A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN CHARTER SCHOOL'S JOURNEY OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY, INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING AND SCHOOL REFORM

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The problem for this study was the need to increase and maintain in student achievement in charter schools. The purpose of this single-case study was to discover how an inner city charter school with a high percentage of at-risk students increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced simultaneously with administrative challenges and increases in state and federal standards. The participants for the single-case study included the school district's superintendent, the high school principal, the dean of students, four faculty of the district, and one outside consultant appointed to work with the district by the state of Texas. The sampling for this study allowed for the opportunity to study in greater depth the choice of reform strategies and organizational structure designed to result in increased student achievement and student success over the course of two years. Since this was a single-case study of one charter school district, participants were referenced by the role in which they served. All district, campus, and participant names remained anonymous. The results showed the increased student achievement was made possible by several reform strategies and best practices. The primary reform strategies and best practices that had the greatest impact were consistent campus leadership and parent and community involvement with the campus. Mission and focus were secondary strategies that contributed to increasing teacher effectiveness and student achievement. All of the interviewees stated their work was "all about the kids" to support the theme of the common mission and focus the campus and district.

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When I started this journey in 2007, I was unsure of where I was going and what I was doing and so the completion of this journey would not be complete without special thanks and appreciation to several people. I want to thank my husband Troy, our two daughters Caroline and Madison, my parents Gary and Lenora Williams, and my brother Stephen Williams. Without their encouragement and support, I would not of have taken this journey. Next, I want to thank some of my closest friends, Ted Purcell, Mollie Purcell, and Dr. Marilyn Wright. Outside of my immediate family, these three individuals encouraged and supported me as well as provided me with opportunities to learn and discover whom I want to be when I grow up. I also would like to like to give thanks for support and guidance to the one and only, Dr. C. I want to thank the rest of my family, friends, and numerous professors who provided me with encouragement and support along the way. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Huffman for sticking with me and not giving up on me, considering my journey to this point lasted a long 8 years. As I am reaching the end of this journey, I still am not sure of what exactly I want to be when I grow up, but I have a strong sense of direction as to where I am going. I know that this is only the end of one journey and the beginning of many new ones as a result.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

President Barack Obama (2010) made education reform a priority during his presidency and outlined a blueprint of the implementation of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):

> We must reform our schools to accelerate student achievement, close achievement gaps, inspire our children to excel, and turn around those schools that for too many young Americans aren't providing them with the education they need to succeed in college and a career. (p. 2)

School reform has many meanings and purposes, not just to educators but also parents, politicians, and community stakeholders. This reform prompted many innovative strategies, legislative mandates, accountability issues, and other concerns related to increased student achievement. School districts and charter schools aspire to be on the cutting edge of the forefront of education reform. As standards increase and stakes increase year to year, it can become difficult to improve student performance each year.

Some districts and charter schools plateau with student performance or become stagnant in practice while attempting to create change for increasing student performance and meeting the increased accountability standards. Other districts and charter schools receive mandates from the state and/or federal governments that require school improvements/reform strategies. The hope with any system of reform is for increased student achievement for each and every student. Charter schools represent a system of reform designed to meet the needs of some constituencies and sustain increased levels of improvements annually. As Garrison and Holifield (2005) stated, "charter schools are a viable reform mechanism" (p. 90). This case study demonstrated and explained how organizational theory, institutional learning and school reform strategies helped

one urban charter school exit late stages of poor academic performance at the state and federal levels of accountability to become a thriving campus on its way to higher standards.

Charter schools are public schools that have been created under state law but are exempt from many local and state regulations in exchange for greater accountability for student performance (Holloway, 2000). Charter schools are created and managed by an entity comprised of parents and/or teachers, community and/or business leaders, non-profit organizations, and for profit businesses (Schwartz, 1996). Charter schools have been viewed as competition for today's traditional school districts.

Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush supported school choice and the charter school option. President Obama has similarly shown support for charter schools. Evidence of his belief in charter schools is reflected in making education a priority in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). In 2009, an additional $53.6 billion were made available to public education and charter schools. Over the past few years, the U.S. Congress has assisted in placing charter schools "in a prominent position in federal education reform and has granted millions of dollars to charter schools nationwide" (Bulkley, 2005, p. 528). Both Congress and parents behind the school choice option and are supportive of the charter school movement as school reform options (Obama, 2010).

"No Child Left Behind (NCLB) connects parental school choice with innovative programs, and endorses charter school status as a primary way of forcing schools to raise student achievement" (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006, p. 56). The NCLB's Title 1 is also part of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provides parents with options for school choice and federal accountability standards for performance and participation in various grades and

contents, and sets graduation standards for students. The areas of mathematics and reading are assessed in Grades 3 through 8 and again in Grade 10.

Parents who are dissatisfied with their neighborhood schools utilize school choice options and advocate for charter schools. In many communities, charter schools meet the needs of some students and establish themselves as a viable option. As evidence that charter schools continue to thrive, 1,825,233 U.S. students are enrolled and attending classes in charter schools (Public Charter School Dashboard, 2012). More than 40 states in addition to Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico have charter schools operating within their communities as public schools.

Charter schools face a great deal of scrutiny, regarding the availability of resources, accountability, and the ability to meet the needs of all students. The ability to educate students with special needs is severely challenged because of lack of funding for special education within charter schools. In some cases, it is difficult to provide extra or supplemental programs for students in charter schools and to provide highly qualified teachers to work with the challenges of a charter school. Building and maintaining teachers' commitment to the mission of the charter school is an ongoing challenge because salaries may not match those found in traditional schools. Challenges increase when state and federal accountability systems are in place and the charter school must adhere to the standards as set forth by the legislatures and policy makers at the state and federal levels. Before any change or reform can occur there must be common understandings and purpose. Wells and Keane (2008) suggested the most important concept that must be understood and accepted by all stakeholders in education is "in order for school systems to improve, change, or reform is the mandate of success for every student" (p. 25). Datnow and Stringfield (2000) suggested that the success or failure of any school reform model is largely dependent upon implementation.

Charter schools, a popular alternative to traditional public schools, are having a dramatic impact on other competing schools in the communities (Center for Education Reform, 2008). Many charter schools emphasize achieving exemplary student performance, maintaining high graduation/completion rates, and simultaneously keeping the dropout rate of at-risk students at a minimum (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006). While nationally, many students of charter schools represent varying ethnicities, the majority of students served in charter schools in Texas are at-risk, minority students (TASB, 2009). From a financial perspective, charter schools work to accomplish and meet standards with less funding than a traditional independent school district (ISD) (TCSA, 2014). There are several studies published such as Fryer and Dobbie (2013) which demonstrate how a charter school may be effective in improving student performance and establishing a positive campus and district culture. For the past 10 to 15 years, charter schools have been highlighted negatively by events including, but not limited to, financial management, student selection, and unequal funding.

Background of the Study

Charter schools began in the early 1990s in Minnesota. By the fall of 1996, the first charter school opened its doors in Texas. When charter schools started in Texas, they were located in predominantly major metropolitan areas such as Dallas, Houston, Austin, El Paso, and San Antonio. The majority of these schools served at-risk and minority students (TASB, 2009). Texas granted its 17th generation of charters in the fall of 2011. One charter is the equivalent of one traditional ISD, and according to TEC 12.101(b), Texas can grant a total of only 215 charters. In September 2014, Senate Bill 2 the cap was increased by 10 and will continue to increase gradually until 2019 and the new cap reaches 305 (TCSA, 2014).

As each ISD is assigned a county district number (CDN), each individual charter is assigned a CDN. What has led to the increase in charters is that there is no cap on the number of campuses allowed to each charter school district. Therefore, the number of charter districts has remained constant for the past 16 years, but the number of campuses and students served by the number of charter school campuses has increased dramatically. According to the Texas Charter School Association (2012), 482 charter campuses educate 133,697 students in Texas. All charter schools in Texas that receive federal funds must adhere to all federal accountability standards both academically and fiscally.

According to Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, and Matland (2000), Texas charter schools enroll a high percentage of minority students and at-risk students. In Texas, 70.7% of students attending charter schools are economically disadvantaged as compared to 58.8% of students are economically disadvantaged in traditional public schools. With this high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, many schools depend on federal funds, but required performance standards are increased each year until 2014, at which time 100% of a charter school's students (i.e., *all students*) must meet the passing standard on the approved federal accountability assessment. If the district has one or more high schools, the graduation rate of students who meet all requirements in 4 years is calculated for adequate yearly progress (AYP) purposes. Within the all students category, the students assessed are based on demographic information. There are seven subgroups calculated into AYP. There are minimum size requirements which must be met for each subgroup calculation.

The development of reform strategies for a specific charter school is significant because of the low student performance on state assessments such as the Texas Assessment Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) beginning with the results from the 2007-2008 academic year. In 2008, the

open-enrollment charter high school targeted for this case study received a rating of academically unacceptable (AU) for mathematics performance under the state accountability system for the second consecutive year. The AU designation resulted in campus leaders initiating plans for reconstitution in the event the campus did not attain academic acceptability in 2008-2009. Reconstitution under the state of Texas's accountability system involves a series of reform strategies placed upon a district and/or campus in the event the district and/or campus enters into a third year of being rated AU.

The campus had also entered into Stage 4 for failing to meet AYP in mathematics performance standards under the federal accountability system. Stage 4 required the campus to plan for restructuring in the event it did not meet AYP at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. Restructuring is very similar to reconstitution under the Texas accountability system, except it is limited to the governance and/or organization of the district and campus. A significant problem facing this charter school district and high school campus is the amount of turnover with seven principals over a span of just 6 years.

Conceptual Framework

Anthony Bryk (2010) described the how, why, and what of events occurring or failing to occur during the process of school improvement or overall systems change. There is a relationship or connection with everything and everyone involved in educating the students of today. Education is very practical in many areas; however, minimal theory has been used to connect various aspects of education. Continuous organizational learning occurs in charter schools as it does in other schools. Peter Senge (1990) predicted that the "organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment

and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization" (p. 4). Reflected in the literature is a clear understanding of the practical organizational learning and connections to organization theory.

Schools and districts need to recognize themselves as organizations and proceed with change/reform efforts that use organizational theory and research to make informed decisions (Fullan, 1990). To make these adaptations in organizational learning, specific organizational structures must be in place to support the identified educational processes (Burkhardt, Petri, & Roddy, 1995). A first step is to define and understand learning organizations and organization theory while defining what organizational structures and educational processes exist in the school. Learning organizations are defined by Senge (1990) are the following:

> Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. (p. 3)

Alignment among all aspects is critical for effective practice. The understanding of organization theory needs to be system-wide and include campus and individual levels to ensure support for the acquisition of the skills necessary to deal with complex instructional and organizational situations (Burkhart et al., 1995). This research provided information related to organizational theory and education in tracking current practices with theory.

Problem Statement

The charter school movement was designed to allow, parents, community stakeholders, and state and federal level policy makers to share a voice in school reform and accountability standards. Amidst multiple concerns, the one common purpose of all education, and that provided by charter schools, is student success and achievement. In charter schools, the need to identify practices and processes leading to increased student and organizational learning as well as student achievement exists. The problem for this study is the need to increase and maintain in

student achievement in charter schools, particularly as this need relates to case of the charter school organization targeted for study. There have been several studies completed on charter schools addressing different aspects of what makes them successful, but none used data and strategies tied to a collaborative theoretical model or framework such as in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this single-case study was to discover how an inner city charter school with a high percentage of at-risk students increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced simultaneously with administrative challenges and increases in state and federal standards. The research allowed for telling the story of one charter school's policies and practices and explaining how one charter school's policies and practices are developed and adjusted as part of exiting the School Improvement Program while increasing student achievement. An additional purpose was to add to the body of research regarding charter school reform and the successful implementation and sustainment of programs and best practices for ensuring student success. This study provided evidence regarding the ability of charter schools to serve predominantly at-risk students from low socioeconomic backgrounds while resulting in increased student achievement.

This study was a single-case study based on data and events from a single charter school district 98% at-risk students and 100% minority students. The findings, including programs and experiences, reflected on the experiences of students, teachers, charter school district personnel, and the community.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided this single case study investigation at the charter school:

1. What steps and strategies occurred to generate organizational learning at the organizational, campus, and individual (superintendent, principal, and teachers) levels?
2. How does a charter school overcome unacceptable status through organizational learning at the organizational, campus, and individual level?
3. How do members of the organization view their experiences with change?

Significance of the Study

This study provided a unique perspective through a case study design to demonstrate the impact of effective planning, organizing, and implementation of structure and strategies that resulted in increased student achievement. A framework of theoretical foundations and concepts for charter school implementation was established. The investigation contributed to the current literature about effective creation and implementation of school reform strategies related to school choice. This study added to the research available to the educational leadership community about how a charter school successfully implements programs and sustains best practices for student success. Educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders might enact new reforms based on the results of this study.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to one high school campus in a charter school district, it was crucial for me, as the researcher and instrument, to remain critical and objective while assessing the data holistically in order to share meaningful picture of real-life events based on the case's

data. I had a unique understanding of the charter school under study as a charter school administrator as well as liaison/representative of the district at the state level.

Limitations

In the state of Texas currently, the state accountability system was previously reviewed and modified. A new accountability testing and rating system was phased in for the 2012-2013 school year. The federal accountability system was adjusted at the state level based upon waivers submitted to the U.S. Department of Education under NCLB. This study was limited due to changes mandated by the federal and state governments that were beyond my and the charter school's control. Changes to some of the criteria and/or standards under the current accountability system likely limited the transferability of aspects of this study.

Definitions of Key Terms

The terms defined in this section apply to the setting addressed in this case study research.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP). Federal progress measure used to determine student achievement in various grade levels and subjects across all public schools in the United States.

Alternative education accountability (AEA). Alternate option of measuring accountability for districts which serve at-risk students whose population is greater than 75% of all students.

Alternative education campus (AEC). Alternate option of measuring accountability for campuses which serve at-risk students whose population is greater than 75% of all students.

At-risk student. Demographic of the student population measured each school year in all public schools of students in Grade PK through Grade 12 who are at-risk of dropping out of high school at some point during his/her school years.

Charter school. Public school choice option provided to parents over sending their children to traditional neighborhood schools. Typically, charter schools offer open-enrollment and follow most of the state mandated regulations directed toward traditional school districts.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Previous and current proposed name of federal education legislation focused on student achievement and accountability.

Independent school district (ISD). Designation of a public school district which receives tax-based funds from the community that it serves, and these are not tied to taxes collected for the municipalities or counties.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2011 (NCLB). Federal public education legislation used to determine accountability standards in all public schools throughout the US (NCLB, 2002).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduced the qualitative case study, posed the research questions, and presented the background and concepts. Chapter 2 provides a literature review related the purpose and choice in strategies chosen by the campus that contributed to the success of the student over the recent years as well as several studies focused on school reform. In Chapter 3, the qualitative case study process is explained including descriptive information, data points, sample surveys utilized over a period of time, and interviews of staff. Chapter 4 presents findings as well as accountability standings for the current year. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion and analysis, of the study, summary, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"We must raise the expectations for our students, for our schools, and for ourselves--this must be a national priority" (Obama, 2010, p. 1). In order to meet President Obama's challenge, researchers and educators must continue to contribute information and data regarding how charter schools are a viable and successful system of reform in achieving student success. Michaels (2008) stated that when successful, charter schools provide students with a valuable education, and as a result, they may expand to the point of eventually outnumbering traditional schools. It is important to understand the state and federal accountability systems as they pertain to charter schools and the standards set forth in each system, it is crucial for all educational stakeholders. In order for districts to improve, it is beneficial to consider theoretical frameworks as they relate to organizations that are continuously evolving while learning.

Any gains made in student achievement are the result of research and implementation of school reform strategies as a shared responsibility, because "the task cannot be shouldered by our nation's teachers and principals alone" (Obama, 2010, p. 1). The purpose of this single-case study is to discover how an inner city charter school with a high percentage of at-risk students increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced simultaneously with administrative challenges and increases in state and federal standards. This chapter includes information about state and federal accountability systems, the theoretical framework for this study, organizational learning, and school reform.

State and Federal Accountability Systems

School reform and reform strategies in the field of education today are driven by increasing accountability expectations that are set forth by the state and by the federal

government. According to Kress, McAdams, Moses, Thompson, and Windham (2008), accountability is the method by which taxpayers are informed about the extent to which schools have attained prescribed goals and the result of the interventions and consequences thought to be appropriate for fostering improvement. The areas of measurement and monitoring as well as the standards set forth for the state of Texas' educational accountability system are different than those of the federal government mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002). President Obama explained in the 2010 Blueprint for Reform that "accountability no longer falls solely at the doors of schools, districts, and states that will be held accountable for providing their schools, principals, and teachers with the support they need to succeed" (p. 5).

The primary functions of NCLB (2002) are to close the achievement gap between groups of students by requiring greater accountability and offering increased flexibility and choice. Districts, campuses, and states are required to meet AYP criteria on three measures: (a) reading/language arts performance, (b) mathematics performance, and (c) either graduation rate (for high schools and districts) or attendance rate (for elementary and middle/junior high schools). If a campus, district, or state receiving Title I, Part A funds fail to meet AYP for 2 consecutive years, that campus, district, or state must provide supplemental education services to students, offer school choice, and/or employ corrective actions.

Under the Texas accountability system, the following indicators are measured for acceptable performance in the area of academics: reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Another indicator measures English language learners' progress. Similar to the AYP graduation rate measurement, Texas uses a completion rate indicator for graduates and continuing students as well as dropout rate for students of Grades 7 and 8. As compared to NCLB (2002) which states that a district and/or campus either meets AYP or does not meet

AYP, the Texas Standard Accountability System has historically employed four potential ratings with its districts and their campuses. The lowest standing of the ratings is *Academically Unacceptable* (AU), followed in ascending order by *Academically Acceptable* (AA), *Recognized*, and *Exemplary*. Both the NCLB's and Texas' standard accountability systems publish school and district ratings annually, usually in late July and/or early August of every year. These ratings are based on data from the previous school year. As under NCLB, if a district or campus receives an AU rating for 2 consecutive years, the state may impose sanctions and require immediate corrective actions upon the affected district or campus.

Conceptual Frameworks

In terms of conceptual framework there are three areas that when they come together at a common point, the possibility for high student achievement occurs. The first area that has to be present for student achievement to occur is an applied institutional theory and its isomorphic pressures. The second area is an understanding of organizational learning. A final component of this conceptual framework is school reform strategies. In the center of all three components there is a common interrelationship which produces the possibility of optimal student achievement.

Figure 1 shows the relationships among school reform strategies, institutional theory, and organizational learning frameworks. All activities can be seen to intersect at times as they come together sharing a common area. The figure illustrates the potential to bring all three elements together to maximize student achievement and organizational learning.

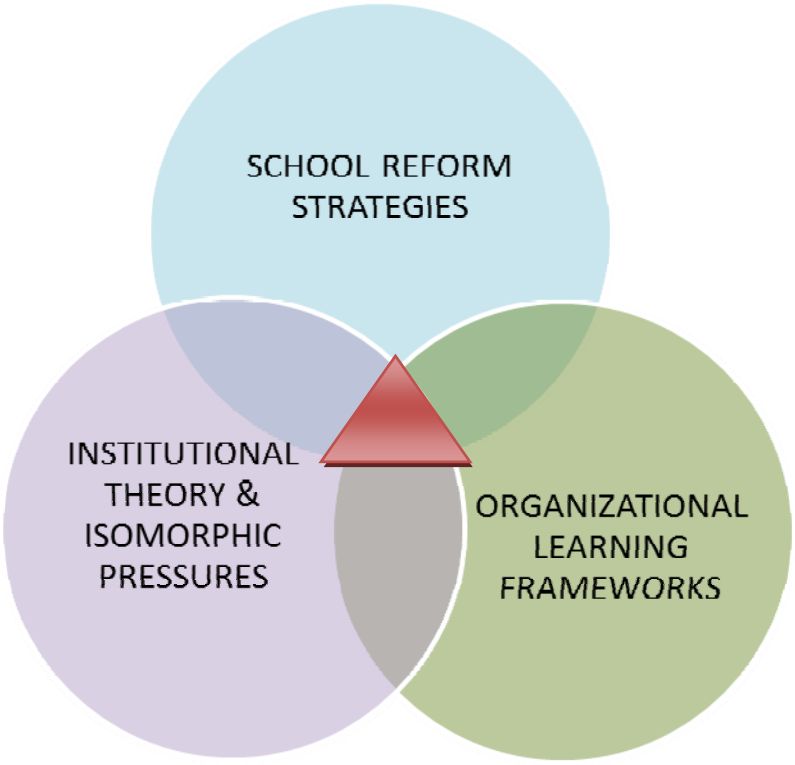

Figure 1. The relationships among the theoretical foundations for this study.

Institutional Theory and Isomorphic Pressures

In institutional theory, when the fit between what the environment expects and requires is out of alignment with what the organization is doing and producing, something takes place in the environment or within an organization to reestablish fit. The reestablishment of fit can occur as the result of institutional pressures and forces designed to reinforce stability within an organization at the expense of change. In organizational theory, these pressures and forces mentioned are commonly referred to as isomorphic change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Isomorphic change leads either to a positive change or to a negative change. Hanson (2003) defined *reform* as a major change leading to a restructuring of core processes, programs, and/or procedures. Hence, with major structural change, school reform is achieved. A unique pattern

of changes impact the institutionalization of changes within an organization, making it a distinctive, orderly, and stable entity infused with societal value (Selznick, 1996).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) provided three mechanisms of isomorphic change, coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism stems from formal and informal pressures for compliance (Hanson, 2003). Governmental and legislative mandates are formal coercive isomorphic pressures as compared to local school board beliefs that are informal coercive isomorphic pressures.

The second isomorphic mechanism is referred to as mimetic isomorphism. Hanson defined (2003) mimetic isomorphism as occurring due to an educational organization consciously modeling itself after another institution that it believes represents a higher level of academic and organizational success and achievement. An example of mimetic isomorphism would be the decision for a campus or district to implement a new program, process, or procedure that has gained status as a trend so quickly that all other institutions want to have the same capability and ability to claim they have employed or attained that trend. Educational organizations tend to look for guidance based on what highly regarded schools are doing (Hanson, 2003).

Normative isomorphism is rooted in the processes of professionalization (Hanson, 2003). The norms of professionalism are diffused through an organizational field and result from standardization. The formation of educator associations and credentialing are responses to normative isomorphism through the setting of standards by which members abide. Each standard or norm reflects a desire for legitimacy and contributes to the appearance of organizational homogeneity (Traver, 2006). Organizations accept or sometimes have no choice

but to accept isomorphic changes if they seek to establish legitimization both within organization and outside of it through public opinion.

Organizational Learning

In schools, organizational learning based the contributions of individual learning, provides opportunities for educator professionals to become well-informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire others. The professional learning community (PLC) process occurs when professional educators work "collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults" (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 12). The PLC process allows organizations to learn from within an institutional framework and at all levels. Members engaging in the PLC process include district officials such as local school board members and campus administrators as well as teachers, students, and parents. In some situations stakeholders understand and can interact as a collective unit, sharing their thoughts and moves at a sophisticated level. "School improvement is most surely and thoroughly achieved when teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practices" (Joyce, 2004, p.76).

Organizations actively identify opportunities or threats and subsequently acquire the systemic knowledge to deal with them effectively. From top-down, each leader inspires others to do things they might otherwise not do and encourages others to go in directions they might not otherwise pursue (Schlechty, 2002). Elmore (2002) stated that school improvements occur based on the beliefs and practices shared by people within the organization. Educational professionals need to work and learn together to eliminate apathy, mistrust, fear, and failure, all of which threaten students, teachers, and administrators equally and daily (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

Organizational learning takes place at the collective rather than individual level; however, what individuals learn feeds the collective knowledge base (Hanson, 2003).

School Reform Strategies

Many school reform strategies have been researched and documented as effective. The effective strategies revolve around one thing: *change*. Therefore, school reform can be viewed as and is a change process. When students, campuses, or districts are not successful, organization members need to be willing to change to produce the desired results.

"Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy, it means changing the cultures of classrooms, schools, districts, universities, and so on" (Fullan, 2007, p. 7). Fullan and Miles (1992) provided seven themes or propositions for success: (a) Change is learning; (b) Change is a journey; (c) Problems are our friends; (d) Change is resource-hungry; (e) Change requires the power to manage it; (f) Change is systemic; and (g) All large scale change is implemented locally. Datnow & Stringfield (2000) state:

> We know that the improvement of schools is possible when the reform effort is well thought out, when teachers are active agents in the change process, when there are sufficient resources and time to support reform, when capable leadership is present, and when school cultures change along with school structures (p. 192).

According to Fullan and Miles, in terms of school reform and student success, there must always be change at some level in order for students to maintain as well as increase success. School reform implementation can be understood as the process of selecting, planning for and enacting a program or model of reform.

In July 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan gave four speeches to various groups regarding the four reform areas. The four areas Duncan outlined are (a) adopt rigorous

standards, (b) recruit and retain effective teachers, (c) build data systems, and (d) turn around low-performing schools. Each area of reform involves change for low-performing students, campuses, and school districts. Fullan and Miles' (1992) seven propositions for success were prophetic as they clearly influenced Secretary Duncan's areas of reform. Fullan (2007) noted the following: "Careful attention to a small number of key details during the change process can result in the experience of success, new commitments, and the excitement and energizing satisfaction of accomplishing something that is important" (p. 8). The key details may vary depending on the specific area, process, or system that is being changed however working to reduce the number of failures and realizing new successes can lead to the revitalization of teaching and learning for teachers and students (Fullan 2007).

Within the four areas of reform introduced by Secretary Duncan, several specific reform strategies may be chosen for implementing a change process in hopes of resulting an increase in student success based upon Fullan's three phases of change (*initiation, implementation*, & *instutionalization*) (Fullan, 1990).

Fullan (1990) noted three phases of change, Phase 1 is the initiation phase and "consists of the process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change" (Fullan, 2007, p. 65). Fullan stated "the initiation of change rarely occurs without an advocate, and one of the most powerful is the chief district administrator, especially in combination with school board support" (p.73). The relationship between initiation and implementation is loosely coupled and interactive (Fullan, 2007).

Fullan (2007) explained that Phase 2 is the implementation phase and "involves the first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice" (p. 65). Fullan (1990) stated "the process of implementation is essentially a learning process" (p. 4). Finally, Phase 3 is the

institutionalization phase that determined the likelihood of the change becoming built into an ongoing part of the system or disappearing by way of a decision (Fullan, 2007). Fullan (2007) stated "the total timeframe from initiation to institutionalization is lengthy; moderately complex changes take 2 to 4 years" (p. 68). Fullan (2007) continued with "the greater use of the change knowledge embedded in policy and strategy will reduce the timeline for successful initiation and implementation" (p. 68).

The first major reform strategy includes adopting and implementing new curriculum based on increasing the rigor of the academic standards. The charter district and campus being studied adopted a curriculum management program that included the state standards and exemplar lessons with increased rigor for implementation. Fullan (1990) remarked: "Effective implementation consists of alterations in curriculum materials, practices, and behavior, and beliefs and understandings" (p. 4).

In terms of Secretary Duncan's reform strategy of adopting rigorous and relevant curriculum standards, Marzano (2005) stated "knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment involves the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge regarding best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (p. 106). It is reasonable to suspect that within a leadership team the task of adopting and implementing best practices curriculum is possible. In order for campus and central office leadership to begin implementation of any reform or innovated strategy or initiative, the type or order of change must be determined (Marzano, 2005). Marzano defined first and second orders of change "by the way people react to a proposed innovation" (p. 112). The difference between the two orders relates to differences in knowledge, experience, values, and flexibility of the individuals or groups perceiving the change (Marzano, 2005).

Marzano (2005) listed perception characteristics for the first order of change as the following:

> Seen as an extension of the past, fits within existing paradigms, consistent with prevailing values and norms, can be implemented with existing knowledge and skills, requires resources currently available to those responsible for implementing the innovations, and may be accepted because of common agreement that the innovation is necessary. (p. 113)

Marzano (2005) listed the perception characteristics for the second order of change as the following:

> Breaks with the past, lies outside existing paradigms, conflicts with prevailing values and norms, requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, requires resources currently not available to those responsible for implementing the innovations, and may be resisted because only those who have a broad perspective of the school see the innovation as necessary. (p. 113)

According to Marzano, "first and second order of change involves establishing procedures and routines that provide faculty and students with a sense of predictability" (p. 120).

The second reform strategy is recruiting and retaining effective teachers and administrators. Hiring and planning appropriate professional development for teachers and administrators helps to recruit as well as retain highly qualified staff. A third area of reform is implementing a PLC process to develop data systems to track student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Upon implementing a PLC process, a staff is afforded opportunities to collaborate with each other regarding how data informs instructional practices and student performance.

The final strategy relates to the restructuring of district and campus leadership roles as it relates to the fourth area of reform cited by Secretary Duncan; turning around low-performing schools. An example is the restructuring of leadership to include a district liaison that works to ensure district and campus leadership are communicating and remaining aligned with the district's mission and goals. The fourth area of reform is the restructuring of campus and district leadership teams. This involves identifying a plan. Marzano (2005) proposed a five-step plan or

model for effective school leadership and restructuring. The five steps Marzano proposed are the following:

> 1. develop a strong school leadership team, 2. distribute some responsibilities throughout the leadership team, 3. select the right work, 4. identify the order of magnitude implied by the selected work, and 5. match the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative. (p. 98)

In 2010, President Obama called for fostering "school environments where teachers have the time to collaborate, the opportunities to lead, and the respect that all professionals deserve" (p. 1). The PLC process can be an effective reform strategy addressing this call for action. According to Hord and Sommers (2008), the PLC progress requires "a great deal of courage is required by the principal to make waves, take action for change, and to introduce a new way of doing things" (p. 3). Hord and Sommers added that the "courage related to establishing a PLC process can be supported at the state, district, and local campus level to give opportunities to principals . . . with responsibility and accountability preserved" (p. 26). Hord (1997) defined the PLC process as ongoing, collaborative, and involving teachers and administrators seeking and sharing learning continuously while acting on their learning; "the goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefit" (p. 6).

Hord and Sommers (2008) identified five dimensions of the PLC process as systemic level when various aspects of all five dimensions are holistically present in the organization. The first dimension is shared and supportive leadership. One can look for campus administrators and district personnel including the superintendent to share in power and authority for making decisions.

The second dimension is shared beliefs, values, and visions (Hord & Sommers, 2008). It is crucial to view evidence of this dimension from the top with the superintendent down to the campus administrators and teachers. A third dimension is collective learning and application

(Hord & Sommers, 2008). In this dimension, PLC process allows members to learn, and how they learn is the bottom line.

The fourth dimension of the PLC process is supportive conditions, which contains two aspects which is evaluated (Hord & Sommers, 2008). First, structural factors are time, requirements, and location of meetings. Second, relational factors are interpersonal development, human relations, openness, and focus on attitudes.

The fifth and final dimension is shared personal practice (Hord & Sommers, 2008). It is important to seek out input from community members and stakeholders that supports both individual and organizational improvement. The ability to analyze all five dimensions is dependent upon leadership coming from the superintendent to the campus administrators in order to determine if increased capacity collectively results in greater results.

In summary, the change process and any school reform strategies, such as the PLC process, must be viewed as dynamic organisms. Not only are organizations continually changing and learning, but the students, teachers, administrators, and communities in which they reside are also dynamically changing. Embarking upon change at any level requires understanding the environment, its expectations as institutional theory suggests, the willingness and ability to embrace the journey of change, all the while paying close attention to detail with student success at the forefront of the process. According to Fullan and Miles (1992):

> Change initiatives do not run themselves. They require substantial effort be devoted to such tasks as monitoring implementation, keeping everyone informed of what's happening, linking multiple change projects, locating unsolved problems, and taking clear coping action. (p. 244)

School Reform Studies

There have been several dissertation and research studies relating to characteristics of charter schools and school reform strategies in national programs and how they relate at the

district and campus levels. In review of a dissertation study about school reform in charter schools, Horsburgh (2011) provides insight into characteristics of successful charter schools. Blanco (2009) provides information in a dissertation study relating to implementation of reform strategies of an urban school superintendent. Fryer and Dobbie (2013) researched 39 charter schools in New York City, looking at the effects of 5 specific reform strategies/policies on increased student performance.

Horsburgh conducted a dissertation study in 2011 for the purpose of understanding what characteristics exemplify two of the highest achieving charter high schools in Colorado. At the time of the study Colorado had a waiting list of 40,000 students for enrollment into charter schools throughout the state. The author conducted a multisite, qualitative case study that included interviews, focus groups, and observations. Horsburgh organized the data into the following five areas of concentration: program, mission, leadership, organizational structure, and community involvement. Horsburgh "selected these themes based on literature identifying them as common characteristics of high achieving charter schools throughout the past decade" (p. 52).

At both sites studied, Horsburgh (2011) found that "program and mission received far more responses than any other categories incurred" (p.113). Organizational structure and community involvement were the lowest identified areas of concentration identified in relation to being major contributors to schools success. Leadership was identified "as strong and supportive" and received many positive responses (Horsburgh, 2011, p.113).

Regarding the area of concentration for programs, parents at both sites wanted their students to attend these two schools based on the "rigorous and challenging" programs offered to them. Teachers felt "important, valued, and respected", and they attributed that to the strength and worth of the program (Horsburgh, 2011, p. 115). Leadership was ever present in the

instructional programs every day, for example “they too taught classes and were directly involved in the curriculum and students” (Horsburgh, 2011, p. 116). All stakeholders in the study contributed the program as the primary contributor to their school’s success. Mission was identified as the second lead contributor to the school’s success. Both school’s missions emphasized “rigor and content-rich curriculum” (Horsburgh, 2011, p. 116). The mission of both schools was reported to influence the families outside of school which led to a strong impact of the mission on the student, teacher, and school success.

Parents and teachers reported during focus group sessions that there was increased respect for the administrators because of the involvement by campus leaders in teaching academic courses. They also “believed leadership valued them in addition to valuing student because it created a collaborative environment across all stakeholder groups” (Horsburgh, 2011, p. 119). This collaborative environment fostered a supportive environment which is has been reported by various researchers as a successful characteristic for high quality charter schools (Braun, Jenkins, & Grigg, 2006; Bulkley, 2005; Finnigan, 2007).

In terms of organizational structure, administrators at both schools taught classes and were viewed as master teachers. Titles for administrators varied between both schools but overall job function and duties were delegated similarly. Principals in both schools were viewed as master teachers while their assistants were considered instructional coaches. In School A, besides the principal/master teacher, there were three other administrators that assisted in various areas of human resources/public relations, extra-curricular/discipline, and business management. The organizational structure was viewed as a support system for staff in both schools. The study concluded that strong leadership is key to successful charter school. In terms of support for staff both schools had time set-aside for staff to collaborate and exchange ideas in one form or another

(p. 121). In 2005, Garrison and Holifield noted the successful charter schools engaged leaders who can unify and inspire staff. Horsburgh noted that regardless of the title held, each person in a leadership capacity had a responsibility of inspiring and reinvigorating the staff (p. 122). "School A and School B constructed organizational structures that supported and advanced the mission and program" (p.122).

Community involvement was viewed low as it is the most difficult to cultivate and maintain within a community and with neighboring districts (p.123). Both schools have yet to produce much success with community involvement in the form of partnerships and extended collaborations with local businesses. The majority of the responsibility for managing community relationships fell on the principals (p. 123).

Horsburgh's study is summed up in establishing that "this type of qualitative case study data can strengthen awareness of the characteristics charter school stakeholders perceive as contributing to student achievement as an important step in creating more quality charter schools" (p.126). It is also concluded that "struggling charter schools can measure the strength of their program, mission, and leadership against the two participating schools" (p.126).

Blanco conducted a dissertation study in 2009 to examine the quality and degree of implementation of ten key reform strategies. The study investigated how one superintendent determined strengths and weaknesses of an urban district and which reform strategies had impacted a large urban school district. Blanco used a case study methodology that included mostly interviews. The following instruments were used to gather the interview research data: Superintendent Interview, Key Player Interviews, Specific Dimensions of Reform Interview Guide, and an implementation rubric. Data included as part of the qualitative data analysis were

collected from the California Department of Education, other state and local websites, the Fair City Office of Assessment, and the Urban School Leadership Foundation.

Data used from the Urban School Leadership Foundation came from a framework developed by the Urban School Leadership Institute (Blanco, 2009). These data consisted of concepts that represented comprehensive strategies in various areas such as: strategic planning, assessment, curriculum, professional development, human resource system and human capital management, finance and budget, communications, governance/board relations, labor relations/contract negotiations, and family and community engagement. This framework was referenced as the "House" model in Blanco's study.

Blanco (2009) studied Fair City Public School District, in Southern California, a public school district which served 32,000 students in pre-kindergarten to adult. The majority of the student population was minority, 43.7% of the population was designated as English learners and 73.5% were economically disadvantaged. Blanco reported the superintendent as able to "strategically change the culture of the district" to focus on student achievement and accountability by reaching, teaching, and learning (p. 200). The strategic planning process was a result of "clear leadership vision that became the reference point for change and set expectations across the system at all levels (Blanco, 2009, p. 200). In terms of assessment as an area of reform, the superintendent "employed a data driven decision-making model to move accountability to the forefront of the district" (Blanco, 2009, p. 201). The superintendent shared the academic state of the district which was not good, Year 3 Program Improvement under the federal accountability system of NCLB. Part of the superintendent's strategic plan, "measurable targets for the district were created in order to further evaluate the strategic plan" (Blanco, 2009, p. 201).

Under the reform strategy of curriculum, new leadership and staff were hired in the curriculum department "to ensure support for the fidelity of the state standards and the adopted curriculum" (Blanco, 2009, p. 202). The superintendent had a vision of managed curriculum which aligned with the continuous improvement model. Professional development became aligned with teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Further professional development plans were designed and consistent with the Learning Forward Standards, formerly known as the National Staff Development Council Standards (Blanco, 2009). All plans were then aligned with the district and site plans as well as with the vision and goals set forth by the board and the superintendent. In the area of Human Resources and Human Capital Development, the superintendent directed the Human Resources department to "develop an operational plan with goals for recruitment, retention, and the employment of highly qualified classroom teachers" (Blanco, 2009, p. 203). As the leader for the entire district and representative of the community, "there was a new vision for human resources which was customer service centered on the four R's: recruitment, relationships, recognition, and respect for staff" (Blanco, 2009, p.203).

Fair City School District was fiscally sound but not resourceful (Blanco, 2009). It was important for the board and the superintendent to be mindful of how funds were utilized and how they impacted student achievement. The superintendent involved the business services department by participating in the development and implementation of the district's mission, goals, and operational activities. As the superintendent aligned each and every department and level of the district to one, communications were open and transparency was established and shared with community and all stakeholders (Blanco, 2009).

Under the remaining three areas of reform the superintendent had to develop and gain the trust of the board through involvement in the strategic planning and implementation of the plan

as well as build relationships with the board members (Blanco, 2009). The changing the culture not only of the district but as well with the board towards improving student achievement assisted in gaining support for initiatives being put through by the superintendent. Again positive relationships were critical in not only in the governance of the board but also in dealing with Labor relations and contract negotiations. The superintendent "encouraged teams from the district and Union Leaders to use the Six Fundamentals of Coherence of the Strategic Plan, mission statements, major goals, and core values to develop objectives" (Blanco, 2009, p. 206). Again building positive relationships is crucial to successful strategy implementation. Lastly the superintendent took time during the first 90 days on the reaching out and listening to what the community had to say and needed. The superintendent "sent a clear message that one of her top priorities was to connect with families" (Blanco, 2009, p. 206). Successful strategy implementation became easier, "trust of the parents was gained by being involved in the decision-making process" (Blanco, 2009, p., 207). In summary, the superintendent was able to capitalize on the strengths of the district by building relationships, sharing a common vision, and involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Blanco (2009) concluded that "focusing simultaneously on restructuring and changing the culture in the district to improve student achievement results in positive gains" (p. 212). The role of superintendent is complex, "there is a need to equip leaders with the skills and strategies to be instructional leaders, managers, politicians as all three roles are necessary for the success of today's system leader" (Blanco, 2009, p. 217). Strategic planning had the largest gains under the House Model as compared to the other reforms and it was viewed as "the center of reform" (Blanco, 2009, p. 217). "Building capacity within the organization through transparent leadership and trust the embraces common vision with a theory of action will provide greater

opportunities for all students to access high quality teaching and learning" (Blanco, 2009, p. 217). It was ever apparent that the superintendent's primary and most important goal of increasing student achievement was at the forefront in the overall vision, and had buy-in from all stakeholders through the superintendent's ability to build capacity in the district and in the community.

Fryer and Dobbie (2013) collected data on the inner-workings of 39 charter schools in New York City to understand the inputs most correlated with school effectiveness. Fryer and Dobbie reported their "data included a wealth of information collected from each school through principal, teacher, and student surveys, sample teacher evaluation forms, lesson plans, homework, and video observations" (p. 20). They focused on five strategies including "frequent teacher feedback, data driven instruction, high-dosage tutoring, increased instructional time and a relentless focus on academic achievement" (Fryer & Dobbie, 2013, p. 20). Fryer and Dobbie stated that these five policies explained almost half of the variation in school effectiveness (p. 20) and used the results to "suggest a model of schooling that may have general application" (p. 1).

Fryer and Dobbie (2013) showed "schools that give formal or informal feedback ten or more times per semester have annual math gains that are 0.048_ (0.023) higher and annual ELA gains that are 0.044_ (0.014) higher than other schools" (p. 3). Feedback provided was identified as academic, behavioral, or general. High achieving charters provided feedback at the secondary level. Effective schools provided academic feedback to parents and students 5.22 times per semester, behavioral feedback 8.80 times per semester, and general feedback 11.08 times per semester (Fryer & Dobbie, 2013). Schools in which students were tutored in groups of six or less at least four days a week displayed "annual ELA gains of 0.040_ (0.020) higher" (Fryer &

Dobbie, 2013, p. 3). Schools that added 25% or more instructional time displayed higher annual gains for math over lower performing schools.

The higher achieving secondary level charter schools provided 20% more tutoring per week over the low performing charter schools (Fryer & Dobbie, 2013). At the secondary level, high achieving charter schools offered 195.2 instructional days per the academic year, and students attended school daily for an average of 8.2 hours (Fryer & Dobbie, 2013). Fryer and Dobbie's conclusions clearly indicated the specific policies and strategies necessary to provide effective student performance within the high achieving charter school.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of literature on the state and federal accountability systems for 2007-2011. This chapter also provided a connection between institutional theory, learning organizations, and school reform strategies such as the PLC process as they relate to the change process, and school improvement. The national school reform programs as well as a review of three studies relating to successful charter school characteristics and reform strategies were also included. In Chapter 3, the qualitative case study process is explained including descriptive information, data points, sample surveys utilized over a period of time, and interviews of staff.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Several studies have been completed related to successful charter schools, but no findings have been explained through the lens of a collaborative model of theory, framework, and strategies. The purpose of this case study is to discover how an inner city charter school with a high percentage of at-risk students increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced simultaneously with administrative challenges and increases in state and federal standards. The research told the story of one charter school's policies and practices as they developed and adjusted as part of exiting the School Improvement Program, and as student achievement increased. This study is intended to add to the research available to the educational leadership community related to how a charter school successfully implements programs and sustains best practices for student success.

In this chapter, the research methods, instrumentation, participant selection, procedures, and data analysis strategies are explained in detail. The research case study was guided by three research questions:

1. What steps and strategies occurred to generate organizational learning at the organizational, campus, and individual (Superintendent, Principal, and teachers) levels?
2. How does a charter school overcome unacceptable status through organizational learning at the organizational, campus, and individual level?
3. How do members of the organization view their experiences with change?

The first question provides a foundation based on a theoretical framework for justification and reasoning in implementing organizational structures and strategies for practice

at the district and campus level. The second question drives the delineation between the strategies selected for implementation compared to overall outcome based on student achievement scores and overall teacher perceptions. The third question specifically identifies opportunities to key strategies and components as viewed by members of the organization.

Research Design

Qualitative research relies on interactive and humanistic methods and is ideally suited for studies occurring in their natural settings (Creswell, 2003). A single-case study model is the most appropriate method for this research in order to provide a detailed review of instances of the phenomenon of *reform strategies* executed by leaders at all levels within the organization in order to increase student achievement and success. Information gained from interviews and questionnaires are from the personal perspective of administrators and outside consultants appointed to work with the school by the state.

Various researchers suggested that a case study approach is acceptable when focusing on a small sample in order to obtain a wide array of information about a specific subject (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) also mentioned that the context-sensitive case study method can equip researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation, events, people interactions, and observed behaviors. A case study approach provides the best avenue to develop and establish a rich description of each reform strategy under study (Patton, 2002). This single-case study was referenced as a topical study, because I sought specific facts, event descriptions, and examples to answer the "particular, focused research question" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 31).

Population and Sample

The participants for the single-case study included the school district's superintendent, the high school principal, the dean of students, four faculty of the district, and one outside consultant appointed to work with the district by the state of Texas. The sampling may be described as purposeful since individuals were selected because "they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 1998). The sampling for this study allowed for the opportunity to study in greater depth the choice of reform strategies and organizational structure designed to result in increased student achievement and student success over the course of two years. Since this was a single-case study of one charter school district, participants were referenced by the role in which they served. All district, campus, and participant names remained anonymous. Patton (2002) noted that "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with information richness of the cases selected and the observational analytic capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 243). This single-case study was focused on gathering data, rich information of four key stakeholders through interviews as well as through analysis of student performance data.

The inner-city charter high school for this study served 150 students in 2008 and up to 175 students in 2010. The charter school has three campuses serving prekindergarten through Grade 12. The high school is comprised of Grades 9 through 12. The high school campus follows all state and federal mandates and adheres to all regulations regarding public education in the state of Texas.

The high school campus student demographics shifted from being a predominantly African-American student population to a predominantly Hispanic student population. In 2008

the students were 60.3% African-American and 39.1% Hispanic as compared to 32% and 57.1% respectively. The high school's special education representation has decreased from 15% in 2008 to 10% in 2010, which was in alignment with state requirements. The number of students on free and reduced lunch remained constant at 95%. The overall at-risk student population ranged from 82% in 2008 to 75% in 2010. Mathematics scores at the high school in 2007 were 7% passing, and in 2008, the mathematics passing rate was 28%. The campus met the criteria as determined by the Commissioner of Education at the Texas Education Agency to be rated under the AEA system as an AEC.

Data Collection Procedures

Multiple sources of data are needed in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Hatch, 2002). The aim of qualitative research is to understand a specific phenomenon in its natural setting. It is to the researcher's advantage to examine multiple types of data for a broader understanding of the phenomena.

The main data sources for this study were interviews, state and federal accountability performance data from 2008 through 2011, and the artifacts related to the charter district's organizational structure for the time span of 2008 through 2011. The artifacts from the district included data from the website, charter documents, archived meeting agendas, and state level reporting documents. Additionally, student performance data reported to the TEA were utilized. Each of the three data sources were reviewed in three consecutive phases and allowed entering into a fourth phase.

In Phase 1, the state and federal performance data for 2008 until 2011 were reviewed and analyzed for areas of strengths and weaknesses for the charter high school campus. Some key notes that were considered during this stage related to any and all curriculum changes, student

enrollment vs. demographic make-up, and principal and teacher quality and turnover. During Phase 2 of the data collection process, I conducted a review of the organizational structure before and after reform strategies were made and compared the membership of the district and campus staff. Areas to consider during this phase were based on systems and process at the district and campus level. In Phase 3, interviews were conducted with the superintendent during the 2008 to 2011 timeframe, the high school principal who was there from 2008 to 2010 and then as a consultant 2010 to 2011, and finally one outside consultant who was assigned to the high school campus from 2008 to 2010. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and summarized before data analysis began. The results from the interviews were coded by a secondary person and then reviewed and interpreted by the researcher. In Phase 4, I analyzed the data, organized changes that occurred into a formal timeline of events related to Miles and Fullan's three phases of change process, and drew conclusions about perceptions, strategies, and structures related to the foundational organizational framework listed in Figure 1.

Instrumentation

The interview instrument used in this case study was a semi-structured 18-question interview based on review of data sources in phases as noted above to allow for flexibility with and responsiveness to the participants. The interview format followed a responsive interviewing format. Rubin and Rubin (2012) defined responsive interviewing as "a style of qualitative interviewing that emphasizes the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give-and-take in the conversation" (p. 36). The interviews were conducted in person and were audio recorded and transcribed. The reasoning behind the semi-structured interview was to create an opportunity for participants to reflect upon experiences and identify contributing factors to the school's success. As the researcher, my role

with the semi-structured interview was to facilitate collecting each participant's responses. This level of inquiry inspired thoughtful, rich responses critical in qualitative research (Hatch, 2002).

Limitations

In the state of Texas currently, the state accountability system has recently been reviewed and modified. A new accountability testing and rating system was phased in for the 2013-2014 school year. This study was limited due to changes mandated by the federal and state governments beyond my and the charter school's control. Changes to some of the criteria and/or standards under the current accountability system could limit the transferability of aspects of this study.

A final limitation was the role of the researcher. I served both a participant and an instrument in the case study. I had served as the district liaison between district and campus leadership as well as between the district and monitors from the state and federal levels prior to conducting the study. To reduce bias and promote objectivity, the interview data were reviewed and coded by an outside person to ensure accuracy of coding of the statements and responses to the questions.

Data Analysis

The purpose of qualitative data analysis was to make sense out of data and to communicate it to others (Creswell, 1998; Hatch 2002). Researchers ask questions to comprehend the implications and significance of the data (Hatch, 2002). In this study, the six-step process was followed as outlined by Creswell (1998): (a) organize and prepare data, (b) carefully read and study the data, (c) design a detailed analysis of the information, (d) generate a description of the findings by themes and/or relevance, (e) represent the descriptions in a narrative format with visuals, and (f) analyze the data and make meaning of the information.

Part of the data analysis process involved seeking concepts and themes that interviewees frequently mentioned from their own emic perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I formalized the events and/or changes that occurred into one of three phases of the change process: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization (Miles et al., 1997). Using Creswell's six-step process for data analysis, I organized the data into one of three phases of change (Miles, et. al. 1997).

With the three phases of change in mind, the data for each interview question were open coded independently from the other interview questions' data (Saldana, 2013). Second, the data were aggregated for the second round of coding between interview questions. Focused coding enabled the narrowing and streamlining of the codes and themes (Saldana, 2013). Third, the themes were identified after the coding process occurred and both reviewers agreed on the assigned codes (Saldana, 2013).

Finally, I analyzed the longitudinal data represented by the charter school's documents and organized the phases of change using longitudinal coding to capture all events and actions that occurred into a formal timeline of events (Saldana, 2013). Fullan and Miles' (1992) three phase process of change was the theoretical structure by which longitudinal coding occurred to ensure systematic induction of evidence for trustworthiness. I documented and aligned each major reform strategy initiated and/or implemented into one of the phases of the change process.

Summary

This chapter provided an outline of research methodology used in this single-case study. The overall goal of the research was to describe the findings, explain the findings, and answer the research questions. This study used various data sources for collection and analysis purposes as well as developed a timeline of events as they relate to the three phases of the change process as described by Fullan and Miles (1992). The review of performance data and organizational

data were relevant to the overall presentation of this case study; however, the interview portion was the most informational source of data and designed to ensure the ability to answer the study's three research questions. Narratives and findings of this information were further detailed and explained in Chapter 4. Interpretations of the study, discussions, conclusions, and any further recommendations for future studies are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This single case study was designed to determine how an inner city open-enrollment charter high school with a high percentage of at-risk students increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced with administrative challenges and increasing state and federal standards. Understanding what made this charter high school successful could possibly help other schools, community stakeholders, and parents in maintaining quality charter high school. The research questions were used in the case study as a guide for discovering what school reform strategies were effective as well as how an organization moved from just a high school campus to an organizational learning community while adjusting to external political pressure. Results from the student performance data and interview results are reported in this chapter.

Data Collection

Data were collected and reviewed in four phases. In Phase 1, the state and federal performance data for 2008 until 2011 was reviewed and analyzed for areas of strengths and weaknesses for the charter high school campus. During Phase 2 of the data collection process, I conducted a review of the organizational structure before and after reform strategies were made and compared the membership of the district and campus staff. In Phase 3, I conducted interviews with the current superintendent who had been the assistant superintendent during the 2008 to 2011 timeframe, the high school principal who was there from 2008 to 2010 and then as a consultant 2010 to 2011, the dean of students, four classroom teachers, and one outside consultant who was assigned to the high school campus from 2008 to 2010. Each interview was

recorded, transcribed, and summarized with the exception of one interview was conducted via email correspondence utilizing the same interview protocol with a follow up phone conversation.

Upon completion of all interviews, data coding and analysis were performed independently by a second reviewer and me. Interview data were disaggregated according to the three guiding research questions. I drew conclusions about perceptions, strategies, and structures related to the foundational organizational framework listed in Figure 1 (see page 14).

Contextual Findings

As part of understanding the first phase of change, the student performance data were reviewed for the academic years beginning with 2007-2008 through 2010-2011. The state assessment given in this period was TAKS. Table 1 displays the student performance data for said charter high school as it pertained to the state of Texas accountability system for high schools rated under the AEA system. For AEA calculations, the campus was required to meet or exceed the standard based upon the average of all tests meeting standard by all students tested. Under the state system, all Grade 9, 10, and 11 students and any Grade 12 students who were unsuccessful in Grade 11 were assessed with the TAKS for reading and math. Science and social studies were assessed under the state accountability system but were excluded from a portion of this case study as to compare similar academic contents. The largest deficits in student performance occurred for the subject of math. Within math, the lowest performing subpopulations were special education students, followed by the African American students, then the economically disadvantaged students. For reading, special education students were the predominant group among the lowest performing students.

Table 1

State of Texas Accountability Performance Data for XXX-XXX-001 for the Charter High School Campus

Test/Grade	ALL %(*n*)	African American %(*n*)	Hispanic %(*n*)	White %(*n*)	Econ. Disadvan. %(*n*)	English Language Learner %(*n*)	Special Ed. %(*n*)
Reading Grade 9-12							
2007-2008	68%(152)	71%(92)	65%(60)	NA	68%(122)	60%(43)	27%(23)
2008-2009	71%(167)	65%(81)	75%(86)	NA	70%(150)	67%(65)	38%(22)
2009-2010	78%(180)	68%(60)	82%(120)	NA	77%(178)	76%(91)	21%(23)
2010-2011	88%(175)	83%(56)	89%(100)	NA	88%(167)	86%(72)	38%(19)
Math Grade 9-12							
2007-2008	46%(152)	37%(92)	54%(60)	NA	46%(122)	48%(43)	14%(23)
2008-2009	41%(167)	25%(81)	53%(86)	NA	41%(150)	51%(65)	<1%(22)
2009-2010	66%(180)	58%(60)	70%(120)	NA	66%(178)	65%(91)	21%(23)
2010-2011	78%(175)	56%(56)	86%(100)	NA	78%(167)	81%(72)	15%(19)
All Tests Grades 9-12 >45-55%*							
2007-2008/45%	46%(152)	37%(92)	54%(60)	NA	46%(122)	48%(43)	14%(23)
2008-2009/50%	81%(167)	76%(81)	86%(86)	NA	81%(150)	82%(65)	61%(22)
2009-2010/50%	74%(180)	67%(60)	78%(120)	NA	73%(178)	72%(91)	25%(23)
2010-2011/55%	80%(175)	72%(56)	83%(100)	NA	80%(167)	76%(72)	38%(19)

Note. *Science and Social Studies TAKS were included in these calculations.

Table 2 displays the student performance data for the charter high school under study as it pertained to the federal accountability system under the NCLB Act for high schools. Under the federal system enrolled 10th graders were assessed with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in Reading and Math. The largest deficits in student performance were in the subject of math. Within math, the lowest performing subpopulations were the Special Education subpopulation, followed by the African American population, and the Economically Disadvantaged population. In the reading area, the Special Education subpopulation was the predominant lowest performing subpopulation. In 2011, the campus did not make AYP Math due to performance of the ALL group, African American, Economically Disadvantaged, and

English Language Learner subpopulations. The campus also missed the federal standard in 2011 in Reading/ELAR in the Hispanic and English Language Learner subpopulations.

According to the guidelines of the NCLB, a campus may enter into a stage of intervention after missing the standard for 2 consecutive years. During the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 years, the campus did not meet standard; however, there were criteria within the guidelines of NCLB that allowed campuses to be rated Met AYP if the size requirement for the ALL group and any subpopulations was not met. The size requirement was for the ALL group as well as the subpopulations was 50 students and 10% or 200 students.

Also in 2009-2010, the campus did meet a provision of meeting AYP standards based on the criteria of required improvement based on an increase of more than 10% from the prior year performance rate. The campus improved in the ALL group by more than 10% in 2009-2010 ELAR and Math. After meeting AYP for two consecutive years, the campus was allowed to exit the school improvement program. However, in 2010-2011 the campus dropped in math by eight points and missed AYP for the first time again since exiting in 2010. In 2011-2012, the state of Texas applied for a waiver under the NCLB act to recalculate the rating used to measure campus and district performance due to its change of testing instruments from TAKS to STAAR with end of course exams across the state. Several causes for the change in scores over the 4-year time span were discussed during the interview portion of the data collection process.

Table 2

NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress Performance Data for XXX-XXX-001 for the Charter School High School Campus

10th Grade	ALL %(*n*)	African American %(*n*)	Hispanic %(*n*)	White %(*n*)	Econ. Disadvan. %(*n*)	English Language Learner %(*n*)	Special Ed. %(*n*)
Reading							
2007-2008/60%	60%(27)	64%(16)	55%(11)	NA	62%(22)	43% (8)	NA
2008-2009/67%	63%(46)	57%(21)	68%(25)	NA	62%(39)	63%(19)	38% (8)
2009-2010/73%	71%(41)	61%(18)	78%(23)	NA	71%(41)	71%(17)	29% (7)
2010-2011/80%	83%(40)	88% (8)	81%(32)	NA	83%(40)	81%(27)	53%(21)
Math							
2007-2008/50%	28%(27)	7%(16)	55%(11)	NA	33%(22)	29%(8)	NA
2008-2009/58%	28%(47)	10%(21)	42%(26)	NA	25%(40)	40%(20)	0% (8)
2009-2010/67%	78%(40)	65%(17)	87%(23)	NA	78%(40)	88%(17)	17% (6)
2010-2011/75%	70%(40)	50% (8)	75%(32)	NA	70%(40)	74%(27)	53%(21)

Phase 2 involved a review of the organizational structure of district prior to 2008 until present. Before the 2008-2009 school year, the campus was a single campus-district consisting of grade levels prekindergarten through 12th grade. The early childhood director oversaw the prekindergarten and kindergarten programs. One elementary principal oversaw Grades 1 through 5. At the secondary level, one principal oversaw Grades 6 through 12 with a Dean of Students who assisted with managing discipline and other duties as assigned by the secondary principal. The district had a monolingual Coordinator of Support Initiatives on staff who worked to engage parents, staff, and community stakeholders as well as develop partnerships with community organizations.

In 2008, the district formally applied to separate into three traditional campuses consisting of a high school composed of Grades 9 through 12, a middle school housing Grades 6

through 8, and an elementary school serving pre-kindergarten through Grade 5. August of 2008 brought about the creation of a new position, district accountability liaison. The district accountability liaison was responsible for working with campus leadership and faculty as needed as well as ensuring continuous collaboration between outside consultants (including state and federal service providers), campus leadership, and district leadership. In 2009, an assistant principal was added at each campus as well as Grades 6 through 12 had RTI Specialists and Content Specialists to assist with small group and one on one instruction for students and additional instructional support for teachers.

A bilingual Coordinator of Support Initiatives position was added to assist current coordinator as well as to support the increasing shift in ELL students and families. It was also observed that for Parent, Teacher, Student Organization meetings, raffle ticket system was used to determine number of attendees at monthly meetings. The traditional procedure of sign-in sheets for events such as monthly PTSO meetings had to be adjusted to more efficiently accommodate the for increase in parents and staff attending the monthly meetings. For example, prior to 2007-2008 academic year, average participation at monthly meetings was less than 50 people, after 2007-2008 school year, the meeting's attendance numbers began to increase into 300 or more attendees.

Additional administrative staff and instructional support staff were brought on based on student and teacher performance data as well as at the recommendation of outside consultants. All positions have been maintained to present with an increase in the number of assistant principals due to student growth at each campus. Central office began conducting bi-weekly administrator meetings in 2008 that included campus principals and dean of students. Upon review of artifacts, administrator meetings transformed from being informative and management

focused to instructional and professional learning oriented. This change notation was based on topics of discussion found on agendas. The topics shifted to best practice strategies for specific populations of students and having crucial conversations with staff, students, and parents. Campus leaders were challenged to target routine campus faculty meetings toward instruction.

Research Question 1

This research question asked for explanation of the steps and strategies that occurred to generate organizational learning at the organizational, campus, and individual (superintendent, principal, and teachers) levels. Going into the 2008-2009 school year, the superintendent was asked, "How did the campus get to be Stage 4 for AYP as well as a second year of Academically Unacceptable?" The first order of business that needed answering before any further learning could occur at the organizational level was to answer "how did the school get here, what does this mean now, and what do we need to do to increase student performance?" The answer to these questions became the foundation for organizational learning for the organization, campus, and individuals. The organizational changes occurred in conjunction with Fullan and Miles' (1992, 2007) three-phase process of change model. The changes that occurred at each phases of the change process are represented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

A review of campus and district improvement plans, student performance data, and interviews rendered strategies and changes which impacted change that were organized into themes such as leadership, curriculum, mission, and parental and community involvement. The events were then organized into a timeline based upon the academic year, in which the strategy was initiated, implemented, and became routine practice or institutionalized. Strategies such as replacing key staff, adopting a new curriculum, increasing and adjusting instructional day, and

utilizing the PLC process were introduced at various phases during the 4-year time period represented in the single case study.

Major initiatives and strategies were categorized into Miles' and Fullan's (1992, 2007) three phases of change involving initiation, implementation, and institutionalization based on whether or not they became part of routine procedure and practice and if there was evidence of increased student and teacher performance. The actions applying to the three phases of change were established through longitudinal coding (Saldana, 2013). Longitudinal coding required attributing events of a change process over time and comparing them (Saldana, 2013). Table 3 displays actions and strategies that specifically occurred during the initiation phase. Table 4 includes strategies that came to fruition and were implemented with fidelity. Finally in Table 5, all strategies and practices that were considered major changes which impacted student achievement routinely were labeled under institutionalization because they became common practices and procedures within the organization, campus, and classroom level.

Table 3

Initiation Phase of Miles and Fullan's Three Phases of Change

Area Affected	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Leadership	• Campus -7 Principals in 6 Years • District - Assistant Superintendent of PEIMS & Federal Programs • Consider hiring Principal w/Turnaround experience • District Liaison State & Federal Accountability			
Curriculum	• Master Schedule - based on block scheduling and no common planning and/or meeting time for staff during the instructional day and increasing instructional day by 25 minutes daily • Targeted professional development based on student and teacher performance • Researched best practice for master schedule for serving At-Risk students and consider built in time for Professional Learning Community Process by content 3 days/week and grade level 2 days/week	• Researching various other developed curriculums • Hired RTI Specialist • Hire Content Specialist • Student data talks/conferences		
Mission	• Annual review at district administrative retreat and with campus leadership			
Community & Parental Involvement	• Consider hiring one district staff member (Bilingual) assigned as a Coordinator of Support Initiatives, to complement current Coordinator of Support Initiatives			

Table 4

Implementation Phase of Miles and Fullan's Three Phases of Change

Area Affected	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Leadership		• Hired Principal with turnaround experience • Appointed District Liaison State & Federal Accountability		
Curriculum		• Targeted professional development based on student and teacher performance • Revised master schedule based upon student data, (double blocked MATH/ELAR-Reading students with enrolled MATH/ELAR class and a math/reading lab for enrichment/intervention/ remediation as well incorporated the Professional Learning Community Process by content 3 days a week and grade level 2 days a week, increased instructional day by 25 minutes daily (Excel time)	• State supported curriculum management system (CSCOPE & TRS) including vertical & horizontal alignment with supporting lesson plans and assessments • RTI and Content Specialist • Student data talks/conferences	
Mission		• Reviewed and discussed with all staff at district convocation and regularly scheduled campus meetings	• Review and Revise quarterly with administrators and faculty	
Community & Parental Involvement		• Two Coordinators of Support Initiatives (1 English speaker & 1 Spanish speaker), membership with 2 community/civic organizations, assist with parental engagement		

Table 5

Institutionalization Phase of Miles and Fullan's Three Phases of Change

Area Affected	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Leadership			• Consistent District & Campus Leadership • Consistent District Liaison State & Federal Accountability	
Curriculum			• Targeted professional development based on student and teacher performance • Revised master schedule based upon student data, students were placed in 2nd math class/reading class for enrichment/intervention/remediation as well incorporated the Professional Learning Community Process by content 3 days a week and grade level 2 days a week, Excel time-25 minutes of instruction time added to instructional day	• RTI and Content Specialist • Student data talks/conferences
Mission				• Review and revise quarterly by but addressed weekly by campus administrators, daily by staff and students
Community & Parental Involvement			• Two Coordinators of Support Initiatives (1 English speaker & 1 Spanish speaker), membership/partnership with several community/civic organizations assist with Parental engagement	

The majority of responses regarding the changes within the organization over time reflected student growth and staff needs as driving the decision making process as well as leadership shifting from a top-down model to a continuous improvement cycle more circular in pattern as far as decision-making. Interviewees also made references to "the importance of the district's vision as being more interactive even as far down as teachers having a lot of input as for campus and district plans." Teacher input and flexibility with change in wanting to do more for kids were several of the changes in mindset that occurred in staff at all levels and increased

organizational learning at all levels. It was reported the teachers and administrators shifted to a data driven focus with the end result leading to increased student growth and better preparedness of students who were graduating and entering into post-secondary learning and/or workforce.

In terms of specific changes that continued and became part of the organization's institutionalization of organizational learning, increased administrative support from the district was observed. Central office continued to assist campus staff with weekly principal meetings that focused on building utilization and facility maintenance. The purpose was to increase the separation of secondary and elementary campuses. All teachers who were interviewed reported increased instructional leadership and support with a focus on student success and meeting the needs of the students. There was also an increase in the number of campus-level support staff for teachers and students. Again at the campus level, most decision- making was made in committees causing an increase push for transparency and redundancy with the emphasis on sharing ideas and communication within the organizational structure.

In terms of community interaction several respondents stated "the community is coming to us and offering help." The superintendent voiced how the charter was a community-based charter school and was part of the community, politically and spiritually. The amount of involvement grew with size, based upon increased participation and involvement with the PTSO (Parent Teacher Student Organization), parent-student academic nights, and school community health fair. Several teachers reported that they specifically went out into the community to recruit families and students to enroll in the school as well as participate in community events. The school as well as the high school campus developed particularly good relationships with the local Rotary club which in turn sponsors a student Interact Club for the high school students. It was also noted that with the increase in staff and now having two Coordinators of Support Initiatives

(i.e. Parent Liaison), the number of parent participants with the partnership with a local community college had increased from 22 to 85 per semester.

One of the questions asked during the interviews related to demonstrating how organizational learning occurred centered around how the school fulfilled its mission. Interviewees concluded that it was important to reach each child and make sure that all were involved by continuously doing the right things for the students. The superintendent commented: "We are pretty adamant about our mission statement, and we have it posted everywhere, and make sure everyone understands that the school is the one to empower, and educate the whole child for life long learning, success as responsible citizens of our community."

The dean of students, who spent all of the time developing students and building relationships, referred several times to the importance of ensuring teachers and staff to grow by "putting students first and meeting the students where they are and helping them grow as people." Another concluded, "it is essential to be dedicated to the process of making kids successful." Several teachers also responded that it is everyone's, including student's, parent's, and staff members', job to help students become successful people and responsible citizens within the community. All interviewees mentioned that the staff and faculty at the campus as well as the central office revisit the mission statement to make sure that they are doing what they said they would do regularly. In order for organizational learning to happen at all levels, data were used to support mission fulfillment with students who might be the most at-risk and needy.

Interviewees stated several times that the mission, curriculum, and discipline were reviewed on a yearly basis prior to 2008. Now all three were on the forefront and center and were talked about on daily basis. It was concluded that in order to grow, "we always have to get

better in curriculum and discipline, and find more creative solutions to help our kids. “It is something that is living and can change as needed” as reported by the superintendent.

Research Question 2

This research question asked how a charter school overcomes unacceptable status through organizational learning at the organizational, campus, and individual level. The principal and the dean of students reported that the first step in helping students and staff grow required spending time in classrooms, doing walk-throughs, and observing teachers and students. Some time was spent monthly working with the state appointed accountability consultants for the state system known as the Campus Intervention Team and with the federal side’s Technical Assistance Provider in order to get out of a poor adequate yearly progress rating and become Academically Acceptable.

Another part of overcoming the unacceptable status to exit the school improvement program was through on offering supplemental programs and services to students. Tutoring before and after school became a standard service and was a non-negotiable for students who were not successful with classwork or state and local assessments. Saturday academies and summer mini-camps were developed for students needing remediation activities but also for providing students with enrichment lessons.

The use of data by staff and students became a standard practice in classrooms. Discussing and analyzing data during common planning times was routine and included reviewing the curriculum framework and students’ expectations with the lesson plans. Based upon data analysis, the master schedule was created, and essentially, it was based on students’ needs. Professional development became an ongoing and continuous cycle focused on student

and teacher needs. The campus and district began implementing a district behavior management system so that there was continuity from campus to campus and classroom to classroom.

Student-centered data drove the curricular decision making process as well as recognizing the children's "needs that don't show up in the data." The campus' leaders became focused on utilizing research based strategies, techniques, and supplemental materials. At the central office level, administrators came together to form a Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) that made sure the district and campuses had a good curriculum framework with a good fit to the population that could meet standards while having alignment with all grades.

One of the last tasks for maneuvering through school turnaround included celebrating successes among students, staff, campus, and district. All interviewees reported leadership and the consistency in leadership as the biggest factor for school turnaround and increased academic performance. With leadership being critical to success, there was a shift in the type of leadership that was visible. The shift went from managerial leadership to instructional leadership. As a result the leadership from the top-down has been stable and consistent. Additional layers of leadership and support for instruction were added at the central office level and campus.

In terms of curriculum the student focus and expectations were shared by all, and everyone was "on the same page as to what was happening" in classes. The community awareness of the school and options for parents to consider became ever present and was constantly evolving and focused on empowering the students. There was a greater understanding of school choice and increase in a sense of community within the school and campus community. The shift in focus was toward holistically developing children as citizens and human beings and giving children more opportunities. Parental involvement was another tremendous factor in increasing student achievement. The expansion of opportunities for parents and the community

to be involved resulted in increasing numbers of parents participating by volunteering and using opportunities to be a part of the school.

Research Question 3

This research question asked how members of the organization viewed their experiences with change. Several teachers were interviewed and suggested that in the role of teacher, they were provided guidance and support from campus and district leaders. Staff believed that there was a common goal, focus on the kids, and a feeling of being a part of something. Teachers and administrators worked hard to create a productive learning environment for students and parents and staff knew that they were in a safe place. At the time students needed someone to teach them a lot more than just math or science. Sometimes there were different relationships with students than those had by the core academic teachers. Teachers became very collaborative regarding students' progress and development from all aspects. It was important that the principal had the vision for where the school needed to go and to make sure other people share it and were willing to carry the vision out. It was crucial that central office supported campus administrators. From the central office viewpoint and campus administrator level the increased in rigor of the interview process for teachers and administrators was impacting as well as the standards were raised as far as what type of staff were hired. The campus became a place where people wanted to work according to several staff interviewed.

In terms of parental involvement experiences, the high school level had less parental contact than did the middle school or elementary school. On the other side, parents were always interested and positive in support of teachers when contact was made. The parents were really involved because most students had several siblings at the campuses. Parents participated in the ancillary activities and chose to bring their students to the charter school. Parents were doing

more volunteer work, and the number of activities increased for parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Parents were willing to support the teachers and tried in any way they could. One teacher reported "very seldom had I called on a parent for help or to be involved in something and have had a negative response." Parents wanted their students at the charter campus. The campus leaders recognized parents' importance and appreciated them by honoring them.

When it came time to talk about the views and philosophy of leadership with staff, campus administrators, and central office the interview responses were aligned and similar. Every person interviewed believed that they could get the very best out of each student. They recognized unanimously how important it was to know the students and see what their needs were in order to fulfill those needs. They said what they did was always about the students and putting them first. One teacher responded that when he was hired in 2008, he was hired to be a great math teacher, and by 2010, he became not just a math teacher but a life teacher as well. "That's far more important than math in the long run for kids." The campus administrators and central office administrators reported similar experiences with being supportive of the students, campuses, and the mission statement.

The interviewees were asked about their perceptions of strengths and weaknesses the campus had over the 4-year period under study. Several strengths comments were focused on specific school improvement strategies such as mentoring/coaching skills, relationships, and knowledge of state and federal accountability requirements. As one interviewee stated, "I knew who my people were, whether if it was students, teachers, or parents." Another said, "Everyone worked hard to build relationships" with all stakeholders. They found importance in being on the same page regarding the mission and goals and in ensuring the teachers could carry them out.

When building relationships, it was crucial to have teachers' buy-in for doing what they needed to do and to develop teachers to be leaders of a team as well as in the PLC process. The superintendent said, "It was my job to see leadership potential in others, allow others to make decisions, and to empower others to be leaders."

School safety and maintaining the safety and order in the school was strength of the campus and district. The interviewed teachers suggested that time management and not having enough time in the day were two of the biggest weaknesses they worked to overcome. With time management being a weakness, "having enough energy and strength to get everything done that needed to be done in an appropriate timeframe" was a challenge for two teachers. The superintendent stated that one of her weaknesses was that she tended not "to step in as soon as I needed to" and to "let others try to lead until they couldn't lead anymore." The dean of students responded about dealing with discipline the majority of the time, during which the focus sometimes fell on the one certain problem rather than seeing the whole picture in terms of the mission and meeting the students' needs. Two teachers reported wanting to be involved in so many things and wanting to help out in so many different areas which caused time management to become a weakness to overcome.

All interviewees were asked what change had the greatest impact. They responded with the words *stability* and *continuity* in the administration and leadership at the campus and central office levels. During the academic years of 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, continuity occurred for the first time as a campus principal was hired and retained for more than one academic year. From 2010-2011 to present, campus leadership remained stable and constant due to support and mentorship from the 2008-2010 campus principal. Fullan (2007) stated that the principal has always been the gatekeeper of change, often determining the fate of innovations coming from the

outside or from teacher initiatives on the inside. One of the teachers exemplified the use of these terms as follows:

> Having these people there and having the focus that they had and being driven by data and making good educational decisions for the students and helping them meet their needs has had the biggest impact on the student success and the progress.

Curriculum was the second highest response and involved "getting the kids prepared to move on." One of the teachers interviewed referenced the change in curriculum by the following statement, "I feel like we're planting seeds with them, and we may not see them sprout, but at least it's there when they need; they can call on it." The dean of students expounded:

> I think all success starts at home, so I'd say parental involvement. Once the parents had bought in, of course, they'll help the school in any way to make sure that their child is successful. If students saw that their parent's care enough, if our parents saw that we care enough about them and then we cared enough about their student, they supported us in that partnership in helping their kids be more successful.

The dean of students summarized the interview with the following statement: "In total, it's a combination of all of them. It takes the whole of the school working together from custodians and maintenance and cafeteria staff to RTI specialists to good counselors and administrators to high-qualified teachers to the parents and community."

Summary

Based on the review of the performance data and interview responses, increased student achievement occurred due to several reform strategies and best practices. The primary reform strategies and best practices that had the greatest impact included consistent campus leadership and parent and community involvement with the campus. Mission and focus were secondary strategies that contributed to the increase in teacher effectiveness and student achievement. All of the interviewees stated at some point during each of their interviews "it's all about the kids" in support of the common mission and focus the campus and district maintained from the beginning of the reform effort until present. Data revealed consistency among all levels of leadership and

consistency at the campus level are present. Additionally it was found parents and community stakeholder's support and buy-in was based on transparency by the administration and leadership at all levels and directed toward all stakeholders including, most importantly, students.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

The purpose of this single-case study was to discover how an inner city charter school, with a high percentage of at-risk students, increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced simultaneously with administrative challenges and increases in state and federal standards. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders that included teachers, principal, dean of students, and the current superintendent. A review of performance data over a 4-year period as well as faculty and administrative meeting minutes and professional learning community (PLC) meeting agendas was conducted and chronicled into a timeline with information gained from interview participants. In Chapter 4, all data including interview responses were analyzed against three research questions and then categorized into one of three phases of change according to Fullan and Miles' (1992) three phases of change. Participants reported that consistent and stable leadership in connection with strong parent and community involvement in the school and community resulted in the greatest impact on increased student achievement. Overall, the organization began to learn and evolve over time to maximize learning for all stakeholders at the district, campus, and individual levels.

Major Findings and Themes

Despite several isomorphic pressures affecting one high school campus, the district and campus organizations evolved and learned how to learn and grow at all organizational levels. During an analysis of the data and based upon the figure in Chapter 2, a unique combination of elements from each of the three areas produced increased student achievement and organizational learning for all stakeholders. Figure 2 summarizes the school reform strategies, institutional theory and isomorphic pressures, and organizational learning frameworks interacting

together throughout the stakeholders' journey through the school improvement process. A balance was present when all three areas worked together for the common purpose of raising student achievement.

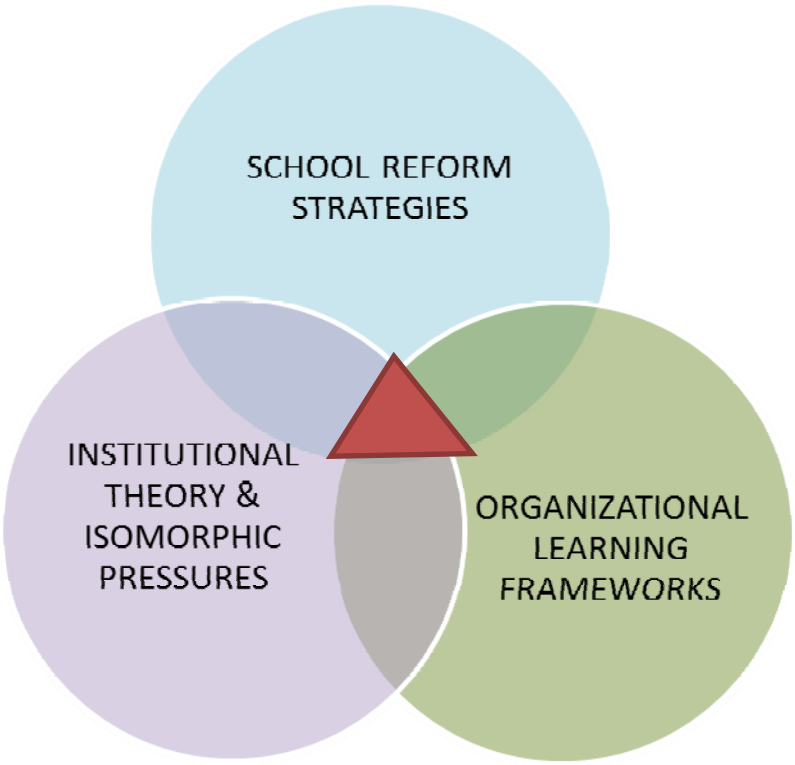

Figure 2. Summary of the relationships among the theoretical foundations for this study.

As a result, steps were taken to modify the actions at the district and campus level to achieve identified goals. The following information describes the practical steps identified to achieve redefined goals. The first major finding of organizational learning was displayed by the ability to understand and the willingness to adjust and adapt to the following isomorphic pressures while navigating through various phases of change with several specific school reform strategies. The campus and district staffs worked diligently to ensure structures for organizational learning frameworks were in place to culminate in increased student success. The lack of consistent campus leadership at the high school campus created an isomorphic pressure

amongst teachers as well as at central office. The district struggled with the ability to maintain consistent leadership due to the inability to compete with compensation as compared to other districts as well as the level of experience and willingness of staff to leave a traditional public school positions for a charter school.

Two additional pressures impacting the case study's data included the campus's attempts at meeting the performance criteria for both state and federal accountability systems simultaneously. The two systems measured performance standards in different ways. A second major finding of the evolving learning organization was the district's response to ensuring all stakeholders were educated and knowledgeable regarding the two separate accountability systems. The district created a district accountability liaison position whose roles involved understanding and becoming an expert on all facets of the state and federal accountability systems as well as keeping up with both systems as they evolved over time. The district liaison educated the central office administration and the campus staff members with all necessary information needed to navigate within both systems at the same time. Sharing of information frequently and keeping all stakeholders on the same page began the process of establishing organizational learning frameworks.

A third finding of the study was that a continuous improvement model developed over time. The district began functioning within a model of continuous improvement at all levels and in all programs. The first step in the organizational learning framework began with conducting a needs assessment. The needs assessment revealed strengths and weakness in all areas within the organization at central office, at the campus level and into the classroom level. It became crucial for all stakeholders to be informed with all of the facts and knowledge necessary to begin the school improvement process. As specific school reform strategies were initiated and

implemented, new procedures and practices evolved and became institutionalized within the organization at various levels. These strategies became best practices and were held as common expectations by all stakeholders. When the appropriate school reform strategies were implemented with fidelity and became part of the culture of the organization, organizational learning occurred within a given framework as well as the institutional theory supported student success and increased learning for all members of the charter school. An example of the continuous improvement model at work was during 2008-2009 school year the comprehensive needs assessment revealed a strong need for a detailed and structured curriculum for the campus. In 2009 -2010 the campus implemented a new curriculum framework and management system. Each the year since, the campus and district conduct a curriculum audit as part of the comprehensive needs assessments as to ensure that what is being used is what is best for the students whom the campus serves.

It became crucial that when including all stakeholders in the continuous improvement model, that the parents, students and community members were the number one priorities. A fourth major finding was the impact of parental and community involvement in the campus and district. There were several instances when parental involvement on campus and district improvement plan committees empowered parents and community members to be a part of the learning organization and work with the school and staff to meet identified goals for students. As parental and community involvement increased the campus began to develop and seek opportunities for stakeholder participation and involvement. Opportunities such as a community health fair, was developed and continues to be an annual event held at the campus. The campus has also invited to parents to attend PTSO meetings around report card dates as to encourage parents to receive their student's report card and conference with staff if necessary prior to the

official release. The campus also conducts academic focused nights such as math night, science night, etc… and host test readiness seminars for parents prior to state testing windows. By offering a variety of opportunities for parents and community stakeholders, there has been a sense of ownership and pride developed that has impacted students positively. In terms of parental and community involvement, the relationships with parents and opportunities to participate and support campus activities as well as the relationships and partnerships the school initiates and cultivates within the community itself are crucial to reform success.

The organization became a learning organization grounded in a framework that began with consistent and stable leadership at all levels from the superintendent and key central office leadership to campus leadership and all instructional staff. Strategies initiated due to the poor student performance, became the preferred strategies used in future reform efforts. All strategies were supported by research and agreed upon by all stakeholders before any implementation began. The central administration and campus staff members, including teachers, began continuous reviews of all programs, procedures, and strategies as common practice therefore monitoring effectiveness and level of impact and made changes and adjustments accordingly. This process served as the guiding framework for continuous learning at all levels. During this study, the district ensured that all practices and procedures which contributed to increased student achievement became standard operating practice and served as non-negotiable. Although central office leadership might be consistent, leadership at the campus level might not therefore have an equally tremendous impact on student achievement. The relevance of consistency is important not just for student success but also for teacher and staff learning.

Discussion

The relevance of the case study brought about the opportunities for the district, campus leadership, and teachers to develop, implement, and reflect about the practice, impact, and effectiveness of reform strategies. It has become critical at all levels to stay true to the continuous improvement model in measuring student progress and achievement. During the case study interviews, recommendations were made to establish a district curriculum and assessment team to ensure curriculum based assessments was in alignment with the curriculum and to allow more time for staff to preview and plan based on the student performance data and teacher evaluation information. At the central administration level, there was a recommendation to conduct routine curriculum audits and review for vertical alignment to ensure students' preparedness for the state's increasingly rigorous end of course exams. At the campus level, the effective use of data expanded as they were used more frequently to follow and measure student progress. In terms of Secretary Duncan's four areas of major reform, the charter school adopted rigorous standards and built useful data systems specifically for improving regular campus practices and procedures. Both adopting standards and building data systems supported the implementation of curriculum and assessment alignment. Through increasing standards and expectations for students and staff, it was important to continue to offer anything and everything in terms of academic and extracurricular options for students "just so they'll have a place that they belong, feel like they belong, that they have value in their school, because they're involved in some activity."

Additionally, the data revealed the critical nature of continuing to push students to excel and not merely achieve. The focus must continue to be on increasing the rigor and instruction for students to excel at what they learn in the classroom. As the district and campus

demographics changed, it became evident that teachers must understand the culture of the students and the community in which the students live. Furthermore, the job of administrative staff is to lead and teach teachers and other staff to watch and listen to students and parents in order to work effectively with each student and maximize each student's potential. In leading teachers and staff, it became more critical for campus administrators to shift their paradigms from a management orientation to an instructional leadership position. By becoming instructional leaders, administrators fulfilled another major reform strategy presented in July of 2009; they gained abilities to recruit and retain effective teachers. Instructional leaders provide on-the-job training as needed and any additional support a teacher may need in the classroom in a timely and efficient manner.

Secretary Duncan's last major area of reform required turning around low-performing schools. The campus and district accomplished this by hiring campus and central office leadership with school turn-around experience. Additionally, collaboration between the district liaison and both of the state (CIT) and federal (TAP) service providers enabled change. With the experience of enabling school turnaround, the administrative staff gained greater abilities for working together and the campus the immediate needs of each whole child and their parents along with supporting staff were met.

The case study demonstrated generalizability with one school reform study discussed in Chapter 2. Fryer and Dobbie (2013) provided a basis for five policies or reform strategies that increase student performance. The first strategy involves providing frequent teacher and student feedback. In the current case study, the campus made sure that teachers received feedback about walkthroughs and observations within 24 to 48 hours. Staff members were required to make

contact with parents and guardians at a minimum of once per 6-weeks and more frequently for the students struggling academically.

The second strategy required using data driven instruction with students (Fryer & Dobbie, 2013). Staff continuously assessed instruction during lesson plan development and monitoring students during each unit of instruction. Teachers participated in re-teach activities. Staff also discussed students' progress with lessons weekly by using monitoring checks and assessment data.

Fryer and Dobbie's (2013) third strategy involved high-dose tutoring with small groups of six or less children that occurred at least three to four times per week. The campus began intensive tutoring for students at-risk of failing based on their prior year of performance from the first day of the school year. In school tutoring and RTI began to occur within each instructional day as well. RTI was utilized small groups and with specific frequency and durations based upon students' needs. In school tutoring required increasing the instructional day by adding 25 minutes to the instructional day for advisory time during which staff could work with students on targeted instruction based upon student performance data. The fourth strategy was increasing instructional time by 25 minutes per day as referenced above (Fryer & Dobbie, 2013).

The final strategy or policy involved ensuring that academic achievement the single most important focus for the charter school campus (Fryer & Dobbie, 2013). It became common practice to have students develop class missions and goals aligned with the campus' and district's missions and goals. Staff also conducted periodic data-talks with students to include students in understanding their progress to their goals and to ensure that all students and teachers were "on the same page," as was said in the interviews, and understood the expectations.

In relation to Horsburgh's (2011) study for understanding the characteristics exemplifying high achieving charter schools in Colorado, the results of this case study were not generalizable. Any given charter school has a different focus, mission, purpose, group of students, and community who has unique needs that may be different from the area served by another charter school. Horsburgh's (2011) found the most references to program, curriculum, and mission than any of other category; however, in the current case study, leadership received the most references as the strongest characteristic. Community involvement was also high in my case study as compared to Horsburgh's findings. Community involvement became the responsibility of the principal in Horsburgh's study as compared to the campus and district hired personnel specifically to cultivate and foster parental and community involvement.

Lastly, Blanco (2009) provided similar reform strategies as those found by Fryer and Dobbie in 2013; both sets aligned well with several of Secretary Duncan's areas of reform. Data-driven decision making and instruction demonstrate a significant impact on student performance between all three above-mentioned sources as well as in my particular case study. Having a clear vision and putting the children first, according to Blanco, was most important for cultivating and changing the culture of the district; Blanco's assertion corresponded to results of the current case study. Also, Fryer and Dobbie's finding that high expectations for all students is necessary further corroborated the transferability of the current study's findings.

Recommendations for Further Research

This case study revealed how consistent campus leadership and relevant parental and community involvement positively impacted student success. Future research could focus closely on the areas impacted by each particular school reform strategy. Additionally, the effect

of reform strategies on students and teachers other than on increased student performance needs further investigation.

A third area for future research could be addressing the significance of parental and community involvement and parental choice in determining student success. Currently, charter schools follow to the same standards for state and federal accountability as traditional public schools. Therefore, it could be helpful to have empirical research findings for charter school environments regarding various the accountability frameworks used to measure student performance as well as student progress. A fourth area for future research includes focusing on the impact and effectiveness of federally and state assigned monitors', Technical Assistance Providers', and External Campus Intervention Team members' leadership with a campus and/or a charter school district.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

IRB PERMISSION LETTER

UNT

A green light to greatness.

THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

September 16, 2014

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Jane Huffman
Student Investigator: Amanda Subjinski
Department of Educational Administration
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 14292

Dear Dr. Huffman:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "A Case Study of an Urban Charter School's Journey of School Improvement Reflecting Applied Organizational Theory, Institutional Learning and School Reform Strategies." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. **Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, September 16, 2014 to September 15, 2015.**

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and **use this form only** for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications. **If continuing review is not granted before September 15, 2015, IRB approval of this research expires on that date.**

Please contact Shelia Bourns. Research Compliance Analyst at extension 2018 if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Chad R. Trulson, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Criminal Justice
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
1155 Union Circle #310979 Denton, Texas 76203-5017
940.369.4643 940.369.7486 fax www.research.unt.edu

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: A Case Study of an Urban Charter School's Journey of School Improvement Reflecting Applied Organizational Theory, Institutional Learning and School Reform Strategies

Student Investigator: Amanda Subjinski, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Educational Administration. **Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Jane B. Huffman.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this single-case study will be to discover how an inner-city charter school with a high percentage of at-risk students increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced simultaneously with administrative challenges and increases in state and federal standards. The research may allow for telling the story of the charter school's policies and practices and how they are developed and adjusted as part of exiting the School Improvement Program while increasing student achievement. This study may provide evidence regarding the ability of charter schools to serve predominantly at-risk students from low socioeconomic backgrounds while resulting in increased student achievement.

Study Procedures: You are being asked to consent to an interview. With your permission the interview will be audio-recorded. The interview will include questions about your role at the school being studied during the timeframe of 2008 to 2010. The interview will take about 30 to 90 minutes to complete. If you do not consent to recording the interview, the interview will not be recorded. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. The location of the interview will occur at a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient for you and the investigator.

Foreseeable Risks: There are no foreseeable risks in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. You are free to withdraw at any time or not answer any questions without penalty.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, but we hope to learn more about successful school reform strategies and how they work in learning organizations.

Compensation for Participants: None

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB
FROM 9/16/14 TO 9/15/15

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Your confidential information will not be used in any report. Research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of Dr. Jane Huffman in the Department of Educational Administration and only Dr. Huffman or the student researcher will have access to the interview and data records. If recorded, the audio-tape will be destroyed after it has been transcribed; the student researcher anticipates having interviews transcribed within 2 months of its taping.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact *Amanda Subjinski* at [redacted] or *Dr. Jane B. Huffman* at (940)-565-3158.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights:

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- The student researcher has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB
FROM 9/16/14 TO 9/15/15

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

For the Student Investigator:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

_____ _____

Signature of Student Investigator Date

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB
FROM 9/16/14 TO 9/15/15

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNT Informed Consent

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: A Case Study of an Urban Charter School's Journey of School Improvement Reflecting Applied Organizational Theory, Institutional Learning and School Reform Strategies

Student Investigator: Amanda Subjinski, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Educational Administration.

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Jane B. Huffman.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this single-case study will be to discover how an inner-city charter school with a high percentage of at-risk students increased overall student achievement and attained acceptable performance status when faced simultaneously with administrative challenges and increases in state and federal standards. The research may allow for telling the story of the charter school's policies and practices and how they are developed and adjusted as part of exiting the School Improvement Program while increasing student achievement. This study may provide evidence regarding the ability of charter schools to serve predominantly at-risk students from low socioeconomic backgrounds while resulting in increased student achievement.

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Foreseeable Risks: There are no foreseeable risks in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. You are free to withdraw at any time or not answer any questions without penalty.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, but we hope to learn more about successful school reform strategies and how they work in learning organizations.

Compensation for Participants: None

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Your confidential information will not be used in any report. Research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of Dr. Jane Huffman in the Department of Educational Administration and only Dr. Huffman or the student researcher will have access to the interview and data records. If recorded, the audio-tape will be destroyed after it has been transcribed; the student researcher anticipates having interviews transcribed within 2 months of its taping.

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Research Participants' Rights:

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- *The student researcher* has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

_____ Printed
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

For the Student Investigator:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

_____ _____
Signature of Student Investigator Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Title _____

Length of service on-site _____

1. In what capacity (ies) were you involved with the school between 2008 and 2010?
2. What was the organizational structure of the school in 2008?
3. What has been the organizational structure of the school after 2010?
4. How has it changed over time?
5. How much of your time was spent administering school, classroom, and district business?
6. How was your role important to the school's and student's success?
7. How does your school interact with the community now compared to 2008?
8. How would you describe the parental role and parental involvement in your school now compared to 2008?
9. What programs has your school developed as a result of poor performance under the state and federal accountability systems?
10. How does your school fulfill its mission?
11. How often did you and your staff review mission, curriculum, and discipline procedures before 2008? After 2010?
12. What drives the curricular decision-making process now? Before 2008?
13. What was your view or philosophy of your leadership role in this school between 2008 and 2010?
14. What are your own strengths and weaknesses as a leader?

15. Describe the biggest successes for your school since 2010 in the following areas?
    a. Leadership
    b. Curriculum
    c. Mission
    d. Community Involvement
    e. Parental Involvement
16. Which change mentioned above do you think had the greatest impact on increased student success?
17. Do you have any recommendations for changes that may potentially increase student success that have yet to be considered?
18. Do you have any other comments or feedback you would like for me to include?