charter and requires approval of the SBE.

16. Licensed Employees

- 16.1** All employees who hold professional valid licenses issued by the SBE are subject to the rules pertaining to licensed professionals and their licenses may be revoked based on any of the grounds listed in 16 N.C.A.C. 6C. 0312.
- 16.2** All Public Charter School administrators must report to the SBE if an employee engages in physical or sexual abuse of a child as listed in 16 N.C.A.C. 6C.0312.
- 16.3** Prior to each academic year, and as required by the SBE, the Nonprofit will ensure the Public Charter School reports the total number of teachers and the total number of teachers who hold valid licenses who are employed to teach at the Public Charter School. Failure to employ at least the number of licensed teachers required by law to teach in the charter school shall be grounds for revocation of the Charter.
- 16.4** The Nonprofit understands and agrees that it shall not employ, or accept voluntary services from, any individual whose certificate or license has been denied, suspended or revoked by the SBE or any other licensing board or agency on the grounds of unethical or immoral behavior, including improper sexual or physical

conduct with children or students. Violation of this provision is grounds for revocation of the Charter.

16.5 In the case of a Nonprofit employee who is on leave from employment with the local board pursuant to G.S. 115C-218.90(3) or its successor statute, the Nonprofit will notify the local board if such employee is suspended, terminated, asked to resign, or otherwise subjected to disciplinary action because of poor performance or misconduct. The Nonprofit shall cooperate with the local board and shall provide any information requested concerning such employees.

17. Fees

As prescribed by law, the Public Charter School shall not charge tuition or fees, except that the school may charge any fees that are charged by the local school administrative unit in which the charter school is located. A charter school, upon approval by the board of directors of the charter school, may establish fees for extracurricular activities, except those fees shall not exceed the fees for the same extracurricular activities charged by a local school administrative unit in which forty percent (40%) or more of the students enrolled in the charter school reside.

18. Transportation

The Nonprofit shall ensure the Public Charter School provides transportation for students as prescribed by law and the approved charter application. G.S. 115C-218.40

19. Indemnity

19.1 The Nonprofit agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the SBE, DPI, the constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina, and local boards of education, their officers, agents, employees, successors and assigns from all claims, damages, losses and expenses, including attorney's fees, arising out of or resulting from any action of the School caused by any intentional or negligent act or omission of the School, its officers, agents, employees, and contractors.

19.2 No indebtedness of any kind incurred or created by the Public Charter School shall constitute an indebtedness of the State or its political subdivisions, and no indebtedness of the Public Charter School shall involve or be secured by the faith, credit, or taxing power of the State or its political subdivisions. The Nonprofit shall clearly indicate to vendors and other entities and individuals that the obligations of the Nonprofit under agreement or contract are solely the responsibility of the Nonprofit and are not the responsibility of the SBE or the State.

19.3 This Charter is not an employment contract. No officer, employee, agent, or subcontractor of the Nonprofit is an officer, employee, or agent of the SBE or DPI.

20. Student Discipline

- 20.1** The Nonprofit shall comply with Article 27 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes.
- 20.2** The Public Charter School shall comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations governing discipline of children with disabilities, including compliance with 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq. and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Sec. 706(8).
- 20.3** The Public Charter School shall comply with state and federal due process requirements both in notifying students of conduct for which they may be suspended or expelled and in providing notice and hearing opportunities to students being recommended for exclusion. If the Public Charter School suspends a student with special needs, it shall continue to provide to the student all continuing education services to the extent mandated by federal and state laws and regulations.
- 20.4** In the event the school suspends or expels a student, the Public Charter School shall promptly notify local School officials in the School district to which the student would otherwise be assigned. Such notification shall include the student's name, special education status, length of suspension/expulsion and the circumstances giving rise to the suspension or expulsion.

21. Instruction

As prescribed by G.S. 115C-218.85(a)(1), the Nonprofit shall ensure the Public Charter School provides the minimum days or hours of instruction as required by statute.

22. Criminal Background Checks

The Nonprofit agrees to comply with the statutory requirement regarding background checks. G.S. 115C-218.90 (4)

23. Open Meetings

The Nonprofit agrees to be subject to the Open Meetings law (Article 33C of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes). This provision is effective upon the SBE's final approval of the charter application.

24. Assignment

Assignment of the Public Charter School to another entity is deemed a material revision to the Charter and must have prior written approval of the SBE.

25. Adequate Performance

The Nonprofit shall comply with all statutory and SBE requirements defining adequate criteria for Public Charter School performance and consequences for failing to meet the statutory requirements.

26. Termination of Charter

26.1 The SBE may terminate this Charter on any of the following grounds:

- a. Failure to meet the requirements for student performance;
- b. Failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management;
- c. Violation of law;
- d. Material violation of any of the conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the Charter;
- e. Two-thirds of the faculty and instructional support personnel at the Public Charter School request termination or nonrenewal; or
- f. Other good cause warranting nonrenewal or termination.

26.2 The following procedures will apply to the termination proceedings:

- a. When sufficient information exists to initiate termination of a Charter, DPI shall give the Nonprofit written notice of its intention to initiate revocation of the Charter. The notice will be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, and shall state in reasonable detail the grounds for the recommendation.
- b. If information available to the SBE indicates that the Public Charter School's current operation poses an immediate threat to the education, health, safety, or welfare of the Public Charter School's students or employees or the public, the SBE may take appropriate protective action pending a final decision on the termination of the Charter.

26.3 If the Nonprofit objects to the termination of the Charter, it must, within ten days following the date on which notice of the SBE's action was mailed, deliver to the State Board of Education a written request for a review by the SBE. If the Nonprofit fails to deliver a timely request for review, the Charter shall terminate on the eleventh day after the date the notice was mailed. If a timely request for a review is made by the Nonprofit, the Chair of the SBE may approve a Review Panel to consider the appeal. The Review Panel may review the matter with or without a formal hearing. If the Review Panel elects to conduct a hearing, the hearing shall be held within 30 days of receipt of the written request, unless otherwise agreed to by the parties. At the conclusion of its review, the Review Panel shall submit a written recommendation to the SBE. Unless the SBE and the Nonprofit otherwise agree, the SBE shall make a final decision at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

26.4 In the event that the Nonprofit is required to cease operation for any reason, including but not limited to non-renewal, revocation, or voluntary surrender of the Charter, the Nonprofit shall comply with the SBE's closure requirements.

27. Charter Amendment

27.1 The Nonprofit shall submit any proposed material revision of the charter to the SBE in accordance with guidance provided by the Office of Charter Schools. Changes that constitute a material revision include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a) Enrollment growth beyond the allowed amount as set out in statute;
- b) Relocation;
- c) Transferring the charter to another non-profit entity;
- d) Altering the mission or targeted student population;
- e) Employing or terminating a management company; and
- f) Changing the application with respect to the National School Lunch program.

27.2 The following proposed amendments to a charter may be approved by Department staff without the necessity of Board action; however, the charter school must seek approval prior to implementation of the change. Further, the Board must be notified by the Department of any approved amendments in the following areas:

- a) Bylaws;
- b) The name of the charter school;
- c) The Articles of Incorporation;
- d) Class sizes as stated in the application;
- e) Length of school day and/or academic year;
- f) Curriculum changes; and
- g) Changing the application with respect to student transportation

27.3 Any potential changes not contained in 27.2 above must be reviewed and approved by the State Board of Education. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Department may carry any proposed amendment to the Board for its review.

28. Agreements with Local Boards of Education

This Charter shall not preclude the Nonprofit from entering into any agreements with the local board of education; provided, no such agreements shall supersede or override any provision of this Charter.

29. Oversight and Intervention

29.1 The SBE will, at its discretion, conduct announced or unannounced site visits at the Public Charter School consistent with its oversight authority.

29.2 The SBE and DPI are, in no event, responsible for any financial support other than the funding as provided by law.

30. Notice

Any notice the Public Charter School is required or permitted to be submitted under this Charter shall be delivered to:

**Director, Office of Charter Schools
Department of Public Instruction
6303 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699**

Upon request, faxes or emails
sent by the School shall be
followed by hard copies
postmarked within the next
business day of the
fax transmittal.

31. Severability

If any provision of this Charter is determined to be unenforceable or invalid for any reason, the remainder of this Charter shall remain in effect, unless the Charter is revoked or relinquished.

32. Non-Endorsement

The Public Charter School acknowledges that the granting of a Charter in no way represents or implies endorsement by the SBE of any method of instruction, philosophy, practices, curriculum, or pedagogy used by the School or its agents; nor does the granting of this Charter constitute a guarantee by the SBE of the success of the Public Charter School in providing a learning environment that will improve student achievement.

33. Legislative Action

This Charter and any amendments to it and renewals of it are subject to applicable laws enacted by the General Assembly and shall be deemed amended to reflect applicable changes to those laws. Upon repeal of the statutes authorizing this Charter, this Charter is null and void.

34. Status of Parties to the Charter

34.1 This Charter is not intended to create and shall not be interpreted to create employer-employee, contractor-subcontractor, or principal-agent relationships between or among any party or parties to this Charter. "Parties," for purposes of this paragraph only, include the parties to this Charter. No officers, employees,

agents, or subcontractors of the School shall be considered officers, employees, agents or subcontractors of the SBE.

- 34.2** The Nonprofit certifies that all contracts obligating the Nonprofit have been and will be undertaken by the Nonprofit and failure to act strictly as a nonprofit corporation shall be grounds for revocation of the Charter.

SIGNATURE AND NOTARIZATION PAGE

FOR THE SCHOOL: _____
(School Name)

This _____ day of _____ 2017.

(Print Name of Board Chair/President)

(Signature of Board Chair/President)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this _____
Day of _____, 2017,

(Official Seal)

Notary Public

My commission expires _____, 20__.

FOR THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION:

This _____ day of _____ 2017

Appendix B

Charter School Performance Framework

2016 Charter School Performance Framework

SCHOOL NAME:

GRADE SPAN:

A. Operational Annual Monitoring Criteria

MEASURE	CRITERIA	STATUS
A1	The NC Report Card and Letter Grade are prominently displayed on the school's website and schools with D/F have sent letter to notify parents	
A2	The school has an assigned administrator in the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS).	
A3	The school meets the required number of instructional hours or days in accordance with State law.	
A4	The school adheres to all testing and accountability policies for state assessments.	
A5	The school implements mandated programming as a result of state or federal requirements.	
	Title I	
	Title II	
	EC	
	School Nutrition	
	Transportation	
A6	The school follows student admissions and lottery requirements as stated in North Carolina General Statute, State Board of Education Policy, and the signed charter agreement	
A7	The school's official funded ADM is within 10% of the projected ADM.	
A8	The non-profit board has a current grievance policy.	
A9	The non-profit board has a current conflict of interest policy that complies with G.S. 115C-218.15 (effective March 1, 2016).	
A10	The non-profit board has a current nepotism policy.	
A11	A quorum of the non-profit board of directors meets no less than 8 times a year (including annual meeting).	
A12	The majority of the non-profit board members primary residence in NC.	
A13	There is evidence of current fire inspections and related records.	
A14	The school has a viable certificate of occupancy or other required building use authorization.	

2016 Charter School Performance Framework

MEASURE	CRITERIA	STATUS
A15	The non-profit board holds current, active civil and liability insurance with the minimum coverage as defined in the signed charter agreement.	
A16	The non-profit board has a criminal history check policy that is at least the same as the LEA in which the school is located.	
A17	The school is compliant with all student health and safety requirements as defined in general statute, SBE policy, or the signed charter agreement.	
A18	The school is compliant with teacher licensure percentage requirements by maintaining at least 50% of teachers licensed from the first day of instruction throughout the school year in accordance with SBE policy.	

B. Operational Review/Renewal/Strategic Plan Monitoring Criteria

MEASURE	CRITERIA	STATUS
B1	The school has graduation requirements that match the approved charter application or approved charter application amendments.	
B2	The school has student promotion requirements that match the approved charter application or approved charter application amendments.	
B3	The school is consistent implementing the mission and educational program in the approved charter application or approved charter application amendments.	
B4	The non-profit board operates in accordance with the approved charter application by-laws or approved charter application amended by-laws.	
B5	The non-profit board is compliant with Open Meetings Law.	
B6	The non-profit board is compliant with Public Records Requests.	
B7	The school maintains a discipline policy that is compliant with state and federal law and that is consistent with the approved charter application and approved charter application amendments.	

2016 Charter School Performance Framework

SCHOOL NAME:

GRADE SPAN:

C. Financial Compliance

MEASURE	CRITERIA	STATUS	DATA
C1	The State Board policy TCS-U-006 outlines the charter school noncompliance levels. This policy details the following three levels of financial non-compliance under which a charter school may be placed by the Division of School Business.		

2016 Charter School Performance Framework

SCHOOL NAME:

GRADE SPAN:

D. Academic Outcomes

MEASURE	CRITERIA	DATA	STATUS
D1	The charter school's School Performance Grade (SPG) is a C or better. ¹		
D2	The charter school met or exceeded expected growth.		
D3	The charter school's Performance Composite Grade Level Proficiency (GLP) is 60% or better.		
D4	The charter school's Performance Composite College and Career Readiness (CCR) is 60% or better.		
D5	The charter school's Performance Composite GLP is comparable ² to the LEA.		
D6	The charter school's Performance Composite CCR is comparable ² to the LEA.		
D7	Female Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D8	Male Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D9	Black Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D10	White Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D11	Hispanic Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D12	American Indian Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D13	Economically Disadvantaged Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D14	Exceptional Children Subgroup Grade Level Proficiency		
D15	Reading Performance Grade		
D16	Math Performance Grade		

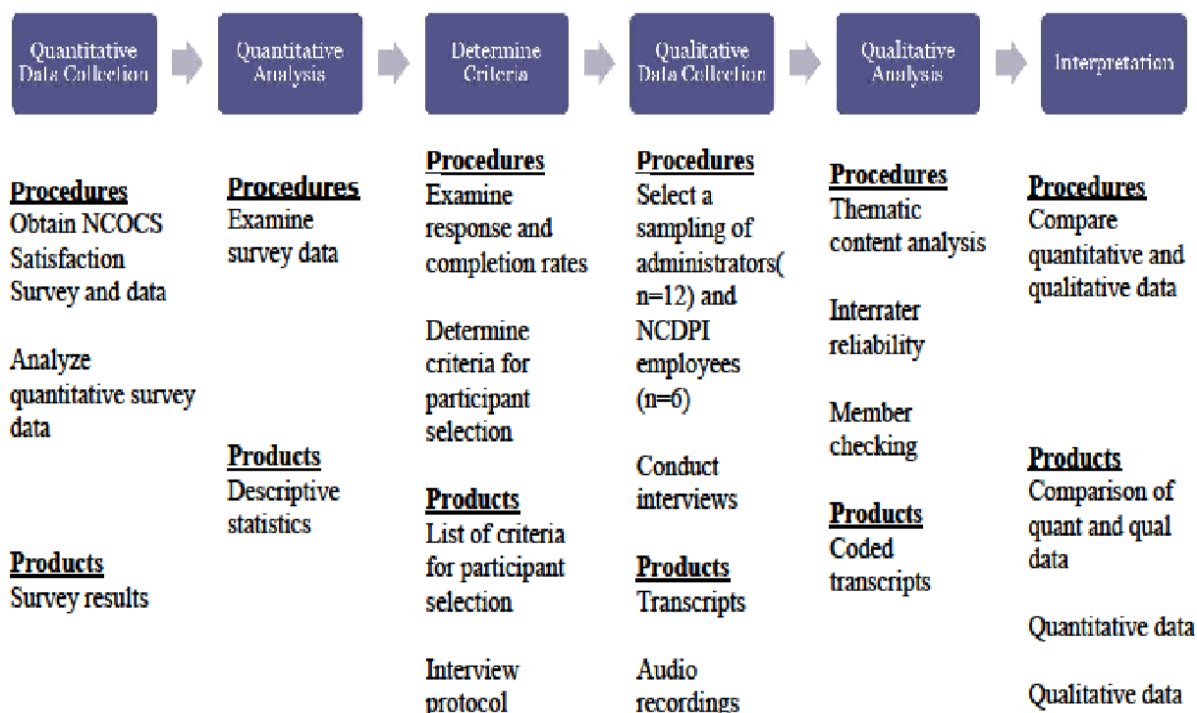
¹ Schools receiving a D or F rating are at-risk of Low Performing designation and must notify parents of School Performance Grade.

² Comparable as defined by the Charter School Advisory Board (CSAB) as being no more than 5% below the LEA on proficiency ratings.

Appendix C

Methods: Mixed Methods Visual Model

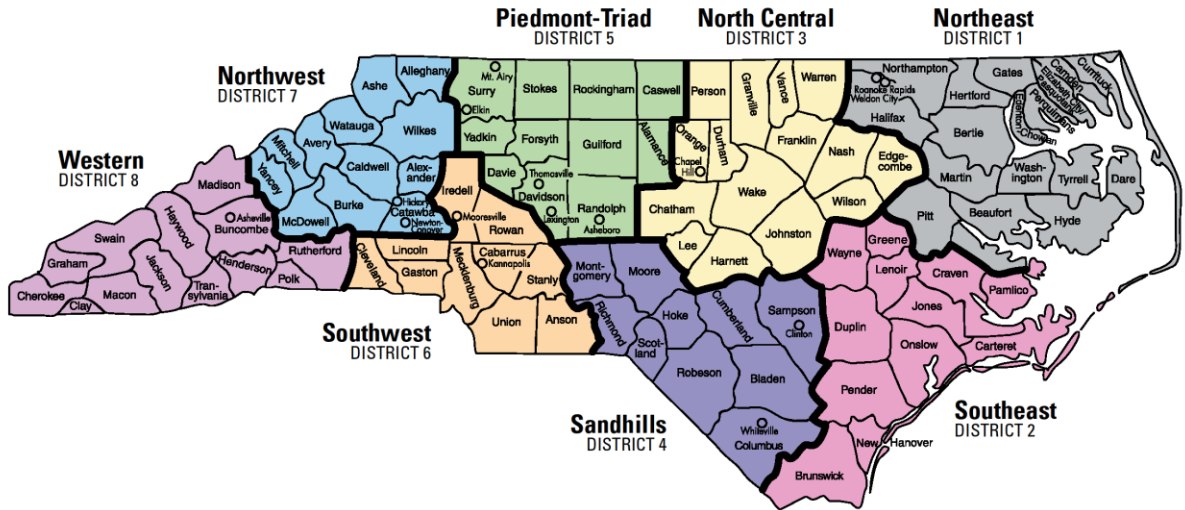
North Carolina Charter School Administrators Perspective of Support from Their Authorizer



Appendix D

North Carolina State Board of Education Districts

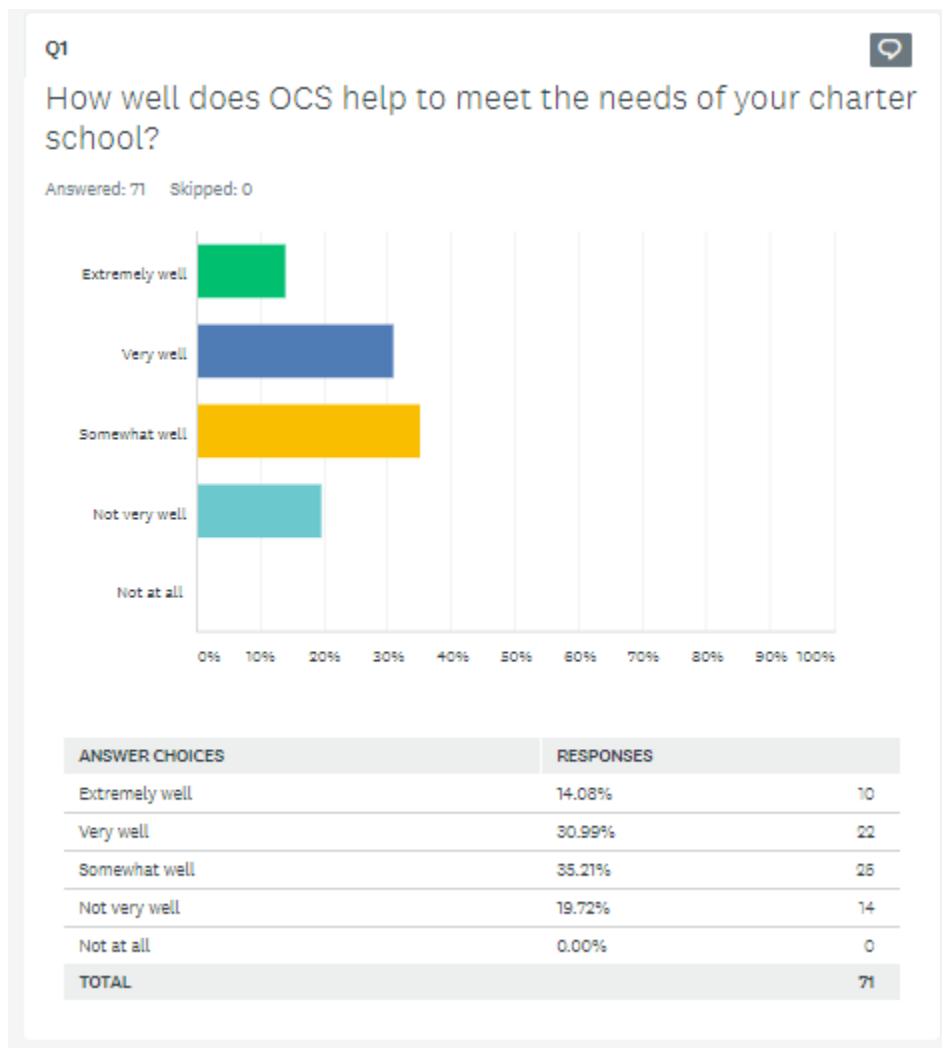
North Carolina State Board of Education Districts



Appendix E

Office of Charter Schools (OCS) Satisfaction Survey Results

In an effort to provide you with exceptional service, we are seeking your feedback. Your response will help us see where we are meeting your needs and outline areas where we need to improve. Please complete the survey below.

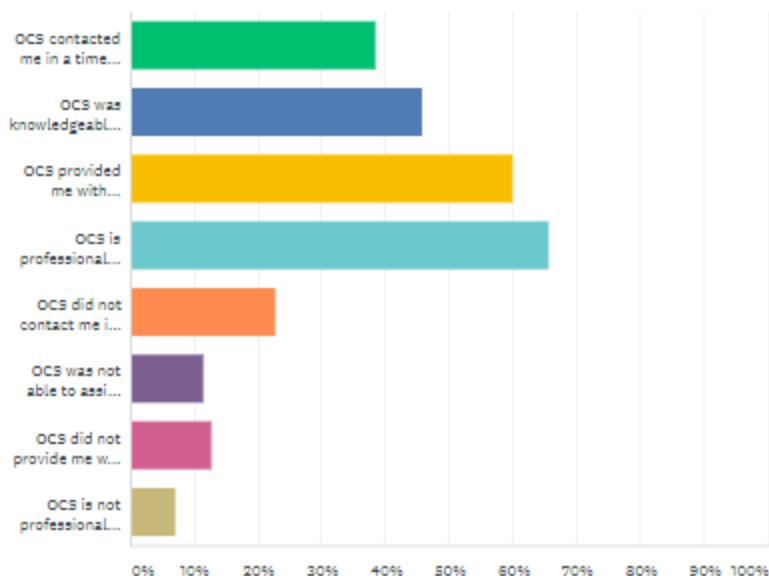


Q2



When you think about all of your interactions with OCS staff in the past 2 years, select the statement or statements that best characterize the majority of those interactions.

Answered: 70 Skipped: 1



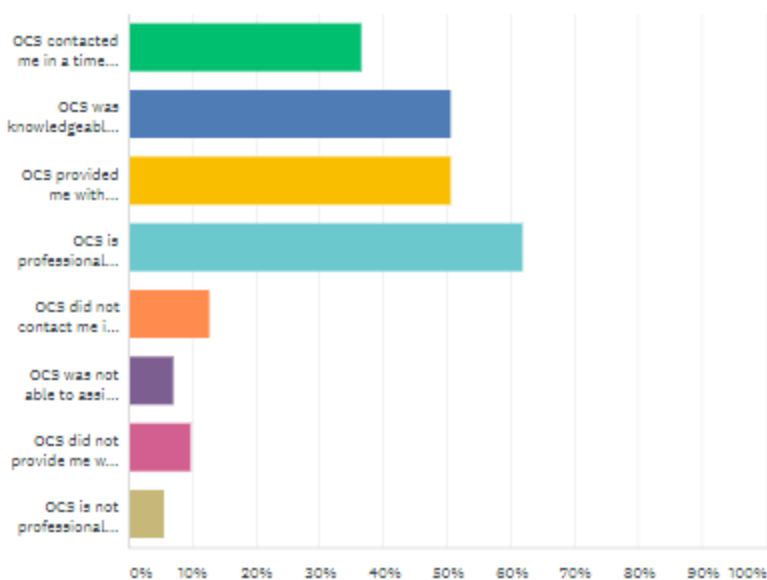
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
OCS contacted me in a timely fashion.	38.57%	27
OCS was knowledgeable and able to assist me.	45.71%	32
OCS provided me with support.	60.00%	42
OCS is professional in their interactions with me.	65.71%	46
OCS did not contact me in a timely fashion.	22.86%	16
OCS was not able to assist me.	11.43%	8
OCS did not provide me with support.	12.86%	9
OCS is not professional in their interactions with me.	7.14%	5
Total Respondents: 70		

Q3



How would you rate your most recent interaction with OCS staff? Mark all that apply.

Answered: 71 Skipped: 0



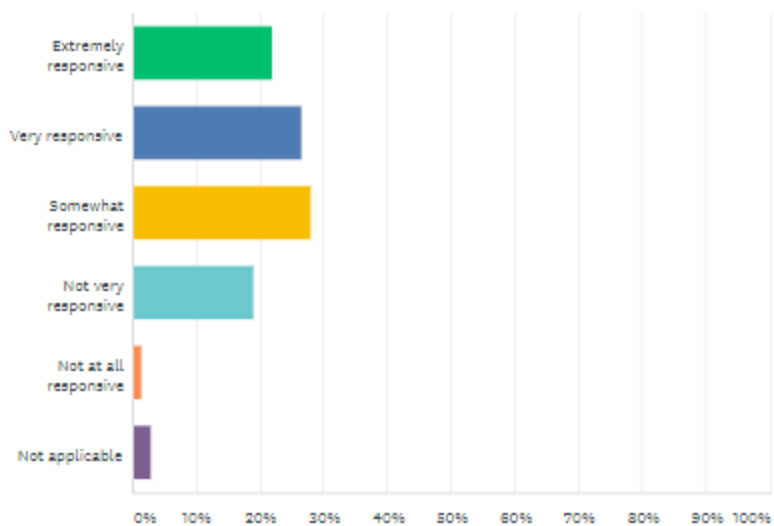
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
OCS contacted me in a timely fashion.	36.62%	26
OCS was knowledgeable and able to assist me.	50.70%	36
OCS provided me with support.	50.70%	36
OCS is professional in their interactions with me.	61.97%	44
OCS did not contact me in a timely fashion.	12.68%	9
OCS was not able to assist me.	7.04%	5
OCS did not provide me with support.	9.86%	7
OCS is not professional in their interactions with me.	5.63%	4
Total Respondents: 71		

Q4



In general, how responsive is OCS to your school's questions or concerns?

Answered: 68 Skipped: 3



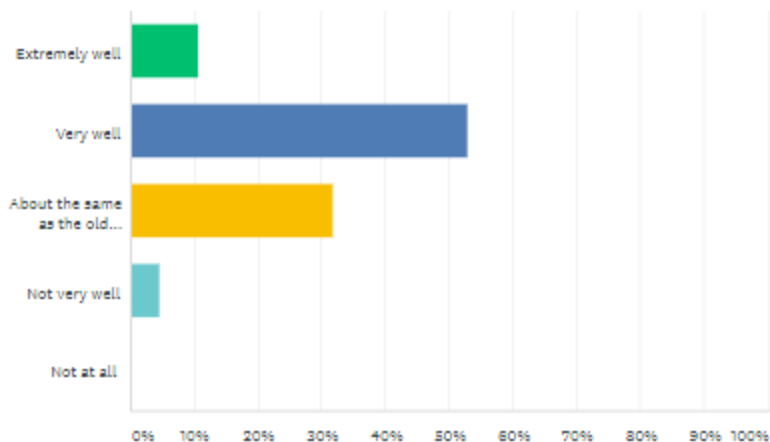
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely responsive	22.06%	15
Very responsive	26.47%	18
Somewhat responsive	27.94%	19
Not very responsive	19.12%	13
Not at all responsive	1.47%	1
Not applicable	2.94%	2
TOTAL		68

Q5



The OCS website has been redesigned. Overall, how well does the new OCS website meet your needs?

Answered: 66 Skipped: 5



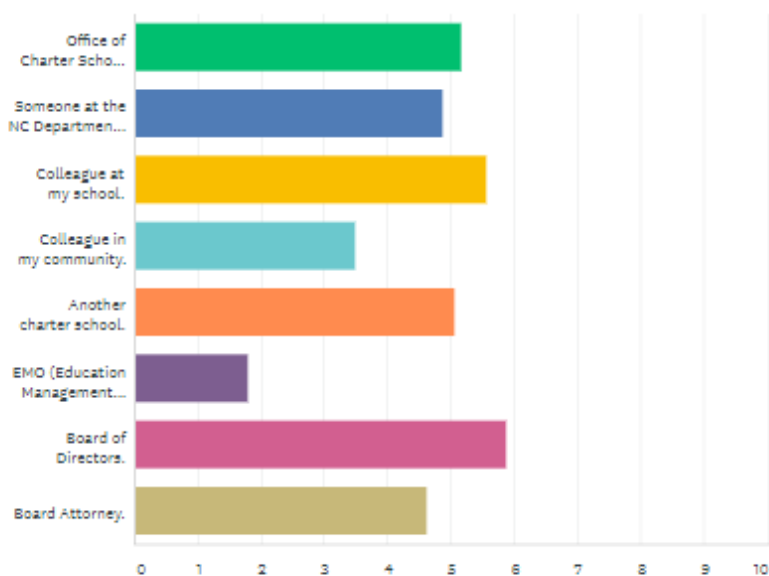
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely well	10.61%	7
Very well	53.03%	35
About the same as the old website	31.82%	21
Not very well	4.55%	3
Not at all	0.00%	0
TOTAL		66

Q7



Who would you turn to if you had a major concern about your charter school? Please rank from first to last, with 1 being the first person you would contact and 8 being the last.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 3



Office of Charter Schools (OCS)	9.23%	6
Someone at the NC Department of Instruction (NCDPI)	6.15%	4
Colleague at my school	38.46%	25
Colleague in my community	4.76%	3
Another charter school	7.81%	6
EMO (Education Management Organization)	3.28%	2
Board of Directors	27.94%	19
Board Attorney	6.06%	4

Appendix F

Mixed Methods Research Questions: Charter School Administrators

1. Tell me about your professional background.
2. Tell me about your educational background.
3. How long have you been a charter administrator in North Carolina?
4. What is your school's current compliance standing in the area of
 - a. academics (probe when needed)

Follow-up: To what extent do you perceive that NCDPI consultants support you in the area of academics?

- b. finances (probe when needed),

Follow-up: To what extent do you perceive that NCDPI consultants support you in the area of finances?

- c. operations and (probe when needed),

Follow-up: To what extent do you perceive that NCDPI consultants support you in the area of operations?

- d. governance (probe when needed)?

Follow-up: To what extent do you perceive that NCDPI consultants support you in the area of governance?

5. To what extent do you perceive that the support you receive provides opportunities for a consultant to work alongside you?
6. To what extent do you perceive that the support that you receive provides the development and use of tools that can be integrated into your work?
7. What is your perception of the overall support you receive from NCDPI?

Appendix G

Mixed Methods Research Questions: NCDPI Consultants

1. Tell me about your professional background.
2. Tell me about your educational background.
3. How long have you been a NCSBE consultant?
4. What area(s) do you provide support in for charter school administrators:
 - a. academics (probe when needed)
Follow-up: To what extent do you support administrators in the area of academics?
 - b. finances (probe when needed),
Follow-up: To what extent do you support administrators in the area of finances?
 - c. operations and (probe when needed),
Follow-up: To what extent do you support administrators in the area of operations?
 - d. governance (probe when needed)?
Follow-up: To what extent do you support administrators in the area of governance?
5. To what extent do you perceive that your support provides opportunities for you to work alongside charter school administrators?
6. To what extent do you perceive that your support provides the development and use of tools that can be integrated in the charter school administrators 'work?

Which is your perception of the overall support that you provide charter school administrators?

Appendix H

NCDPI Divisions

Public Schools of North Carolina
 State Board of Education | NC Department of Public Instruction

SEPTEMBER 7, 2017

