

## Concerns, Use of Time, and the Intersections of Leadership: Case Study of Two Charter School Principals

**Dana L. Bickmore and Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell**  
*Louisiana State University*

*As part of a multiple case study of charter school leadership, the researchers in this study examined 2 principals' priorities and practices through their expressed concerns and use of time. Through an embedded case design and analysis, 6 themes surfaced from the principal interviews that occurred over the course of a school year—accountability, personnel, student-related issues, management issues, school promotions, and instructional issues and supervision—with issues of accountability permeating all other themes. Although comparison of these themes to charter principal research and general concepts of successful principal leadership indicates similarities, these charter principals' myopic focus on state testing might have limited involvement in other elements of leadership both specific to charter schools and general successful school leadership.*

Approximately 4,900 public charter schools educate nearly 1.6 million students in the United States (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010). Although a fraction of the total school population (5.1%), the expectation is that the number of charter schools will continue to increase within the current policy environment (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010; Weitzel & Lubienski, 2010). Despite a 6.9% growth rate during the 2009-2010 academic year (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010), research about those persons who lead the day-to-day operations of these schools is limited (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Dressler, 2001). Sometimes called directors, these principals often function in a different context than do their traditional school principal counterparts. Variations exist among state charter laws and policies; however, generally, these publically funded schools are granted autonomy and flexibility with respect to human resource allocation, funding, and general operational procedures. Within this context, charter schools and the principals that lead them are expected to innovate and to improve student outcomes. Principals 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.

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Correspondence should be addressed to Dana L. Bickmore, Educational Theory, Policy and Practice, College of Education, Louisiana State University, 111E Peabody Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
E-mail: danabick@lsu.edu

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With the lack of research explicitly examining the work of charter principals, initial understanding of their roles and practices begins with a brief discussion of the traditional principalship. The work of the traditional school principal is complex and includes the managerial tasks necessary for effective school operations and leadership that support student learning (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008). Since the advent of the accountability movement, principals in traditional schools have increasingly been held responsible for school improvement and student achievement (Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003). Although limited, several researchers have examined the concerns of principals related to their roles in this accountability context and how principals address role expectations through the use of time (Camburn, Spillane, & Sebastain, 2010; Cooley & Shen, 2003; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003; Goldring et al., 2008; Goodwin et al., 2003; Hines, Edmonson, & Holland, 2008; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2009; Protheroe, 2008). Examinations of principal concerns and how they spend time in relationship to competing demands can provide insights into principal priorities and practice (Goldring et al., 2008). Principal concerns and use of time also can be compared to models of effective leadership allowing further insights into principal practice (Camburn et al., 2010).

Traditional principal concerns identified in the recent leadership include compliance with bureaucratic and legal issues, particularly related to students with disabilities; lack of authority and

funding to address mandates; student testing and accountability issues; developing and hiring competent teachers; and time to address instructional issues (Cooley & Shen, 2003; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Farkas et al., 2003; Goodwin et al., 2003; Protheroe, 2008). The literature suggests principals spend the bulk of their time on management tasks rather than on leadership related to instruction (Camburn et al., 2010; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Goldring et al., 2008; Horng et al., 2009). In these studies, the majority of principals' time was spent on administrative tasks related to students (discipline, administering testing, scheduling, discipline, and student activities), personnel issues (hiring, communicating, and problems solving), organizational tasks (financing, scheduling, compliance issues, and building maintenance), and instructional issues (monitoring/observing instruction, supporting teachers' professional development, analyzing student, data or work, modeling instructional practices, and teaching a class).

Despite similarities and parallels, charter school principals' concerns and time use would expectedly be different from those of traditional public school principals because of contextual differences. In exchange for greater autonomy from various state and district policies and greater flexibility in decision making at the school level, principals of charter schools generally do not have access to structural supports available to traditional principals. As a result of this lack of centralized support, charter principals often take on additional management responsibilities typically dedicated to district office personnel (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Dressler, 2001). Little research, however, has examined the concerns of charter principals, their use of time, the interaction of their concerns and allocation of time, or how concerns and use of time interface with models of principal leadership (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Campbell & Gross, 2008).

Evidence from a growing body of research suggests principal practices have an impact on student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Louis et al., 2010). Less conclusive, however, is how principals impact student outcomes (Louis et al., 2010). Researchers examining school leadership have called for continued efforts to understand how the relationship of principal concerns, time, and practice impact schools and students (Camburn et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2010). With the limited research related to charter principal in general, and specifically related to their concerns and use of time, the purpose of this study was to elicit and to examine the concerns of two relatively inexperienced charter school principals, new to their schools, over the course of a school year. We were concurrently interested in how

those concerns were reflected in their expressed use of time, which would provide an insight into how these principals enacted leadership practices. We expected that the concerns and use of time of these principals would vary depending on the time of year. Finally, we were interested in how the expressed concerns and principals' use of time compared to successful school leadership practices in the current literature. Our specific research questions were:

1. What are the expressed concerns of select charter school principals new to their setting?
2. How do select charter principals who are new to their setting report their use of time?
3. How does the use of time by select charter principals vary over the course of the school year?
4. How do the expressed concerns and use of time of select charter principals, new to their settings, compare to successful school leadership practices outlined in the current school leadership literature?

In order to address our questions, we framed our research through a conceptualization of effective school leadership, primarily based on traditional principal leadership, and the limited survey research outlining charter principals' concerns and use of time.

### Perspective and Framework

Effective principal practice and how to measure effectiveness continues to be debated (Camburn et al., 2010; Danzig, 2009). Increasingly however, research on student outcomes indicates that principals have a significant, albeit indirect, impact, particularly on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010). Various models of school leadership provide insight into how principals impact schools and students (Leithwood & Duke, 1999); yet, in the current atmosphere of accountability, student academic achievement is clearly an important indicator of successful principal practices.

Using student achievement as the metric, Leithwood et al. (2004) have conceptualized successful school leadership by outlining three sets of practices—setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization, as outlined in Table 1. Principals appear to influence student outcomes through these practices. Setting direction encompasses development of a shared understanding of the mission, vision, and goals of the school. Principals develop people by building individuals' skills and capacity within the organization through support and providing models of effective teaching practices. Principals enhance school and student performance by strengthening school cultures

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through modifying organizational structures and building collaborative processes. Using this framework, Leithwood et al. (2004) suggested that a principal's concerns and time focused around these three broad sets of practices would result in enhanced student outcomes.

**The Charter School Principal**

Focusing on these core practices might be more difficult for charter principals than for their traditional counterparts. According to Zimmer et al. (2009), “[C]harter schools operate outside the direct control of local school districts and, under a publically issued charter that give them greater autonomy than other public schools have over curriculum, instruction, and operation” (p. iii). The bureaucratic organization of charter schools generally is composed of a charter board that oversees single or small groups of charter schools. Although more charter schools are contracting with educational management organizations (EMO) for support with operational issues, the vast majority of charter schools place management tasks with principals and give them significant autonomy with respect to management and instructional decisions (Miron & Urschel, 2009). As a result, charter principals are

responsible for tasks or contractual agreements generally designated to personnel in district central offices, such as human resource, accounting, transportation, or special education services (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Miron & Urschel, 2009). Additionally, principals must engage in tasks unique to charter schools. Charter schools operate as market-driven entities and, thus, must attract an adequate number of students to be financially viable. Promoting and marketing the school to attract students often become the charter principals' responsibility (Campbell & Gross, 2008). Parental/familial involvement might take on a different view when parents and guardians are seen as customers/clients rather than as constituents. Although state laws vary, charter schools frequently do not have the same funding sources as do traditional schools for facilities (Campbell & Gross, 2008). Therefore, charter principals often have responsibility for acquiring, financing, and managing facilities to a greater extent than have traditional principals (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Dressler, 2001). These additional tasks, however, do not abdicate charter principals from management and leadership responsibilities and tasks of traditional principals.

Table 1

*Successful Principal Practices Model*

Broad Category	Definition	Practices
Setting Direction	Development of a shared understanding of the organization and its goals to support purpose and vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on goal-based motivation</li> <li>● Identify and articulate a vision</li> <li>● Foster acceptance of group goals</li> <li>● Create high performance expectations</li> </ul>
Developing People	Implementation of practices that develop people's ability to improve the quality of teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Know the “technical core” of schooling – teaching and learning</li> <li>● Attend to and utilize employees capabilities</li> <li>● Provide for intellectual stimulation</li> <li>● Provide for individual support</li> <li>● Model appropriate practices</li> </ul>
Redesigning the Organization	Development of effective organizational culture and structures that support and sustain the performance of staff and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitate work of organizational members to meet changing improvement needs</li> <li>● Strengthen school culture</li> <li>● Modify organizational structures</li> <li>● Build collaborative practices</li> </ul>

Summarized from: Leithwood, K. A., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: Review of research*. Minneapolis; Toronto: Center of Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota; Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

### Concerns and Use of Time

Few researchers have outlined the concerns of charter principals and how they spend their time (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Dressler, 2001; Gross & Pochop, 2007). Dressler (2001), in a pre-No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001) study of urban Colorado charter school principals, documented that charter principals were most concerned with funding limitations, time constraints, working with the local districts, and aligning curriculum to standards. Only two specific studies, Gross and Pochop (2007) and Campbell and Gross (2008), have been conducted examining these issues after the NCLB implementation. Considering the amplified and expanded role of principals in charter schools and the current policy focus on accountability, it is reasonable to assume variations in how principals spend their time post-NCLB. Surveying charter principals in three Midwest states post-NCLB, Gross and Pochop (2007) reported the challenges faced by these principals. Beginning with the most pressing concern, the following list of challenges dominated principals' thinking: (a) raising funds or managing finances, (b) engaging parents, (c) acquiring or maintaining facilities, (d) negotiating with district and traditional schools, (e) attracting qualified teachers, (f) attracting students, (g) maintaining a focus on the school's mission, (h) complying/reporting on state or federal law/requirements, and (i) having conflict with the charter boards of trustees. In a more expansive study, but using the same questionnaire with 410 charter principals in six states, Campbell and Gross (2008) obtained similar results. In the questionnaire principals were given the option to identify multiple challenges. The top three challenges identified by this set of charter principals were acquiring and managing facilities (39%), raising funds and managing finances (37%), and attracting qualified teachers (36%). The percentages of principals who identified the remaining challenges were: engaging parents (27%), negotiating with district and traditional schools (25%), attracting students (20%), complying/reporting on state or federal law/requirements (17%), maintaining a focus on the school's mission (11%), and working with the charter boards of trustees (7%). One of the constraints of this survey, used by these researchers post-NCLB, was the exclusion of instructional issues when asking principals to identify concerns and an overemphasis on the unique features of charter principals.

However, the questionnaire used by Gross and Pochop (2007) and Campbell and Gross (2008) also asked charter principals about their use of time and this section on use of time included instructional leadership as part of the survey. In the Gross and Pochop (2007) study, organizational management

occupied the highest percentage of the principals' time (28.5%), whereas Campbell and Gross (2008) documented that instructional leadership required a significant amount of time (21%). In both post-NCLB studies, principals identified if time spent on the activity was excessive, adequate, or not adequate. Principals' responses were similar in each study, indicating a desire to spend less time on organizational management and more time on what would be considered leadership tasks—instructional leadership, promoting the school culture, strategic planning, and public relations. These principals appeared to be engaged in many of the same tasks as were their traditional counterparts, including instructional and management tasks. It is unclear how these principals' concerns and time, however, correlate to traditional models of school leadership.

The studies just outlined above present initial insights into the working life of these administrators; however, singular use of survey methodology provides limited depth and understanding of the complexity of the charter principalship. Camburn et al. (2010) posited, "many principal surveys focus on only one domain of principal leadership practice, thus making assessment of relative frequency of principal practice in particular domain" (p. 711). In the case of the two specific studies outlining charter principal leadership in the context of accountability post-NCLB, there is a focus on a limited set of concerns specific to charter leadership and a narrow set of parameters on time use. Given the limited number of research studies focused on charter principals and the singular focus on survey methods within these studies, we pursued a more qualitative approach to examining the concerns of charter principals and the use of their time. A more expanded understanding of charter school principals' concerns and use of time might provide avenues to support these leaders to more effective practice.

### Method

As identified by Yin (2009), this investigation was an embedded case design within a multiple case study of two charter schools. In an embedded design, "attention is also given to a subunit or subunits" (Yin, 2009, p. 50) within the multiple case study. Leadership in charter schools bounded the broader multiple case study, or quintain, as Stake (2006) described the condition or phenomenon studied in multiple case study research. In the embedded design and analysis we isolated principals' concerns and use of time. We purposefully selected the charter schools for the multi-case study based on two sampling schemes as outlined by Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao (2007), criteria and convenience sampling. We

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set three criteria for selection of charter schools for the multi-case study. First, the charter schools selected must have been in the same state because charter law, governance structures, and practices vary widely among states. Second, the charter schools must have represented different types of charters with respect to authorization to allow for leadership comparisons among governance structures. Third, we targeted charter schools where the principal was new to his/her setting, assuming that the principal would be more cognizant of his/her leadership decisions and practices in a context where every enactment of leadership was new. A convenience sampling scheme then was used to identify specific charter schools. We selected the southern state in which we worked, developing a list of charter schools with principals new to their setting. We then narrowed that list to charter schools based upon travel proximity. Considering our research capacity in regard to funding and time constraints, we limited our potential cases to two sites. Finally, we selected two different types of charter schools; an open enrollment choice charter school that had been in operation for several years and a new charter school that opened as a result of government take-over of a traditional public school.

As suggested by Stake (2006), each case was treated separately, with each researcher/author being responsible for how data were collected and initial analysis of the assigned case. We employed several data collection methods in the broader multiple case study: interviews of teachers and principals, documents and artifacts produced by and about the schools, archival data such as the schools' charters, and observations. In the embedded design and analysis reported here, we focused on the two principals, specifically their expressed concerns and use of time. As such, principal interviews were the primary data sources for the analysis of the embedded examination of principals' concerns and use of time. We conducted three semi-structured extended interviews of 60 to 90 minutes with each principal, two at the beginning of the school year and one at the end of the year. These three extended interviews provided background and context for the study, as well as a concluding summary of the year's experiences. The substantive interviews for this study, however, were bi-weekly interviews with the two charter principals over a 7-month period. The principals were asked two questions in these bi-weekly interviews that lasted between 15 and 50 minutes: (a) What school experiences or issue(s) have dominated your thinking these past 2 weeks? and (b) What school experiences or issues(s) have occupied the greatest amount of your time? Follow-up and probing questions were asked in the context of these interviews. We also collected documents such as

local newspaper and magazine articles in which the principals were interviewed. Artifacts such as periodic copies of the schools' website and visual representations of the principals' visions for the school also were collected. Additionally, we observed the principals in faculty meetings and in assemblies. With each of these additional data collection points, we asked the principal to interpret the event or to document it in either the bi-weekly interview or the end-of-the-year interview.

### Participants and School Context

The two principals were both new to their schools. Mr. Compton at City Schools (CS) (all names are pseudonyms) was a first-year principal. He was an alternatively certified teacher, having taught for 3 years, first in a traditional middle school and then for 1 year as a teacher in a district-sponsored charter high school. He then spent 1 year at the state office of education training groups of people interested in applying for charter school authorization. Under state provision, Mr. Compton was not required to, nor did he obtain principal certification. CS was in its 12th year of operation, serving 277 K-8 students in an urban area in the south (91% free and reduced lunch and 95% Black students). CS was a district-authorized charter school and, as such, was eligible for some district services.

After receiving his degree in chemistry from his home in a Mediterranean country, Mr. Damla moved to the United States and obtained an alternative teaching certification. He had taught for 3 years in a Southwestern high school in the United States. He was recruited to serve as an assistant principal for 2 years and then principal of a charter middle/high school in a southern city. This middle/high school had been taken over by the state for poor academic performance the year Mr. Damla became the assistant principal. The charter for this middle/high school was granted to a charter board that was affiliated with a national non-profit organization. As a take-over charter, the charter board for this school reported to a state agency rather than to a local district. The charter board for which Mr. Damla worked as a principal contracted for another take-over middle school in the same state. The board asked Mr. Damla to open this new state take-over charter school—Kemp Middle School (KMS). KMS was chartered with a technology and science focus, in the same southern urban city as CS. Also, KMS served a high poverty population of 447 students (95% free and reduced lunch and 87% Black students). Like Mr. Compton, Mr. Damla did not have principal certification.

### Cross-Case Analysis

Our analysis in this investigation flows from our constructivist paradigm as advocated by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, and Hayes (2009). The multiple case study approach, embedded design, and congruent methods provided us with the data to develop a rich description of these two charter principals' perceived concerns and experiences related to their use of time. We chose to use a cross-case analysis of the two principals' concerns and use of time because a "cross-case analysis can begin in search of patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 57).

We employed several procedures to address threats to credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Creswell, 2007; Stake 2010). As a research team, we had prolonged engagement with each school through multiple interactions with the principal and other data sources from the schools. We triangulated the data, as suggested by Stake (2006, 2010), by providing the opportunity for principals to audit and to correct each transcribed interview, having multiple individuals collect and analyze data, and eliciting critical feedback of our analysis and case write-ups from colleagues. Further, within this embedded analysis of principals' concerns and use of time, we developed cross-case themes through a systematic process of coding and categorizing. Specifically, principal-transcribed interviews were coded using ATLAS-ti 6.2 software. We analyzed the initial, extended transcribed interviews side-by-side. We began by highlighting sentences, passages, and quotations that provided insights into the concerns of the participants and how these concerns were experienced by the principal (the first question asked in each interview). The same process occurred with the events that principals outlined as occupying their time (second interview question). Codes were assigned to describe these specific concerns and events. The first author then coded the remaining interviews using this coding process. Upon completion of the coding process, the researchers, together with a graduate student, re-examined each coded passage for consistency. The team then clustered these significant statements into categories, which then were further synthesized into themes. Through discussion of these themes, we were able to provide a rich description of these principals' concerns and use of time, which represented an additional approach to validating the research findings.

### Results

The principals reported spending time engaged in numerous tasks throughout the year. These tasks ranged from management issues, such as organizing

the science fair and changing bell schedules, to student and teacher discipline. As might be expected, there seemed to be a connection between a concern expressed in one interview and time spent dealing with that concern in subsequent interviews. In other words, concerns seemed to precipitate time spent on a task. Although intuitively obvious, the research literature provides few examples of how principal concerns precipitate the time spent and actions taken to deal with concerns.

This connection between a concern and action to resolve an issue is particularly noteworthy in the context of charter school leadership. The premise that charter school principals have the autonomy and flexibility to make rapid changes in school operations when needed suggests that a concern should lead to a rapid response. As an example, in November, Mr. Compton expressed concern about the effectiveness of the extended day approach, an 11-year practice used by the school to increase time on task as a means to improve student achievement. By December, he had decided to change the calendar for the subsequent school year, eliminating the extended day, shortening the current school year by 2 weeks, and increasing the calendar year by several weeks for the next year. Mr. Damla's actions also were precipitated by earlier concerns. A case in point was illustrated by his concerns in December related to student discipline. By January he had rescheduled students with major discipline issues into a self-contained classroom and implemented a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) for the whole school. The ability of these principals rapidly to make expansive changes represents the autonomy given them as charter school principals. Unlike their traditional counterparts, these two principals were governed only by their charter boards. Thus, without the layers of bureaucracy present in traditional schools, there were no district policy manuals or supervisors to consult. These two instances and others present in the data indicated that both charter boards granted each of these principals much greater discretion and autonomy in the operation of the schools than what might generally occur in a traditional school setting.

The sequencing of concerns and time spent on tasks also played out in the themes surfacing from the data (see Table 2 and Table 3). Two of the three most common themes—personnel and student-related issues—appeared more prominently as part of the principals' focus in various parts of the year. Personnel issues occupied the principals' concerns and time primarily in the spring, whereas student-related issues were foremost in November and December. The most dominant theme—accountability—permeated the principals' concerns and time over the entire year in various forms, resulting in almost a myopic focus on state testing.

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Table 2

*Code Frequency and Total Instances of the Charter Principals' Concerns*

Theme	Concerns - Total Instances	Codes	Code Counts
Accountability	51	state test	23
		school structures	11
		benchmark testing	10
		data gathering	3
		data analysis	2
		student/teacher incentives state test	2
Personnel Issues	28	personnel concerns	15
		teachers not buying into data driven culture	4
		hiring faculty/staff	4
		faculty/staff dismissal	3
		professional development	1
		communication	1
Student-Related Issues	26	student behavior	17
		student activities	6
		meeting student social/emotional needs	3
Management Issues	15	funding/budget	4
		state paperwork	3
		facilities	3
		working with local school district	2
		grants	1
		busses	1
		charter board conflict	1
School Promotion	14	parent-buy in importance of achievement	10
		differences in home school expectations	3
		attracting students	1
Instructional Issues and Teacher Supervision	9	improving writing	4
		improving reading/literacy	3
		classroom libraries	1
		principal involvement with instruction	1

Table 3

*Code Frequency and Total Instances of the Charter Principals' Use of Time*

Theme	Time Spent - Total Instances	Time Spent Codes	Codes Counts
Accountability	11	state testing – school structures	7
		benchmark testing	2
		data analysis	1
		data gathering	1
Personnel Issues	10	personnel dismissal	3
		hiring faculty/staff	3
		teacher conflict	1
		promoting teacher buying into data driven culture	1
		strategic planning for recruiting teachers	1
		observing prospective teachers	1
Student-Related Issues	16	student behavior	8
		school activities	5
		school schedules	2
		parent conferences	1
Management Issues	9	funding/budget	7
		facilities	2
School Promotion	3	Marketing	3
Instructional Issues and Teacher Supervision	3	commercial programs	1
		teacher evaluations	1
		walk throughs	1

**Accountability**

Each principal viewed his mission as improving student academic achievement. For these principals, academic achievement translated directly to improved scores on the state accountability test. When asked about his mission and vision for the school, Mr. Compton, in the initial interview, stated:

So, I mean that's sort of the vision that I think everyone here shares, the board shares we want to be a great place academically. ... We have too many kids right at like the basic level, basic meaning [state] score, [state] score basic. And if we have a student from K-4th grade they should not be at basic, they should be at minimum mastery if not advanced. We've got to get into triple digits, [school state test] scores, we got to get away from our bell curve, sorry we have to shift our bell curve...

Mr. Damla confirmed that state testing was his major concern. When asked why, he responded, "Because

it is the only measure." Yet, he lamented this felt pressure by further commenting, "It's kind of sad that, you know, basically science fair results in the region wide, you know, in the regional science fair and everything else—it is based on the test scores and nothing else."

This singular vision makes sense in the context of these two charter schools. First, Mr. Compton perceived that he was hired to improve achievement scores that had been static at the school for several years. As a state-takeover school, the only reason Kemp Middle School existed was because of poor student academic performance as measured by the state accountability test.

**Benchmarking.** This concern over low performance and improving student state test scores manifested itself in multiple forms related to both concerns and time spent in each of the biweekly interviews for each principal. One of the most apparent concerns that demanded principals' time was tracking student performance through ongoing



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assessments—benchmark tests—because both principals perceived benchmarks assessment results as having predictive value for the state test. Modifying school structures that accommodated benchmark testing and interventions for students identified as performing poorly on benchmark tests consumed principal thinking and time spent. Additionally, both assumed benchmark data should drive instruction. As Mr. Compton stated, “If we can get to the point where the data is [sic] driving the instruction, that’s number one.” As examples of the intense focus on monitoring student achievement, principals assigned teachers to develop benchmark tests and principals purchased multiple benchmark tests, all geared to maximize performance on the state test. In October, when asked what issues were of concern to Principal Damla, he discussed his efforts in getting benchmarking testing implemented and working:

We try to regulate it [learning] with monthly assessments with the benchmarks. We use different tests to see their levels throughout the school year. We did one in August and we got the results and we will do another one next week. We are using [State Test] coach. We are also using *Buckle Down* series. And we will do another next week and we will see who made how much progress. We do meetings with the parent to see if they need Saturday school or some kind of remediation so we kind of make some adjustments for the groups.

Mr. Compton expressed concerns throughout the school year that his benchmark testing was not as effective as he had hoped. This concern led him to purchase a comprehensive data-monitoring program in the spring. The following quotation provides an insight into these principals’ focus on tracking student achievement:

...we’re actually getting a data system installed Monday so that’s where I’ll be, which I’m super excited about. We can like finally have a comprehensive tracking in terms of the nitty-gritty attendance, tardies, early checkouts and standardized test scores, report cards. We can link it to unit tests for classes. Like, I’m so excited about what we’re going to be doing with this. Like, we can actually be systematically tracking our students.

The development, use, and implementation of benchmark assessments tied to the state accountability tests consumed much of these two principals’ time and were the most stated concerns over the course of the year. The concern over tracking student progress led principals to other

actions, including developing and modifying schools structures.

**School structures.** From the beginning of the year, principals developed and adjusted school structures based on testing and benchmark data. This focus on state data guided Mr. Damla’s creation of the master schedule. As he stated:

We are using the data from last year. We set-up the classrooms homogeneously so if everybody’s, if I have 20 students who are performing at the basic level, I’m going to put them together so the teacher who’s going to teach them the core subjects can adjust their curriculum. So it’s not going to start at the beginning because they already performing at the basic level, so she has to push for the masters or advanced category; there are 5 different categories, class levels.

Mr. Compton also intended to use state testing results to track students into classes, but determined there was not enough variation in test scores to justify grouping students.

Throughout the year the principals continued to express concerns about poor student performance on benchmark tests, resulting in modifications to school schedules and structures. These modification included implementation of Saturday school, amending teaching schedules, and adding after school tutoring. Mr. Compton discussed how student information on benchmark data led to his decision to departmentalize the entire elementary school:

...quite frankly our benchmark data for our grades that are departmentalized were above and beyond our other grades. Part of it is teachers, but also part of it is also the structure of setting it up that way and again being able to exploit the strengths of those teachers.

A major modification to both school schedules, and further evidence of both autonomy and concern over accountability, occurred in the spring when both principals moved spring break after state testing, under the assumption that the break would lesson student performance on the tests.

### Personnel Issues

This central focus on student achievement also interfaced with the second theme, personnel issues. Both principals expressed ongoing concerns about teachers following their plans for and use of benchmark testing, test preparation, and a continuous focus on student achievement. There was a dissonance between principal expectations and teacher performance. The principals expected ongoing benchmark testing and improved state test scores, even offering annual bonuses tied to student outcomes. They also expected adherence to the state

curriculum; yet, little support was given to teachers as a means to improve instructional practices to meet expectations in these areas. By mid-year, however, personnel concerns, particularly as they related to teachers not teaching to benchmark and state tests, began to increase both in expressed concerns and time spent by the principals.

Before the winter break Mr. Compton became increasingly concerned about teachers not using benchmark testing as the basis for instruction:

Teachers for the most part use DRA [Developmental Reading Assessment] (1997) throughout the year, some more than others you know again some have really bought into it and some it as, it's just a number and they're still going to teach whatever they want to teach. That's the other thing that you know we have some teachers that go through to process of DRA, they see that the students are below grade level. They can see it but they still teach the same thing that they shouldn't be teaching.

After the winter break, Mr. Damla also expressed concern over teachers not adequately connecting their curricula and instructional practices to the state test:

Busy work, like, it doesn't correlate with the state objectives and maybe it's not even in the benchmarks and some teachers were, like, teaching a subject that won't be even on the test, that's, like, unrelated stuff. And sometimes they were... spending a whole bunch of time on some content that has only a very small portion on the test; there might be only maybe one or two questions on one content but they were spending like 4 weeks or 3 weeks. And you know, it's kind of very risky and it's stealing from everybody. Wasting time is wasting money and it costs a lot.

In the case of Mr. Compton, he revealed that tying teacher bonuses to state testing became problematic as he assumed teachers had "cheated" on the test:

I think that some teachers fudge the numbers, or fudge the administration of the [state] test. And, you know, when you tie bonuses into that, that's bound to happen. I mean, it shouldn't, but I understand why it would. So that we know we need to, definitely need to fix. And you know, some people that won't be invited back, that's one of the reasons why, because there's no way their numbers are accurate.

The pressures of accountability, to improve test scores through financial bonuses, and the limited professional support given to teachers, seemed to be problematic in terms of personnel issues.

This connection between accountability and personnel issues became a major issue as the school year concluded. Mr. Compton did not renew contracts for one half of his staff. Mr. Damla, as of the last day of school, had renewed slightly more than one half of his teachers' contracts. During each of the April and May interviews, both principals expressed concern over finding quality teachers, and Mr. Compton further conveyed that the search for new staff was consuming most of his days.

### Student-Related Issues

The third most common theme, student-related issues, appeared of paramount concern to principals mid-year. Both principals articulated frustration with student behaviors that seemed to escalate in December. Mr. Compton discussed how as a charter school, they were not equipped to deal with the major behavior problems that he and members of his school staff were encountering and that perhaps a strict focus on academic performance was not adequate:

The biggest thing that we've been talking about is, how can we, what do we need to do to address more than just the academic side for our students? I think some of that is rooted in some of the fact that we haven't had the best behavior week this week... we have some students, not a high percentage, but we have some students that I have taken them on as my mission. These five students or these seven students, we as a staff we're still learning and I am especially. How do we work with students like that who have so many things going on and we are nowhere equipped for some of them but how do we do it?

However, as expressed by Mr. Damla, both principals often discussed improving student discipline in relation to student academic performance:

We are kind of trying to brainstorm to maybe restructure a couple of things. It's not only kids' test scores, I have to deal with the discipline... So we need to kind of think if we need some changes on different levels of the school. We want to brainstorm how it is going to affect not only the test scores but also the student behavior.

The principals' concern for student discipline involved meeting student needs beyond testing, such as student social emotional needs. However, discipline and student needs were most often framed in term of improved academic achievement performance as measured by the state test. Mr. Compton succinctly stated the following continued focus: "I don't know how far we can really progress academically, improve our school [state] score, if we

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don't address the social-emotional component of our students."

As previously mentioned, both principals addressed concerns by changing schedules and implementing programs. Mr. Damla spent time in January and February reacting to the discipline concerns by implementing PBIS, where students received token "Tiger-bucks" from teachers for positive behaviors. He also instituted a self-contained class of students with behavior problems and he purchased a bullying prevention program. Mr. Compton tried Saturday Detention, in-school suspension, and parent conferencing, but did not find a specific structure that he felt addressed his most challenging students.

Although less prevalent than discipline issues, the principals also voiced concern and spent time related to student activities. CS did not have a middle school activity program, but Kemp, as a take-over charter school, had the same activity program as do the traditional public schools. As a result, Mr. Damla did spend time at football and soccer games, but concern over these activities did not surface in the data. Instead, Mr. Damla aired concerns over the school's science fair. Marketing itself as a science and technology magnet charter school, Mr. Damla felt the science fair was an important tool in promoting the school. Both principals, however, developed student activities that they felt would motivate students and enhance performance on the state test, including motivational assemblies and enrichment activities. As an example, Mr. Damla discussed his enrichment camping program:

One of my Teach for America teachers, she is kind of happy to help on the enrichment program, different enrichment programs. So they [students] love to camp and she'll do like a test prep, so they get some test prep.... The parents like it, the kids liked it. So they went to one of the camping places close to town... So they enjoyed it.

This integration of school activities with test preparation further indicated the principals' laser focus on student achievement.

### Management Issues

The three remaining themes—Management Issues, School Promotion, Instruction and Teacher Supervision—continued to be connected to accountability issues but also provided insights into unique concerns of these charter principals. Management issues were particularly insightful. The principals' primary management focus was on funding for personnel and dealing with the local school district. Mr. Compton became increasingly concerned about not having sufficient funding for support personnel, such as a counselor and classroom

aides. He expressed concerns about finding additional money for classroom libraries because the school did not have a library. His concern with limited funding also interacted with his frustration with the local school district over the lease of the building and limited special education services provided by the district. As a state take-over charter, Mr. Damla had use of the district's building without a lease and was required to purchase his own special education teachers rather than using the local school district's services. As a result, Mr. Damla's concern with the local school district centered on building maintenance issues. Of greater concern for Mr. Damla, however, were funding and budgeting issues related to personnel and student motivation. Several of the positions, including a librarian, were purchased with grant funding. In addition, Mr. Damla had received grant money to pay for student incentives for high state test performance, such as trips to Disneyworld for students.

Surprisingly, management issues related to complying with state and district requirement appeared as a repeated concern to these principals. One of the proposed characteristics of charter schools is freedom from such oversight and paperwork. Also interesting was the lack of concern over daily management issues. Even though these principals had the primary responsibility for managing or contracting for most services, as well as dealing with the daily routines of schools like bussing and cafeterias, such issues did not appear to concern these principals.

Considering the challenges over lack of funding as a primary management concern, it was not surprising that much time was spent by these principals locating funding or supporting board efforts in finding funding sources. Mr. Compton worked extensively with the board in locating potential sites for a new school and supporting the board's efforts in funding the purchase of the new school. Mr. Damla spent time throughout the year applying for various grants. In addition, Mr. Damla was involved in helping the board gain political and financial support for a new 9-12 charter for a high school. Each principal also noted they spent some time dealing with the local school district issues, particularly as they related to the building facilities.

### School Promotion

The need to find outside funding resulted in each principal spending time promoting the school to the greater community. As an example, both principals contacted reporters and were featured in local newspapers and magazine articles. The following is Mr. Compton's account of how and why he solicited the interview:

And I called up the reporter and was like you have to do an article on our middle school kids. Like we're doing some interesting stuff that I think people need to hear about. And he was like alright. So he followed us around for 2 days. Um you know I sort of have no shame. Whatever you got to do to get these kids what they deserve I mean I think you got to do it.

Mr. Damla also spent considerable time organizing and advertizing the school's science fair as a means of promoting the school. Marketing itself as a science and technology charter school, in three separate interviews, he outlined the importance of soliciting positive community support for the activity by noting the local dignitaries involved in the fair as guests and judges, such as the dean of the local university, community business leaders, and a representative from the mayor's office.

Whereas the principals spent time marketing their schools, of greater concern to both principals was promoting their priorities to parents, particularly parent buy-in and subsequent acceptance of the school focus on testing and test scores, school schedules and structures that the principals viewed as improving student test scores, and the overall effectiveness of the school. The principals expressed concern over this disconnect between the school culture they promoted and the students' home culture. As Mr. Compton stated, the principals wanted students to adjust to school expectations:

I mean, we're not going to change it everywhere but we need to start, we need to start hitting home the point that you live in 2 or 3 or 4 worlds and you have to learn how to operate in all of them well. I think that's a very hard concept for a Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> grader, but as they get upstairs here, they should start understanding that, and in middle school, they should definitely be able to do that.

In both cases, the principals did not think parents were appropriately concerned about their students' performance as it related to testing. The following quote from Mr. Damla typifies the concerns both principals identified about lack of parent priority for the interventions implemented to improve student test performance:

It kind of worries me for the first year, but we still want to take the necessary interventions to get the scores high. The thing about that is, the parents, they do not realize how important that is. They are not bringing the children in the morning. Most likely, they will start kind of rushing after January, when it kind of gets close to the testing, because they don't want their

students, you know, to fail, at the same time they are not taking enough action.

Mr. Compton also delineated concerns and frustrations about parent buy-in to various interventions and school schedules he was implementing to improve student performance. One such intervention was Saturday school:

Parents say they want, say they want it and then no kids show up. ... they had to sign a contract; and more importantly they had to pay \$20 and if the student missed the Saturday or is tardy or has to be removed because of behavior, they forfeit their \$20.

We considered labeling these issues related to student home and parents as parental involvement; however, it became clear as we continued coding that these principal concerns were less about involving parents with their children's school, and more about convincing parents to accept and to support school goals and student achievement.

### **Instruction and Teacher Supervision**

The limited instances of concern directly related to the last theme—Instructional Issues and Teacher Supervision—is perhaps understandable in relationship to the previous themes and both principals' limited experience as teachers and administrators. The principals articulated the few concerns they had with curriculum and teacher skill levels in general and somewhat vague terms, expressing little depth in problem identification or solutions. The following comment by Mr. Compton illustrates how both principals' limitation in pedagogical and curricular problem identification unfolded:

The main thing is instruction; we're not cohesive enough as we need to be. We need to have an actual, "Ok this is what we think it should look like in kindergarten." This is what it should look like in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This is what it should look like in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. We know our instruction is not strong enough.

Mr. Compton's mixing of two issues in the passage above, weak instruction and a lack of a coherent sequencing of the curriculum, might have been a result of how both principals identified instructional issues. We noted only two instances where principals talked about time spent in the classroom evaluating teacher performance and found no instances of time spent with teachers discussing the results of these evaluations. Instead, benchmark test scores seemed to be the process by which principals evaluated instruction. Mr. Damla expressed the following sentiment:

...first we are kind of trying to brainstorm to maybe restructure a couple of things. It's kids' test scores, I have to do some other

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things with the teaching. So we need to kind of think... if we need some changes on different levels of the school.

In the subsequent interview, Mr. Damla discussed spending time implementing a review and test preparation program titled Study Island© as a solution to his concerns about teaching.

When the principals expressed a concern over teachers' skill level, they did not concomitantly discuss improving teachers' skill level. Instead, as illustrated by Mr. Damla, they purchased instructional programs or they discussed replacing teachers as solutions. Mr. Compton exemplifies this second solution, "I don't think a lot of our teachers were comfortable teaching writing. I don't think a lot of our teachers know how to teach reading comprehension and therefore our kids have these huge gaps." When asked how he would remedy these issues he stated, "... finding the right people to actually implement what we want to do." The ability to replace staff rather than improve teacher skill level might provide an explanation as to why these principals expressed no concern or time spent in providing or discussing teacher professional development. Another explanation for a lack of focus on developing teachers and a reliance on purchased programs to address instructional issues might be a result of these principals' limited educational preparation, restricted teaching experience, lack of principal preparation/certification, and, thus, narrow pedagogical understanding.

### Discussion

Comparison of charter principal practice and effective models of school leadership are absent from the current literature. Comparing these two charter school principals' experiences, as outlined by the six themes derived from their expressed concerns and time spent, to the concerns outlined by charter principals in previous research and effective principal practices, is a means to understand further charter principal leadership. We first compare our findings with the extant research related to charter principals' concerns and use of time and then to Leithwood et al.'s (2004) conceptualization of successful school leadership.

#### Comparison to Previous Research

As noted by Weitzel and Lubienski (2010), the political and policy context for charter leadership is considerably different with the advent of NCLB, narrowing the focus of charter schooling toward state testing. Our findings both confirm and disconfirm the results of the only other two studies of charter principals' challenges and use of time in a post-NCLB context (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Gross &

Pochop, 2007). Unlike the previous research, the principals in this study were much less concerned about management tasks, such as raising funds or managing finances. Rather, they were almost singularly concerned about improving student performance on state testing, which might be considered a very narrow interpretation of instructional leadership. This concern over test scores also was expressed in terms of engaging parents in this achievement goal and frustrations with teachers not complying with the principal's focus on test-related instruction and formative assessments that were thought to predict state test results. These concerns over parents and personnel might be tangentially associated with Gross and Pochop's (2007) and Campbell and Gross's (2008) findings of concerns with engaging parents and attracting qualified teachers, although the emphasis in our study seems more about promoting the principals' goal of improving state test results to parents and teachers.

The principals in this study also voiced concerns noted in previous research related to negotiating with the local district, complying/reporting on state or federal laws/requirement and, in the case of Mr. Compton, acquiring facilities. Yet, these concerns were limited and far less pervasive than were concerns about student achievement, personnel, and student-related behavioral issues. In the case of student-related issues, the previous research is silent. In our research, concerns about attracting students, maintaining a mission, and experiencing conflicts with charter boards were negligible. Attracting students seemed to be associated generally with promoting the school to the community at large, with little concern for specifically recruiting adequate numbers of students. Other than their personal mission of improved testing results, the principals in this study expressed little concern for the focus of the school's mission as outlined in their charter. Mr. Damla did express concern about the school science fair as representing the school's mission, but did do so in a limited fashion. Overall, the unique concerns of charter principals such as raising funds, attracting students, and issues with building and local districts were far less important to these principals than were issues that might be more similar to traditional principals—student achievement, personnel, and student behavior.

As for time spent, again, the principals in this study indicated some similarities and differences to previous charter school principal research. Determining how the principals' laser focus on test scores in our study related to organizational management and instructional leadership, the two areas in which principals spent time in the Gross and Pochop (2007) and Campbell and Gross (2008) studies, is a matter of interpretation.

Interpreted narrowly, instructional leadership means principals should be more directly involved in the curriculum and instructional practices of teachers and orchestrate school and teacher improvement (Marks & Printy, 2003). Broadly defined, instructional leadership is all principal-related activities that contribute to student learning, including managerial behaviors (Hallinger, 2003). Although Gross and Pochop (2007) and Campbell and Gross (2008) do not distinctly define instructional leadership, the principals' desire to increase involvement in classroom observation suggest the more narrow interpretation of instructional leadership in these previous studies.

Under this interpretation, the results of our research study suggests principals spent most of their time in organizational management tasks that were meant to support student achievement, not through direct involvement in the curriculum and instructional practices of teachers. Thus, preparing for state tests, changing school structures for student performance on state testing, and developing and analyzing benchmark tests were the organizational management tasks in which principals engaged as a means to improve student achievement. In addition, time spent adjusting schedules to manage student activities and discipline issues also were organizational management tasks. Unlike previous research, principals in this study reported little time in instructional leadership tasks meant to improve teacher performance. Instead, hiring and firing teachers, which equated to the human resource activities in the previous studies, were perceived to consume a greater portion of the principals' time.

Financial management and public relations (marketing in our study) seemed to require similar portions of time as in previous studies. Time spent in strategic planning, promoting school culture, and staff-student-family politics, appeared in our study, but across themes. The principals clearly set improved student academic performance as the ultimate organizational objective and were continually adjusting procedures and operations to achieve this goal, but did so independently of the teachers. Further, the principals did not express time spent or concern for collective decision-making or strategic planning with others. Promoting a school culture of high academic performance, although a strong concern for these principals, appeared less in their expressed use of time. It seemed principals assumed that they had adequately communicated the importance of improved student achievement and became frustrated with teachers, parents, and students when that culture was not embraced by the community. Actual time spent on prompting culture was limited and only tangentially appeared when principals discussed promoting benchmark tests with

faculty and teacher buy-in to data-driven decision making. Staff-student-parent politics, loosely defined as the social acquisition of power, crossed our themes of student issues, personnel, and school promotion. The principals spent time with such political issues as student discipline and student motivation for testing, as well as dismissing teachers who did not follow the principals' goals for the school. Overall, when comparing our findings to the previous research related to time spent by charter principals, the two principals in this study expressed spending most time with organizational management, student/teacher politics (student issues/personnel issues), and financial management. Little time was spent with regard to the other areas, with a notable dearth of time spent on instructional leadership.

### Setting Direction

Comparing the principals in this study with Leithwood et al's (2004) review of successful principal practices, these principals identified a direction for their schools. The first and most prominent theme in this study, improving student achievement on state assessments (accountability), pervaded principals' thinking and expressed actions, as well as interacting with other themes. Developing, organizing, and analyzing benchmark testing, developing schedules, and changing school structures to implement academic interventions were all focused on raising state academic scores. From the principals' perspectives, personnel issues were a result of staff members not meeting high expectations set for teachers to use ongoing assessments and to improve student performance. Concerns over student behaviors and student activities, another prominent theme, were often couched in terms of how those behaviors and activities might interfere or enhance student academic performance. Promoting the school, especially with parents, also was centered on the seemingly singular direction of the principal to improve school performance on the state test.

The high incidence of personnel issues, particularly teacher compliance with this vision of improved test scores and instruction based heavily on benchmark data, indicated perhaps this direction was not collectively developed or effectively shared throughout the school. Both principals expressed no concern or time spent working with faculty to identify or to set goals. It appeared that, although principals had a clear vision of where they wanted the school to be, they were unable or failed to see the need to develop shared goals. As a result, they were unable to foster motivation based on shared goals or even the principals' vision.

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### Developing People

The inability or choice not to foster collectively developed goals and the lack of group goal-based motivation also might have resulted in the solution these principals enacted related to personnel issues. These charter principals expressed teacher replacement as the sole solution to teacher dilemmas rather than developing teacher capacity. Perhaps the ease of non-renewing annual contracts might have been an incentive for the charter principals to replace rather than develop people. Replacing nearly 50% of the staff at each school supported this assumption. In addition, the limited expressed concern and time spent with instruction and supervision, coupled with the lack of depth when discussing issues of instruction and supervision, also might suggest a superficial understanding of the technical core of schooling—teaching and learning. These two principals' limited preparation and experience as teachers and administrators might have contributed to reliance on replacing teachers rather than on building capacity. In general, we noted virtually no concern or time spent providing for intellectual stimulation, modeling of appropriate practices, or attending to or utilizing employee's capabilities beyond organizational changes such as departmentalizing of the school or tracking students.

### Redesigning the Organization

Accountability as a vision and issues with personnel also dictated how the principal engaged in redesigning the organization. Their time and concern was highly invested in monitoring student achievement and developing school structures that supported student performance on accountability tests, perhaps at the exclusion of building collaborative shared practices and developing people. Redesigning the organization also seemed to be these principals' preferred method of improving teaching and learning, relying on commercial programs or interventions that could be implemented school-wide, rather than through developing teacher content and pedagogical skills. Developing culture in the context of programs rather than people might be difficult, and the principals' concerns and frustrations with personnel, coupled with high incidence of student issues, indicate both principals' difficulties in building culture.

Our fourth theme, management issues, and elements of the fifth theme, school promotion, are tangentially related to redesigning the organization, but more notably and directly related to the charter school context. Raising funds, attracting students, acquiring facilities, dealing with local school districts, and marketing the school are all necessary for the survival of the school and the development of the school culture. Within the context of charter

school leadership, effectively designing and redesigning the charter organization might require an expansion of how culture and school structures are developed in order to accommodate the need to promote the school in a market-driven environment.

### Principal Differences

Interestingly, when we examined each case separately, we found little substantive differences in themes between the principals with respect to concerns and use of time. Instead, we noted variation in the degree to which each theme represented each principal. Mr. Compton tended to be more concerned about personnel issues and reported spending more time with management issues than did Mr. Damla. Mr. Compton, being chartered by the local school district, also had to have more interactions with the district, particularly concerning the use of the building. In contrast, Mr. Damla was more concerned and spent more time than did Mr. Compton on promoting the school, particularly recruiting students in this first year of operation. The emphasis on accountability, however, was equally as pervasive for both principals with variations occurring only in how they expressed accountability concerns. As an example, Mr. Damla focused more on purchasing and implementing commercial benchmark and instructional programs aligned with the state test, whereas Mr. Compton spent a great deal of time and concern promoting and developing school-made benchmark tests. Considering the difference in the contexts of the two schools, a noteworthy finding was the relative lack of variation in principal concerns and time spent.

### Conclusion

The examination of these two charter school principals' concerns and time spent cannot be generalized to the experiences and priorities of charter school principal as a whole. The context of charter schools is even more varied than that of traditional principals as a result of variations in state chartering laws (Education Commission of the States, 2010), making even findings from quantitative research suspect for generalization across charter schools. Yet, outlining the experiences of these principals' priorities and practices through their concerns and use of time provides a touchstone for examining charter principal leadership.

For these two principals, their concerns often precipitated time spent as a means to address expressed concerns. Although we culled six themes from the data—accountability, personnel issues, student-related issues, management issues, school promotions, and instructional issues and supervision—it was concerns over state testing and

formative data (accountability) that dominated other themes and often triggered time spent on a concern or issue. Although a concentrated focus by school administrators on student performance data has been linked to improved student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Portin et al., 2009), these principals' seemingly singular focus on formative and benchmark data and student test scores overlapped and precluded concerns and time spent on other leadership tasks. Student-related and personnel issues, promoting the school, and the limited concern and time spent on instruction and supervision were most often framed in terms of how they affected student test performance. Although management issues seemed more closely aligned with the unique nature of charter schools, even elements of this theme indicated principals' concerns with and time spent on benchmark and state testing.

Our findings, although indicating some similarities to the previous research, provided notable differences. The principals in this study appeared much more concerned and spent more time on organizational management and student and human resource issues, particularly as they related to state test scores, than has been noted in previous research. However, they seemed less concerned and spent less time on management issues uniquely related to charter schools, such as finding funding and dealing with local school districts. Similar to previous research (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Dressler, 2001; Gross & Pochop, 2007), the principals in this study had little concern or spent time with strategic planning and issues with their boards, but did have some concern and time spent with state and national compliance issues. Previous research related to challenges of charter school principals did not address instructional leadership concerns, but indicated that principals spent the most or second most time on this issue. Our study indicated that, other than a focus on benchmarking and state test results, these two principals showed much less concern and spent little time on improving teaching and learning or improving teacher skill level. We speculate that this concentration on testing and data and limited leadership in instructional issues might be related to the pressure felt by these principals to improve test scores in their particular contexts as well as their limited pedagogical background and experience as teachers and administrators. Research related to charter principal has indicated that the principal in this study had less experience and background than do charter principals nationally, where the majority of charter principals have 2 or more years as administrators; hold degrees in education; are certified; and hold a master's, Ph.D. or Educational Specialist degree (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Gross & Pochop, 2007).

Comparison of these two charter principals' priorities and actions, as indicated by their concerns and time spent, with Leithwood et al.'s (2004) conceptualizations of successful school leadership, indicated that these principals had a strong personal sense of mission to improve student test scores and believed they had set a clear direction for their schools. However, concerns raised by the principal about personnel indicate the direction set by the principals was not shared by teachers, perhaps because there appeared to be little time spent or concern for collaboration with teachers. The greatest variance from the conceptualization of successful practice was the principals' development of people. We suggest the ability to non-renew contracts and the principals' lack of experience with the pedagogical core of teaching and learning might have contributed to little concern and lack of time spent in this area. Instead, these principals attempted to improve student performance through redesigning the organization, almost exclusively by modifying school structures, rather than by building collaboration or culture.

As researchers, we cannot assume that these principals were less effective because they were not well aligned with a prominent conceptualization of successful school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). Furthermore, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to charter principals in other settings. We posit, however, that context matters: that the description of experiences of these two principals provides further insights into how principal leadership interacts with the unique and growing charter school environment of autonomy and accountability. This research provides opportunities to explore multiple avenues for future research, building a broader base of how charter and traditional school leadership impact school improvement and student outcomes.

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