
Charter School Leadership in Colorado

by

Dick M. Carpenter II, PhD
Krista Kafer



The Colorado Department of Education
Schools of Choice Office
201 E. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80203
303.866.6771/hines_p@cde.state.co.us

Executive Summary

This study examines the leadership landscape in Colorado's charter schools using an extensive survey of charter administrators/principals. The survey was administered in fall 2009 and covered a broad range of topics in five general areas: Background of Charter Leaders, Leadership of Charter School Principals, Charter Principals and Boards, Charter Leaders' Time and Resources, and Instructional Leadership.

Background of Charter Leaders

Among Colorado's charter leaders, 56 percent are women and 44 percent are men. On average, they are a little more than 47 years old, and the majority are White. Charter leaders in Colorado are well educated. Eighty-six percent hold at least a master's degree, and almost 10 percent hold PhDs. Almost 50 percent hold a Colorado principal's license and more than 40 percent hold a Colorado teacher license.

In terms of experience, charter leaders, on average, have served as principals at their schools for a little more than four years, with the range spanning zero to 16. On average, charter leaders did not work any substantive amount of time at their schools in a separate capacity prior to assuming their current roles, but they did work in various educational positions in schools other than their current one, ranging from different administrative positions, to counselor or specialist, to district administrators or board members. Charter school principals also served as leaders in business, the military, non-profits, and government prior to their current positions.

On average, charter leaders planned to remain in their position for another six years. Some planned to leave at the end of the current school year, while others believed they would remain for several decades. Of those who plan to leave their principal positions, the greatest percentage will seek to work as an educational consultant, followed by leading another school. Other than retirement, only a small percentage plan to leave education entirely.

Leadership of Charter School Principals

Overall, charter school principals feel confident in their ability to attend to the various tasks required of them, although men reported significantly greater levels of confidence than women. When asked to identify important factors for their work, setting academic standards and building community within the school topped the list, while fundraising and meetings were identified as less important. Principals consistently rated the amount of influence they have over work factors as less than the importance of those same factors. Likewise, levels of satisfaction with work factors were lower than amount of influence over those factors. Correlation analysis shows a strong relationship between level of influence and job satisfaction, and those who work for boards for whom micro-managing is a "problem" are less likely to be satisfied with their work.

Charter Principals and Boards

The working relationship with and perspectives on boards is generally positive among charter administrators, and the working relationship is an important feature. Principals with a greater working relationship with their board plan to stay longer in their jobs. Charter boards, on average, are only moderately involved in the leadership of their schools, with more involvement in "big picture" activities and less in day-to-day operations.

On average, charter principals assigned their boards a rating of 4.4 on a scale of one to six, where six equaled “Excellent.” Principals who reported greater shared expectations with their boards were more likely to give their boards a higher overall rating, and principals who wished for greater board involvement in the school rated their boards lower. Moreover, boards who were more involved in articulating a vision for their schools and managing facilities received higher overall ratings from their principals.

Charter Leaders’ Time and Resources

Charter principals estimate they work an average of about 58.5 hours per week. In general, principals want to spend more time on activities that bear a greater relationship to student learning and less time on “bureaucratic” responsibilities.

Factors that make charter principals’ work most difficult include time, financial resources, and paperwork. The factors that make the job least difficult are a lack of community support, a lack of autonomy, and student discipline.

Instructional Leadership

The amount of time principals spend on instructional leadership is motivated by a host of factors, some more important than others. In general, having a vision focused on learning was most influential in shaping how administrators prioritized their leadership time and activities, while factors that were least influential included grant requirements and state improvement mandates.

With the advent of state standards and assessment, school leaders are increasingly expected to use assessment data to inform practice. Most charter leaders review assessment data of any type on a weekly basis, followed by those who review it on about a monthly basis. Charter principals appear to use assessment most when meeting with teachers and with their boards. They appear to use the data less often with parent groups and committees or as part of teacher evaluations.

Finally, charter leaders actively engage in opportunities to further their own development. More than 90 percent attend workshops, and more than half visit other schools as a way to improve their own leadership. Less than 20 percent take university courses related to their positions.

Conclusion

The report concludes by examining the leadership preparation opportunities in Colorado and finds that given the increase in the number of new charter schools in Colorado, and recent calls for replication of successful charter schools, more training options will likely be necessary.

Introduction

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools predicts that the charter school sector will need between 6,000 and 12,000 new school leaders over the course of the next decade.¹ These leaders will be difficult to find since the demand for leaders surpasses the current supply. More than half of today's leaders will retire in the next five to 10 years, and the number of new charter schools will likely continue to increase at the current level of more than 300 openings a year. Unless the sector can produce more leaders, a great many charter schools will lack an effective leader at the helm.

Given the critical nature of leadership to the success of a school, this trend poses serious consequences to the charter school movement. School leadership is second only to teaching among school related factors that influence student learning.² In other words, the quality of the principal has a direct impact on how well students achieve. Moreover, the effect on students is largest where the challenges to learning are greatest.

For charter schools, the stakes of leadership are even greater than for traditional public schools because they typically lack the support of a school district. Charter schools are public schools that operate independently of the school district. Charter schools generally select their own curricula and instructional programs, determine their own human resources policies and protocols (i.e., hiring, evaluation, termination, compensation, benefits, etc.), manage their own budgets, acquire and maintain their own facilities, and oversee other policies and procedures typically managed or supported by a school district. The greater autonomy enjoyed by charter schools translates to more responsibility for charter school principals.

Much of the weight of accountability also rests upon the principal's shoulders. Charter schools are schools of choice. They must market their program and enroll a sufficient number of students to maintain a viable financial state. Charter schools must meet the terms of the charter contract in order for the charter to be renewed. Failure to meet the terms of the contract, insufficient enrollment, or significant financial or academic deficiencies can cause a school to be closed, making the consequences of ineffective leadership arguably greater at charter schools.

Research into best practices in charter school leadership would be particularly helpful given the higher stakes involved for these schools. Unfortunately, there have been few studies of charter school leadership to date. Research on the traits of leaders in general is far more common. A 2003 meta-analysis of three decades of research on school leadership identified 21 "leadership responsibilities."³ When the researchers calculated the correlation between leadership responsibility and student achievement, they found that when a principal improved his or her "demonstrated abilities in all 21 responsibilities by one standard deviation," student achievement increased by 10 percent. According to the report, the 21 responsibilities of effective principals are to 1) foster culture and community, 2) create operating routines and procedures, 3) maintain discipline, 4) provide adequate resources, 5) oversee curriculum, instruction, and assessment, 6) focus the school community on goals, 7) remain knowledgeable about curriculum, instruction, and assessment, 8) interact with teachers and students, 9) recognize and reward accomplishments, 10) maintain lines of communication with students and staff, 11) advocate for the school, 12) elicit input into critical decisions, 13) affirm accomplishments and acknowledge failure, 14) acknowledge personal and relational issues, 15) act as a change agent, 16) inspire and innovate, 17) communicate strong ideals about education, 18) evaluate the impact of programs and practices on student learning, 19) exhibit flexibility and comfort with dissent, 20) remain aware school's challenges, problems, and undercurrents, and 21) stimulate the intellectual capacity of staff.

Although it is generally assumed that the leadership findings for traditional public school principals apply to charter schools, many questions remain: What are the characteristics of individuals who enter charter leadership? What does the job entail? What are their challenges? What kind of training have they received and is it adequate? To date, only a handful of studies have asked such questions.

Characteristics of Charter Leaders

Several have examined the characteristics of charter school leaders through multi-state surveys. This research reveals that in some ways, charter administrators are quite similar to those in traditional public schools. For example, the racial and gender distributions are comparable between sectors.⁴ As in traditional public schools, charter leaders are also well-educated. More than 79 percent hold a masters degree or greater, and 60 percent hold or have held a state principal certification.⁵ Not surprisingly, those who were newest to the profession were least likely to hold traditional certification or advanced degrees.⁶

Where charter administrators differ from those in traditional public schools is in experience, age, and length of time in leadership. Reflecting the short tenure of the charter school movement and perhaps its entrepreneurial ethos, charter principals are younger and report less experience both in charter schools and in educational leadership generally.⁷

This is not to say that charter principals assumed their responsibilities with no experience at all. In some states, more than 85 percent of charter principals moved into leadership roles from another position in education.⁸ Pre-charter experience also included financial management, organizational management, curriculum and instruction, nonprofit fundraising, and local politics and community organizations.⁹ Given that charter schools typically receive less funding than their traditional public school counterparts,¹⁰ they often must engage in fundraising to pay for programs and expenses. Yet, many charter leaders report no experience or training in nonprofit fundraising.¹¹ And of those who did have such experience, almost half said it was not helpful at their current position.¹²

What charter leaders characteristically bring to their positions, however, is a sense of purpose and mission. Some come with an “outlaw mentality” in that they were outside of the public school system or were habitually challenging the system from within. This characteristic helps leaders maintain a commitment to their charter school.¹³ Most sought out charter leadership because of an affinity with the school’s mission, a desire to work with the type of students served, and because they were “seeking a challenge.”¹⁴ Few pursued the position because of pay and benefits and career advancement,¹⁵ which is a good thing since one study found that a quarter of respondents took a pay cut when they accepted their current job.¹⁶ Compared to traditional public school principals, charter leaders make anywhere from \$7,000 to \$14,000 less per year, on average.¹⁷

Despite the commitment to school mission and the student populations served, however, job turnover remains a significant issue among charter leaders. One study found that 71 percent of respondents said that they expected to leave their current job within five years.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the report did not explore in any detail why charter principals said they would leave or empirically examine the relationship between other variables in their data and leaders’ longevity.

The Training and Preparation of Charter Leaders

One such influence on leaders’ longevity might be, for example, their training and preparation. Prior research on charter leaders has found that most felt disappointed with their formal training.¹⁹ After

assuming their leadership positions, they discovered that training programs did not prepare them to undertake the cultural, strategic, or external complexities associated with their roles. Given that upwards of 80 percent of charter leaders complete traditional public school leadership preparation programs,²⁰ this points to a lack of quality associated with these programs, a mismatch between the content of such courses and the responsibilities of charter principals, or both.

Indeed, some prominent studies question the quality of leadership preparation programs. Arthur Levine, of Columbia's Teachers College, authored a 2005 report that concluded such programs were inadequate in terms of curriculum, admission/graduation standards, faculty credentials, clinical instruction, research, and degree offerings. Levine's survey of principals and superintendents said that almost all were unprepared to deal with classroom realities and politics.²¹ Two years later, a separate study by Frederick Hess and Andrew Kelly found that only a fraction of leadership preparation programs provided training in critical areas such as accountability, using data and research, managing human resources, and instructional program oversight.²²

It is not surprising, then, that more than 40 percent of charter leaders in one study reported receiving training specific to their school's educational program from a variety of other providers, such as an educational management organization (EMO) or charter management organization (CMO), national/regional network, authorizer, or community based organization.²³ Moreover, once in the job, charter leaders continue to pursue training specific to their responsibilities. Most often, these opportunities take the form of information networks with other charter school directors or the school's authorizer. More general training, such as national charter school conferences, are often deemed unimportant by charter leaders.²⁴

The Responsibilities of Charter School Leadership

In addition to their training and preparation, leader longevity also may be a function of the responsibilities of the job. Given that prior research on charter school leadership has examined charter principals' responsibilities, how they spend their time, and the confidence they hold in their ability to do the job, it is possible to examine the relationship between longevity and responsibilities, but few have.

Of those studies that have examined the nature of charter leaders' work, charter administrators spend, on average, 60 hours a week at their schools.²⁵ The greatest percentage of that time is spent in instructional leadership and organizational management, including scheduling, enrollment, facilities, safety, discipline, and transportation.²⁶ The second tier activities, in terms of time use, include promoting school culture, staff/student/family politics, and financial management. Charter principals indicated they spent the least amount of time on human resources, strategic planning, and public relations.²⁷ Despite spending much of their time on instructional leadership, most leaders wanted to spend more time on this responsibility.²⁸ Yet, when asked to identify the major challenges they face, charter leaders did not cite instructional concerns but most often referenced issues associated with organizational management, such as managing facilities, raising funds/managing finances, engaging parents, negotiating with districts, and attracting qualified teachers.²⁹

The confidence charter leaders hold in their ability to address their different responsibilities varies, based on the type of responsibility and the leaders' background. In general, charter directors are most confident in their ability to inspire staff around a common vision, establish high expectations for students, and create a safe and effective learning environment. They are less confident of their ability to engage parents and the community in working toward a common vision, strategic

planning, lead a schoolwide math or literacy initiative, or manage the budget/align resources with academic improvement.³⁰

Not surprisingly, principals with the most amount of experience report the greatest levels of confidence in performing job responsibilities. Principals who came to their position from the teaching field were most comfortable with instructional roles and least likely to report confidence with managing budgets and operations, while principals from the business or nonprofit world were the most confident with these management tasks. Finally, charter principals of schools managed by CMOs reported less confidence than independent charter school principals with comparable experience in the areas of leading school improvement, conveying a common mission, developing leadership, and setting high expectations for students.³¹

Given these different levels of confidence and interest, it is not surprising, then, that the leadership roles and responsibilities in charter schools often take different structures and arrangements to suit the leadership team's unique attributes, dispositions, and talents.³² Some research indicates leadership responsibilities in some charter schools are divided between managerial and instructional leadership to avoid overwhelming one person with all of it.³³ Another study describes three different configurations: The One Man-Band, where the principal is centrally involved in all core leadership functions; the Jazz Bandleader, where the principal focuses on a few key functions but distributes leadership to others; and the Orchestra Conductor, where the principal is essentially a superintendent focused on strategic leadership and development while subordinates fulfill key responsibilities.³⁴

The Focus of This Report

Although revealing and helpful as charter schools continue to mature, the existing research literature discussed above would benefit greatly from additional studies. First, despite the aforementioned importance of charter leadership, it is an area that has seen surprisingly little research compared to the large and growing body of work in other areas of charter school research. Second, of the existing research, samples have been somewhat limited in their representativeness, undermining the generalizability of results.³⁵ The extant body of work can only benefit from additional research. Third, and related to number two, for policymakers and educational leaders in Colorado, results from the aforementioned studies provide some important information, but it is not specific enough for decision and policy-making purposes. Finally, the number of charter schools continues to grow rapidly, thereby exacerbating the need to understand better the dynamics of charter school leadership.

Thus, we examined the leadership landscape in Colorado's charter schools in order to contribute to the greater knowledge-base and to inform policymakers and educational leaders in Colorado about charter school leadership. Similar to some of the aforementioned studies, we did so with an extensive survey of Colorado's charter school administrators/principals. The survey covers a broad range of topics, from the background of charter leaders, to perceptions about their roles as leaders, to their opinions about governance at their schools, to how they use their time and resources in leading their schools (See Appendix A for the complete survey).

The survey was administered online during fall 2009. All charter administrators/principals were invited to participate. Of 154 charter schools in operation at that time, principals of 78 schools responded. The schools represented educate almost 29,000 students, with an average enrollment of 424. On average, a little more than 33 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch, and more than 37 percent are minorities. Of these schools, 19 percent serve only elementary grades, 4 percent serve

only middle grades, 21 percent serve only high school grades, 43 percent serve elementary and middle grades, 3 percent serve middle and high school grades, and 10 percent enroll students from PK-12.

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics—such as averages (i.e., means), standard deviations (a measure of variability in the data), frequencies, and percentages—and statistical tests, such as correlation and multiple regression. The latter were most often used to examine the relationship between different questions or topics on the survey. For example, one of the survey questions asks administrators how long they plan to remain in their current position. We used other questions on the survey to determine if there were differences in that longevity based on the level of influence principals believe they have, job satisfaction, level of board involvement in the school, the quality of board leadership, and how many hours a week the principals work.

Throughout, we report whether the differences from these statistical tests are statistically significant. If a result is significant, this means the difference or finding is greater than what one could expect to find by random chance or error. By convention, we use a standard of $p < .05$ to determine statistical significance, which means a finding with significance less than .05 is considered statistically significant.

Results

The Background of Charter Leaders

This section includes results on the background characteristics of charter leaders—their age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, years of experience, and the like. In addition to painting a portrait of charter leaders, these characteristics are used in subsequent sections of the report to examine differences in the perceptions held by these leaders, such as opinions about their leadership role, their resource needs, and their relationships with their boards.

Personal Characteristics

Among Colorado’s charter leaders, 56 percent are women and 44 percent are men. On average, they are a little more than 47 years old, and the majority are White, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Racial/Ethnic Composition of Charter Leaders

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
Black	1
Hispanic	8
Multiracial	1
White	90

In general, charter leaders in Colorado are well educated. As Table 2 indicates, 86 percent hold at least a master’s degree, and almost 10 percent hold PhDs. Although not required by state law, almost 50 percent hold a Colorado principal’s license and more than 40 percent hold a Colorado teacher license. A little more than a quarter hold no license or certification whatsoever from any state.

Table 2: Educational Attainment of Colorado Charter School Leaders

Degree	Percent
No degree	1
BA	13
MA	65
Education Specialist	12
PhD	9
Credentials	
Colorado Principal License	49
Principal License from Another State	12
Colorado Teacher License	44
Teacher License from Another State	33
Other Professional Education License from Colorado	5
Other Professional Education License from Another State	5
National Board Certification for Teachers	0
None of These	26

In terms of experience, charter leaders, on average, have served as principals at their schools for a little more than four years, with the range spanning zero total years to 16. The latter means some principals have led their schools since Colorado passed its charter law in 1993.

The pre-principal experience of charter leaders is quite diverse. As Table 3 demonstrates, on average, charter leaders did not work any substantive amount of time at their schools in a separate capacity prior to assuming their current roles.

Table 3: Years of Prior Experience at Their Present School, by Position

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Board Member	0	4	0.15	0.65
Assistant Principal	0	5	0.51	1.21
Dean	0	10	0.53	1.77
Specialist	0	0	0.00	0.00
Counselor	0	0	0.00	0.00
Full-time Teacher	0	20	1.40	3.25
Part-time Teacher	0	2	0.08	0.31
Substitute Teacher	0	2	0.03	0.23

They did, however, work in various educational positions in schools other than their current one. Those positions ranged from different administrative positions, to counselor or specialist, to district administrators or board members. The position with the most number of years, on average, was full time teacher, at almost five and a half years (see Table 4).

Table 4: Years of Prior Educational Experience other than at Their Present School, by Position

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Elementary Principal	0	20	1.27	3.98
Middle School Principal	0	5	0.37	1.08
Elementary/Middle School Principal	0	8	0.24	1.12
K-12 Principal	0	17	0.46	2.25
Middle School/High School Principal	0	7	0.19	0.99
High School Principal	0	16	0.63	2.56
Elementary Assistant Principal	0	6	0.28	1.02
Middle School Assistant Principal	0	4	0.18	0.68
Elementary/Middle School Assistant Principal	0	3	0.06	0.37
K-12 Assistant Principal	0	0	0.00	0.00
Middle School/High School Assistant Principal	0	2	0.09	0.40
High School Assistant Principal	0	2	0.13	0.47
Dean	0	7	0.77	1.55
Specialist	0	10	0.26	1.29
Counselor	0	12	0.17	1.36
Full-Time Teacher	0	32	5.42	6.52
Substitute Teacher	0	4	0.26	0.67
District Administrator	0	4	0.21	0.89
Board Member	0	8	0.68	1.90

The grades in which charter leaders taught spanned all of them except kindergarten. However, as Table 5 illustrates, a greater percentage taught in the secondary grades—as compared to elementary grades—prior to their current roles.

Table 5: Grades in which Charter Leaders Taught Full-Time

Grade	Percentage
1	17
2	21
3	17
4	14
5	15
6	27
7	40
8	40
9	49
10	47
11	49
12	47
None	18

In addition to education, charter school principals also served as leaders in business, the military, non-profits, and government prior to their current positions. As the top panel of Table 6 indicates, business leadership saw the most number of years, followed by non-profit leadership. The same pattern was evident in years of experience charter leaders amassed in non-educational/non-leadership positions.

Table 6: Years of Experience in Non-Educational Positions Prior to Current Position

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Leadership Positions				
Business	0	25	3.51	5.93
Military	0	26	0.82	3.81
Nonprofit	0	20	2.24	4.37
Government	0	4	0.17	0.71
Non-leadership Positions				
Business	0	34	4.45	6.37
Military	0	36	1.10	5.49
Nonprofit	0	22	2.21	4.69
Government	0	9	0.24	1.15

The Relationship of Training and Experience to Charter Leadership

Given that charter school principals come to their positions with a diversity of training and experience, both education and non-education related, and that state law does not require a principal's license and its requisite educational coursework (indeed, half of charter leaders hold no such license), it is interesting to explore whether they felt prepared for their leadership positions.

Table 7 includes 22 elements of a charter school principal’s job and how the respondents believed their training and experience prepared them for these elements. Respondents rated each element on a six-point scale, ranging from “extremely helpful” to “a hinderance.” As the table illustrates, charter leaders tended to rate their training and experience between “somewhat helpful” (4) and “helpful” (5). They rated their training and experience as most helpful in preparing for curriculum development, modeling teaching, and student discipline, and least helpful in the area of fundraising.

Table 7: How Helpful Charter Principals’ Training Experience was for Elements of Their Job

Job Elements	Mean	SD
Teacher evaluations	4.91	1.05
Facilities management	4.32	1.25
Curriculum development	5.03	0.94
Modeling teaching	5.01	1.01
Budgets	4.46	1.30
Parents	4.82	1.15
Student discipline	5.01	0.95
School safety	4.74	1.04
Student assessment	4.90	0.86
Program evaluation	4.86	0.99
Professional development	4.92	0.82
Community relations	4.74	1.10
Reporting and compliance	4.27	1.09
Fundraising	3.90	1.33
Strategic leadership	4.79	1.01
Guiding teachers	4.68	0.97
Support students	4.49	0.98
Boards	4.12	1.25
Databased decisions	4.69	1.12
Building school culture	4.91	0.93
Master schedule	4.32	1.20
Human resources	4.65	1.29

Why They Want the Job, Why They Stay or Go, and Where They Go from Here

On average, charter leaders who responded to the survey planned to remain in their position for another six years. Some planned to leave at the end of the current school year, while others believed they would remain for several decades.

We examined if there were differences in planned longevity based on characteristics above and several variables discussed in greater detail below, including the level of influence principals believe they have, job satisfaction, level of board involvement in the school, the quality of board

leadership, and how many hours a week the principals work. Results indicate no significant differences in planned longevity based on any of these variables.

In deciding to pursue their current position, the most important factor was the school’s mission. This was measured on a six-point scale, ranging from “critical” (6) to “irrelevant” (1). This was followed by seeking a challenge and the type of students served by the school. The least important was career advancement. The same pattern also held for how important these elements were for remaining.

It is interesting to note differences in the importance principals assign to the factors between why the principals accepted the position and why they remain (see Table 8). For some factors, the importance remained essentially the same, such as with type of student and location. For others, the importance grew, such as school mission, wanting to lead a charter school, and pay and benefits. The difference for each of these was statistically significant. None of the other differences were significant.

Table 8: The Importance of Accepting and Remaining in the Position

	Importance for Accepting the Position		Importance for Remaining in the Position	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
School mission*	5.21	0.99	5.54	0.72
Seek a challenge	4.96	1.00	4.79	1.05
Type of students	4.41	1.38	4.44	1.43
Want to lead charter school*	3.69	1.67	4.03	1.67
Location	3.96	1.54	3.94	1.49
Career advancement	2.58	1.58	2.54	1.53
Pay and benefits*	3.17	1.29	3.68	1.39

*<.05

The “importance for remaining in the position” data were also used as predictors of how long charter principals plan to stay in their current position. Only two—school mission ($p=.007$) and location ($p=.023$)—were significant. The first of these was the more significant of the two. The results indicate that principals for whom school mission is more important are likely to remain at their present school longer. For example, those principals who responded that school mission was “important” are likely to remain at their school for two and a half years longer than those who responded that school mission was “somewhat important.”

Of those who plan to leave their principal positions, the greatest percentage will seek to work as an educational consultant, followed by leading another school (see Table 9). Other than retirement, only a small percentage plan to leave education entirely.

Table 9: Where Leaving Principals Plan to Go

Next Step	Percentage
Retire	21
Work for a district	11
Lead another school	29
Work as an educational consultant	34
Leave education entirely	5

The Leadership of Charter School Principals

Knowing the backgrounds of charter school principals provides some insight into who leads Colorado's schools, but this research also examines the perspectives principals have about their leadership roles, how confident they are in their positions, and their level of satisfaction with their jobs. This section examines whether there are differences in these perspectives based on some of the background characteristics above.

Confidence to do the Job

Overall, charter school principals feel quite confident in their ability to attend to the various tasks required of them. As Table 10 demonstrates, the level of confidence was between "confident" (5) and "extremely confident" (6) for almost all job tasks. Only in leading literacy and math was the average just slightly less than the "confident" rating. When all items were averaged together, charter leaders reported a mean confidence level of 5.26 (SD=.51).

When we examined differences in overall confidence level based on the background characteristics above, only one showed a statistically significant difference—gender ($p=.037$). On average, men ($m=5.4$) reported greater overall confidence than women ($m=5.1$).

Table 10: Level of Confidence in Various Job Tasks

	Mean	SD
School safety	5.69	0.54
Facilitate high standards	5.55	0.60
Engage staff in common vision	5.46	0.77
Manage operations	5.36	0.66
Develop leadership	5.29	0.77
School improvement	5.24	0.82
Develop faculty	5.26	0.76
Seek critical feedback	5.28	0.64
Retain teachers	5.22	0.80
Implement long range plan	5.15	0.77
Manage budgets	5.18	0.85
Align resources	5.13	0.81
Delegate responsibilities	5.12	0.76
Attract teachers	5.24	0.84
Engage parents in common vision	5.03	0.82
Lead literacy and math	4.99	0.90

Defining Charter School Leadership

As with leadership generally, educational leadership can be and often is defined in numerous ways. Given the differences between educational sectors (public and private, for example), leadership takes on different forms and responsibilities. Also, because they are comparably new to the educational scene, charter schools may or may not require different definitions of leadership. We sought to determine this by asking charter principals to identify importance of various roles and responsibilities inherent in their work. The six-point scale here ranged from “a distraction” (1) to “very important” (6).

Table 11 presents the results of this question. Most of the factors were rated as “important,” with setting academic standards and building community within the school topping the list. Some, however, were identified as relatively less important, specifically fundraising and conducting meetings.

Table 11: Importance of Various Aspects of Charter School Leadership

	Mean	SD
Setting academic standards	5.81	0.46
Establishing curriculum	5.41	0.80
Setting the content of professional development	5.47	0.68
Evaluating staff	5.64	0.56
Hiring staff	5.69	0.59
Managing budgets	5.38	1.23
Articulating vision	5.68	0.86
Building community within the school	5.81	0.43
Building community outside of the school	5.18	0.86
Developing leaders in the school	5.31	1.15
Building parental involvement	5.33	0.73
Conducting meetings	4.78	0.98
Strategic planning	5.65	0.62
Managing facilities	4.99	1.00
Modeling teaching	4.85	1.31
Dealing with parent issues	5.49	0.68
Dealing with discipline	5.42	0.75
Managing school safety	5.72	0.48
Student assessment	5.51	0.68
Program evaluation	5.63	0.61
Reporting and compliance	5.21	0.93
Fundraising	4.68	1.13
Motivating teachers	5.69	0.59
Working with the board	5.49	0.58
Data based decision making	5.50	0.70
Ensuring stakeholders are involved in the mission	5.29	1.14
Providing instructional leadership	5.35	1.25

Of course, identifying something as important does not automatically mean the principals have actual influence over it. Given the governing structure of charter schools (elected boards, parent advisory committees, educational management organizations, etc.), certain elements of school life may be the direct responsibility of someone other than the principal, reducing the latter's actual influence.

We explored this possibility by asking charter leaders to estimate how much *actual* influence they have over the same elements in Table 11. As with level of importance, this relied on a six-point scale, ranging from "no influence" (1) to "primary influence" (6). Table 12 presents those results and rearticulates the results from Table 11 for the sake of comparison. Asterisks indicate which differences were statistically significant between actual influence and importance.

For all but four factors, charter principals report their level of actual influence as less than the level of importance they assign, although all responses were still within the range of moderate and much influence. Of the four factors, three could be considered bureaucratic: conducting meetings, managing facilities, and reporting and compliance. For the fourth—developing leaders in the school—the difference was trivial. When all leadership elements are combined, charter principals report an average level of influence of 5.21 (SD=.48), which is between much and primary influence.

Table 12 also indicates which variables showed a significant difference between actual influence and importance.

Table 12: Level of Actual Influence Charter Principals have over Aspects of Their Jobs

	Actual Influence		Importance
	Mean	SD	Mean
Setting academic standards*	5.28	0.82	5.81
Establishing curriculum*	4.86	1.00	5.41
Setting the content of professional development*	5.12	0.93	5.47
Evaluating staff	5.53	0.92	5.64
Hiring staff	5.64	0.58	5.69
Managing budgets	5.19	1.07	5.38
Articulating vision*	5.47	0.77	5.68
Building community within the school*	5.35	0.60	5.81
Building community outside of the school	5.10	0.75	5.18
Developing leaders in the school	5.36	0.72	5.31
Building parental involvement*	4.92	0.88	5.33
Conducting meetings*	5.26	0.71	4.78
Strategic planning*	5.40	0.73	5.65
Managing facilities	5.04	0.83	4.99
Modeling teaching	4.67	1.05	4.85
Dealing with parent issues	5.44	0.59	5.49
Dealing with discipline	5.29	0.70	5.42
Managing school safety*	5.38	0.74	5.72
Student assessment*	5.15	0.99	5.51
Program evaluation*	5.23	0.87	5.63
Reporting and compliance	5.38	0.65	5.21
Fundraising	4.55	1.12	4.68
Motivating teachers	5.33	0.66	5.69
Working with the board	5.45	0.78	5.49
Data based decision making*	5.21	0.81	5.50
Ensuring stakeholders are involved in the mission*	4.90	1.11	5.29
Providing instructional leadership	5.09	1.12	5.35

* $p < .05$

Taking this analysis one further step, we asked charter principals to identify the level of satisfaction they realized in each aspect of their leadership positions. This, again, used a six-point scale, ranging from “no satisfaction” (1) to “extreme satisfaction” (6). As before, Table 13 includes the results plus the reiterated findings for level of importance and actual influence. The results show the same basic pattern from Table 12—in all but two factors, charter principals show less satisfaction with the various elements of their work than the importance they assign to the elements and the level of influence they have over them. Of the two where this pattern is not evident, one—providing instructional leadership—shows an identical result between satisfaction and influence, both of which are less than importance. For the other—building community within the school—satisfaction is slightly greater than influence but less than importance. Across all factors, charter principals report an average satisfaction level of 4.67 ($SD=.67$), which is between moderate and much satisfaction.

Table 13: Levels of Satisfaction Charter Principals have with Aspects of Their Work

	Satisfaction		Actual Influence	Importance
	Mean	SD	Mean	Mean
Setting academic standards	5.04	0.86	5.28	5.81
Establishing curriculum	4.78	1.14	4.86	5.41
Setting the content of professional development	4.68	1.04	5.12	5.47
Evaluating staff	4.64	1.15	5.53	5.64
Hiring staff	5.00	0.98	5.64	5.69
Managing budgets	4.06	1.60	5.19	5.38
Articulating vision	5.35	0.88	5.47	5.68
Building community within the school	5.40	0.73	5.35	5.81
Building community outside of the school	4.82	0.99	5.10	5.18
Developing leaders in the school	5.17	0.80	5.36	5.31
Building parental involvement	4.62	1.00	4.92	5.33
Conducting meetings	4.06	1.25	5.26	4.78
Strategic planning	5.04	1.04	5.40	5.65
Managing facilities	3.86	1.29	5.04	4.99
Modeling teaching	4.64	1.18	4.67	4.85
Dealing with parent issues	4.15	1.38	5.44	5.49
Dealing with discipline	4.38	1.10	5.29	5.42
Managing school safety	4.68	1.11	5.38	5.72
Student assessment	4.71	1.11	5.15	5.51
Program evaluation	4.86	1.04	5.23	5.63
Reporting and compliance	3.78	1.32	5.38	5.21
Fundraising	3.69	1.33	4.55	4.68
Motivating teachers	5.18	1.14	5.33	5.69
Working with the board	4.68	1.10	5.45	5.49
Data based decision making	5.04	1.07	5.21	5.50
Ensuring stakeholders are involved in the mission	4.63	1.24	4.90	5.29
Providing instructional leadership	5.09	1.10	5.09	5.35

Table 14 illustrates the relationship between charter principals' level of satisfaction and the amount of perceived influence they hold over the different elements. For 13 of the 27 elements, there is a strong correlation ($r > .60$) between satisfaction and influence, and for another six there is a moderate correlation ($r > .40 < .60$). Thus, for most elements, there is at least a moderate relationship between the amount of influence charter principals believe they have in their school and the amount of satisfaction they reporting their work. When the items are averaged for influence and for satisfaction, to derive a mean level for each, the correlation shows a strong relationship ($r = .71$) between mean level of influence and mean job satisfaction.

Table 14: Correlation between Amount of Influence and Job Satisfaction

	r
Academic standards	0.59
Establishing curriculum	0.63
Content of professional development	0.71
Evaluating staff	0.62
Hiring staff	0.52
Managing budgets	0.40
Articulating vision	0.50
Building community in school	0.28
Building community outside of school	0.50
Developing leaders	0.60
Parental involvement	0.60
Conducting meetings	0.35
Strategic planning	0.43
Facilities	0.33
Modeling teaching	0.60
Dealing with parent issues	0.27
Student discipline	0.39
School safety	0.34
Student assessment	0.67
Program evaluation	0.76
Reporting and compliance	0.07
Fundraising	0.63
Motivating teachers	0.63
Working with a board	0.38
Data based decision making	0.78
Involving stakeholders in the mission	0.74
Instructional leadership	0.77

Extending this analysis even further, we examined whether any of the areas of influence acted as significant predictors of overall satisfaction. Results indicated that only one factor significantly predicts overall satisfaction—to what extent boards micro-manage ($p=.007$). Those who work for boards for whom micro-managing “is a problem” are less likely to be satisfied with their work.

Charter Principals and Boards

A significant difference in the leadership responsibilities of most charter principals compared to their traditional public school counterparts is their direct working relationship with boards. Many charter leaders answer directly to elected boards that govern the school, which means their duties can be part principal and part superintendent. As such, the leadership provided by boards and the

relationships principals have with the board can play a significant part of charter principals' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, their level of satisfaction, and their professional longevity.

Therefore, we asked charter leaders to provide their perspectives on their boards—the quality of board leadership, the relationship between the principal and the board, and the level of involvement of boards. This section also examines differences in these perspectives based on aforementioned characteristics and perspectives.

Principals' Perspectives on Their Boards

To gain an overall sense of the working relationship between principals and boards, the former were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements using a six-point scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (6). As results in Table 15 indicate, the working relationship and perspectives in boards is generally positive. For items written in a positive tone (e.g., My board’s expectations are clearly communicated to me), average responses range from “agree somewhat” (4) to “agree” (5). Likewise, those items written in a negative tone (e.g., The board does not provide the support I need to do my job) tend to center around “disagree” (2). The one exception appears to be the statement that principals have to spend “a lot of time educating and training board members to do their job appropriately.” This yielded an average response (3.33) between “disagree somewhat” and “agree somewhat.”

We also examined whether there was a significant difference in how long principals planned to remain in their current position based on their perspectives of their boards. Results indicate a significant difference for only one of these statements—I have a good working relationship with my board. Logically, those with a greater working relationship plan to stay longer. For example, for those who responded “agree” are likely to remain at least three years longer than those who responded “somewhat agree.”

Table 15: Principals' Perspectives on Their Boards

	Mean	SD
My board's expectations are clearly communicated to me	4.31	1.37
My board and I identify conflicts and resolve them when possible	4.54	1.33
The board does not provide the support I need to do my job	2.03	1.30
The board and I share expectations that guide the school	4.79	1.12
Members of my board practice single-issue partisanship	2.55	1.43
An atmosphere of trust and understanding exists between the board and me	4.86	1.33
My board gives me the necessary latitude to do my job	4.99	1.19
My board respects the chain of command in our school	4.74	1.37
I have a good working relationship with my board	5.13	1.06
I have to spend a lot of time educating and training board members to do their job appropriately	3.33	1.64
My board struggles to maintain civility and a proper level of behavior	1.81	1.34
I wish my board were more involved in the school other than making policy	2.35	1.52
With my board, micro-managing is a problem	2.09	1.38

Board Involvement

Although the final statement in Table 15 indicates principals do not believe their boards micro-manage, this is not to say boards are uninvolved. In fact, as results in Table 16 demonstrate, charter boards are somewhat to moderately involved in several aspects of charter leadership. As with earlier questions, respondents rated board involvement using a six-point scale, ranging from "not at all involved" (1) to "very involved" (6).

Generally, board involvement that earned between "somewhat involved" and "moderately involved" tends to encompass "big picture" elements, such as managing the budget, articulating vision, strategic planning, and building relationships with the community. Fundraising and ensuring stakeholder involvement in the school were rated between "somewhat involved" and "somewhat not involved." Leadership elements that would be considered more "day-to-day" (e.g., instructional leadership, determining professional development, evaluating staff) appear to draw less involvement by boards. When all items are combined, average board involvement is 3.15 (SD=.88), or somewhat not involved.

Table 16: Levels of Board Involvement

	Mean	SD
Setting academic performance standards for students and teachers	3.14	1.55
Establishing the curriculum	2.85	1.52
Determining the content of professional development for staff	1.94	1.18
Evaluating teachers and other staff	1.82	1.20
Hiring teachers and other staff	2.36	1.68
Managing the budget	4.37	1.39
Articulating a vision	4.37	1.41
Building community and culture in the school	3.73	1.35
Building relationships with the community outside of the school	4.24	1.18
Building parental involvement	3.53	1.55
Planning strategically for future needs and growth	4.67	1.42
Managing facilities	3.15	1.63
Dealing with parent issues	2.55	1.34
Student assessment	2.10	1.50
Program evaluation	3.05	1.65
Reporting and compliance	2.85	1.75
Fundraising	3.60	1.66
Ensuring stakeholder involvement in the school mission	3.88	1.54
Providing instructional leadership	1.71	1.29

Overall Board Leadership

Before leaving the topic of boards, charter principals were asked to provide an overall rating of their board’s leadership using a six-point scale ranging from “poor” (1) to “excellent” (6). Consistent with the results in Table 15, principals, on average, rated their boards a 4.4 (SD=1.3). It is interesting to note that responses to this question ran the full range—from “poor” to “excellent.” Table 17, provides the distribution of responses across ratings.

Table 17: Distribution of Ratings of Board Leadership by Principals

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
1 (poor)	3	4
2	4	5
3	12	15
4	17	22
5	27	35
6 (excellent)	15	19

We also examined whether any of the statements from Table 15 acted as significant predictors of principals' perceptions of overall board leadership. Results indicate two of the statements act as significant predictors: "The board and I share expectations that guide the school" and "I wish my board were more involved in the school other than making policy." For the first, principals who reported greater shared expectations were more likely to give their boards a higher overall rating ($p=.002$). For the second, principals who wished for greater board involvement in the school rated their boards lower on the overall rating ($p=.006$).

We performed a similar analysis on ratings of board leadership using the areas of board involvement from Table 16. Again, we examined whether any of the discrete areas of board involvement predicted overall board leadership ratings. Results indicate two areas of involvement acted as significant predictors of overall board ratings: Articulating a vision ($p=.001$) and managing facilities ($p=.008$). For both variables, boards that are more involved received higher overall leadership ratings from their principals.

Charter Leaders' Time and Resources

As with leaders in many fields, the success of charter principals may depend, in part, on how they use their finite time and resources. Although the latter is often conceptualized fiscally, other types of resources are also important, such as human capital, board support, and even autonomy. This section addresses how principals use their time, their need for more resources, and what they believe makes their job more difficult.

Time

Charter principals estimate they work an average of about 58.5 hours per week ($SD=8.4$). Table 18 indicates how they actively spend that time and how they *want* to spend that time. Asterisks indicate which differences between actively spend and want to spend are statistically significant. Respondents estimated their weekly time use based on a six-point illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Scale used to Estimate Weekly Time Use

1	2	3	4	5	6
None	< 1 hour	1-5 hours	6-10 hours	11-20 hours	> 20 hours

In general, principals want to spend more time on activities that bear a greater relationship to student learning and less time on "bureaucratic" responsibilities. Examples of the former include setting and maintaining academic standards, student assessment, program evaluation, modeling teaching, and so forth, while examples of the latter include conducting meetings, reporting and compliance, fundraising, managing the budget, etc.

Table 18: How Principals Spend Their Time and Want to Spend Their Time Each Week

	Actively Spend		Want to Spend	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Setting and maintaining academic performance standards*	2.96	0.81	3.46	0.83
Developing leadership capacity among the staff*	2.85	0.79	3.21	0.84
Building parental involvement	2.76	0.79	2.87	0.80
Conducting meetings*	3.38	0.90	2.77	0.68
Planning strategically for future needs and growth*	2.85	0.81	3.21	0.86
Managing facilities*	2.99	0.76	2.21	0.71
Modeling effective teaching*	2.45	1.01	3.03	1.08
Dealing with parent issues*	3.38	0.79	2.47	0.66
Establishing and maintaining student discipline*	3.12	0.82	2.58	0.76
Maintaining school safety*	2.83	0.89	2.54	1.04
Student assessment	2.73	0.77	2.85	0.91
Establishing and maintaining the curriculum*	2.59	0.75	3.03	0.81
Program evaluation*	2.67	0.77	2.99	0.85
Reporting and compliance*	2.90	0.69	2.31	0.84
Fundraising	2.27	0.86	2.22	1.00
Guiding and motivating teachers*	3.37	0.97	3.76	0.91
Working with a board	2.88	0.70	2.74	0.69
Data-based/research-based decision-making*	2.96	0.78	3.31	0.89
Ensuring stakeholder involvement in the school mission	2.64	0.93	2.82	0.80
Providing instructional leadership*	3.31	1.12	3.87	1.24
Determining the content of professional development for staff*	2.51	0.64	2.78	0.75
Evaluating teachers and other staff*	2.95	0.88	3.36	1.03
Hiring teachers and other staff	2.04	0.59	1.97	0.60
Managing the budget	2.99	0.88	2.86	0.88
Articulating a vision	2.85	0.98	3.00	0.97
Building community and culture in the school	3.37	0.98	3.50	0.92
Building relationships with the community outside of the school*	2.62	0.81	2.96	0.86

* $p < .05$

Human Resources

In addition to managing time effectively, leaders also need to use human resources efficiently—often in the form of shared and delegated responsibility—to address the numerous needs of a school. Leadership structure is one way to formalize shared and delegated responsibility. Table 19 indicates how Colorado charter schools structure their leadership roles. Most schools have a principal with assistant principals or subordinate specialists who attend to particular responsibilities. Less common is where the principal role is divided between an instructional and a managerial leader. And very few schools use a model with leadership shared among teachers.

Table 19: Leadership Structures in Charter Schools

	Percentage
One principal with one or more assistant principals	38.71
One principal with subordinate specialists who attend to particular responsibilities, such as finances or external development	38.71
Principal role divided between an instructional leader and a managerial leader	20.97
School leadership shared among teachers, with a designated lead teacher	1.61

Even with such structures, charter leaders still identify some responsibilities for which they need more staff to assist them (see Table 20). For each statement, respondents used a six-point scale, ranging from “do not need” (1) to “critical” (6), to identify the responsibilities for which they needed more assistance. Although no average reached “very much” (5), 11 approached it, with averages between four (moderately so) and five (very much).

Table 20: Areas for which Charter Leaders need more Staff Assistance

	Mean	SD
Setting and maintaining academic performance standards	3.97	1.50
Establishing and maintaining the curriculum	3.90	1.55
Determining the content of professional development for staff	4.15	1.36
Evaluating teachers and other staff	3.90	1.68
Hiring teachers and other staff	4.68	1.44
Managing the budget	4.41	1.61
Articulating a vision	4.51	1.43
Building community and culture in the school	4.31	1.37
Building relationships with the community outside of the school	3.71	1.46
Developing leadership capacity among the staff	4.42	1.38
Building parental involvement	3.65	1.35
Conducting meetings	4.74	1.34
Planning strategically for future needs and growth	3.78	1.62
Managing facilities	3.81	1.66
Modeling effective teaching	3.77	1.65
Dealing with parent issues	4.31	1.51
Establishing and maintaining student discipline	4.24	1.50
Maintaining school safety	4.37	1.47
Student assessment	3.94	1.56
Program evaluation	4.00	1.47
Reporting and compliance	3.99	1.46
Fundraising	3.32	1.68
Guiding and motivating teachers	3.99	1.60
Working with a board	4.63	1.43
Data-based/research-based decision-making	3.82	1.68
Ensuring stakeholder involvement in the school mission	3.88	1.70
Providing instructional leadership	3.78	1.61

Elements that Make Work Difficult

Expanding beyond time and human capital needs, respondents were asked to identify the extent that other elements made it difficult to fulfill their leadership responsibilities. The six-point scale for these statements ranged from “critical” (1) to “do not need” (6). In other words, lower scores indicate that element (or the lack thereof) makes the principals’ jobs more difficult. As Table 21 indicates, the most urgent factors included time, financial resources, and paperwork. Means for all three were between “moderately so” (3) and “very much” (2). The factors with the highest average ratings (making the job least difficult) were lack of community support, lack of autonomy, and student discipline. Means for all three exceed a rating of four (somewhat). Lack of board support and lack of budgetary authority were not far behind.

Table 21: The Extent to Which Certain Elements Make the Job Difficult for Charter Leaders

	Mean	SD
Time	2.33	1.11
Financial resources	2.40	1.24
Quality of teachers	3.77	1.60
Lack of budgetary authority	4.10	2.10
Student discipline	4.24	1.44
Lack of autonomy	4.28	1.93
Lack of community support	4.32	1.69
Lack of board support	4.19	2.01
Paperwork	2.95	1.36
Burnout	3.24	1.65

We also examined whether there was a significant difference in overall job satisfaction based on the elements in Table 21 and the number of hours principals reported working each week. Results indicate only one—lack of board support—significantly predicted overall job satisfaction. Not surprisingly, those that report a lack of board support as *not* making their jobs difficult indicate greater levels of satisfaction ($p=.006$). In other words, greater board support yields greater job satisfaction for charter leaders.

Instructional Leadership

In recent decades, the idea of instructional leadership has become the sine qua non of the principalship. It is no different for charter schools. Indeed, results above indicate charter leaders seek to spend more time on activities aligned with this leadership element. A final part of the survey asked respondents specific questions about their instructional leadership efforts. These questions addressed what factors influence leadership priorities, how charter principals use assessment data, to what extent principals engage in certain practices, and their activities around their own professional development.

Influences on Instructional Leadership Priorities

Using a six-point scale ranging from “not at all” (1) to “most extent” (6), charter principals rated the influence of 15 factors on their leadership priorities (see Table 22). Only one—vision focused on learning—reached the level of “great extent” (5). Seven others were rated between “moderate extent” (4) and “great extent” (5), the highest of those being classroom observations. The factor that appears to exert the least influence is grant requirements, followed by state improvement requirements, both of which were rated between minor (2) and some extent (3).

Table 22: Influences on Instructional Leadership Priorities

	Mean	SD
State standards	4.33	1.17
Vision focused on learning	5.26	0.84
Benchmark assessments	4.44	1.01
Curriculum test results	4.05	1.25
Student grades	3.63	1.36
Classroom observations	4.74	0.97
Grant requirements	2.38	1.33
State improvement requirements	2.90	1.40
Categorical funding requirements	3.15	1.45
Research on best practices	4.65	1.11
Practices from high performing schools in CO	4.10	1.53
Practices from high performing schools outside CO	3.94	1.53
Program evaluations	4.14	1.25
AYP targets	3.55	1.62
Board mandates	3.65	1.47

The Use of Assessment Data

With the advent of state standards and assessment in the 1990s, school leaders (and teachers) are increasingly expected to use assessment data to inform practice. The same is true for charter schools. As public schools, charters in Colorado participate in CSAP testing and often implement additional testing (national standardized tests, benchmark testing, etc.) to provide further information about student performance. We asked a series of questions designed to ascertain how and how much charter leaders use assessment data in their instructional leadership.

As Table 23 illustrates, most charter leaders review assessment data of any type on a weekly basis, followed by those who review it on about a monthly basis. None reported that assessment data are reviewed only once a year or not at all.

Table 23: Frequency of Assessment Data Review

	Percentage
Never	0
Once a year	0
Few times a year	16.67
Every 6-8 weeks	12.82
Every 3-4 weeks	21.79
Weekly	48.72

Of course, reviewing data does not equate to using data actively in instructional leadership. Results in Table 24 capture how charter principals use assessment data. For each statement, respondents indicated a level of agreement in a six-point scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (6).

On average, charter leaders appear to use assessment most when meeting with teachers—whether individually, within grade levels, or across grade levels—and with their boards. Principals appear to use the data less often with parent groups and committees or as part of teacher evaluations.

Table 24: Use of Assessment Data

	Mean	SD
I review assessment data only independently	2.08	1.07
I review assessment data with teachers in their grade levels	4.56	1.37
I review assessment data with teachers across grade levels	4.60	1.35
I review assessment data with individual teachers	4.65	1.23
I review assessment data with the board	4.22	1.49
I review assessment data with parent groups, school committees, and other groups	3.64	1.40
I use assessment data to identify and help teachers who need instructional improvement	4.33	1.34
I use assessment data as part of teacher evaluations	3.77	1.56

Other Instructional Leadership Activities

In addition to assessment, survey respondents indicated how often they engage in other instructional leadership activities. Using a six-point scale ranging from “never” (1) to “daily” (6), principals responded to six statements. Results in Table 25 demonstrate that charter leaders conduct walkthroughs almost once or

more per week, followed by teacher observations and grade level meetings at almost once or twice per month. The activity in they engage the least is lesson modeling, at a rate of between a few times per year and several times a semester.

Table 25: Frequency of Other Instructional Leadership Activities

	Mean	SD
Participate in grade level meetings	3.63	1.34
Teach staff to use research based instructional strategies	3.05	1.22
Conduct walkthroughs	4.64	1.47
Model a lesson	2.47	1.19
Discuss instructional skills with teachers	3.42	1.25
Observe teachers	3.67	1.31

Personal Professional Development

Finally, charter leaders actively engage in opportunities to further their own professional development (see Table 26). More than 90 percent attend workshops, and more than half visit other schools as a way to improve their own leadership. Less than 20 percent, however, take university courses related to their positions.

Table 26: Frequency of Professional Development Activities

	Percentage
University courses related to role as principal	19
Visits to other schools to improve as a principal	58
Formal mentoring	27
Principal networking	56
Attending workshops, not as presenter	92

Yet, as results in Table 27 indicate, these professional development activities are generally not highly rated. Respondents rated the importance of each in assisting them in their work, using a six-point scale that ranged from “irrelevant” (1) to “critical” (6). None fully reached a rating of “important” (4), instead populating the “somewhat important” (3) and “not important” (2) categories.

Table 27: Importance of Professional Development Activities in Providing Advice/Assistance in Helping with the Job

	Mean	SD
Informal meetings with other charter leaders	3.77	1.13
State charter association meetings	3.58	1.12
State resource center/technical assistance	3.12	1.09
Formal networks of similar schools	3.71	1.31
Meeting with school authorizer	3.31	1.40
National charter school conference	2.49	1.05

For each of these professional development (PD) activities, we examined whether there was a significant difference in the importance assigned to them based on the personal characteristics reported earlier and the average level of confidence charter principals reported in their responsibilities. Four of the six PD activities had significant differences based on at least one characteristic.

For state resource center/technical assistance, principals who hold a teacher license from any state found this PD resource more important than principals without a teacher license ($p=.000$), as did racial and ethnic minorities compared to whites ($p=.014$). Turning to formal networks of similar schools, those with greater numbers of years at their school found this PD opportunity more important ($p=.029$), but those who express more confidence in their ability to perform their responsibilities rated this as less important ($p=.022$). On meetings with school authorizer, those

who hold a principal's license from any state rated this PD activity as more important than those without a license ($p=.005$). Finally, although already comparably less important than the others, national charter school conferences were even less important to men than to women ($p=.044$).

Conclusion

In many ways, these findings draw a positive profile of charter leaders in Colorado. They are well educated and bring diverse backgrounds and experience to their work. They convey confidence in their ability to lead their schools and express satisfaction with their jobs. The relationships they have with their boards are generally positive, and charter leaders appear focused on their school's mission and instructional priorities therein. Compared to the earlier charter school leadership research cited above, these findings are quite consonant.

There are, however, areas worthy of attention. First, the longevity of charter leaders is rather brief, at just a little more than four years. Although on average they plan to stay an additional six, this estimate is subject to myriad internal and external influences that make it conjectural. Two factors from this study that appear important in longevity are a positive working relationship between the board and the administrator and how important the school's mission was to the principal. Both point to the importance of paying close attention to the "fit" of potential administrators with schools, something boards need to be aware of in the hiring process.

Beginning with the board-administrator relationship, shared expectations appears to play a significant role, according to our findings. This requires that boards and principals fully understand in their own minds what they expect of each other and engage in a frank, open, honest, and early discussion of these expectations. Board involvement also appears to influence principals' satisfaction levels. Not surprisingly, those who work in schools where boards micro-manage are less satisfied, but this should not be interpreted to mean charter leaders want disengaged boards. Rather, principals want boards to be involved but in more strategic activities, such as providing vision or direction for the school. As with expectations, the level of board involvement is something boards and leaders or prospective leaders should discuss early and likely revisit over time.

Turning to school mission, the importance of this element cannot be overestimated. As we have illustrated in prior research, charter schools are typically driven by a particular mission and structured around specific educational ideologies.³⁶ This requires that the educational beliefs of administrators be consonant with those of the school. Thus, potential principals need to understand their own beliefs to ensure a good fit. For their part, boards need to clearly represent those beliefs to aspiring leaders and use the interview process to ensure a proper fit. Such actions will facilitate a greater working relationship for all involved and likely contribute to greater longevity for charter leaders.

A second area worthy of attention is the training and ongoing development of charter leaders. Our findings indicate many charter leaders worked as teachers prior to serving as administrators, but others came to the job from diverse fields outside of education. Although survey respondents tended to rate their training and experience as at least somewhat helpful, they still reported feeling less than confident in their ability to lead literacy and math initiatives, a finding consistent with earlier research on charter leadership cited above. Due to the centrality of literacy and math, this is cause for attention both in the preparation of charter leaders and their ongoing professional development.

Survey respondents also identified fundraising as an area for which their training and experience was least helpful. Although in response to one question they concluded fundraising was not important, on another they identified a lack of financial resources as one of the most urgent factors that made their job difficult, a finding also consistent with prior research on charter school leadership. Because charter schools do not enjoy the same funding streams as traditional public schools,³⁷ this is not surprising. However, the dissonance between charter leaders' conclusion that fundraising is not important and the urgency of tight financial resources means charter leaders and boards (who were rated by principals as between "somewhat involved" and "somewhat not involved" in fundraising) will likely need to face some stark realities about the necessity of fundraising and acquiring training to do so.

Much of this points to a third area worthy of attention—leadership training and development opportunities. As stated earlier, most charter leaders in Colorado earned advanced degrees and many hold professional licenses of some sort. However, there is concern among some experts on charter schools that such training may not adequately prepare aspiring charter leaders for their roles. As noted earlier, some studies question the quality of leadership preparation programs generally, and there is also the issue of alignment between content of such programs and the demands of leading charter schools. Because charters are schools of choice and due to the different demands placed on charter administrators compared to those in traditional public schools, the content of traditional leadership preparation programs may not align well.

As a result, institutions and organizations have started offering charter school leadership preparation programs to meet demand. One study has identified 13 charter school leadership preparation programs nationwide.³⁸ Duration and costs range from a six-day program costing \$600 to a two-year program at a \$120,000. There are full-time, online, part-time, and summer enrichment programs. Some are some offered statewide, others nationwide. The oldest program has operated for 13 years. Examining the survey data of charter school leadership programs, researchers determined that the programs covered many topics but treated too lightly issues charter school leaders report as the greatest challenges. There is not yet enough data to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and not enough programs to meet demand.

In Colorado specifically, such programs have been limited, but new programs have recently begun offering services. Some are tailored to current leaders and offer training in a professional development or continuing education model. Others are designed for new or aspiring leaders and offer training through either an induction model or a degree-granting structure.

- Colorado League of Charter Schools (CLCS): CLCS offers training to existing charter leaders primarily in a content-based format through workshops in school-based sessions, regional meetings, or at their annual conferences. Topics include roles and responsibilities of leaders and boards, data driven decision making, accountability, and governance.
- Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI): CSI provides an induction program for principals that have recently earned a state provisional license and need to complete an induction program to earn the professional license. The induction program includes a day-long seminar, primarily focused on charter school leadership issues, and a year-long series of assignments and activities focused on state leadership standards.
- Get Smart Schools (GSS): GSS is partnering with the University of Denver Colleges of Business and Education to offer an MBA program to aspiring school leaders, charter and otherwise. The program offers courses in both business and education and includes a residency program. At the completion of the degree, graduates will also be able to obtain a state principal license. GSS also offers a separate fellowship program for charter leaders

associated with a school that has already been approved for operation. Fellows participate in half-day, bi-weekly professional development sessions that cover topics relevant to opening and building a successful school and provide networking opportunities for new school leaders.

- Colorado Department of Education (CDE): CDE offers or will offer a leadership training program and a leadership guidebook for new or aspiring charter leaders.
 - Administrator Guidebook: The guidebook was created as a resource and information manual that contains guidance and practical help for the administrator to successfully fulfill the enormous responsibilities and avoid many operational challenges. The guide summarizes what a charter school administrator needs to be aware of and offers links to resources where more detailed information in a specific area can be found. The guidebook is available online.
 - Leadership Training Program: The purpose of the training program is to grow the leadership capacity of charter school principals, increase mastery of administrative skills, and retain excellent administrators. It follows a two-year cohort model, culminating in the potential for continued work as a mentor beginning in the third year. The program follows an instructional model that includes work as a cohort team, work with a mentor, written reflections, and site visit observations. The text for the program is the aforementioned Administrator Guidebook.

Such programs have the potential to contribute greatly to training landscape that has been rather meager. According to our findings, most charter leaders attend workshops of various types, many visit other schools as a way to improve their leadership, and a few take university courses. Yet, survey respondents did not rate such opportunities all that highly. As more offerings like those above become available, the quality of training opportunities may improve. Consistent with other reports on charter school leadership training, these programs will offer instruction in financial development and management, strategic planning, and problem-solving, and include hands-on residencies or mentoring—all of which have been identified as critical needs in the preparation and development of charter leaders.

However, given the increase in the number of new charter schools in Colorado, and recent calls for replication of successful charter schools, more training options will likely be necessary. This is particularly so in a large state like Colorado, where charter schools are distributed throughout the state. Thus far, many of the leadership training opportunities reside predominantly in the large population centers, specifically in or around Denver. Opportunities in Southern Colorado or on the Western slope could contribute substantively to new and existing charter school leadership development.

Endnotes

- ¹ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2008). *Charter school executives: Toward a new generation of leadership*. Washington, DC.
- ² Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*. Minneapolis, MN and Toronto: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- ³ Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- ⁴ Campbell, C., & Gross, B. (2008). *Working without a safety net*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education; Gross, B., & Pochop, K. M. (2007). *Leadership to date, leadership tomorrow: A review of data on charter school directors*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.
- ⁵ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ⁶ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ⁷ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ⁸ Campbell and Gross, 2008.
- ⁹ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ¹⁰ Speakman, S., & Hassel, B. (2005). *Charter school funding: Inequity's next frontier*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.
- ¹¹ Griffin, N. C., & Wohlstetter, P. (2001). Building a plane while flying it: Early lessons from developing charter schools. *Teachers College Record*, 103(2), 336-365; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ¹² Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ¹³ Griffin and Wohlstetter, 2001.
- ¹⁴ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ¹⁵ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ¹⁶ Campbell and Gross, 2008.
- ¹⁷ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ¹⁸ Campbell and Gross, 2008.
- ¹⁹ Portin, B., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M., & Gundlach, L. (2003). *Making sense of leading schools*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.
- ²⁰ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ²¹ Levine, A. (2005). *Educating school leaders*. Washington, DC: Education Schools Project.
- ²² Hess, F. M., & Kelly, A. P. (2007). Learning to lead: What gets taught in principal-preparation programs. *Teachers College Record*, 109(1), 1-28.
- ²³ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ²⁴ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ²⁵ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ²⁶ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ²⁷ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ²⁸ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ²⁹ Campbell and Gross, 2008; Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ³⁰ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ³¹ Campbell and Gross, 2008.
- ³² Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach, 2003.
- ³³ Griffin and Wohlstetter, 2001.
- ³⁴ Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach, 2003.
- ³⁵ Gross and Pochop, 2007.
- ³⁶ Carpenter, D. M. (2005). *Playing to type*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute; Carpenter, D. M. (2006). Modeling the charter school landscape. *Journal of School Choice*, 1(2), 47-82; Carpenter, D. M., & Kafer, K. (2009). *A typology of Colorado charter schools*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education.
- ³⁷ Speakman and Hassel, 2005.
- ³⁸ Campbell and Gross, 2008.