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Which School- and Community- Characteristics Lead to Charter School Success?

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Which School- and Community- Level Characteristics Lead to Charter School Success?

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Abstract

Charter schools have existed in the United States for thirty years, with mixed results. Research has largely focused on charter school failure and an analysis of what led to the demise. This study aimed to understand characteristics predicting charter school success, alongside those predicting failure. Specifically, it focused on a charter school’s first six years to understand how one successfully establishes a strong foundation, with the expectation that early success will lead to long-term success.

To understand characteristics predicting charter school success and failure, a review of existing data determined which charter schools were successful. Then, founding school leaders were surveyed to understand foundational priorities, successes, and struggles. Finally, founding school leaders were interviewed, gathering more data about foundational priorities, successes, and struggles.

The results showed academic achievement, business management, school culture, and mission and vision predicted success. Academic achievement resulted from prioritizing people. Therefore, future leaders should prioritize people first, as well as understand how to establish a comprehensive school district.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Charter schools have existed as a strategy to reform education in the United States since 1992, when the first public charter school opened in Minnesota (Gleason, 2017, p. 559). No matter one’s perspective on whether or not charter schools are the right way to reform education, the fact remains that they are serving many students in the United States. As of 2017, approximately three million students attended almost 7,000 charter schools in all but seven states (Gleason, 2017, p. 559). For this reason, it is important to understand what charter schools are and how they can most effectively provide an excellent education to students and families. According to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, the number of charter school openings has been decreasing after a peak in 2013, but they are still educating millions.

CHARTER SCHOOL OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS OVER TIME
Since the first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992, there have been thousands of charter schools opened (and closed) in 43 states, as well as the District of Columbia. “Of the approximately 6,700 charter schools that have ever opened across the United States, 1,036 have closed since 1992” (Consoletti, 2011, p. 7). Between 2009 and 2016, 4,026 charter schools opened and 1,666 charter schools closed (LiBetti, A, et al., 2019, p.11) . Charter schools have had mixed results: some have demonstrated great success in educating students, others have failed to reach their collective mission of presenting a better option for students living in areas with failing schools (CREDO, 2015, p.37).

Charter schools share certain commonalities with, but are different than traditional public schools (TPS). They are similar in that they are public schools, open to all students free of charge, required to take standardized tests and report results publicly. They are publicly financed but are different from traditional public schools (TPS) because they are regulated in fewer areas related to curriculum and instruction, staffing, and budget decisions (Gleason, 2017, p. 559). The idea behind charter schools is that they can be more innovative and have more flexibility to respond to the needs of their communities. Charter schools can function as an educational reform lab, testing innovative educational strategies that can be shared with traditional public schools (TPS) that tend to be less agile in their abilities to innovate. “President Barack Obama highlighted this point, saying that charter schools ‘that are successful can provide effective approaches for the broader public education system’” (Gleason, 2011, p. 560).

Charter schools are designed to be more subject to the market, succeeding only when meeting the needs of the market. When charter schools are successful, they will
thrive. If schools are not meeting the needs of the educational market, they will be, in theory, closed for lack of enrollment (Jones, 2013, p.1). Without students enrolled, there will be no funding; and with no funding, there is no support for the school.

In addition to charter schools being subject to the market, they are subject to accountability through their sponsors. The United States Department of Education (2000) defines the role of accountability through sponsorship in great detail, arguing that, “Even though charter schools may be designed to ‘break the mold’ and ‘think outside the box,’ these schools are usually held to the same or greater outcome standards as other public schools.” Charter schools must be sponsored (by whom is dictated by varied state laws), and the sponsor (not the state) is responsible for ensuring that the charter school is fulfilling obligations as set forth in the charter and a performance agreement with the sponsor. Schools that are unsuccessful according to the sponsor are either non-renewed or have their charters revoked, providing greater accountability.

According to a study supported by the Network for Public Education, more than one in four charter schools closed by their fifth year between 1999 and 2017, and by year ten that number increased to 40% closed (Burris and Pleger, 2020, p.5). This also means that by the fifth year nearly 75% of charter schools were operating and serving students and by the tenth year 60% of charter schools were still operating. According to an article in the Washington Post that cited the Burris and Pleger study, charter school advocates say “it is inevitable that some charter schools will fail but that the closure rate is less than with privately funded start-up initiatives”; while charter school opponents say, “there is little public accountability over many charters and that they drain resources from traditional districts” (Strauss, 2020).
The debate over educational reform initiatives and their place in public education is far from new and encompasses a broader spectrum than only that of charter schools.

**A History of Educational Reform in The United States**

For decades, many have raised concerns that the United States’ education system is failing to meet the needs of students. Media and educational advocates regularly report test scores, pitting U.S. students’ performance against that of students in other countries and bemoan that U.S. students are falling behind while other countries are making progress (Bradbury, Corak, Waldfogel, & Washbrook, 2015). There is concern that our economy and status as an international powerhouse are threatened by U.S. students’ status as the intellectual elite continues to fall in comparison to other countries.

A commitment to educational reform came in response to the 1983 report published by Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education: “A Nation at Risk.” This report declared a concern that our failing education system could lead to our nation’s demise:

*Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.*
What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur--others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments (National Commission on Excellence in Education).

In response to “A Nation at Risk,” education reforms came from both the federal and state government. In March of 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act working to develop standards for each students’ learning. In October 1994, the Improving America’s Schools Act was signed as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and provided funding for educational reform. One of the most notable federal reforms includes the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1997) which revamped the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, ensuring that students with disabilities had equitable access to education and a process was in place to ensure that schools were effectively doing so. In 2002, President George Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requiring greater accountability of schools with regard to student performance. This law was in place until 2015, when it was replaced with President Barack Obama’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which continued many of the accountability requirements outlined in NCLB. In 2009, President Obama also announced a grant called Race to the Top that focused on encouraging innovation and educational reform.

The research is clear that the U.S. educational system has not effectively served all students. Achievement gaps persist; U.S. students continue to perform at lower levels than students in other countries (Bradbury, Corak, Waldfogel, & Washbrook, 2015). Charter schools, in addition to other school choice options, have been presented as a path to uproot deeply embedded practices that are no longer relevant or effective, to do better.
than the current failing schools, especially in urban areas across the United States (CREDO, 2015). They are not a part of entrenched educational systems. Charter schools offer an alternative to traditional public schools (TPS) and are able to operate differently and more independently, with less regulation expected to lead to the ability to innovate and improve. Further, charter schools are beholden to the market; if they are not meeting the needs of their students and their community, or if they are not attracting families to enroll each year, they can be closed. If charter schools are not meeting the accountability standards as set by the sponsor, they can be closed. Conversely, traditional public schools are not closed for not meeting expectations of either families or the organization holding them accountable.

Highly successful charter schools have the opportunity to address the educational needs of students in innovative ways, reaching beyond the scope of the traditional public school system. Some schools have been more successful than others in reaching their mission and in providing a drastically better option for students (CREDO, 2015). Yet, as examined in the literature review (chapter two), far more research has been conducted as to why charter schools fail than as to why (and how) they succeed. Charter schools have been around for nearly 30 years and yet there is still much to learn and understand about what leads to their success.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Charter schools are inherently different from traditional public schools (TPS): they open to meet a need identified within the community in which they operate, they are governed by non-elected boards, they are held accountable by a sponsor, and they can
close if they are not performing as expected. Because they are educating so many in the United States, are so different from traditional public schools, and are so relatively new, it is important to study that which makes them successful, especially as they are establishing themselves during the founding years. The early years of a charter school will set the tone and establish the foundation on which many students will rely for a great education. According to the Network for Public Education, the first two years are the riskiest for the charter school. Thirty-six percent of charter schools that failed (closed) did so in their first two years. Burris and Pleger go on to say, “A majority of charter schools (59 percent) that failed by their tenth year failed early on, during years one through four” (2020, p.18). This indicates that what happens in the founding years of a charter school is likely to predict long-term success (or lack thereof). If that foundation is not strong, students may suffer the consequences. Unless reformers understand how successful charter schools established a solid foundation in the early years, new charter schools are at risk of opening and operating without identified best practices and may continue to perpetuate that which is not effectively educating young people. The existing research has focused largely on that which has caused charter schools to fail, and ultimately close. Now, researchers must focus on that which has helped charter schools succeed in establishing an effective charter school so that other educators may learn from these trailblazers and replicate their successes and avoid pitfalls.

To do that and better understand the characteristics that lead to charter school success, this study evaluated the first six years of a charter school’s operation with enrolled students to determine the priorities and successes of schools as they built from nothing to thriving (or not). The researchers intend for this study to serve as a guide for
charter school leaders-to-be, so they may better understand the prioritization that went into building successful schools and the lessons their leaders learned along the way, as well as lessons learned from leaders of schools that have not yet succeeded, or even those that have failed (closed). By examining the collective lessons from schools that have succeeded and those that have not, future leaders can take actions that will guide them toward greater likelihood of success, thus increasing the number of successful charter schools meeting their mission and providing significantly better educational opportunities for students.

**Charter Schools in Missouri**

To hone in on understanding charter school success, this study focused on charter schools in the state of Missouri in order to remove the impact of varied policies and guidance received by different charter schools in different states. In 1998, Missouri was the 34th state to authorize charter schools. Fifteen charter schools opened in Kansas City, Missouri in 1999. In 2000, two more opened in Kansas City and four opened in St. Louis, Missouri. The 1998 legislation authorizing charter schools in the state of Missouri limited them to operate only “in a metropolitan school district or in an urban school district containing a city with a population greater than 350,000 inhabitants. The cap restricted charter schools within the boundaries of the Kansas City Metropolitan School District or the City of St. Louis” (Thaman, 2014). Until 2005 legislation, charter schools operated under the local school district. In 2005, legislation made it so charter schools became their own Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

Missouri charter schools operate with the sponsorship of either a university, the Missouri Charter Public School Commission, or the local school district. In 2012, it
became possible for charter schools to operate in unaccredited districts or districts that are classified as provisionally accredited for three consecutive years (Young, 2012). The first to open under these guidelines is expected to open in the 2021-2022 school year. Since 1999, 62 charter schools have been approved in Missouri: 24 (39%) have closed, and two (3%) never opened. Of the remaining 36 charter schools, 16 are in St. Louis and 20 are in Kansas City (Thaman, 2014).

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Charter schools are a controversial solution to a perceived decline in the United States education system. Advocates and opponents alike have studied charter schools’ effectiveness in improving student outcomes. Data show that some charter schools have done well; others have not (CREDO, 2014). Understanding what it is that led some to be successful and others not successful remains. Attention has been given to what happens after the charter school is up and running, but less attention has been given to the startup, understanding what it takes to get the charter school up and running effectively in order to provide the foundation from which students can best be served. This study was designed to understand what founding school leaders of successful charter schools did (or did not do), for the purpose of guiding future founding leaders to more effectively establish a solid foundation.

Research Questions

This paper evaluated the evidence available from charter schools’ founding years (0-6), examining data from 46 charter schools in Missouri. Data determined which
priorities and practices led to either success or failure by asking and answering the two following research questions:

- Which school- and community-level characteristics predict charter school success in Missouri?
- Which school- and community-level characteristics predict charter school failure in Missouri?

**Definition of Success**

In order to understand the school- and community-level characteristics that predict charter school success in Missouri, the researchers first defined success. In the state of Missouri, a charter school must apply for renewal at the end of their fifth year. Therefore, the researchers’ definition of success began with the criterion that a charter school had to have been renewed after their fifth year in order to be considered successful. This study primarily focused on data from the time immediately before and after renewal (years five and six).

Even though achieving renewal required charter schools to demonstrate their worthiness for renewal (which required demonstrating some success), making it through renewal alone was not a comprehensive definition of success. The most important component to consider in determining a school’s success was academic outcomes. If a school was not able to provide an excellent education to students, the rest didn’t really matter. A school’s essential purpose is to provide a high-quality education. To measure academic success, the researchers compared the charter schools’ standardized testing data in the fifth and sixth years to the home districts’ data. Outperforming the academic
outcomes of the home district was an essential element to the definition of charter school success.

In addition to academic outcomes, the charter school had to demonstrate that it maintained or grew their enrollment through its sixth year. A charter school growing by adding grade levels or classes should have increased enrollment every year. A charter school that reached its maximum growth point should have maintained enrollment.

Enrollment was a key factor indicating if the charter school was, indeed, a good choice, according to families. The researchers also considered the attendance rate of the charter school an important criterion of success. It had to have exceeded that of the home district, in both the fifth and sixth years.

Finally, a successful charter school had to demonstrate a strong business foundation. Having a strong business meant the structure was there to support that which students need to succeed. The researchers required charter schools to show evidence of having maintained at least a 10% financial surplus in their fifth and sixth year in order to be considered successful. In Missouri, a charter school must have more than 3% financial surplus, or it is considered financially distressed. Financial solvency is critical to a well-run business operation, and a school is ultimately a business. Rather than accept the very bottom level of acceptable (3%), the researchers determined 10% was a stronger indicator of success for this study. Having the bare minimum (3%) is not enough to weather a crisis, but having enough to weather a couple of challenging years provides more stability for a school should they have an unexpected recession or financial crisis.
OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This paper follows the general standard for research papers beginning with an introduction of the topic, followed by a literature review, methods section, results and conclusion.

Chapter II: The Literature Review

The Literature Review provides context for charter school success as well as charter school failure. Significantly more research has been conducted as to why charter schools fail than as to why (or how) they succeed. Additionally, the research associated with charter school failure is most often conducted in conjunction with that of charter school closure. Little research has examined charter schools as they are operating, but not performing adequately to meet the needs of students and families, and their communities. Almost absent from the research is an understanding of the start-up process of charter schools.

After a thorough review of the available literature, twelve studies were selected for the study. Each study met the following criteria:

- Referenced schools opened in 1994 or after
- Published in 2000 or after
- Was found in either a peer-reviewed journal, systematic review, meta-analysis, case study or case control study
- Studied urban U.S schools
- Focused on the comprehensive school, rather than one particular element (i.e., academic outcomes only)
Chapter III: The Research Methodology

In Research Methodology, the researchers describe the methods implemented to thoroughly investigate the questions. The study was conducted in three distinct, but interconnected phases:

1) Review of Existing Data
2) Mixed Methods Survey Analysis
3) Mixed Methods Analysis of School Leader Interviews

In the Research Methodology, the researchers first explain the process for the Review of Existing Data of all charter schools in Missouri. Assessed against the definitions of success, charter schools were categorized as successful or not based on existing, publicly available, data. During data collection, the researchers determined that examining public data for each Local Education Agency (LEA), rather than each school building, would provide the most accurate public data. Data were collected for all charter schools to have had a charter approved by the state.

Following the Review of Existing Data, the methods chapter describes the process for administering the school leader survey, as well as the process of analysis. The survey was shared with 161 viable candidates via email and received 45 responses. Valid responses represented 40% of charter LEAs ever approved in the State of Missouri.

Finally, the methods chapter explains the process for selecting candidates for the interviews, the interview process, and the method for analyzing interview data. Sixteen interviews were conducted via Zoom: fourteen founding school leaders and two university sponsors, each of whom sponsors many LEAs. The founding school leaders all
served as Executive Directors/Superintendents and/or Principals/Heads of School during at least a portion of their time with their LEA.

**Chapters IV, X, VI: Results**

Chapters four through six include the results of the study, divided by the three phases of the study. Each results chapter provides data for one phase of the study: Review of Existing Data, Survey, and Interview.

First, the Review of Existing Data provides a detailed analysis of the categorization of charter LEAs as successful or not, trends of successful LEAs and trends of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. The review utilized publicly-available data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE’s) Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS).

During the determination for success, the researchers identified two categories and three subcategories of LEAs.

1. Successful LEAs
2. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success
   a. *on the cusp* LEAs
   b. *open* LEAs that did not meet criteria for success
   c. *closed* LEAs

In Chapter Five, the researchers provide a detailed analysis of survey results, which was administered to founding school leaders from all 46 charter schools in the State of Missouri that qualified for this study. Survey respondents represented 68% of LEAs that qualified for this study.
Chapter Six provides a detailed analysis of data from the interviews conducted in the third and final phase of the study. Interviews were conducted with sixteen people, fourteen founding school leaders representing each of the four LEA subcategories and two charter school sponsor representatives.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

Finally, the researchers provide conclusions based on trends across all three phases of the study as well as limitations of the study. This chapter analyzes patterns of prioritization that led to desired outcomes between and amongst LEA categories, but particularly examines those that directly led charter schools to meet the criteria for success. The researchers also offer recommendations for future charter school leaders indicating which characteristics to prioritize in order to achieve success. The researchers also highlight who within the organization should lead certain priorities. Finally, the conclusion chapter offers recommendations for future study to build upon the available literature in the hopes that more charter schools will be successful.

SUMMARY

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers examined school- and community-level characteristics that led to charter school success and failure by conducting a three-phased study evaluating the founding years of charter schools in the State of Missouri. The study included a review of existing data for each LEA, survey analysis of responses from founding school leaders, and interview analysis of founding school leaders and charter school sponsors. The results from each phase were compared and contrasted to identify trends. The research was then considered in conjunction with
available literature on charter school success and charter school failure in order to make recommendations for future founding charter school leaders’ design of a strategic plan to support prioritization of characteristics that would increase their likelihood for success.
CHAPTER II
Literature Review

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this systematic review was to gather and synthesize all relevant research that has determined the school- and community-level characteristics that predict charter school success in order to inform start-up charter schools of the characteristics most important to prioritize in the early years of operation.

METHODS OF REVIEW

Search Strategy

Several databases were used to search for relevant articles: Google Scholar, Eric, Academic Search Complete, and Education Full Text. The terms “charter school,” “success/ful,” “fail/ure,” “characteristics,” “urban,” “clos/ing,” “start/ing,” open/ing,” and “founding” were searched. The researchers also reviewed pertinent articles referenced in articles found through the search.

Selection Criteria

For the purposes of the study, the researchers accepted only studies focused on urban, public charter schools in the United States that opened in 1994 or later. The researchers accepted only the following types of studies: peer-reviewed journals, systematic review, meta-analysis, case studies, or case control studies that followed schools over time. Further, the researchers only accepted studies focused on
characteristics of schools succeeding or failing to stay open versus whether or not they served students well once open.

Criteria for Considering Studies for Review

Time Frame

Only studies focused on charter schools opened in 1994 or later were accepted for this review. This excluded only the very early schools opened from 1992-1993. Further, only studies published after 2000 were accepted for this review. 1998 is the year that charter schools were authorized in Missouri, and the researchers wanted to ensure that factors affecting charter school success were identified within similar timeframes, social and political contexts, and regulations. No studies were excluded by these criteria.

Types of Studies

Peer-reviewed journals, systematic review, meta-analysis, case studies or case control studies that followed schools over time were considered for this review. Commentaries and reports by political organizations were excluded. An example of a study excluded for being commentary is:


Good to provide an example of an exclusion.

Types of Charter Schools

For acceptance into this review, the researchers accepted only studies including urban schools in the United States. Because most charter schools are concentrated in urban areas, most studies met this criterion, although a couple were excluded because it could not be determined that the study focused on urban schools. One such study was:
Karanxtha, Z. (2013). *When a dream turns into a nightmare. Education Administration Quarterly, 49*(4), 576-609. This case study did not specify if the school was urban or not, so it was excluded.

Accepted studies were also limited to studies that included K-8 students. Therefore, any study with a focus on only high schools was excluded.

**Focus on Start-Up or Comprehensive Assessment of Success**

This study is specifically focused on that which builds a successful foundation in the founding years of a charter school. Therefore, only studies referencing school start-up or the qualities that lead to a school’s success or failure were accepted in the review. Studies that focused only on academic success once open, or one element of a charter school’s operations were excluded. For example, one study focused solely on charter school governance, and was therefore excluded.

**Search Strategy for Identifying Relevant Studies**

To better understand the relevant research related to school- and community-level characteristics that predict charter school success, the researchers initially utilized several broad key terms within many search engines in order to narrow the databases that would best generate results on the topic. It was determined the best databases to use included Google Scholar, Eric, Academic Search Complete, and Education Full Text. The researchers further narrowed the search results by adding parameters and key words.

After conducting a significant search through each of the databases, 808 titles, 79 abstracts, and 36 full studies in total were reviewed. (See Table 1)
Table 1 - Identification of Relevant Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source - Database</th>
<th>Titles Reviewed</th>
<th>Abstracts Reviewed</th>
<th>Full Studies Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google Scholar</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Search Complete</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Full Text</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the initial list was compiled, the researchers reviewed the 36 studies selected for review, removing duplicates and articles with limited relevance. Upon deeper evaluation of the 36 studies reviewed, nine fully met the criteria and were included in this systematic review. When reviewing the nine qualified studies, three more were identified as worthy of review when referenced by one of the nine qualified studies. Figure 1 demonstrates the systematic search process. In the end, twelve studies satisfied the search criteria:

- Referenced schools opened in 1994 or after
- Published in 2000 or after
- Was found in either a peer-reviewed journal, systematic review, meta-analysis, case study or case control study
- Studied urban U.S schools
- Focused on the school’s ability to stay open or close
Data Synthesis

Because the studies ranged in methodology (meta-analyses, systematic reviews and case studies), the researchers utilized a spreadsheet to code identified characteristics related to successful and failed schools. When a study identified a characteristic, it was added to the spreadsheet as a potential trend. For each of the next studies, any evidence supporting the same characteristic was coded as such. New characteristics were added to the spreadsheet as they were identified in the studies. Once all evidence related to successful or failing schools was compiled, the researchers selected characteristics identified as important in three or more studies. One characteristic with only two supporting studies was included because it was referenced in several of the other reviewed studies.
RESULTS

Through the search process, twelve studies met all of the criteria. Each study was unique with no overlap in specific data. There is overlap in the sense that some of the research relates to charter schools across the United States, while others are specific to one school or one state. All twelve studies are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Identified Qualifying Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Failure Traits Identified</th>
<th>Success Traits Identified</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 American School & University (2012) | ● Financial  
● Substandard Student Achievement | | St. Louis, Missouri | Case Study |
● Substandard Student Achievement  
● Local For-profit Management | | St. Paul, Minnesota | Case Study |
| 3 Cannata, M., Thomas, G., & Thombre, Z. (2013). | ● Effective Leadership  
● Strong Mission/Vision  
● School Culture/Parent Involvement  
● Business Management | Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, DC. | Case Study |
| 4 Carter, C. J. (2011) | ● Effective Leadership  
● More Diverse Population  
● Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers | Urban, Arkansas | Qualitative Study Using Interviews of School Leader |
| 5 Consoletti, A. (2011) | ● Finances  
● Mismanagement | | Meta-Analysis |
<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Substandard Student Achievement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Effective Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Qualitative Study Using Interviews of Various Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Facility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strong Mission/Vision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>District Obstacles</strong></td>
<td><strong>School Culture/Parent Involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Giblom, E. A., &amp; Sang, H. I. (2019)</td>
<td><strong>Substandard Student Achievement</strong> is NOT an indicator</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Non-Diverse Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>Survival Analysis Using Life Tables and Binary Logistic Regression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gleason (2017)</td>
<td><strong>Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers</strong></td>
<td>U.S Urban Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Han, C., et al (2017)</td>
<td><strong>Substandard Student Achievement</strong></td>
<td>Meta-Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Effective Leadership</strong></td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed methods: quantitative event history analysis from public sources and case study of two schools using an inductive approach looking for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The subject of charter school failure has been a hot topic amongst charter school advocates and opponents alike. The Center for Education Reform (2011) found that “of the approximately 6,700 charter schools that have ever opened across the United States, 1,036 have closed since 1992. That means that 15 percent of charters have closed for cause” (Consoletti, 2011, p. 7). Charter school advocates have cited closure as proof that charter schools are held more accountable, while opponents have cited closure as proof that charter schools are not a good educational reform. Either way, because the closure of a charter school has a specific end point and is often tied to concrete reasons for closure, the study of charter school failure included more concrete reasoning than the reasoning behind characteristics leading to charter school success. The studies included in this review examined charter school failure as reported after the fact. All of the studies looked at failure or closure through an event history lens. The findings of the six studies related to failure are displayed in Table 3 below.

| 12 | US Department of Education. (2004) | • Effective Leadership  
• Strong Mission/Vision  
• Hiring, Supporting, and Retaining Teachers  
• School Culture/Parent Involvement | U.S Urban Schools Meta-Analysis |

**Failure Trends**

The subject of charter school failure has been a hot topic amongst charter school advocates and opponents alike. The Center for Education Reform (2011) found that “of the approximately 6,700 charter schools that have ever opened across the United States, 1,036 have closed since 1992. That means that 15 percent of charters have closed for cause” (Consoletti, 2011, p. 7). Charter school advocates have cited closure as proof that charter schools are held more accountable, while opponents have cited closure as proof that charter schools are not a good educational reform. Either way, because the closure of a charter school has a specific end point and is often tied to concrete reasons for closure, the study of charter school failure included more concrete reasoning than the reasoning behind characteristics leading to charter school success. The studies included in this review examined charter school failure as reported after the fact. All of the studies looked at failure or closure through an event history lens. The findings of the six studies related to failure are displayed in Table 3 below.
### Table 3 - Characteristics of Failure by Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mismanagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* “Yes” indicates the study identified this characteristic as a significant contributor to failure; “No” indicates it was specifically claimed this characteristic did NOT contribute to the school’s failure; blank indicates this characteristic was not referenced as a significant contributor to failure.

Characteristics identified in three or more studies were included, with the exception of facilities. Facilities were included because the studies here were cited by others in their analyses.

Mismanagement was included because the Cannata (2013) and Leahy (2019) studies indicated business management was essential to success, which provided support to the idea that a lack of good management led to failure. Therefore, mismanagement was included as a reason for failure.

Although this vote count was an imperfect analysis because characteristics identified by the researchers of each individual study may have defined the characteristics differently, it provided an overview of that which leads to charter school failure. For the purposes of this systematic review, finances included any mention of financial trouble. Management included anything having to do with business practices or the management of the business operations of the charter school. Academics referred to the characteristic of having substandard academic achievement. Facilities referred to any reference to the
inability to secure facilities or having an inadequate facility. While the researchers specifically defined characteristics of failure, most studies did not and reference the terms very closely to those as outlined by the researchers.

**Finances**

Research on charter school closure identified finances as the leading reason for charter school closure. The Center for Education Reform (CER) found charter schools were most likely to be closed for financial deficiencies (41.7%) (Consoletti, 2011, p. 8). While many assumed charters were closed due to poor academic performance, the CER research demonstrated that “A charter school that is likely to fail on its merits will have displayed enrollment troubles, management deficiencies, and potentially operational failures before the academic problems are apparent” (Consoletti, 2011, p.12).

Support for the Center of Education Reform’s (CER) finding that finances were the leading cause of school failure were well-documented. Bowman (2000) and American School & University (2012) both cited finances as one of two reasons for two specific schools’ closings. The Paino study focused on charter school failure in North Carolina found that “charter schools in North Carolina report closing for only three reasons: Facility, Financial, and Mismanagement, with the majority of schools closing for financial reasons” (Paino et al, 2014, p. 516). Financial distress has been tied to enrollment because funding is allocated on a per-pupil basis. It has been difficult to disentangle financial problems related to enrollment from other factors. If students were leaving because of
poor academics, financial distress may have been the reason cited for closure even though the root cause may have been something else.

Another source of financial distress was found to be related to how the state provides funding to the schools. Bowman (2000) indicated that a failed St. Paul charter school “had not accounted for a one-year lag in enrollment-based school funding” (p. 3). Carter (2011) also talked about early years’ financial stress based on reduced state funding due to reduced enrollment and state funding calculations, which led to a cash flow problem and deficit for the year (p. 294).

Charter schools were found to have been further stretched financially because they often receive no funding for facilities. As the CER study pointed out, “the other cause of financial distress is the paucity of funds that many charter schools are expected to stretch to cover both their operations and their facilities costs” (Consoletti, 2011, p. 8). Consoletti (2011) also pointed out, in addition to having fewer sources of funds, charter schools had few big name, high-dollar partnerships to help them fill the gaps. Independent and grass-roots startups often did not have such powerful or generous connections (p. 9). No matter the reason, finances were the leading reason cited for charter school failure.

**Mismanagement**

Second to financial trouble was mismanagement, as cited by the Center for Education Reform (2011): “failing to produce audits, pay vendors, or conduct basic, required, oversight processes is a sure sign that whoever is in charge is not capable of leading a strong organization, or that perhaps a board is not focused on its duties and
responsibilities” (p. 10). The CER also found that many charters were closed due to ethical violations (p. 9).

Conversely, research on characteristics leading to school success indicated a need for good business management. Leahy and Shore (2019) identified management as essential to success pointing out it includes more than finances, but also “strength in areas of management: knowledge of and experience with areas such as finance, knowledge of real estate, and delegating” (p. 269). Cannata, Thoman & Thombre (2013) also found that business management was essential to a charter school’s success (p. 18). They highlight that effective management means delegating and knowing which elements to manage internally and which to allow someone else to manage: "charter schools require a variety of different services—food service, transportation, payroll and benefits, and janitorial services, to name a few. Successful schools knew how to prioritize spending for these services and which ones could be outsourced” (p. 19). Whether looking at charter schools from either the success or failure side, management was a critical component of determining whether a school succeeded or failed.

Poorest Academic Achievement

Most studies identified finances as the primary cause for closure, with the exception of the CREDO study (Han et al, 2017). The CREDO study focused only on low-performing schools, comparing those which closed and those remaining open. Therefore, they analyzed variations in schools that had low performance for common cause of closure, focusing primarily on the student population. CREDO found the following:

Closing schools had lower academic performance and smaller student enrollment than low-performing schools that were permitted to remain open. In fact, there
were steady declines in both academic achievement and growth in closing schools in the last three years before closure. Enrollment in those schools also dwindled in the last few years of operation. (Han et al, 2017, p. 3-4)

The remaining accepted studies had mixed findings with relation to academic performance as an indicator of either success or failure. Giblom and Sang’s Ohio study focused specifically on whether or not student achievement was a predictor of failure. Giblom and Sang (2019) found that 36.2% of charter school closures were tied to finances, with only 18.8% related to academic performance (p. 9). Giblom and Sang excluded this data from their analysis, though, after determining that the data was irregular. They did conclude, after the survival analysis, that "average scores in reading and math were not significant predictors of closure" (Giblom & Sang, 2019, p. 21).

The Paino et al (2014) study also reported that closed charter schools did not document poor academic performance as their reason for closure (p. 516), but they found that schools closed for finances performed lower than schools that remained open. (p. 527) Further, they found that “reading scores are significant predictors of closures, indicating that academics have an influence on charter school closures” (p. 516). Both the Bowman (2000) and American School & University (2012) reports cited academic performance as the second reason for closure, alongside financial trouble.

The Center for Education Reform (2011) found that 18.6% of school closures cited academic performance as the reason for closure (p. 10). The CER indicates that failing schools do have serious academic deficiencies, but that is not a prominent reason cited for closing: “closing a school for academic reasons—while important—is less likely because the operational deficiencies show up first” (p. 10). By all accounts, it was likely that poor academic performance was present in failing schools, but that reason may not
have been listed as the reason for closure because it was not as clear cut as closing a
school for financial reasons. Academic performance varied based on the student
population served, so a school with fewer at-risk students was less easily compared to a
school populated primarily with at-risk students.

Facilities

Finally, facility woes presented a moderate predictor of charter school failure.

This may have been a slightly skewed finding as all of the studies only included schools
approved and opened. There was likely a large number of schools who were approved but
never opened due to not finding an adequate facility (as is the case for two charters in the
past five years in St. Louis, MO). Consoletti (2011) wrote, “many charter schools lose
their facility or have difficulty finding one at all” (p. 13). For those that opened, though,
both Paino (2014) and Consoletti (2011) cited facilities as a leading cause for charter
school failure. While some could not find facilities, “some will settle for a very
inadequate facility and lose enrollment—and money—over it, ending up closing after
failing to secure the building they most needed to be able to deliver the education they
intended” (p. 13).

Success Trends

For the most part, there was a paucity of research identifying characteristics most
predictive of charter school success. While charter school advocates and opponents have
clearly articulated why charter schools fail, the reasons for success have been studied less
often, and when studied, have been more difficult to define. Seven of the twelve qualified
studies linked specific characteristics of a charter school to their success.
Each study defined what success meant. While there were minor differences within each study, each included student academic achievement data as a measure of success. They utilized state standardized testing data, comparing charter schools’ data to home district and/or state averages to determine success. The findings of the seven studies related to success are displayed in Table 4 below.

### Table 4 - Characteristics of Success by Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective School Leadership</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Mission/Vision</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture/Parent Involvement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*"Yes" indicates the study identified this characteristic as a significant contributor to success; blank indicates this characteristic was not referenced as a significant contributor to success.*

Characteristics of success identified in at least three studies were included.

Business management did not show up in the required three out of seven studies, but when reviewing the causes for charter school failure, poor business management
practices were present in both the Consoletti (2011) study as well as the Paino, et al (2014) study. Therefore, research indicated sound business management practices (or the absence of poor business management practices) were a characteristic influencing success.

For the purposes of this systematic review, effective school leadership included references to an effective founding leader. It also included references to longevity of leadership. Strong mission and/or vision included references to the creation and implementation of the mission or vision of the school. It also included references to the mission or vision in connection with other elements of operations or programming. Hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers included practices related to recruiting or hiring staff and supporting teachers once hired, including professional development. It also included references to teacher retention, both as a data point and the methods utilized to encourage retention. School culture and parent involvement included staff and student culture, the establishment of culture, and the practice of aligning culture to the vision of the school. It also included any indication of parental involvement in the operations or programming of the school, including board service.

Effective School Leadership

The most prevalent trend identified as contributing to the success of charter schools during the founding years was effective leadership. Effective leadership was highlighted in six of the seven studies as a critical component of charter school success, particularly in the earliest years of the school. Some studies specifically elaborated on effective leaders’ skills: leading others towards a cohesive vision was deemed most important. As Leahy and Shore (2019) outlined, “The effective educational leader sets the
culture, vision, and expectations in a school community, this role becomes pivotal in charters because of the unique design and focus of most charter schools” (p. 261).

Effective charter school leaders also needed to have an understanding of how to manage the business side of the school. Leahy and Shore (2019) described the types of skills needed in the charter school leadership role:

“Superintendent-type” skills (managerial leadership) in addition to instructional leadership skills were found to be valuable for charter school leaders. “Big picture skills” such as having an understanding of charter school law, compliance-based accountability, authorization and assessment, and high-stakes accountability and standardized assessments were found to be key elements of charter school leadership (261).

In a 2004 study, the United States Department of Education evaluated eight of the most successful charter schools in the United States. The study uncovered that effective charter school leaders had the ability to manage many elements of the school at once, while under a significant amount of pressure. During interviews with stakeholders, the United States Department of Education (2004) learned that most of the leaders were surprised at the level of commitment it took to create the systems needed to effectively open and operate a school.

Successful charter school leaders also demonstrated an ability to plan for and manage the unexpected. The Cannata study (2013) found that leaders repeatedly discussed the need to “learn on the fly” and work long hours for years, as they prepared to open the school and well beyond the first year. Charter school leaders needed to be flexible in order to effectively manage the multiple challenges they encountered every day. The Leahy and Shore study (2019) found a “multidimensional leadership approach”,

48
coupled with flexibility and a growth mindset were critical to leading successful charter schools (p. 263).

During interviews conducted in the Vanderbilt study, school leaders also articulated the importance of creating a professional network and seeking the advice of other leaders: “The best preparation, founders said, was networking with school leaders from other high-performing charter schools—both within the community and across the country—to learn best practices and avoid having to reinvent the wheel” (Cannata, Thomas, & Thombre, 2013, p. 12). Though the work was challenging, effective school leaders found collaboration with other effective leaders to ease the burden, creating a more efficient path to success.

**Strong Mission and Vision**

The characteristic of effective leadership was prevalent amongst successful charter schools, and it often appeared in conjunction with effectively leading towards a clear mission. “In a survey of 110 charter schools, charter school founders ranked ‘establish clear vision, mission, philosophy to which all are committed’ at the top of the list of advice to someone who is trying to create a charter school” (Cannata, et al, 2013, p. 6). Though the most successful charter schools studied did not have a similar vision or way of reaching their vision, the vision was clearly articulated and largely understood by all invested parties. “At the heart of each charter school is a well-conceived and powerful mission, a shared educational philosophy that guides decision-making at every level” (Department of Education, 2004, p. 14).

The U.S. Department of Education study found that how the mission brought the school community together was part of a charter school’s success.
Success comes not only from the ideas themselves but also from the focused and energized school culture that thrives in a mission-driven school. School communities become internally accountable - dedicated to working together to accomplish their shared goals, adjusting their approach based on results, and responding flexibly and quickly when needed (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 28).

The United States Department of Education (2004) also found that many of the most successful schools were small with a family feeling and strong community connection. Smaller schools were more adaptable and able to build connections within the community. Research demonstrated that an important part of the school leader’s role was defining and refining the mission and vision of the school in conjunction with other invested parties, including the governing board and parents. This process, in turn, created stronger investment which led to greater success.

Hiring, Supporting, and Retaining Teachers

Research demonstrated effective hiring and retention of staff also had a profound impact on the school’s success. Cannata, et al (2013) found that hiring staff who connect with the mission was critical to retaining effective staff. The United States Department of Education study (2004) also emphasized the need to hire people aligned strongly with the vision of the school. The same study identified the importance of a charter school focusing retention efforts on staff fit with the overall vision of the school (p.19). People were more likely to stay and build a successful school if they believed in the mission and vision and felt connected with the team.

Recruiting and retaining the right staff in the founding years, though, was identified as challenging. Cannata, et al (2013) found it especially challenging for schools
to find staff who could effectively navigate the challenges associated with wearing many hats and serving in multiple roles each year (p.28). The necessity of wearing multiple hats during the founding years came from the need to do more with less, in order to ensure financial stability (the lack of which has been attributed to school failure),

Another key to attracting teachers and promoting charter school success was the development and support of teachers. Gleason (2017) found, “teacher autonomy is a huge piece that may attract teachers to a charter school, and a culture of developing and coaching people can be persuasive to new teachers trying to start a career” (p. 26). Successful charter schools used different methods and strategies to provide that support, but some consistencies were evident. The United States Department of Education (2004) articulated the keys to supporting staff in their study:

Most of the charter schools visited provide teachers with additional professional development and planning time throughout the year. Some also have summer sessions during which staff build ownership of the school’s mission and vision, developing the systems and curriculum that will create the unique culture of the school (p. 21).

Though the studies outlined components of the professional development, there was no indication as to the actual effectiveness of the program, as might have been indicated through teacher surveys or interviews. The literature did show that successful charter schools had a clearly defined professional development program for staff that was believed to increase teacher retention and overall satisfaction.

School Culture/Parent Involvement

In addition to supporting a staff aligned with the mission of the school, successful charter schools developed a strong and cohesive school culture with family involvement.
“While our study did not reveal a strong relationship between high-achieving schools and state-of-the-art facilities, constructing a welcoming environment where staff and students feel safe is essential nonetheless—and requires a good deal of forethought and creativity” (Cannata, et al., 2013, p. 22). Cannata et al. (2013) went on to say, “on the road to founding a stand-alone charter school, it’s important that founders identify and collaborate with two of their most vital constituents: parents and community organizations. Parents have the potential to be a new school’s strongest allies or most fierce enemies” (p. 29).

Research demonstrated charter schools that focused on parent investment had greater success. “The fact that students are never assigned to a charter school, but are there as a conscious choice, helps create a voluntary civic community” (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 22). Successful charter schools created an environment where parents were connected through intentional choices related to their program and operations. As the Cannata et al. (2013) study highlighted, these elements might include things like volunteer requirements or the decision not to offer transportation:

Several schools explained their decision to not offer transportation, because they wanted a chance to connect with a parent twice a day at drop off and pick up.

Once parents are in the building, it becomes much easier to familiarize them with volunteer opportunities or roles with Parent Teacher Associations (Cannata et al., 2013, p. 30).

Conclusively, research connected parent involvement and school culture to charter school success.
Business Management

As outlined in the Failure Trends section, mismanagement was identified as a common characteristic of closed schools. According to Cannata, et al (2013), “the founders and CSO leaders we interviewed were clear: charter schools are not just educational centers— they are organizations with significant budgetary and operational needs and expectations. Managing the business side of the school is vital to its success” (p. 18). This study emphasized the importance of effectively managing the business side of a charter school in support of the vision and programming for the school. Cannata, et al (2013), went on to highlight the importance of strategic planning with an emphasis on financial health (p. 19).

The Leahy and Shore (2019) study connected effective leadership specifically to the management of the business. “Leaders displayed strength in areas of management: knowledge of and experience with areas such as finance, knowledge of real estate, and delegating. These could be influenced by the functions of the leaders’ current roles that are less related to day-to-day operations of the school and instructional leadership” (Leahy & Shore, 2019, p. 269). The need to manage from both an educational perspective and a business perspective was unique to the charter school leader profile. Many school leaders lacked the needed business acumen to effectively navigate the additional responsibilities required for starting and maintaining an effective charter school; charter schools whose leaders had strong business management skills tended to fare much better.

While the education of children is typically the primary concern for any educational leader, the successful charter school leader also needed to prioritize and effectively manage operational and business needs. Both studies that mentioned business
management as a characteristic of success connected the school’s business management needs to the overall vision, as well as a measure of effective leadership.

Conclusions and Discussion

The research examining charter school successes and failures led to some defining characteristics in need of further study to understand how those characteristics relate to charter school success. According to the reviewed literature, charter school failures were attributed to a combination of challenges in finances, management, academics, and facilities. Charter school successes were attributed to a combination of effective school leadership; a strong mission and vision; hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers; school culture/parent involvement; and mismanagement.

In broad strokes, it is clear that failures were more tied to business and outcomes while successes were more tied to the people side of schools: developing people, leading and inspiring people, and connecting with people. The concept of mismanagement landed on both sides, but mostly because the presence of mismanagement led to failure and the absence of mismanagement led to success. This is tricky, though, because it is imperfect to assess a school’s success by measuring the absence of something.

When researching why charter schools fail, the researchers found that nearly all of the studies (five out of six) found financial concerns a significant reason for closures. In fact, it was one of the most publicly cited reasons for a school closure. Conversely, the concept of financial struggles was absent from literature about characteristics of successful charter schools. More research is needed to understand the impact of a strong financial model in supporting charter school success, rather than assuming the absence of poor finances indicates success.
In addition to finances, failing charter schools were also found to struggle with other elements of the business: facilities and management. While the absence of these two struggles was not highlighted for successful schools, research showed that successful charter schools had effective school leadership, and that leadership included a strong working knowledge of effectively managing the business and operational components of the school.

Poor academic outcomes surfaced as an additional indicator leading to failure. Two studies explicitly found no impact of academic performance on a school’s failure, while five found a relationship between poor academic performance and school closure. While one might expect to see strong academic performance tied to successful charter schools, such a connection was not found in this literature review. That may be attributed to the terms of the search. If a study only focused on one element of charter schools, it was excluded. Therefore, if a study only focused on academics, it was not included.

This systematic review of research primarily connected the success of charter schools to the human side of the school versus the business side. It may be that this was due to the absence of concerns with relation to the business of the school. Further study could evaluate the business practices of successful charter schools to more quantitatively determine if successful charter schools actually had sound business practices.

Successful charter schools demonstrated success in the human side of the business by creating and implementing a clear vision. Effective school leaders built a community of invested staff and parents committed to and prepared to work together towards a vision. The business was managed by a competent leader in support of that vision, helping guide decision-making, including financial management. Recruiting, supporting,
and retaining teachers was also central to achieving the vision of the school. Successful charter schools intentionally developed staff to achieve the vision.

The mission and vision of a successful charter school defines the school culture: Why are we here? What are we working toward? What do we value? A strong school culture, with invested parents was an essential characteristic for successful charter schools. School culture was modeled and carried out by an effective school leader, keeping the team focused on the goals of the school and providing the support and professional development staff needed to accomplish those goals. However, more research and analysis is needed to uncover how all of the more human-based characteristics of a successful charter school interplay with the actual business.

Overall, the results of previous research created the beginning of a framework to define school- and community- level characteristics that lead to charter school success. However, the results were not conclusive and the studies available were not comprehensive in examining charter schools in the broadest sense. More research will help educators better understand the specific characteristics that lead to successful founding years for charter schools.
Chapter III
Research Methodology

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in three phases: 1) Review of Existing Data, 2) Survey Analysis, and 3) Analysis of School Leader Interviews. The first phase, Review of Existing Data, collected publicly available data to determine if a charter school qualified as successful. This phase of the study was an analysis assessing schools’ success through an inductive analysis of existing data. The second phase of the study collected data through a survey distributed to founding school leaders, asking them to provide data through an event history lens. This phase utilized mixed methods of analysis, analyzing descriptive data from multiple choice questions and short answer responses by coding them into characteristics and groupings (fuller explanation to come). The quantities of responses in each characteristic and grouping were then evaluated for trends between successful charter schools and those that did not meet the criteria for success. The third and final phase, interviews with founding charter school leaders, also used a mixed method analysis through an event history lens. Transcripts of interviews were coded according to groupings (adding any new ones indicated) as were used for survey analysis. The responses in each grouping were then evaluated for trends between successful charter schools and those that did not meet criteria for success.

At the completion of the three phases of the study, the researchers compiled all data from each phase to complete the inductive analysis of which school- and community-level characteristics predict chart school success and failure in Missouri.
REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

The process to determine which school- and community-level characteristics predict charter school success and failure began with securing a list of all charter Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that opened in the state of Missouri with the years they opened and closed (if relevant). The Missouri Public Charter School Association (MCPSA) provided this information. This research focused on each charter LEA’s first through sixth years of operation: through the initial renewal of the charter.

For the initial phase of the study (Review of Existing Data), the researchers developed criteria by which each charter LEA would be evaluated in order to determine which charter LEAs met the criteria for success and which did not. In order to be determined a Successful LEA, all five criteria outlined in Table 5 had to have been met in the relevant years (explanation of relevant years is forthcoming). The criteria listed below were selected in response to the Review of Literature. According to the reviewed literature, charter school failures could be attributed to a combination of challenges with relation to the business side of charter schools (finances, management, and facilities) as well as a failure to meet academic standards as measured by the state. Charter LEA successes could be attributed to a combination of characteristics related to the human side of operating a charter school: effective school leadership; a strong mission and vision; hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers; school culture/parent involvement; and effective business practices as evidenced by the absence of mismanagement. Existing research did not often weigh in on how student outcomes and the business affected the success of charter schools. For failing schools, existing research weighed in primarily on the business side of charter schools, not the human side of failing schools. The
researchers set out to better understand how the two work together in either success or failure.

**Table 5 - Criteria for Successful LEAs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Successful LEA</th>
<th>LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Renewal</td>
<td>Was renewed after the first five years (open for at least 6 years)</td>
<td>If any of the criteria to the left was not met, the charter LEA was classified as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Data</td>
<td>Exceeded home district’s MAP % Proficient and Advanced by at least 5% during both relevant years in both ELA and Math</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>Maintained or grew number of students enrolled during both relevant years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>Maintained a 10%+ financial surplus during both relevant years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Equal to or greater than the home district’s proportional attendance rate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** All metrics were evaluated based on publicly available data available on the Department of Education (DESE’s) Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS) portal or through formal data requests made directly to and received from DESE.

**Categories of Schools**

When reviewing the existing data to determine whether or not an LEA met the criteria for success, the researchers determined more than two LEA categories would illustrate a clearer understanding of the research questions. Several schools were very close to the mark, just barely missing it. The researchers wanted to capture their priorities and successes separately from LEAs drastically far from the mark. For this reason, LEAs were categorized as follows:

1. Successful LEAs: met all criteria for both relevant years
2. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: did not meet all criteria for both relevant years
   a. on the cusp LEAs: met ⅘ of the criteria for both relevant years
   b. open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success: met fewer than ⅘ criteria for both relevant years
   c. closed LEAs: LEA is no longer in operation

<p>| Table 6 - Details for Evaluating if a Charter LEA Met or Did Not Meet Criteria for Success |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Details for determining if criteria were met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Renewal</td>
<td>If an LEA was in operation during the sixth year, it was determined the LEA had been renewed. If the closure date preceded the sixth year, it was determined the LEA had not been renewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Data</td>
<td>Based on publicly available data, the percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced on the MAP test were combined into one percentage and rounded to the nearest percentage for ELA and Math separately. This percentage was then compared to the home district. If the charter LEA’s percentage was five or more percent higher than the home district’s percentage for the same relevant years in both ELA and Math, it was determined the charter LEA met these criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>Based on publicly available data (DESE’s “Enrollment K-12”), the number of students enrolled in the charter LEA was evaluated for growth or maintenance of enrollment as compared to the same charter LEA’s enrollment the previous year. Enrollment numbers were rounded to the nearest number. Maintenance of enrollment was indicated by having the same number of students enrolled as the previous year. Growth was indicated by having more students enrolled than the previous year. If the charter LEA demonstrated either maintenance or growth of enrollment for both relevant years, it was determined the charter LEA met these criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>Based on publicly available data, any charter LEA that demonstrated greater than or equal to a 10% financial surplus during both relevant years was determined to have met these criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>A charter LEA with a “Proportional Attendance Rate” (90% of students achieve 90% attendance) of equal to or greater than the home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
district’s Proportional Attendance Rate, as reported in DESE’s MCDS for both relevant years was determined to have met these criteria.

Additional Data Collected

In addition to data collected for the purpose of identifying charter LEAs meeting the aforementioned criteria for success, the researchers collected additional publicly available data for the purpose of evaluating for additional trends between LEAs identified as having met the criteria success and those that did not.

Table 7 - Criteria Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Details for Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline</strong></td>
<td>As defined by DESE: “Incidents per 100 Students”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
<td>As defined by DESE: “Lunch Count Free Reduced Pct Grades K-12”; Note: Starting in 2014-15,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count (%)</td>
<td>many LEAs have 0% FRL, likely due to the beginning of the Community Eligibility Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>where eligible LEAs no longer tracked FRL by specific students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students of Color (%)</strong></td>
<td>100% minus “Enrollment White %” (as defined by DESE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Language Learners</strong></td>
<td>As defined by DESE: “Enrollment ELL-LEP Pct”; Note: Home districts @ 0% until 2008-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ELL or EL) (%)</td>
<td>(as defined by DESE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IEP Incidence Rate</strong></td>
<td>As defined by DESE: “IEP Incidence Rate”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After determining which LEAs had and had not met the criteria for success, the researchers analyzed this data to determine if additional trends were evident in either LEAs that met the criteria for success or not.
Relevant Years

Initially, the researchers intended to examine the data for each LEA’s fifth and sixth years, capturing the year before and after the initial charter renewal. The researchers began by searching the Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS) portal for the relevant data and developing data requests to submit directly to DESE requesting data not available in the portal. During this process the researchers discovered that fifth- and sixth-year data were not available for all LEAs in all categories.

When searching for enrollment data, the researchers found that charter data prior to SY 2006-2007 in Kansas City and SY 2007-2008 in St. Louis were incorporated into the home district’s data. This is because, at the time, charters were not their own LEAs; they were part of the home district LEA (either St. Louis Public Schools or Kansas City Public Schools). For this reason, the researchers then shifted to reviewing building-level data instead of LEA-level data for all LEAs. Charter data were expected to be available at the building level both before and after SY 2006-2007 in Kansas City and SY 2007-2008 in St. Louis. For LEAs whose relevant years’ data were aggregated into the home district, the plan was to pull charter building-level data from the home district data and then combine it to represent the full view of the charter LEA’s data separate from the home district’s data. The intent was to then reaggregate the home district’s building-level data minus the charter LEA’s building-level data. Doing so, would allow for a comparison of charter LEAs and home districts separate from each other/not combined. The researchers intended to use building-level data for all charter LEAs, whether they opened under the home district LEA or not, to ensure data for charters operating under the home district
LEA would be comparable to LEAs that did not, when charter data were reported separately from the home district (they gained their own LEA status).

Several problems emerged, though. Researchers were not confident they had a complete list of all charter buildings: some had changed names, some were missing from lists received, etc. This led to the concern that disaggregating the data by buildings and then re-aggregating into what would later be their LEAs had high probability of error. Further, the manipulation of such large amounts of data seemed more subject to error than did accepting the data managed by DESE.

Then, DESE notified the researchers that MAP data were not available prior to 2006. This excluded 26/62 LEAs (9 in St. Louis and 17 in Kansas City) because data were not available for the years at which the researchers aimed to look. For this reason, the researchers adjusted from the original intent: to examine the data for each LEA’s fifth and sixth years, capturing the year before and the year after the initial charter renewal.

Instead, the researchers developed the concept of relevant years: the years during which existing data were evaluated for each LEA. The relevant years were defined as “EITHER the fifth and sixth years of operation OR the second and third years of data available for LEAs that achieved initial renewal.” If the fifth and sixth years of data were available for LEAs that achieved initial renewal, they were the preferred relevant years. If they were not available for LEAs that achieved initial renewal, the second and third years of data available became the relevant years. The second and 3rd years of data available were used instead of the first and second years because the enrollment criteria is based on maintenance or growth of enrollment. For this reason, the researchers needed three years of data so a comparison to a previous year could be made.
For LEAs that did not achieve initial renewal, the researchers utilized the last two years of data available. All data were public data available after the LEAs separated from the home district (SY 2006-2007 in Kansas City and SY 2007-2008). The researchers made notation of the relevant years for each school and will report clearly about the differences in schools being evaluated on their 5th and 6th years versus schools being evaluated on different relevant years.

**Table 8 - Charter LEAs in Missouri**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA</th>
<th>Year Opened</th>
<th>Year Closed</th>
<th>1st Relevant Year</th>
<th>2nd Relevant Year</th>
<th>1st Relevant Year: Year of Operation</th>
<th>2nd Relevant Year: Year of Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>St. Louis</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biome Steam School</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Garden Montessori School</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle College Preparatory Schools</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gateway Science Academy of St. Louis</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Center Arts Academy</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Name</td>
<td>Years 1</td>
<td>Years 2</td>
<td>Years 3</td>
<td>Years 4</td>
<td>Years 5</td>
<td>Years 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kairos Academies</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2023-2024</td>
<td>2024-2025</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIPP: St. Louis Public Schools</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Salle Middle School</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shearwater Education Foundation</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soulard School</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2024-2025</td>
<td>2025-2026</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Can ! Academies of STL</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tessara</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Name</td>
<td>Start Year</td>
<td>End Year 1</td>
<td>End Year 2</td>
<td>End Year 3</td>
<td>End Year 4</td>
<td>Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernare</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kansas City</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy for Integrated Arts</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens of the World Charter Schools - Kansas City</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>2021-2022</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossroads Charter Schools</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeLaSalle Education Center</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewing Marion Kauffman School</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Name</td>
<td>Years 1</td>
<td>Years 2</td>
<td>Years 3</td>
<td>Years 4</td>
<td>Students 1</td>
<td>Students 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Leadership Academy</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Girls Preparatory Academy</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2023-2024</td>
<td>2024-2025</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City International Academy (Della lamb)</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIPP KC: Endeavour Academy</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Excluded Schools**

Not all 62 approved charter LEAs were eligible for this study. Charter LEAs were excluded for the following reasons:

- Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year (opened after the 2014-2015 school year in St. Louis and are still open)
- Charter LEA was founded by the researchers
● Charter LEA closed before data were publicly available (2006-2007 in KC and 2008-2009 in STL)
● Charter was approved, but the LEA never opened with students.

After excluding the schools that did not meet the eligibility criteria, the researchers determined 12 St. Louis and 4 Kansas City charter LEAs did not qualify for this study.

The Process for Reviewing Existing Data
The researchers gathered data on the remaining 46 charter schools granted charter approval in Missouri between 1998 and 2015. In a shared spreadsheet, the researchers collected publicly available data for the qualified charter LEAs, as well as data for the home district for the same years (where relevant). For all missing data, formal data requests were made to DESE. Once all data were compiled, the researchers completed an analysis of the data identifying which charter LEAs met the criteria for a Successful LEA, as defined above, and which did not.

School Categories
Once data was collected and charter LEAs were assessed again the criteria, LEAs were categorized as follows:

● Successful LEA: met all five of the criteria outlined in Table 7 in both relevant years
● LEA that Did Not Meet the Criteria for Success: did not meet all five of the criteria outlined in Table 7 in both relevant years
  ○ on the cusp LEA: met four out of five of the criteria outlined in Table 7 in both relevant years
SURVEY DATA

Collecting Survey Data

After collecting the publicly available data and completing the IRB process, the next phase of the study included surveying founding school leaders with several required closed-ended questions plus opportunities to explain more about why they chose their answers in optional open-ended questions. Their perspective was retained through an event history lens. See Appendix C for the complete survey.

The survey questions did not identify individuals, but the survey asked the LEA leader to identify the LEA at which they were a founding school leader, their position at the LEA, and the years during which they worked there. Once responses were received, the researchers confirmed that each response was from a founding school leader, as defined. Any responses from people who did not qualify as a founding school leader (3) were excluded from the analysis. The remaining survey questions focused on early priorities, successes and challenges, as well as an invitation to volunteer for the next phase of the study: interviews.

Founding school leaders included anyone who could be considered part of the charter school administrative team: Superintendents, Executive Directors, Principals, Heads of School, Assistant Principals, Deans of Students, Chief Finance Officers (CFOs), Chief Operating Officers (COOs), etc. Board members were not included. Only people in

- open LEA that did not meet criteria for success: met fewer than four of the five of the criteria outlined in Table 7 in both relevant years
- closed LEA: no longer in operation
the leadership position at some point during the year preceding the first year through the end of the sixth year of the LEA’s operation (the founding years) were considered a founding school leader. This limitation was in place to best determine leaders’ priorities in their early years. At one point, the researchers considered requesting data from school leaders through all of the relevant years, in order to match up to the data from the Review of Existing Data. The researchers determined that collecting school leader perspectives for up to ten years for some schools and only two years for others would lead to too broad a perspective about early priorities, successes and challenges.

The researchers began the process of finding school leaders by listing the names of all charter LEAs and the relevant years for founding leaders. This information was shared with Doug Thaman of MCPSA and a charter school sponsor with a request for the names of founding school leaders and any current contact information. For the most part, this yielded mostly current school leaders’ information. Then, through a formal DESE data request, the researchers acquired DESE’s school leader directories from 1999-2020. The directories provided school leaders’ names, emails, and roles for each year, as reported by the LEAs to DESE. The names of leaders listed as active during the founding years were added to the list. For many, the contact information was out of date, so the researchers searched for them using Google Search, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Using these leads, the researchers also looked for contact information on charter LEAs’ websites. The researchers also directly emailed founding school leaders for whom they had current contact information with a request for current contact information for others on the list with out-of-date contact information.
Through this process, contact information was primarily found for Superintendents/Executive Directors, Principals/Heads of School, and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students, as that is what is reported in the DESE’s school leader directories. DESE’s directories do not include CFO or COO type of positions but focus primarily on instructional positions. Some information about CFOs and COOs was gathered through direct contact with founding school leaders, MCPSA, and the researchers’ personal connections with founding school leaders. In total, the researchers had viable contact information for 196 school leaders, representing all but 11 closed charter LEAs.

The survey was sent on January 13, 2021 to all 196 contacts. 31 emails were returned because the addresses were not found; one was blocked; three people responded saying they were not at the charter LEA during the founding years. 45 people completed the survey; three were disqualified for not meeting the criteria for being a founding leader.

**Survey Data Analysis**

Survey data responses were downloaded from the Google Form. Data were sorted in several ways, for analysis:

- School Category, as defined above
- Region: St. Louis or Kansas City

Data were also sorted to assess for trends based on LEA size and the perceptions of school leaders in different roles.

Closed-ended questions were tallied separately from open-ended questions.

Closed-ended questions were tallied into the original twenty characteristics offered as a
multiple-choice option in each of the four areas about which they were asked: Top Priorities, Needing More Priority, Successes, or Struggles. The twenty characteristics available are hereafter italicized throughout the paper and were:

- ability to adequately compensate teachers and administrators
- academic achievement (as measured by state standardized tests)
- administrators’ expertise and competence
- attendance
- board leadership
- curriculum
- discipline
- enrollment
- facility acquisition/development
- finances/business management
- parent involvement
- implementation of mission and vision of the school
- professional development of administrators
- professional development of teachers
- hiring, supporting and retaining teachers
- effective school leadership
- staff culture
- student culture
- student: teacher ratio
- teacher expertise and competence

Open-ended questions and response to the “other” option in closed-ended questions were evaluated for trends. Each response was coded according to the characteristic with which it aligned. If it did not align with one of the twenty offered in the multiple choice, a new characteristic was identified and listed. For example, any mention of an education management organization was assigned the code for the characteristic education management organization and the context of the comment was evaluated to determine if it represented a Top Priority, Needing More Priority, Success, or Struggle. In total, 48 new codes for characteristics were created. Both researchers evaluated the comments to ensure alignment in the coding.
With 48 additional characteristics (green) and the twenty original characteristics (gray), the researchers then sorted all of the characteristics to nine larger groupings (blue):

**Table 9 - Groupings of the Closed-Ended and Open-Ended Survey Questions’ Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13: Intervention Programs</td>
<td>23: Student Diversity 33: Finances/Business Management 43: Focused on academics, not love of learning 53: Professional Development of Administrators</td>
<td>63: Board/Leader Relationship 73: Long-Term Planning</td>
<td>83: Staff Culture 92: Teacher Expertise and Competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14: Meet Students’ Needs</td>
<td>24: Student Mobility 34: Student:Teacher Ratio 44: Instruction</td>
<td>54: Big Enough Administration Team 64: Education Management Organization (EMO) 74: Stable Priorities</td>
<td>84: Student Culture 93: Teacher/Staff Retention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36: Expansion 46: SEL Learning</td>
<td>66: Sponsor</td>
<td>86: Caring Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37: Lack of Resources</td>
<td>47: Student Exploration/Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>87: Changes in the Neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38: Systems/Structures</td>
<td>48: Tech/1:1</td>
<td></td>
<td>88: Character Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39: Transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

73
The researchers acknowledge several characteristics could have been assigned to several groupings, and their placement may have effect on the analysis by grouping. For this reason, the researchers analyzed the data by the original twenty characteristics and the nine compiled groupings. The researchers then compared the two analyses to confirm they yielded similar results (discussed further in the Results Chapter).

**INTERVIEW DATA**

Following the survey, the researchers selected founding LEA leaders (14) to interview from all LEA categories. School Leader interviewees self-selected by indicating an interest in being interviewed on the survey. When selecting from all who expressed interest, the researchers took care to find representation from both regions, with variance in their numbers of years open, size (by enrollment), involvement with an educational management organization, and opening under the home district LEA or independent of it.
Two charter school sponsors were also interviewed: one who sponsored schools in St. Louis and another who sponsored schools in both St. Louis and Kansas City. Because sponsors are the organizations responsible for holding charter schools accountable and closing them if they do not meet the goals outlined in their Performance Contracts, sponsors were interviewed to gather their perspective on characteristics that predict charter school success and failure. The sponsors had the experience of working with both successful and failed charters and evaluated that which they were doing along the way.

Table 10 - Representation of Selected Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Category</th>
<th>St. Louis</th>
<th>Kansas City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Cusp LEAs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed LEAs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note that the sponsor listed for Kansas City also sponsored schools in St. Louis.*

Once interviewees were selected, an email confirmed their interest and established a date and time for the interview. At this stage, one changed their mind stating it had been so long ago that they were concerned about offering valuable insight. Another’s email was not deliverable. Another never replied, so three new candidates were
selected and recruited for the interview. Replacements fit into similar demographics as those selected initially to ensure representation across different types of LEAs and respondents.

All interviewees were, at one point in their time at the LEA, either Heads of School/Principals (9) or Executive Directors/Superintendents (5), although an effort was made to include Assistant Principals/Deans of Students. Some had progressed from teacher to Assistant Principal to Principal, so their perspectives captured some of all of those roles.

Interviewees were invited to a Zoom interview; with the knowledge they’d be recorded and transcribed. The Zoom interview was transcribed using the Notiv application. After the interview was complete, the interviewer reviewed the transcript for accuracy and edited it to accurately represent the words spoken.

The researchers then coded the transcripts of the interviews using the same characteristics and groupings used for the survey analysis. Unlike the survey, though, characteristics were not so easily categorized and separated. Interviewees blurred the lines and drew connections between different characteristics and groupings when not limited to the multiple-choice offerings of the survey. They also tended to blend priorities with successes and characteristics needing more priority with struggles.

Data were compared and contrasted similarly to survey results. The data were analyzed both vertically and horizontally. The vertical analysis looked for characteristics that the subject within the school deemed pertinent to their success, while the horizontal analysis looked for recurring themes and patterns to emerge within the data across LEAs in the same LEA category.
Finally, the results of the interviews were compiled and analyzed alongside the Review of Existing Data and survey results to make final determinations regarding which school- and community-level characteristics predict charter school success and failure.
Chapter IV
Results: Review of Existing Data

The Review of Existing Data was the first phase of this study. The primary purpose of the review was to identify which LEAs met criteria for success and which did not. This allowed the researchers to sort LEAs into the LEA categories, as described in Chapter III:

1. Successful LEAs: met all criteria for both relevant years
2. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: did not meet all criteria for both relevant years
   a. on the cusp LEAs: met ⅘ of the criteria for both relevant years
   b. open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success: met fewer than ⅘ criteria for both relevant years
   c. closed LEAs: LEA was no longer in operation

The criteria used to determine if an LEA was successful by the relevant years were, in summary, as follows, with more details available in Chapter III.

- **Initial Renewal**: was renewed after the first five years (open for at least 6 years)
- **Academic Data**: exceeded home district’s MAP % Proficient and Advanced by at least 5% during both relevant years in both ELA and Math
- **Enrollment**: Maintained or grew number of students enrolled during both relevant years
- **Finances**: Maintained a 10%+ financial surplus during both relevant years
- **Attendance**: Equal to or greater than the home district’s proportional attendance rate
CATEGORIZATION OF CHARTER LEAs

Of the sixty-two approved charter LEAs in the state of Missouri, forty-six qualified for this study, as outlined in Chapter III. Fifteen percent of qualified charter LEAs in Missouri (7) met the criteria for success in the relevant years, while 85% (39) did not. Of the qualified Successful LEAs, two were from St. Louis. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were more evenly distributed between the two regions, although Kansas City had twice as many open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success as St. Louis.

On the cusp LEAs demonstrated most signs of success, but missed one criterion (most often just barely missed it). If added to Successful LEAs, the total of charter LEAs meeting the mark would have been 13/46 (27%) with 73% not meeting criteria for success. This was worth considering because this study represented only one snapshot in time, and had another timeframe been chosen, it was possible these LEAs would have been categorized differently.

Table 11 - % of Qualified Charter LEAs in Missouri by LEA Categories and Subcategories

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>STL</td>
<td>KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of LEAs in Each Category</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of LEAs in Each Category</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LEA subcategories are a percentage of the LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, not LEAs overall. STL and KC are the percentage of the region within that subcategory only, not respondents in total.**

Size of LEAs

After sorting LEAs into LEA Categories and subcategories, the researchers further categorized them by the size of their LEA, based on their second relevant year:

- Small LEAs: < 500 students
- Midsize LEAs: 500-900 students
- Large LEAs: > 900 students

Based on enrollment for the second relevant year, there were 27 small LEAs, 9 midsize LEAs, and 9 large LEAs. (Note that two LEAs changed sizes between the two relevant years, and one LEA’s enrollment data was not available). Because there were so many small LEAs, it appeared that more trends were attributable to small LEAs. For example, most Successful LEAs were small LEAs (42%). But this did not demonstrate which size LEA was most likely to be successful. Instead, data in Table 12 illustrate the percent of each size of LEA in each LEA category. For example, of the small LEAs, 11% were successful and 89% did not meet criteria for success. The same number of small and
large LEAs met the criteria for success (6), but because there were so many more small LEAs overall, the large LEAs were considered more likely to be successful.

St. Louis had the smallest Successful LEA with only 197 students in their 6th year. In Kansas City, Successful small LEAs were on the higher end of small (between 454 and 500). *On the cusp LEAs in Kansas City had a range of enrollment closer to the midsize LEAs than other subcategories: between 204 and 683 students. On the cusp LEAs in St. Louis, though, had a much wider range from 201 students to 1,285 students.*

**Table 12 - % of Each Size LEA in each LEA Category and Subcategory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Category</th>
<th># Small LEAs (% of Small LEAs)</th>
<th># Midsize LEAs (% of Midsize LEAs)</th>
<th># Large LEAs (% of Large LEAs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs (16% of all LEAs)</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (85% of all LEAs)</td>
<td>24 (89%)</td>
<td>8 (89%)</td>
<td>6 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Cusp LEAs (13% of all LEAs)</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (33% of all LEAs)</td>
<td>10 (37%)</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed LEAs (38% of all LEAs)</td>
<td>11 (41%)</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages shown are in relation to size (i.e. of all small LEAs, 11% were Successful LEAs). Subcategories are a percentage of all LEAs, not only LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success*

To assess the difference between the subcategories, the researchers examined the raw number and percent of each LEA category within each size as shown in Table 12. Successful LEAs accounted for 33% of the large LEAs, although they are only 15% of all
LEAs. This indicated large LEAs were more likely to be successful than small and midsize LEAs were. On the cusp LEAs represented 13% of all LEAs and showed a fairly similar distribution between the sizes, indicating that the size of an LEA did not impact achieving on the cusp LEA status.

Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success equaled 33% of all LEAs. They only represented 22% of large LEAs, though, and represented a slightly higher proportionate share of small LEAs. This indicated open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success were more often small. Closed LEAs equaled 38% of all LEAs with a distribution between the sizes that was not significantly different than their proportionate share of all LEAs. This indicated the size of LEA was not a significant factor for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, overall. That said, of large LEAs, they were as likely to be Successful LEAs as they were likely to be a closed LEA.

Influence of Relevant Years

Because the Review of Existing Data depended on publicly available data and data mechanisms changed over time, certain years of data were not available. As described in Chapter III, this led to the researchers utilizing different relevant years for LEAs. Typically, the LEAs that opened earlier had relevant years beyond their renewal years (years 5 and 6) because their older data were not available.

Table 13 - % of each LEA subcategory Using Different Sets of Relevant Years, by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>St. Louis</th>
<th>Kansas City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant Years</td>
<td>Between Years 1-5</td>
<td>Years 5 and 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Category</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>(1) 50%</th>
<th>(2) 40%</th>
<th>(3) 60%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>(3) 18%</td>
<td>(9) 53%</td>
<td>(5) 29%</td>
<td>(3) 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Cusp LEAs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>(3) 60%</td>
<td>(2) 40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed LEAs</td>
<td>(3) 33%</td>
<td>(3) 33%</td>
<td>(3) 33%</td>
<td>(1) 11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentage equals percent of LEA Category using certain relevant years within region**

In St. Louis, one of the two Successful LEAs was assessed using years 9 and 10 for the relevant years, versus the renewal years (years 5 and 6) as was originally intended. This may have given that LEA an advantage in that it had twice the time to establish itself in the indicators of success than the LEA that qualified by years 5 and 6. A similar split was true for Kansas City, with two of the five Successful LEAs being evaluated using years’ five and six data; three were evaluated with later years’ data (between years 8 and 10). Therefore, Successful LEAs were represented fairly evenly between LEAs using years five and six as relevant years and those using later years.

Of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, fewer St. Louis LEAs were assessed using the years beyond the fifth and sixth years than Kansas City LEAs. In St. Louis, one open LEA that did not meet criteria for success and one closed LEA utilized years nine and ten as the relevant years. In Kansas City, one on the cusp LEA, six open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success, and four closed LEAs utilized years nine and ten as the relevant years.

Charter LEAs in both regions were closed at or before renewal with the same frequency: St. Louis 3/9 (33%) and Kansas City 3/9 (33%). The researchers were more
likely to use data from relevant years beyond years five and six (56%) for closed LEAs in Kansas City. This was because 5/9 qualified closed LEAs in Kansas City were opened in either 1999 or 2000, so data were not available. Only 1/9 qualified closed LEAs in St. Louis opened that early.

Data Identifying an LEA as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

All Successful LEAs, by definition, met all criteria for success. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, on the other hand did not. They were categorized into three subcategories under the broader category of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: on the cusp LEAs, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success, and closed LEAs.

Table 14 indicates the percent of each LEA subcategory not meeting the specific criteria for success.

**Table 14 - % of LEA Subcategories Not Meeting Each Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>ELA Testing DID NOT Exceed Home District by &gt;5%</th>
<th>Math Testing DID NOT Exceed Home District by &gt;5%</th>
<th>DID NOT Maintain or Grow Enrollment</th>
<th>DID NOT Maintain a 10% Surplus</th>
<th>Attendance Rate DID NOT Exceed Home District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Cusp LEAs</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed LEAs</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Blue = most often not met; Red = second most often not met**
On the Cusp LEAs

As was true by definition, on the cusp LEAs were very close to meeting all of the criteria to be categorized as a Successful LEA. They met all but one criterion, for either one or both of the relevant years. This LEA category included six LEAs with two years of data for each, so the researchers looked at 12 years of relevant data. These LEAs were so close to being successful that their shortcomings were very minimal:

- Two LEAs had a single year they did not meet the criterion of exceeding the home district’s ELA percentage of proficient or advanced on the standardized test by >5%. One exceeded by 4%, and this was the only factor that excluded the LEA from being classified as a Successful LEA.

- Another LEA had a single year where they did not meet the criterion of exceeding the home district’s Math percentage of proficient or advanced on the standardized test by >5%. The LEA exceeded by 1%, and this was the only factor that excluded the LEA from being classified as a Successful LEA.

- Two LEAs were excluded from being considered Successful LEAs by missing the criterion of having a 10% or better financial surplus in both years. Each did not meet the criterion for only one of the two years and were at 8% and 9% surpluses.

- One LEA was excluded from being a Successful LEA because in both relevant years they did not exceed the home district’s attendance. One year was only 2% less.

On the cusp LEAs were so close to having been classified as Successful LEAs that the researchers considered their data as important insight for determining which characteristics predict a charter school’s success.
Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Data for the fifteen LEAs in this LEA category represented 30 line items of data (2 years for each LEA). As by definition, *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* did not meet multiple indicators: 47% did not meet two, 37% did not meet three, one did not meet four.

Academic results was the leading criterion not met by *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*. When combining ELA and Math, they did not exceed the home district’s results by greater than 5% for 26 of the relevant years (87% of the time). This criterion was met less often in Math than in ELA.

The second criterion most often not met by an *open LEA not meeting criteria for success* was finances (not met 53% of the time). For the 15 LEAs in this subcategory, each was anticipated to have had two years’ data available (30 years data total). All data were not available, though. Only 17 of the 30 years of financial data were available from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This made these data more difficult to assess. Of the seventeen years of available data, though, *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* did not meet this criterion nine times.

Similarly, attendance data were not available for all of the years the researchers aimed to evaluate (6 of the 30 years were unavailable). Using the available 24 of 30 years’ data, it was determined this criterion was not met for 10 of the available 24 years.

Enrollment was not a significant problem for *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*: did not meet criterion 20% of the available years.
Closed LEAs

The eighteen LEAs in this category provided 36 years of data for evaluation. For the years evaluated, closed LEAs met fewer criteria than the other subcategories: 25% did not meet two, 28% did not meet three, 28% did not meet four, and 11% did not meet five. Further, six LEAs (33%) did not meet the criterion of having been renewed.

Academic results was the criterion most frequently not met by closed LEAs: 100% of closed LEAs did not meet the academic criterion when combining ELA and Math, as defined in Chapter III. This was the most problematic characteristic for closed LEAs, as it was for open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success.

The second most problematic characteristic for closed LEAs was attendance. This was difficult to analyze, though, because eight years of relevant data were not available and two were removed because it was determined by a court the leaders fraudulently reported attendance data. No closed LEAs met the DESE 90/90 requirement, except the two that falsely claimed attendance and were prosecuted for fraud.

Finance was a significant problem, but provided less data for analysis because data were unavailable for 15 of the 36 requested data points. Further, one data point was excluded because the LEA had committed fraud related to finances. In addition to the financial criterion set by the researchers, DESE requires all charter LEAs maintain a minimum 3% surplus, or they are considered financially distressed. Three of the eighteen closed LEAs fell below the 3% surplus, one of which was later found to have falsely claimed attendance which added funds (based on the fraudulent attendance reports) to correct the problem of being financially distressed.
Enrollment was the least problematic for closed LEAs in terms of not meeting this criterion (56% did not meet), although closed LEAs had a much more significant problem meeting this criterion than all other subcategories of LEAs.

Conclusion of that Which Categorized an LEA

When categorizing LEAs, failing to meet the academic criterion was the most frequent reason an LEA was categorized as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. The exception to this was on the cusp LEAs. On the cusp LEAs were more likely to be categorized as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success due to not having met the criteria for finances and attendance.

Enrollment was the least likely reason an LEA was categorized as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

TRENDS OF SUCCESSFUL LEAs

Academic Data

Table 15 - % of Successful LEAs Meeting Academic Criterion in Comparison to Home District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Average</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the forefront of determining the success of a charter LEA was students’ academic success. Successful LEAs significantly outperformed the home district in both ELA and Math. In most cases, the margin was quite large, with Successful LEAs outperforming the home district on average by 24 percentage points in ELA and 27 percentage points in Math. Results were similar in both regions, with a slightly higher margin between Successful charter LEAs and the home district in Kansas City in Math.

**Enrollment**

Successful LEAs demonstrated consistent enrollment with modest growth. On average, they increased enrollment by 66 students for the relevant years. Ten of the relevant years had growth of 50 students or less. Four of the relevant years saw growth between 150 and 200 students for one midsize and one large LEA. On average, Successful LEAs grew by 9% (rate of growth) during the relevant years. The highest rates of growth came from a very small LEA with only 167 students that grew by 20% (added 33 students) and a midsize LEA that grew by 23% (added 158 students).

**Finances**

Successful LEAs demonstrated strong financial surpluses, with an average surplus of 31%. Data were incomplete, though, because 50% of data for the relevant years were not available. Data were available for LEAs measured in years five and six, with the exception of one year nine. Of the available data, surpluses ranged from 19% to 44%.

In addition to the financial surplus, the researchers evaluated “expenditures per pupil” for Successful LEAs. Many years’ data were not available (50%). The missing
data were for older LEAs assessed using relevant years beyond years five and six. The average home district expenditure/student was $14,680. On average, Successful charter LEAs spent $12,043/pupil ($2,637/student less the home district). Most were within the $9,500-$10,500 range, with one outlier spending a little over $17,000 per pupil. The outlier operated within the same district and so had similar funding from the state, but had the backing of a very well-resourced foundation.

**Attendance**

Successful LEAs also had strong attendance (average of 92%) that not only exceeded the home district’s (average of 76%) but also often exceeded the DESE’s goal of 90/90 (90% of students achieve 90% attendance). In St. Louis, both LEAs met 90/90 for both years and had an average proportional attendance rate of 94%, significantly exceeding the state’s goal. In contrast, St. Louis’s home district average proportional attendance rate for the years evaluated was 77%.

In four of seven years for which data were available in Kansas City, Successful charter LEAs met 90/90 (57% of the time) and had an average proportional attendance rate of 91%. In contrast, Kansas City’s home district average proportional attendance rate for the years evaluated was 76%.

**Conclusion**

As defined, Successful LEAs met all criteria for success. Of note, they not only met but significantly exceeded the criteria. Very rarely did an LEA just barely meet the criteria. For the most part, they exceeded the criteria by a significant margin.
TRENDS OF LEAs THAT DID NOT MEET CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

Academic Data

Table 16 - Average % of Students Achieving Proficient or Advanced on Standardized Test in Comparison to Home District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On the cusp</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Total On the Cusp</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open, Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average - Total Open, Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average - Total closed</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>-12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average - Total LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charter LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had significant variation between the subcategories. On the cusp LEAs, especially those in St. Louis, outperformed the home district when assessing the average percent proficient or advanced in both ELA and Math. Though they performed significantly better than the home district, they did not quite meet the levels of performance of Successful LEAs. On the cusp LEAs’ students’ average of proficiency in ELA was 6 percentage points lower than Successful LEAs. Their students’ average of proficiency in Math was 11 percentage points lower than Successful LEAs.

Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success performed fairly even with home districts’ performance, performing on average, at a slightly lower percent proficient and advanced in both ELA and Math. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success in St. Louis performed slightly higher than the home district in both ELA and Math, while Kansas City LEAs performed lower. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success’s performance was much lower than Successful LEAs, though: 39 percentage points lower in ELA and 29 percentage points lower in Math. In ELA, an open LEA that did not meet criteria for success exceeded the district’s results twice (but by less than 5%). In Math, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success exceeded the home district’s results seven times and were the same twice, but this was not considered having met the criteria because they exceeded by less than 5%.

Closed LEAs averaged significantly lower in both ELA and Math than the home district, drawing the overall average of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success down to the point that they were averaging 4 percentage points lower than the home districts overall. They performed much lower than Successful LEAs: 33 percentage
points in ELA and 40 percentage points in Math. Closed LEAs had the lowest percentage students proficient by a wide margin.

LEAs whose data were available for their fifth and sixth years (relevant years) had a more even split between those that exceeded the home district’s performance and those who did not than LEAs whose relevant years were beyond the fifth and sixth years (they opened earlier). In ELA, 46% of LEAs using the fifth and sixth relevant years exceeded the home district in ELA and 41% exceeded the home district in Math. For LEAs using years beyond the fifth and sixth years only 18% exceeded the home district in ELA and 15% in Math. This indicated that the older LEAs, even though being assessed after having significantly more time to develop their programs, outperformed their home districts much less frequently.

**Enrollment**

**Table 17 - LEA Subcategories: Enrollment Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On the Cusp</th>
<th># of Students Enrolled in Second Relevant Year</th>
<th>% Maintaining or Growing Enrollment</th>
<th>Average Number of Students Added</th>
<th>Average Rate of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All On the Cusp</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open, Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th># of Students Enrolled in Second Relevant Year</th>
<th>% Maintaining or Growing Enrollment</th>
<th>Average Number of Students Added</th>
<th>Average Rate of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>1101</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All open, Did Not meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charter LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success varied in their ability to maintain or grow enrollment across subcategories, although the ability to meet his criterion decreased when progressing from on the cusp LEAs to closed LEAs. The average number of students added for the relevant years also decreased when progressing from on the cusp LEAs to closed LEAs. Those that did not meet the criterion were spread evenly between both regions and LEA size.

On the cusp LEAs had the strongest data related to maintaining or growing enrollment, and were even 8 percentage points higher than Successful LEAs. All six of the open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success that did not meet the enrollment criterion were from Kansas City and had fewer than 332 students enrolled. One hundred percent of St. Louis open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success met this criterion.

Closed LEAs struggled the most to maintain or grow their enrollment during the relevant years. While it was the least significant contributor to an LEA being categorized as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, it was a problem for closed LEAs.
**Finances**

**Table 18 - LEA Subcategories: Finance Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Status</th>
<th>Surplus Average</th>
<th>Charter School Expenditures per Pupil Average</th>
<th>% Meeting this Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On the Cusp</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>$11,130</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>$12,424</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All On the Cusp</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>$11,453</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open, Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>$10,533</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>$16,537</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All Open, Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>$13,535</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>$11,605</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>$13,408</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All Closed</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>$12,236</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>$11,182</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>$14,765</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average - All LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>$12,566</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Surplus is equal to “unrestricted fund balance”/“total expenditures”*

**Expenditures per ADA is equal to “total current expenditures”/ “average daily attendance”**

In order to assess the financial success of an LEA, the researchers looked at each LEA’s financial surplus. The surplus indicated how much a district had in accumulated unrestricted funds that could be used for future expansion or growth, weathering...
downturns in the economy or enrollment that may lead to less funding from state and local governments, capital projects, or improvement of the program overall. DESE required a minimum 3% surplus, or it considered an LEA “financially distressed.” Two closed LEAs in St. Louis were considered financially distressed, one of which was later determined to have defrauded the state by mis-reporting attendance. The other was closed immediately after the two years of financial distress. One Kansas City LEA was considered financially distressed the year before closing.

The researchers set the financial criterion for success at having a 10% or greater financial surplus with the idea that meeting the bare minimum was not a sign of success, it was merely a sign that an LEA was not at the bottom of financial health. Being at the minimum 3% placed an LEA in a precarious position, on the brink of not having enough reserved to weather difficult years, low enrollment, or being able to grow when the time is right. Ten percent is a much safer surplus, although ten percent as the safe zone was not based on anything more than the researchers’ experiences as founding charter school leaders. A 10% surplus, though, was determined to be an adequate reserve to help an LEA through a difficult year or two.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success only maintained a little more than half as high an average surplus (16%) as Successful LEAs (31%), with on the cusp LEAs maintaining the highest surplus of all LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Data for financial well-being was limited by many years of data being unavailable (42%). For the most part, data were unavailable for schools open the longest, for which the researchers often assessed an LEA’s success on relevant years nine and ten; these LEAs accounted for 79% of the unavailable data. In comparison to the proportion of LEAs that
Did Not Meet Criteria for Success at each size, small LEAs were least likely to not meet this criterion (52% did not meet criterion, but small LEAs make up 62% of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.)

*LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success* in Kansas City maintained a higher average surplus (22%) than those in St. Louis (13%). *On the cusp LEAs* in St. Louis maintained one of the highest average surpluses (26%). Only *closed LEAs* in Kansas City had a higher average surplus of 29%.

The range of surpluses varied by subcategory. *On the cusp LEAs* ranged from 8% to 48%. *Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success* ranged from 4% to 34%. *Closed LEAs* had the widest range from -7% to 63%.

**Table 19 - LEA Subcategories: Range of Expenditures per Pupil**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Low End of Range</th>
<th>High End of Range</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On the Cusp LEAs</strong></td>
<td>$8,673</td>
<td>$14,951</td>
<td>$6,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</strong></td>
<td>$9,658</td>
<td>$27,344</td>
<td>$17,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closed LEAs</strong></td>
<td>$9,659</td>
<td>$22,740</td>
<td>$13,081</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to assessing the surpluses of LEAs in order to determine if an LEA met the criteria for success, the researchers evaluated charter school expenditures per pupil. This told a different side of the financial picture, indicating how much an LEA spends to educate each child. As a whole, charter LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in Kansas City spent more per pupil than LEAs in St. Louis, spending $3,583 more on average. Charter LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also spent more than Successful LEAs: $523/pupil more. *Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*
spent the most of the LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Kansas City *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* spent the most, by a significant margin. They spent $16,537/pupil on average; more than $6,000 more per pupil than their counterparts in St. Louis.

As Table 19 illustrates, *on the cusp LEAs* had the smallest spread between those spending the least to those spending the most. *Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* and *closed LEAs* had a much larger difference between the low end and high end of expenditures per pupil.

**Attendance**

**Table 20 - LEA Subcategories: Attendance Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Proportional Attendance Rate</th>
<th>% Meeting this Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On the Cusp</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All On the Cusp</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open, Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All Open, Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Average</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Average</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All Closed</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Total LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>St. Louis Average</th>
<th>Kansas City Average</th>
<th>Average - All LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td><strong>74%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td><strong>47%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success maintained an average proportional attendance rate of 74% during all of the relevant years; this was below the home districts’ average proportional attendance rate of 78%. It was also well below Successful LEAs’ average proportional attendance rate of 92%.

*On the cusp LEAs* had the highest average proportional attendance rate with one St. Louis and one Kansas City LEA meeting DESE’s 90/90 goal for one year each. All other years evaluated were in excess of 85%.

*Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* averaged lower than *on the cusp LEAs*, with Kansas City lower (73%) than St. Louis (80%). Overall, they were 16 percentage points lower than Successful LEAs and 2 percentage points lower than the home districts. While a little more than half met this criterion by exceeding the home district’s attendance rate, few actually met the state’s expectations of 90/90 (90% of students have 90% attendance): only one LEA met it for both years.

*Closed LEAs* had the lowest proportional attendance rate with Kansas City coming in lower than St. Louis. This was 25 percentage points lower than Successful LEAs and 11 percentage points lower than the home districts. *Closed LEAs* that did not meet this criterion were significantly more likely to be either small or large: 88% of small *closed LEAs* and 80% of large *closed LEAs* did not meet this criterion.
Additional Data Collected

In addition to looking at data related to determining if a school met the criteria for success, the researchers evaluated additional data seeking trends between the different LEA categories: expenditures/pupil (already discussed), discipline rates, mobility rates, and demographics of student populations.

Discipline Rates

The discipline rate was defined as “the number of discipline removals of 10 or more days per 100 students” by DESE. Successful LEAs had the lowest rate (0.96), which was 3.3 days (77 percentage points) lower than LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. The highest rates for Successful LEAs were 3.3 and 4.2 days (lower than the average of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success overall).

Table 21 - LEA Categories and Subcategories Discipline Data

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Category</th>
<th>Incidents per 100 students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Cusp LEAs</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed LEAs</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Below the line is data by subcategory of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

On the cusp LEAs were the second lowest: 1.8 days higher than Successful LEAs.

Two St. Louis on the cusp LEAs were very high (9.7 and 14.9) and four were below 0.5.

The range for on the cusp LEAs in St. Louis was 0.3-14.9. Kansas City had a smaller
range: 0.1-2.1. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success and closed LEAs had rates in excess of four and wide ranges between LEAs: 0 to 19.3, and 1-27.2 respectively.

These data demonstrate that having a lower discipline incidence rate was correlated with charter LEA success.

Mobility Rate

Mobility rate was defined as the “percentage of students in a school in a given year that moved into or out of a school for reasons other than academic promotion,” according to DESE. DESE calculates mobility rate by dividing the number of transfers by total enrollment (fall count date plus additional enrollment) multiplied by 100.

Table 22 - LEA Categories and Subcategories: Mobility Rate Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Category</th>
<th>Mobility Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Data</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful and on the cusp LEAs</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed LEAs</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Successful and on the cusp LEAs had the lowest mobility rate. Within the Successful LEAs, though, Kansas City had a much higher mobility rate. They were on par with all LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

The highest mobility rates were in open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success and closed LEAs. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success were 24
percentage points higher than Successful LEAs and on the cusp LEAs. Closed LEAs were
18 percentage points higher.

These data indicate that having a lower mobility rate was correlated with charter
LEA success.

Student Demographics

Table 23 - LEA Categories and Subcategories Student Demographic Data

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Category</th>
<th>% IEP</th>
<th>% EL</th>
<th>% FRL</th>
<th>% Students of Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>STL</td>
<td>KC</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Cusp LEAs</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed LEAs</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researchers also evaluated available demographic data. With relation to IEP
Incidence Rate (% IEP), there was little variation between the LEA categories and
subcategories, indicating the IEP Incidence rate was not a factor in whether or not an
LEA would meet the criteria for success.

Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also had equal
percentages of English Learners (% EL), indicating this was also not a factor predicting
success. It is worth pointing out that rates of EL students were significantly higher in
charter LEAs in Kansas City, and closed LEAs had the lowest percentage of EL students.
Successful LEAs and *on the cusp* LEAs had lower rates of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch (% FRL): 71% and 74% respectively. *Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* and *closed LEAs*’ percent of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch was significantly higher than Successful LEAs: 14 percentage points and 17 percentage points higher, respectively. This indicated that having a lower percentage of students who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch was correlated with the likelihood of meeting the criteria for success.

Similar, but more pronounced trends were found related to the percent of students of color. *On the cusp LEAs* had the lowest percentage of students of color; Successful LEAs had the second lowest percentage. *Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* and *closed LEAs* had much higher percentages at 93% and 96%, respectively. This indicated that Successful LEAs had a more diverse student population. Of note, LEAs in Kansas City were less diverse in every category than LEAs in St. Louis.

**Conclusion: Additional Data Collected**

Additional data collected looked only for trends within qualified charter LEAs in comparison to each other and not in comparison to the home districts. Through this analysis, it emerged that Successful LEAs have lower discipline incidence rates, lower student mobility, and a more diverse student population. The same was true for *on the cusp* LEAs. Conversely, *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* and *closed LEAs* had higher discipline incidence rates, higher student mobility, and a less diverse student population.
Chapter V
Results: Survey

RESPONDENT DATA

The first step to distributing the survey was finding school leader contact information. A total of 196 viable contacts were found, and the survey was distributed to them via email.

Table 24 - School Leader Contact Information by LEA Category and Subcategory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of people for whom contact information was found in each LEA category</th>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs That Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Cusp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contact information for founding leaders of closed LEAs was the most difficult to find for a couple of reasons: 1) Much time has passed for many of them, so the leads and relationships had gone cold, 2) Many of the founding leaders in those LEAs appeared to have changed fields of work. Contact information for 11 closed LEAs was not found.

Forty-five people completed the survey. After analyzing all 45 responses to ensure they met the qualifications of the study, 42 responses qualified for the analysis. One response was disqualified because the respondent was not an employee of the LEA during the founding years. Two responses were disqualified because the respondents were not school leaders during the founding years and became leaders in years not relevant to the study.
Respondents primarily represented Executive Directors/Superintendents (17%), Principals/Heads of School (45%), and Assistant Principals/Deas of Students (29%). Of the 42 qualified responses, respondents represented 40% of all charter LEAs ever approved in Missouri (25/62 LEAs). Respondents represented 67% (24/36) of currently open charter LEAs and 64% (18/28) of open LEAs that qualified for this study. In the Review of Existing Data, LEAs were sorted into categories based on meeting or not meeting the criteria for success. The main categories of Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were capitalized throughout the written analysis. Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (on the cusp LEAs, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success, and closed LEAs) were italicized throughout the written analysis. Table 25 indicated how many responses were received from each LEA category.

### Table 25 - % LEA Category and Subcategory Represented by at Least One Survey Respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Cusp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of LEAs in Each Category</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of LEAs with Responses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Each Category who Responded</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having fair representation from all LEA categories provided the researchers adequate data to make comparisons between the different LEA categories. The researchers’ focus was to identify the characteristics that led to charter LEAs’ success in the founding years, so having strong representation from Successful LEAs (even if the...
raw number was lower) provided good insight into the first research question. Having strong representation from the on the cusp LEAs was valuable because they were very close to having met the criteria and had valuable practices to consider, as well. The least representation was from the closed LEAs (especially in Kansas City), as their contact information was much less available. Nonetheless, a similar number of responses for each LEA category will provide for a strong analysis across LEA categories.

In addition to analyzing across LEA categories, survey data were analyzed to draw comparisons and distinctions between the two regions: St. Louis and Kansas City. The researchers sought to understand if two different regions (on opposite sides of the state) governed by the same state policies, but different local contexts, might impact factors that predict charter school success or failure. Of the 42 viable responses, 66% (28) were from St. Louis and 33% (14) were from Kansas City. This discrepancy was likely due to more recognition of the researchers’ names/relationships with colleagues in the city in which they are founding LEA leaders. The overall data were therefore skewed to more representation of LEAs in St. Louis which only comprise 43% (20/46) of the total LEAs eligible for study (versus representing 66% of respondents).

Table 26 - % LEA Category and Subcategory Represented by at Least One Survey Respondent by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Cusp</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of LEAs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of LEAs with responses</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Though the researchers attempted several times to gain responses from leaders of closed LEAs in Kansas City, only one responded to the survey. Outside of this difference, data from the two regions allowed the researchers to adequately compare trends between the two. Another challenge was that only two eligible LEAs in St. Louis qualified as Successful LEAs. This made for a very small sample size in St. Louis. For this reason, on the cusp LEAs also provided valuable insight because they nearly met the criteria.

In order to ensure that no one LEA’s experiences and perspectives outweighed another, the researchers evaluated how many responses came from each LEA. It was determined that no one LEA dominated the responses, but that responses were distributed across many LEAs, as outlined in Table 27.

**Table 27 - Number of Responses per LEA by Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Responses per LEA</th>
<th>St. Louis LEAs with this # of responses</th>
<th>Kansas City LEAs with this # of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses represented LEAs open for a long time and those that were not, ranging from 4 to 22 years open. Respondents from LEAs open for 21 and 22 years submitted the most responses.

- 13%, open 4-5 years
- 21%, open 6-10 years
- 33%, open 11-15 years
- 33%, open 16-22 years

Responses represented LEAs both big and small, ranging from an enrollment of 159 students to 1,290 students in the second relevant year.

- 46% Small LEAs: < 500 students
- 29% Midsize LEAs: 500-900 students
- 25% Large LEAs: > 900 students

For Successful LEAs, the breakdown of respondents from the three sizes was as follows:

- One response from a small LEA in each region
- One response from a midsize LEA in Kansas City
- 2 responses from the same large LEA in St. Louis and 4 responses from the same large LEA in Kansas City

For on the cusp LEAs, the breakdown of respondents from the three sizes was as follows:

- Two responses from the same small LEA in St. Louis and two responses from different LEAs in Kansas City
- Two responses from the same midsize LEA in St. Louis and two responses from the same midsize LEA in Kansas City
- One response from a large LEA in St. Louis

For open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success, the breakdown of respondents from the three sizes was as follows:

- Three responses from small Kansas City LEAs
- Four responses from one midsize LEA in St. Louis, two responses from another midsize LEA in St. Louis, and one response from a midsize LEA in Kansas City
- Three responses from the same large LEA in St. Louis

For closed LEAs, the breakdown of respondents from the three sizes was as follows:

- Seven responses from four small LEAs in St. Louis and none from small Kansas City LEAs
- One response from a midsize LEA in St. Louis
- Two responses from the same large LEA in St. Louis and one from a large LEA in Kansas City, all of which were from the same education management organization

It was important to note the sizes of LEAs in order to ensure analysis was in consideration of the proportion of responses given for each size. For example, there were no respondents from large open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success, so one could not determine that a characteristic was more likely to be prioritized by a small or midsize LEA in this subcategory because there was nothing to compare it to.

Overall, the survey data were determined to represent both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, with representation from many LEAs. Respondents represented LEAs with varied experience (length of existence) and enrollment size. Additionally, data made examining trends between the two regions possible in 80% of the categories, since only one respondent in a closed Kansas City LEA completed the survey compared to 6 in St. Louis.

**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE OF RESULTS**

The researchers analyzed survey results to better understand the two research questions. Because both questions were so closely intertwined, the analysis looked at both questions side by side, in comparison and in contrast.

1) Which School- and Community-Level Characteristics Predict Charter School Success?

2) Which School- and Community-Level Characteristics Predict Charter School Failure?
As was evident in the Literature Review, potentially absent priorities, challenges, or successes may say as much as those that are present when comparing and contrasting different LEA categories.

In order to evaluate the closed-ended survey questions for trends, the researchers developed three categories to indicate level of significance:

- **Significant**: if more than 60% of respondents selected the characteristic (blue in tables)
- **Moderately Significant**: between 50-59% of respondents selected the characteristic (green in tables)
- **Minor Significance**: between 40-49% of respondents selected the characteristic (yellow in tables)

If fewer than 40% or respondents selected the characteristic, the characteristic was determined not to hold significance for this study (white in tables).

**SCHOOL LEADERS’ RATING OF THEIR LEAs AS SUCCESSFUL OR NOT**

The first survey question to address the research questions asked: Would you characterize this LEA as successful by the 5th or 6th year of operation (or during your time there)? Respondents indicated their LEA was successful with reducing percentages when progressing from Successful LEAs toward closed LEAs; the lowest percentage was from closed St. Louis LEAs.

**Title 28 - School Leaders’ Rating of Success**

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City*
**LEA subcategories show the percentage of respondents from that subcategory indicating they were successful. STL and KC are the percentage of respondents from that region within the subcategory.**

All but one respondent from Successful LEAs agreed on rating their LEAs as successful, including the LEA for which there were four responses. The one Kansas City outlier from a Successful LEA who rated their LEA as not successful was the only respondent from that charter LEA and wrote: “our progress took time to perfect our vision of what a quality school truly was.”

Only one respondent from a St. Louis on the cusp LEA did not rate the LEA as successful. This respondent indicated many successes in the early years but stated that scaling up and expanding made it difficult to maintain great outcomes.

*Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* also mostly agreed on their rating of whether or not the LEA was successful, with the exception of one charter LEA in each region.

**Rationale for School Leaders’ Rating of LEAs as Successful or Not**

Following the closed-ended question, the survey asked respondents: Which factors led you to give the answer you gave for #4 (the rating as successful or not)? For this analysis, responses were coded according to characteristics, as indicated in Chapter III. All characteristics were italicized in the written analysis.
Table 29 - % of Respondents by Subcategory Indicating Academic Achievement Was the Reason They Rated Their LEA as Successful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)</th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>On the Cusp</th>
<th>Did Not Meet Criteria, Open</th>
<th>Closed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>88% (of 9)</td>
<td>88% (of 9)</td>
<td>70% (of 13)</td>
<td>33% (of 11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All LEAs, except for closed LEAs, had strong alignment in the reason for their answers. Academic achievement was the primary reason all open LEA categories rated their LEAs as successful. The one respondent from a Successful LEA that did not indicate academic achievement as a reason for success was one of four respondents from a Kansas City LEA and focused on home visits and partnerships. Academic achievement was the only characteristic with significant results defining why Successful LEAs rated themselves as successful; no characteristics were identified to have moderate or minor significance.

On the cusp LEAs also identified academic achievement as the most significant reason for their responses. This was in alignment with the Review of Existing Data as all but one on the cusp LEA exceeded the home district’s academic results by 5% (twice on the cusp LEAs exceeded the home district’s academic data, but not by the required 5%). Respondents (44%) indicated finances/business management as having moderate significance for their rating of success, as well. This also aligned with the Review of Existing Data; only two on the cusp LEAs were excluded from being considered Successful LEAs due to missing the financial criterion for success, even though they had 8% and 9% surpluses. Two St. Louis respondents from the same LEA also indicated teacher/staff retention as the reason for rating their LEAs as successful.
Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success also attributed academic achievement as their reason for rating their LEA as successful. This perception was in contrast to data from the Review of Existing Data that showed the primary reason an LEA was categorized as an open LEA that did not meet criteria for success was because they did not exceed the home district’s academic results; eighty-seven percent of open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success did not meet this criterion. Two Kansas City LEAs and one St. Louis LEA added post-secondary placement as their reason for rating their LEA as successful. Thirty-three percent of respondents from open St. Louis LEAs that did not meet criteria for success indicated success in attendance as the reason for their rating, much less than the 60% of LEAs that met that criterion. Fifty percent of open Kansas City LEAs that did not meet criteria for success pointed to enrollment as their reason, which was also in alignment to (but short of) the Review of Existing Data showing 70% met this criterion.

Closed LEAs did not have significant trends for ratings of success, as only 55% indicated they were successful.

Some of the LEAs that rated their LEAs as not successful identified the struggles that led to their rating. One on the cusp LEA listed expansion as a struggle. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success and closed LEAs listed several characteristics (academic achievement thrice), but no trends emerged. This indicated academic achievement was the primary reason respondents rated themselves as either successful or not. Successful LEAs attributed their rating of success to strong academic achievement, while LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated that poor academic achievement was their reason for rating their LEA as unsuccessful.
PRIORITIES

To understand how school leaders invested their energy and resources during the founding years, the researchers analyzed LEAs’ top priorities via survey. Survey respondents were asked: Which of the following categories did the LEA have as top priorities during the 1st-6th years of operation? Respondents were provided twenty characteristics to choose from and the option to write in “other.”

Respondents were asked to select up to six top priorities for their LEA during the first six years (some selected more). As indicated in the Research Methodology chapter, the researchers did not eliminate any selections in excess of six. Of the nine respondents from Successful LEAs, all but one limited their priorities to six (the outlier selected 16). All but one of the characteristics selected as priorities came from the twenty characteristics offered as multiple choice, with one write-in: character development. Of the thirty-three respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, all but six limited their priorities to six; those in excess of six responses spanned seven to fourteen selections. All but two of the identified priorities came from the twenty characteristics offered as multiple choice, with two write-ins: too small an administrative team and expansion.

Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success separately shared four priorities and also illustrated where they differed in priorities:

Successful LEAs’ Priorities:

- Academic achievement
- Curriculum
- Enrollment
- Implementation of mission and vision
- Parent involvement
- Student culture
- **Staff culture**

LEAs that Did Not Meet the Criteria for Success’s Priorities:

- **Academic achievement**
- **Attendance**
- **Curriculum**
- **Enrollment**
- **Finances/business management**
- **Student culture**

**Table 30 - Priorities (% Respondents Selecting Priority)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>On the Cusp Open Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)</td>
<td>89% 67% 100%</td>
<td>55% 54% 56%</td>
<td>67% 80% 50% 62% 67% 50% 36% 30% 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>33% 0% 50%</td>
<td>58% 63% 44%</td>
<td>44% 60% 25% 67% 78% 50% 55% 50% 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>44% 67% 33%</td>
<td>42% 50% 22%</td>
<td>44% 60% 25% 62% 78% 25% 18% 20% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>78% 67% 83%</td>
<td>52% 50% 56%</td>
<td>44% 40% 50% 54% 44% 75% 55% 60% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances/Business Management</td>
<td>11% 0% 17%</td>
<td>45% 46% 44%</td>
<td>56% 40% 75% 23% 22% 25% 64% 70% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Mission and Vision</td>
<td>56% 67% 50%</td>
<td>27% 29% 22%</td>
<td>33% 40% 25% 31% 33% 25% 18% 20% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>44% 67% 33%</td>
<td>27% 25% 33%</td>
<td>44% 60% 25% 31% 22% 50% 9% 10% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Culture</td>
<td>44% 33% 50%</td>
<td>27% 21% 44%</td>
<td>22% 40% 0% 23% 0% 75% 45% 30% 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Culture</td>
<td>67% 67% 67%</td>
<td>52% 54% 44%</td>
<td>44% 40% 50% 54% 67% 25% 55% 50% 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEA subcategories are a percentage of the respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, not of LEAs overall. STL and KC are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**
Successful LEAs

Significant Priorities of Successful LEAs

Collectively, Successful LEAs selected seven characteristics as top priorities in their 1st-6th years of operation. Three of the characteristics were significant priorities: academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture. While less significant characteristics had more variance in significance between the regions, all three of these characteristics were significantly prioritized in both St. Louis and Kansas City. Four of nine respondents selected all three characteristics as priorities; four respondents selected two of the three as priorities; and one respondent only selected one of the three as a priority.

Academic achievement was the most often prioritized characteristic by Successful LEAs. Only one respondent from a Successful St. Louis LEA (an Assistant Principal) did not select this as a priority; the other respondent (the Executive Director) from the same LEA did.

Enrollment was the second most often prioritized characteristic by Successful LEAs. Only two respondents from Successful LEAs did not choose enrollment as a priority: one from each region. Both respondents not selecting enrollment worked in midsize to large LEAs during the second relevant data year. All respondents for small Successful LEAs (enrollment less than 500) selected enrollment as a priority. Both the smallest Successful LEA and the largest Successful LEA indicated enrollment as a priority.
Assistant Principals/Deans of Students from Successful LEAs all selected enrollment as a priority. In contrast, only half of the Executive Directors/Superintendents and Principals/Head of Schools indicated enrollment as a priority.

Student culture was the third significant priority of Successful LEAs. Of the top priorities, student culture was the most consistently selected by Successful LEAs, selected by at least one respondent from each Successful LEA. In addition to the characteristics offered as multiple choice, one respondent who did not choose student culture selected “other” and wrote in character development, which the researchers ultimately placed into the same overall grouping of School Culture. (See Priorities by Groupings for additional analysis.) The researchers did not define School Culture for respondents, so their perception of what that meant may vary.

All Principals/Head of Schools from Successful LEAs selected student culture as a priority. Additionally, all but one Principal/Head of School from on the cusp LEAs indicated student culture was a priority. Other leadership roles from Successful LEAs, such as Executive Directors/Superintendents and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students had more variation in their selections with relation to student culture.

On the cusp LEAs also selected academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture as top priorities, though at a lower rate. This was significant because on the cusp LEAs were very close to being rated as Successful LEAs, narrowly missing only one of the five criteria for success. Three of nine respondents from on the cusp LEAs selected all three as top priorities; one respondent selected two as top priorities; three respondents selected one as a top priority; and two respondents did not select these three as their top
priorities. Similar to Successful LEAs, academic achievement was the most selected priority for on the cusp LEAs.

Successful Kansas City LEAs indicated academic achievement and enrollment were more important than student culture, while Successful St. Louis LEAs valued the three evenly. In addition to equally valuing the top three priorities, respondents from LEAs in St. Louis also selected implementation of mission and vision, curriculum, and parent involvement as significant priorities. These characteristics were selected by fewer LEAs in Kansas City, so were considered either moderately significant or of minor significance for the Successful LEA category overall. Overall, academic achievement and enrollment were the most often prioritized by Successful LEAs in total and across both regions.

Moderately Significant Priorities of Successful LEAs

Successful LEAs also identified one additional priority as moderately significant: implementation of mission and vision, with respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis selecting it more often than Successful LEAs in Kansas City. At least one respondent from each Successful LEA indicated implementation of mission and vision was a priority. The respondent’s role had a significant impact on whether they indicated this characteristic as a priority. All respondents in the role of Executive Director/Superintendent or Principal/Head of School selected this characteristic as a priority; only one respondent with the role Assistant Principal/Dean of Students made the same selection.

When examining regional trends, the researchers identified two additional points of interest. First, while all three Successful LEAs in Kansas City had at least one
respondent indicate *implementation of mission and vision* as a priority, only one respondent from the Successful LEA with four respondents selected this characteristic as a priority even though all four were Assistant Principals/Deans of Students during the 1st-6th years of operation. Second, similar to respondents from Successful LEAs, respondents from *on the cusp LEAs* in St. Louis also selected *implementation of mission and vision* more often than those in Kansas City. This suggested *implementation of mission and vision* was more often prioritized by St. Louis LEAs than Kansas City LEAs.

**Minor Significance Priorities of Successful LEAs**

In addition to the aforementioned significant or moderately significant priorities for Successful LEAs, three priorities emerged as having minor significance: *curriculum*, *parent involvement*, and *staff culture*. St. Louis respondents indicated *curriculum* and *parent involvement* were significant priorities, while Kansas City’s selections showed them to be a minor priority. Kansas City respondents prioritized *staff culture* more than St. Louis, for whom it was not even a minor priority.

**Additional Priorities for Kansas City**

Successful LEAs in St. Louis’ priorities aligned with those identified by all Successful LEAs. Though emphasis was not necessarily to the same degree between regions, respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis did not prioritize additional characteristics that were not prioritized by the collective responses of Successful LEAs. However, Successful LEAs in Kansas City prioritized three additional characteristics to a moderate degree: *ability to adequately compensate teachers and administrators*, *attendance*, and *discipline*. Each characteristic was selected by 50% of the survey
respondents from Successful LEAs in Kansas City and 0% of the respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis.

Summary of Priorities for Successful LEAs

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended question related to priorities, seven were identified by Successful LEAs as priorities. Though there was some discrepancy in prioritization between regions, the highest rated priorities: academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture were consistent across all Successful LEAs.

**Significant Priorities:** academic achievement, enrollment, student culture

**Moderately Significant Priority:** implementation of mission and vision

**Minor Significance Priorities:** curriculum, parent involvement, and staff culture.

It was evident that people in different roles had somewhat different priorities. Executive Directors/Superintendents and Principals/Heads of School prioritized implementation of mission and vision more often than people in other roles. Principals/Heads of School prioritized student culture more than others, while Assistant Principals/Deans of Students indicated enrollment was the priority.

There were also three characteristics that were not selected by respondents working in Successful LEAs: administrators’ expertise and competence, professional development of administrators, and student: teacher ratio. Though there were some survey respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that named each of these characteristics as a priority, all three characteristics were selected infrequently across all LEA categories, between 0-23% respondents selected them. However, Successful LEAs identified professional development of administrators and
administrators’ expertise and competence as needing more priority, to be discussed in the More Priority Needed section.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Priorities of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected six characteristics as priorities during their first six years of operation. Of those six characteristics, four of them were the same as characteristics prioritized by Successful LEAs: academic achievement, curriculum, enrollment, and student culture; though all were prioritized to a lesser degree. In addition to these four characteristics, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also prioritized attendance and finances/business management.

Prioritization during the first six years was less consistent between LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success than for Successful LEAs. This variation led to no significant priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success and subcategories. Four of the six selected priorities (attendance, academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture) were in the moderately significant range (selected by 50%-59% of respondents in this subcategory). Two priorities (finances/business management and curriculum), fell in the minor significance range (selected by 40%-49% of respondents in this subcategory).

Moderately Significant Priorities of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Attendance was the most often selected priority by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. It was significantly prioritized by LEAs that Did not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis, compared to being of minor significance in Kansas
City. Of the LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* prioritized this much more than the others; *on the cusp LEAs* prioritized it the least. Respondents from large LEAs that Did Not meet Criteria for Success more often prioritized *attendance* (75% selected it), as compared to 50% of respondents from small LEAs and 57% of respondents from midsize LEAs selecting this priority. Principals/Heads of Schools were more likely to indicate *attendance* was a priority (72%), whereas Executive Directors/Superintendents did not (0%).

*Academic achievement* was the second most often selected priority of respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. It was prioritized similarly in both regions. Of the LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, *closed LEAs* prioritized this the least, while *on the cusp LEAs* and *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* indicated it was a significant priority. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success who indicated they were not successful did not select *academic achievement* as a priority. Both respondents who served in Operations roles identified *academic achievement* as a priority. This indicated *academic achievement* was a significant priority across the board, with the exception of *closed LEAs*.

*Enrollment* was selected as a priority by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, with the least representation from *on the cusp LEAs*. *Closed LEAs* indicated this was a significant priority. The two respondents in Operations roles indicated *enrollment* was a priority, but less than 50% of respondents from any other role selected this characteristic as a priority; the lowest frequency came from Assistant Principals/Deans of Students (14%). Sixty-four percent of respondents from small LEAs (<500) prioritized *enrollment*. Respondents from midsize or large LEAs that Did Not
Meet Criteria for Success indicated it was a priority much less often (47% and 25% respectively). Enrollment was selected with similar frequency in St. Louis and Kansas City.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also selected student culture as a priority, with the least representation from on the cusp LEAs. The other two subcategories indicated this was a moderate priority. Student culture was more prioritized by St. Louis LEAs than Kansas City LEAs. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success who indicated they were not successful did not select student culture as a priority. Principals/Heads of School selected student culture as a priority more often (67% selected it) than Executive Directors/Superintendents (20% selected it). Neither Executive Director/Superintendent in Kansas City selected student culture as a priority and only 33% of those in St. Louis did.

Minor Significance Priorities of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also identified two characteristics as minor priorities: finances/business management and curriculum. Respondents from on the cusp and closed LEAs indicated finances/business management was a priority more often than open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success. Executive Directors/Superintendents overwhelmingly indicated finances/business management was a priority (all but one selected it); the outlier was from a closed LEA. Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success on both ends of the enrollment size spectrum prioritized finances/business management, with 64% of respondents from small LEAs and 57% from large LEAs selecting it as a priority. Only 17% of respondents from
midsize LEAs selected it. This indicated \textit{finances/business management} was less of a priority for midsize LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

\textit{Curriculum} was selected as a priority by more respondents from \textit{open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success} than the other two subcategories. St. Louis respondents from LEAs that Did Not meet Criteria for Success selected \textit{curriculum} as a priority much more often than those in Kansas City. Respondents from St. Louis LEAs serving more than 500 students were also significantly more likely to prioritize \textit{curriculum}, compared to Kansas City where only respondents from LEAs with 400-500 students selected \textit{curriculum} as a priority. Fifty-seven percent of respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success who prioritized \textit{curriculum} also prioritized \textit{academic achievement}. Of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success with more than one respondent, only two LEAs had consensus on \textit{curriculum} being an early priority. At least one respondent from 55\% of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected \textit{curriculum} as a priority.

\textbf{Additional Priorities for St. Louis}

\textbf{Table 31 - Additional Priorities of St. Louis LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (\% of Respondents Selecting Priorities)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All  St. Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>36% 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility Acquisition and Development</td>
<td>36% 46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only, not respondents in total.**

In addition to the collective priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, St. Louis LEAs prioritized two additional characteristics with minor
significance: discipline and facility acquisition/development. On the cusp LEAs from St. Louis demonstrated discipline was a significant priority. Discipline emerged as a moderate and minor priority for the other two subcategories from St. Louis. Only 15% of respondents from St. Louis LEAs who prioritized discipline also prioritized student culture.

Of St. Louis LEAs that Did not Meet Criteria for Success, closed LEAs indicated facility acquisition/development was a significant priority, while respondents from the other two subcategories did not indicate this characteristic was a priority of any significance. Fifty-five percent of respondents from St. Louis LEAs who prioritized finances/business management also prioritized facility acquisition/development, as compared Kansas City where 11% of respondents selected both priorities.

Additional Priorities for Kansas City

Table 32 - Additional Priorities of Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (% of Respondents Selecting Priorities)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>St. Louis</th>
<th>Kansas City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective School Leadership</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Culture</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only, not respondents in total.**

In addition to the collective priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, Kansas City LEAs prioritized two additional characteristics with minor significance: effective school leadership and staff culture. Respondents from both on the cusp LEAs and open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success from Kansas City indicated effective school leadership was a moderately significant priority with 50% of
respondents from each subcategory selecting it. All Executive Directors/Superintendents selected effective school leadership as a priority.

*Staff culture* was primarily prioritized by open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success (75% selected it) in Kansas City; respondents from the other two subcategories did not select *staff culture* as a priority of any significance. In fact, none of the respondents from on the cusp LEAs prioritized *staff culture*. *Staff culture* was more often indicated as prioritized by Assistant Principals/Deans of Students or Instructional Coaches/Content Specialists; none of the Executive Director/Superintendents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected *staff culture* as a priority.

**Summary of Priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success**

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended questions related to priorities, six were identified by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as being of moderate or minor priority: academic achievement, attendance, curriculum, enrollment, finances/business management, and student culture.

**Significant Priorities**: none

**Moderately Significant Priorities**: attendance, academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture

**Minor Significance Priorities**: curriculum and finances/business management

Though there was some discrepancy in prioritization between regions, academic achievement and enrollment were similarly prioritized in both regions. Further, there were trends related to the roles of respondents. Executive Directors/Superintendents were more likely than people in other roles to indicate the priorities were finances/business; people in an Operations role were more likely than people in other roles to indicate the
priorities were *academic achievement* and *enrollment*; and Principals/Heads of School were more likely than people in other roles to indicate the priorities were *attendance* and *student culture*.

At least one respondent selected each of the twenty available characteristics, though respondents in Kansas City did not select *board leadership* or *professional development of administrators*: two of the lowest selected priorities across all LEA categories and subcategories, between 0-20%. However, both characteristics arose as needing more priority, to be discussed in the Needs More Priority Section.

**Comparison of Priorities of Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success**

After understanding each LEA category separately, the researchers evaluated them for commonalities and differences to better understand the distinguishing priorities of Successful LEAs and those that may have been lacking for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

**Academic Achievement**

*Academic achievement* was identified as a significant priority for Successful LEAs and moderately significant for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, for which respondents selected it at a frequency of 34 percentage points lower. *Academic achievement* was one of the most often selected priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Every subcategory of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, with the exception of *closed St. Louis LEAs*, identified *academic achievement* as a significant or moderately significant priority.
There was no obvious difference between LEA respondents who chose academic achievement as a priority and those who did not. They spanned LEAs of different sizes, different regions, and served in different roles. Some of the LEAs were part of management companies and others were managed locally. LEAs with more than one respondent did not always agree that academic achievement was one of their top priorities. Only two LEAs with more than one respondent (2 for each) highlighted academic achievement as a top priority from all respondents.

Overall, LEAs in Kansas City selected academic achievement as a priority more often than LEAs in St. Louis. Academic achievement was the second most selected choice for on the cusp LEAs from Kansas City, though it tied with four additional categories also selected by 50% of respondents (enrollment; hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers; effective school leadership; and student culture). In summary, academic achievement was a priority across the board, with the exception of closed St. Louis LEAs.

Enrollment

Enrollment was identified as a priority for Successful LEAs and every LEA subcategory except closed LEAs in Kansas City. However, respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected it at a frequency of 26 percentage points lower than Successful LEAs.

On the cusp LEAs, overall, prioritized this significantly less than Successful LEAs and other subcategories. LEAs in Kansas City selected enrollment more frequently in all LEA categories than those in St. Louis, with the exception of the one closed LEA. In
summary, enrollment was a priority across the board, with the exception of the one closed Kansas LEA.

It was also evident that enrollment was more of a priority for LEAs on the far ends of the enrollment spectrum: small and large LEAs. Midsize LEAs from both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not indicate enrollment was a priority, though there was only one midsize, Successful LEA.

Student Culture

All LEA categories indicated student culture was a priority, but it was selected more frequently by respondents from Successful LEAs (15 more percentage points) than by respondents from LEAs that Did Not meet Criteria for Success. This difference was not as large as it was for academic achievement (34 more percentage points) or enrollment (26 more percentage points).

It was worth noting that respondents from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success in St. Louis selected student culture as a significant priority, with the same frequency as respondents from Successful LEAs. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success in Kansas City was the only subcategory of LEAs where respondents did not indicate student culture was a priority. On the cusp LEAs, overall though, prioritized this significantly less than Successful LEAs and other subcategories.

Implementation of Mission and Vision

When comparing prioritization of implementation of mission and vision, it was evident that respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated this was prioritized much less often (29 fewer percentage points) than Successful LEAs. The only subcategory of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that selected
implementation of mission and vision as a priority with any significance were on the cusp St. Louis LEAs. Of the responses from Successful LEAs, only respondents in the roles Executive Director/Superintendent or Principal/Head of School selected this characteristic as a priority; though not all respondents in these roles made this selection. Unlike the significant priorities from Successful LEAs, implementation of mission and vision was not selected as a priority by a majority of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

Curriculum

Curriculum was identified as a minor priority for Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. LEAs in St. Louis identified curriculum as a significantly higher priority than those in Kansas City in all LEA categories. Respondents from St. Louis on the cusp LEAs and open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success identified curriculum as a significant priority, whereas LEAs in Kansas City did not select curriculum as a significant priority.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement was identified as a minor priority for Successful LEAs but not for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Similar to curriculum, parent involvement was more frequently selected by Successful LEAs in St. Louis. While Successful LEAs and on the cusp LEAs in St. Louis chose parent involvement as a significant priority, Successful LEAs and on the cusp LEAs in Kansas City did not select parent involvement as a priority at all.

Similar to the implementation of mission and vision characteristic, parent involvement was not selected as a priority for most LEA categories. Principals/Heads of
School more often selected *parent involvement* as a priority, though not all in this role chose this characteristic. In Kansas City, 50% of *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* indicated *parent involvement* was a priority; both were Principals/Heads of School.

**Staff Culture**

*Staff culture* was a minor priority of Successful LEAs, but it was not a priority for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. It was prioritized in several LEA subcategories, but not consistently. Respondents who indicated their role was Executive Director/Superintendent did not select *staff culture* as a priority, though other roles (Principals/Heads of School and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students) did intermittently. *Staff culture* was selected more often by Kansas City LEAs than by St. Louis LEAs, though not across all LEA categories. It was a significant priority for both *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* and *closed LEAs* in Kansas City.

**Attendance**

Attendance was a priority for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success overall, but not for Successful LEAs. None of the respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis prioritized *attendance*, but 50% of respondents from Successful LEAs in Kansas City prioritized it. *Attendance* was largely prioritized by Principals/Heads of School (82% selected it) from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, compared to 50% of respondents from Successful LEAs selecting it. *Attendance* was not chosen by any Executive Director/Superintendent in any LEA category. Most LEAs with more than one respondent differed in their prioritization of *attendance*; however, two LEAs that Did
Not Meet Criteria for Success, both from St. Louis, selected attendance across the board (three and four respondents respectively).

**Finances/Business Management**

*Finances/business management* was a minor priority for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success but did not emerge as a significant priority for Successful LEAs. It was indicated as a priority most often by *on the cusp LEAs* and *closed LEAs*. *Closed LEAs* indicated this was a significant priority. Only one Successful LEA indicated they prioritized *finances/business management*.

**Priorities by Groupings**

In addition to the closed-ended question on priorities, respondents were asked an open-ended question related to top priorities and characteristics needing more priority. It asked: was there anything else you would like us to add with relation to characteristics prioritized during the 1st - 6th years of operation? Respondents were given the option to write in an answer. With relation to priorities, only four new responses were provided, with none of them showing a pattern (repeated more than once). These responses were coded and incorporated into the following analysis of groupings.

In addition to analyzing data related to each of the individual characteristics, the researchers analyzed data in nine larger groupings. The groupings clustered the characteristics into broader categories pulling together similar topics (i.e. *student culture* and *staff culture* were grouped into School Culture), as defined in Chapter III. These groupings included characteristics identified in both the closed-ended questions and the open-ended question that followed each set of closed-ended questions.
Table 33 - Priorities, by Grouping (% Respondents Selecting Priorities)

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total STL</td>
<td>Total KC</td>
<td>On the Cusp STL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>89% 67% 100%</td>
<td>55% 54% 56%</td>
<td>67% 80% 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Enrollment</td>
<td>78% 67% 83%</td>
<td>79% 75% 89%</td>
<td>67% 60% 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>33% 0% 50%</td>
<td>85% 83% 89%</td>
<td>100% 100% 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum/Instruction</td>
<td>44% 67% 33%</td>
<td>42% 50% 22%</td>
<td>44% 60% 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Vision</td>
<td>56% 67% 50%</td>
<td>30% 33% 22%</td>
<td>33% 40% 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>89% 100% 83%</td>
<td>85% 88% 78%</td>
<td>67% 80% 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff</td>
<td>56% 67% 50%</td>
<td>55% 54% 56%</td>
<td>89% 100% 75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Percentages indicate the percent of respondents in the subcategory selecting at least one characteristic from this grouping.

Significant and Moderate Priorities, by Grouping

Respondents from Successful LEAs in both regions indicated that the groupings Academic Achievement, Attendance/Enrollment, and School Culture were significant priorities. These groupings clearly align with the individual characteristics identified as priorities. The School Culture grouping included Successful LEA respondents’ significant priorities of the student culture characteristic plus the two minor priorities of parent involvement and staff culture and three other characteristics. In School Culture, one respondent also added character development.

Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success shared two groupings as significant priorities: Attendance/Enrollment and School Culture. This was in alignment with the analysis of individual characteristics.
The Academic Achievement grouping was also a priority for most LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, although it was less significant compared to Successful LEAs. Closed LEAs did not indicate Academic Achievement was a priority, as was also evident in the analysis of individual characteristics. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also indicated the Finances/Business Management grouping was a significant priority, while most Successful LEAs did not indicate this grouping had significant priority for them: similar to the analysis of individual characteristics. Successful Kansas City LEAs indicated this grouping was a moderate priority.

Successful LEAs’ moderate priority groupings (Mission and Vision and Teaching Staff) partially aligned with priorities identified in the analysis of individual characteristics. Mission and Vision captured Successful LEAs’ prioritization of the characteristic implementation of mission and vision. Successful St. Louis LEA respondents selected this grouping more often than Kansas City respondents.

As a new trend, the Teaching Staff grouping emerged as a new priority for Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis selected the characteristics that make up this grouping more often than Kansas City. None of the individual characteristics that make up the grouping emerged independently as having significance for Successful LEAs, but when grouped together became a prioritized grouping. The individual characteristics combined into the Teaching Staff grouping included hiring, supporting, and retaining staff; professional development of teachers; and teacher expertise and competence. The Teaching Staff
grouping was prioritized by most LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, with the exception of open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success.

Minor Priority, by Grouping

Successful LEAs selected the Curriculum/Instruction grouping as a minor priority, which aligned with the minor priority of curriculum in the individual characteristic analysis. Successful LEA respondents from St. Louis indicated this was a significant priority grouping, while fewer Kansas City respondents indicated this was a priority. It was also more prevalent amongst St. Louis respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Respondents from closed LEAs did not select characteristics from this grouping very often, while open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success indicated Curriculum/Instruction was a significant priority.

Insignificant Priorities, by Grouping

The groupings of Leadership and LEA Oversight were not indicated by respondents from Successful LEAs or LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as even minor priorities, with the exception of Kansas City’s respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (indicated Leadership was a minor priority). This aligned with their additional prioritization of the characteristic effective school leadership. The subcategory of on the cusp LEAs also selected the Leadership grouping with moderate frequency, especially in St. Louis.

Table 34 - Comparison of Insignificant/Absent Priorities, by Grouping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td>On the Cusp</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Conclusion: Priorities

In total, there were nine individual characteristics that emerged as priorities for Missouri LEAs during their first six years: *academic achievement, attendance, curriculum, enrollment, finances/business management, implementation of mission and vision, parent involvement, staff culture* and *student culture*. Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success shared four priorities: *academic achievement, curriculum, enrollment*, and *student culture*. Though both LEA categories indicated these characteristics were priorities, Successful LEAs placed more significance on each, in total and by region.

The differences in priorities between Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were clear. In addition to the shared priorities, Successful LEAs prioritized *implementation of mission and vision, parent involvement, and staff culture*; LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success prioritized *attendance and finances/business management*; Successful LEAs did not.

When characteristics were grouped into broader groupings, there was alignment with the analysis of individual characteristics, for the most part. The one exception to the alignment between the two analyses was the addition of the Teaching Staff grouping as a
priority. None of the individual characteristics that make up the Teaching Staff grouping emerged independently as having significance for Successful LEAs, but when grouped together became a prioritized grouping for all LEA categories and subcategories except open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success.

In comparison to Successful LEAs, different subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated different priority of individual characteristics. On the cusp LEAs were most aligned with Successful LEAs, sharing five of the seven priorities of Successful LEAs: academic achievement, curriculum, enrollment, parent involvement, and student culture. They did not share Successful LEAs’ priorities of implementation of mission and vision or staff culture. They did prioritize two that Successful LEAs did not: attendance and finances/business management.

In comparison to Successful LEAs, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success were aligned less, sharing four of the seven priorities of Successful LEAs: academic achievement, curriculum, enrollment, and student culture. They did not share three of Successful LEAs’ priorities: implementation of mission and vision, parent involvement, or staff culture. They did prioritize one that Successful LEAs did not: attendance.

In comparison to Successful LEAs, closed LEAs were significantly less aligned with Successful LEAs, sharing only three of the seven priorities of Successful LEAs: academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture. They did not share four of Successful LEAs’ priorities: curriculum, implementation of mission and vision, parent involvement, or staff culture. They did prioritize two that Successful LEAs did not:
attendance and finances/business management, as did other LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

In addition to commonalities and differences in the characteristics selected by different LEA categories, differences emerged in the perception of priorities as seen by respondents in different roles. Data indicated Executive Directors/Superintendents had different priorities (implementation of mission/vision and finances/business management) than Principals/Heads of School, who more often indicated attendance and student culture were priorities. Further, the size of the school affected the LEA’s priorities, as midsize LEAs tended to prioritize enrollment less than small and large LEAs; with small LEAs prioritizing enrollment the most.

Overall, all LEA categories and subcategories indicated academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture were top priorities. It was in the differences in their priorities that data highlight how a founding school leader might prioritize specifically with the goal of being a Successful LEA.

MORE PRIORITY NEEDED

Understanding the similarities and differences in the top priorities of Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success was the first step to understanding how school leaders planned and operated in the founding years. To more fully understand which characteristics led to charter school success or failure, the survey also asked respondents to indicate (in retrospect) which characteristics needed additional prioritization in the founding years. Survey respondents were asked: “Which of the following categories should the LEA have given more priority during the 1st-6th years of
operation?” Respondents were given the same twenty characteristics as were given as options in the question about their priorities, plus the option to write in “other.”

Similar to the question on priorities, respondents were asked to limit their responses to no more than six, but characteristics beyond the initial six were not removed. One respondent from a Successful LEA selected more than six characteristics (selected 7). All responses came from the twenty characteristics available for selection; none were written in. All but four respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected six or fewer characteristics needing more priority. Two respondents selected seven characteristics; one selected eight; and one selected 16. Two respondents included write-in characteristics: funding and allocation of state funds and equity and restorative justice in discipline. Overall, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected more additional characteristics than Successful LEAs, but they were less consistent across LEAs.

The researchers compared and contrasted the characteristics identified as having the most need for additional prioritization and determined the following characteristics needed more priority:

Successful LEAs’ More Priority Needed:

- Administrators’ Expertise and Competence
- Board Leadership
- Curriculum
- Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers
- Professional Development of Administrators

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success’s More Priority Needed:

- Board Leadership
- Staff Culture
Table 35 - More Priority Needed (% Respondents Selecting Needed More Priority)

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th>On the Cusp</th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Closed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators’ Expertise and Competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>STL KC</td>
<td>STL KC</td>
<td>STL KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tota l</td>
<td>44% 33% 50%</td>
<td>36% 38% 33%</td>
<td>33% 20% 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44% 100% 17%</td>
<td>45% 33% 70%</td>
<td>56% 40% 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring, Supporting, and Retaining Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44% 67% 33%</td>
<td>27% 33% 11%</td>
<td>11% 20% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development of Administrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67% 67% 67%</td>
<td>24% 25% 22%</td>
<td>44% 40% 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22% 0% 17%</td>
<td>67% 75% 44%</td>
<td>89% 100% 75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** LEA subcategories are a percentage of respondents from the LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, not of LEAs overall. STL and KC are the percentage of the region only, not respondents in total.

** Successful LEAs

Significant: More Priority Needed

Successful LEAs indicated five characteristics needed more priority during the founding years: administrators’ expertise and competence; board leadership; curriculum; hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers; and professional development of administrators. Only one (professional development of administrators) had more than minor significance. Professional development of administrators was the characteristic indicated as having the most significant need for more priority and was selected with
similar frequency by both regions. LEAs of all sizes and respondents from all roles indicated this characteristic needed more priority, as did respondents from single-site LEAs and multi-site LEAs.

**Minor Significance: More Priority Needed**

Successful LEA founding school leaders selected four characteristics as needing more priority in the range of minor significance: administrators’ expertise and competence; board leadership; curriculum; and hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers.

The first, administrators’ expertise and competence, aligned with data demonstrating professional development of administrators was in significant need of priority. It stands to reason that if administrators were not considered competent experts, they needed more professional development. Three of the four respondents who indicated more priority was needed for professional development of administrators also selected administrators’ expertise and competence.

Similar to administrators’ expertise and competence, board leadership was indicated as a characteristic needing more priority by Successful LEAs that did not show up in significant priorities of Successful LEAs. Hindsight highlighted this need, versus founding school leaders anticipating the need to prioritize it, especially by Executive Directors. Executive Directors/Superintendents from Successful LEAs indicated board leadership needed more priority, whereas Principals/Heads of School did not.

Curriculum, on the other hand, was indicated as both a top priority by 44% of respondents from Successful LEAs and as needing more priority by 44% of respondents from Successful LEAs. This indicated that while it was prioritized to a certain degree,
more was needed, specifically in Kansas City. All but one respondent from Successful LEAs selected *curriculum* as either being prioritized or needing more priority; none of the respondents indicated this characteristic as both a priority and a need.

Respondents in Kansas City viewed the prioritization of *curriculum* very differently than those in St. Louis. *Curriculum* was prioritized by Successful LEAs in St. Louis (67%) with no need for additional priority (0%). In contrast, Kansas City LEAs did not proactively prioritize it, but realized, in retrospect, it needed more priority. This was true for both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

*Hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* emerged as another characteristic Successful LEA leaders indicated needed more priority that had not emerged as one that had been prioritized significantly in the early years, except as a part of the Teaching Staff grouping. One hundred percent of small LEAs in both St. Louis and Kansas City indicated that *hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* needed more priority, whereas only 33% of respondents from large LEAs indicated this need. Of the four respondents who selected this characteristic, two were from each region; they did not have the same role; and their LEAs were different sizes (enrollment) and had different structures (single-site vs. multi-site).

**Summary of More Priority Needed for Successful LEAs**

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended question, five characteristics were identified by respondents of Successful LEAs as needing more priority: *administrators’ expertise and competence; board leadership; curriculum; hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers; and professional development of administrators.*

**Significant More Priority Needed:** *professional development of administrators*
Moderate More Priority Needed: None

Minor More Priority Needed: administrators’ expertise and competence; board leadership; curriculum; and hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers

Though there was some discrepancy in prioritization between regions, professional development of administrators (the highest-rated need) was similarly prioritized in both regions.

Board leadership emerged as a need from those who predominantly work closely with the Board: Executive Directors. Curriculum was shown to need more priority from Successful Kansas City LEAs who had not indicated it had been a priority in the first place. Finally, the characteristic of hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers was a minor need for more priority. This characteristic had not shown up as a priority for Successful LEAs until grouped together with other characteristics in the Teaching Staff grouping.

Five of the twenty available characteristics were not selected by any respondents from Successful LEAs: attendance, discipline, enrollment, facility acquisition/development, and teacher expertise/competence. Though they received some selections from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, those respondents also did not indicate they were characteristics in significant need of more priority.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Significant: More Priority Needed

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis and Kansas City agreed staff culture was a significant characteristic needing more prioritization. Midsize and
large LEAs (more than 500 students) indicated it was a greater need (79% selected it) as compared to smaller LEAs (less than 500 students) where only 50% of respondents selected this characteristic. The role of the respondent had an impact as well, with 83% of Principals/Heads of School selecting it as compared to 60% of Executive Directors/Superintendents and 57% of Assistant Principals/Deans of Students.

*Staff culture* had strong alignment between respondents from the same LEA. Five LEAs with more than one respondent all indicated *staff culture* as a needed priority. The timeframe that the LEA opened also had an impact on whether or not *staff culture* needed more priority. Eighty-four percent of respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that opened after 2008 indicated *staff culture* needed more priority. Only 43% of respondents from LEAs that opened prior to 2008 selected *staff culture* as needing more priority.

**Minor Significance: More Priority Needed**

Seventy-eight percent of Kansas City LEAs indicated *board leadership* needed significantly more priority in the first six years of operation, 45 percentage points higher than LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis. All LEAs in Kansas City that opened prior to 2008 indicated *board leadership* was a need, whereas only one-third who opened after 2008 did. Two LEAs with more than one respondent unanimously chose this characteristic as needing more priority.

**Summary of More Priority Needed for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success**

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended response question, two were identified by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as being of significant or minor need of more priority: *staff culture* and *board leadership*. The need
differed between St. Louis and Kansas City; St. Louis LEAs identified *staff culture* as a
greater need than Kansas City LEAs, whereas Kansas City LEAs identified *board
leadership* as having greater need. Both regions identified a need to prioritize people
within their LEA, but differed as to which group (staff or board) needed more
prioritization. At least one respondent selected each of the twenty available
characteristics and data were spread more evenly across the categories; identifying fewer
significant needs.

**Comparison: Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success
More Priority Needed**

In retrospect, school leaders have insight into what it was they should have given
more attention to, where priority was needed. Successful LEAs identified more
characteristics than did LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Part of this was that
Successful LEAs were more aligned in their responses, so significant trends were easier
to identify. School leaders from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success
individually identified many characteristics that needed more priority, but they identified
fewer common needs.

**Professional Development of Administrators**

*Professional development of administrators* was identified as needing more
priority by Successful LEAs and *on the cusp LEAs*. This was also in line with Successful
LEAs indicating that *administrator expertise and competence* also needed more priority.
The perception of whether or not this needed more priority was strongly aligned in both
regions. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not indicate this needed more
priority (24%), with the exception of *on the cusp LEAs*. Across all LEA categories, 29%
of Executive Directors/Superintendents identified this characteristic as needing more priority, compared to 40% of Principals/Heads of School.

Administrators’ Expertise and Competence

Successful LEAs as well as on the cusp LEAs in Kansas City identified administrators’ expertise and competence as a characteristic needing more priority. Closed LEAs also selected this as needing more priority.

When combining results between this characteristic and professional development of administrators, 78% of Successful LEAs and 52% of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated additional priority was needed in one or both characteristics. Seventy-five percent of respondents from Successful LEAs that selected administrators’ expertise and competence as needing more priority also selected professional development of administrators, compared to 25% of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

Board Leadership

Board leadership was the only characteristic that respondents from Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success agreed needed more priority. However, between the regions, there was almost a complete reversal of data. Successful LEAs in St. Louis indicated this was a significant characteristic needing more priority, while Successful LEAs in Kansas City did not. The reverse was true for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success; St. Louis (33%) and Kansas City (70%).

Curriculum

This was one of two characteristics that emerged as both a priority and needing more priority. Successful LEAs indicated curriculum was both a priority (selected by
44%) and as needing more priority (selected by 44%). This indicated that while it was prioritized to a certain degree, more was needed, specifically in Kansas City. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated *curriculum* was a priority (42%), but did not select this characteristic as one that needed more priority. When combining respondents’ selections of *curriculum* as either priority or needed more priority, 64% of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated *curriculum* was either a priority or needed more priority. When combined, 88% of Successful LEAs selected *curriculum*. One respondent from an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected *curriculum* for both. This indicated Successful LEAs were more likely to identify *curriculum* as needing more priority either proactively or retrospectively than were LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

In every LEA category other than the one closed Kansas City LEA, LEAs in Kansas City indicated *curriculum* needed more priority at a higher rate than LEAs in St. Louis within the same subcategory. Executive Directors/Superintendents did not indicate *curriculum* as needing more priority in either Successful LEAs or LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, though other roles did.

**Hiring, Supporting, and Retaining Teachers**

Successful LEAs considered *hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* as a characteristic in need of more priority; LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not, overall. When combining respondents’ priorities and more priority needed, 19% of respondents from all LEA categories selected *hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* as both a priority and in need of more priority. This indicated that while some prioritized it, it was not enough.
In both LEA categories, Principals/Heads of Schools were more likely to select hiring, supporting and retaining teachers as needing more priority than those serving in other roles. A larger percentage (43%) of large LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (enrollment >900) indicated this characteristic needed more priority than small LEAs (21%). Mostly, Successful LEAs from St. Louis saw a need for more priority here, while others did not.

Staff Culture

Staff culture was the other characteristic that emerged as both a priority and needing priority. Successful LEAs indicated it was a priority; LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated it needed more priority. Only two respondents from Successful LEAs selected staff culture as needing more priority, while respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated this was a significant need in all subcategories.

Respondents from large LEAs from both LEA categories were more likely to indicate staff culture as in need of more priority than respondents from either small or midsize LEAs. Seventy-nine percent of respondents from large LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated staff culture needed more priority; and though only 33% of respondents from large Successful LEAs indicated this needed more priority, both respondents came from the same large LEA (>900 students). All but three respondents from Successful LEAs indicated staff culture was either a priority or a characteristic needing more priority, indicating staff culture was important to Successful LEAs either proactively or in retrospect. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, on the other hand, only identified this need in retrospect. On the cusp LEAs overwhelmingly indicated
staff culture needed more priority, with all but one choosing it. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success also indicated staff culture was a characteristic in significant need of more priority especially respondents in St. Louis.

Further, of the LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, most that opened after 2008 selected staff culture as in need of more priority (84%) while only 50% of Successful LEAs that opened after 2008 did.

More Priority Needed, by Grouping

In addition to the closed-ended question on priorities, respondents were asked an open-ended question related to top priorities and characteristics needing more priority. It asked: was there anything else you would like us to add with relation to characteristics prioritized during the 1st - 6th years of operation? Respondents were given the option to write in an answer. With relation to needing more priority, only two new responses were provided, with neither of them showing a pattern (repeated more than once). These responses were incorporated into the following analysis of groupings.

Table 36 - More Priority Needed by Grouping (% Respondents Selecting Needed More Priority)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th>On the Cusp</th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Closed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>44% 100% 7%</td>
<td>61% 63% 56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>78% 67% 83%</td>
<td>58% 54% 67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>44% 60% 25%</td>
<td>69% 67% 75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>67% 40% 100%</td>
<td>46% 40% 50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>58% 54% 67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Successful LEAs in both regions most frequently selected the Leadership and Teaching Staff groupings as needing more priority. This aligned with the analysis of individual characteristics. The Leadership grouping included professional development of administrators and administrators’ expertise and competence, which were identified as individual characteristics also in need of more priority. The Teaching Staff grouping relied mostly on the need to prioritize the individual characteristic hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers.

Similar to Successful LEAs, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also selected the Leadership and Teaching Staff groupings. The individual characteristics of these two groupings did not emerge as characteristics in need of priority for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, though, until clustered in a grouping.

Leadership included the individual characteristics of administrator expertise and competence, professional development of administrators, and professional development of administrators. Though none were identified by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as needing more priority individually, 36% of respondents selected administrator expertise and competence, 21% selected professional development of administrators, and 24% selected professional development of administrators. Combined, this grouping
became a moderate grouping in need of priority for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

The Teaching Staff grouping also emerged as a new grouping in need of priority by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Similar to the Leadership grouping, when combining the less significant individual characteristics’ selections, this grouping emerged as more significant (minor significance). The individual characteristic of hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers was selected by 27% of respondents; professional development of teachers was selected by 39% of respondents; and teacher expertise and competence was selected by 24% of respondents. All together, they led to Teaching Staff emerging as a grouping in need of priority.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also aligned with the analysis of individual characteristics in their selection of the School Culture grouping as a significant priority. The School Culture grouping relied mostly on their identification of the individual characteristic of staff culture as most frequently needing more priority. This was a significant grouping in need of more priority for every subcategory of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in every region. Conversely, this was not a significant grouping in need of more priority by Successful LEAs, although Kansas City did indicate this grouping needed more priority at a moderate level.

As described above for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, new areas in need of priority emerged when individual characteristics were grouped together. One emerged for both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: Business Management. Neither LEA category identified the individual characteristics within the grouping as needing more priority. Respondents from Successful and on the
cusp LEAs in St. Louis were more likely to select from this grouping than respondents from Kansas City in the same two LEA categories.

**Table 37 - Comparison of Individual Characteristics’ Need to Increase Priority within Business Management (% Respondents Selecting Individual Characteristics Needed More Priority)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators</td>
<td>11% 33% 0%</td>
<td>30% 33% 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum / Instruction</td>
<td>44% 0% 67%</td>
<td>18% 17% 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility Acquisition / Development</td>
<td>0% 0% 0%</td>
<td>24% 21% 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances / Business Management</td>
<td>33% 100% 0%</td>
<td>21% 21% 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA Oversight</td>
<td>44% 100% 17%</td>
<td>45% 33% 78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student: Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>11% 0% 17%</td>
<td>6% 4% 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0% 0% 0%</td>
<td>3% 4% 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As was evident in Table 37, Successful LEAs most often selected finances/business management (especially in St. Louis) as the individual characteristic that led to this grouping emerging with minor significance. For LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, though, this grouping emerged as a significant priority with three individual characteristics combining with similar influence (ability to adequately compensate teachers and admin, facility acquisition/development, and finances/business management...
management). While both LEA categories pointed to this grouping needing more priority, it was clear that LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had more priority needed in more characteristics.

Minor Need for More Priority by Grouping

For LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, one moderate and one minor grouping in need of priority were discussed in the previous section due to Successful LEA’s identifying them as a significant grouping: Leadership and Teaching Staff. For Successful LEAs, the minor grouping of Business Management has also been discussed because LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success identified it as a grouping in significant need of more priority.

Two other groupings were indicated as having minor significance: Curriculum/Instruction and LEA Oversight. This aligned with Successful LEAs’ identification of curriculum as an individual characteristic needing more priority. Kansas City respondents from Successful LEAs indicated this needed more priority, while St. Louis respondents did not.

Both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated LEA Oversight was a grouping in need of more priority. This was in strong alignment with both LEA categories selecting the individual characteristic of board leadership as an area needing more priority. Respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis selected this far more often than respondents from Kansas City. The reverse was true for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: Kansas City respondents were much more likely to select from this grouping.
Insignificant Need for More Priority by Grouping

Three groupings did not emerge as having a significant need for more priority: Academic Achievement, Attendance/Enrollment, and Mission/Vision. This aligned with the analysis of individual characteristics.

Conclusion: More Priority Needed

In total, there were six characteristics that emerged as needing more priority by Missouri LEAs during their first six years: administrators’ expertise and competence; board leadership; curriculum; hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; professional development of administrators; and staff culture. Board leadership was the only characteristic that both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success agreed needed more priority.

Five of the individual characteristics: administrators’ expertise and competence; curriculum; hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; professional development of administrators; and staff culture differed significantly between the two LEA categories, having gaps between them that ranged from 17 percentage points (hiring, supporting and retaining teachers) to 45 percentage points (staff culture).

When characteristics were grouped into broader groupings, there was alignment with the analysis of individual characteristics, for the most part. In alignment with the individual characteristics analysis, Successful LEAs indicated Leadership, Teaching Staff, Curriculum, and LEA Oversight all needed more priority. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success aligned to the individual characteristic analysis in their indication that School Culture and LEA Oversight needed more priority. As was true in the analysis
of individual characteristics, both LEA Categories agreed LEA oversight needed more priority.

As compared to the individual characteristic analysis, two new groupings emerged as needing more priority for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria of Success: Teaching Staff and Business Management. Teaching Staff was also a grouping in need of priority for Successful LEAs. The one new grouping that emerged as needing more priority for both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success was Business Management. This indicated that the complexities of the business side of charter schools was in need of more attention.

Of the four groupings selected by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, only School Culture was not also selected by Successful LEAs as needing more priority. Leadership and Curriculum were selected as needing more priority by Successful LEAs but not by LEAs that Did Not Meet the Criteria for Success.

Data show there was more difference than similarity between what Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated needed more priority in the foundational years. The common theme to emerge, though, was all individual characteristics in need of more priority, with the exception of curriculum, have to do with developing people, not the business side of starting a charter LEA. The needs had to do with developing and supporting teachers, the board, and administrators. All of that fits well with the need to improve staff culture overall, with Successful LEAs prioritizing staff culture on the front end and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicating more priority was needed in retrospect. All LEAs agreed that the individual
characteristics of the people side of the founding years of a charter LEA needed more attention.

This emphasis on the human side of charter LEA start-up was reinforced by the groupings, but the business side emerged here as well. When clustering individual characteristics related to Business Management, it was clear that a Successful charter LEA needs to give more priority to more than the human side of the business.

GREATEST SUCCESSES

After respondents reflected on which characteristics their LEAs prioritized and which characteristics needed more priority in the founding years, they were asked to identify their LEA’s greatest successes during that time. Survey respondents were asked: Which of the following categories encompass the LEA’s greatest successes during the 1st-6th years of operation? They were given the same twenty characteristics to choose from as were given in the priorities questions, with the added option to write in “other”.

Unlike the previous questions related to priorities, respondents were permitted to select as many characteristics as they deemed accurate. Respondents from Successful LEAs selected between three and eight characteristics, with a mean of six. All of the selected characteristics were from the list of twenty available to them. Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected between two and sixteen characteristics, with a mean of five. In addition to the twenty characteristics available to them, one respondent added two characteristics as write-ins: buy-in from neighborhood and wrap around services.

In addition to considering the successes independently and comparing between Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, the researchers also
analyzed the correlation between indicated priorities and indicated successes to determine if the characteristics LEAs prioritized resulted in success, as reported by individual respondents. The researchers also compared the successes indicated by respondents to the qualitative data from the Review of Existing Data to determine if respondents who indicated they were successful in *academic achievement*, for example, were successful according to the researchers’ criteria for success.

Respondents to the survey indicated the following successes during their founding years:

Successful LEAs’ Successes:
- *Academic Achievement*
- *Attendance*
- *Enrollment*
- *Implementation of Mission and Vision*
- *Student Culture*

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success’s Successes:
- *Academic Achievement*
- *Enrollment*

**Table 38 - Successes (% Respondents Selecting Success)**
*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>On the Cusp</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>STL</td>
<td>KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Achievement</strong></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LEA subcategories are a percentage of the LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, not of LEAs overall. STL and KC are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

### Successful LEAs

Successful LEAs indicated five characteristics as their greatest successes during the founding years: *academic achievement, attendance, enrollment, implementation of mission and vision,* and *student culture.* Two characteristics were selected at a rate that placed them at the highest level of significance: *academic achievement* and *enrollment.* These two characteristics were also Successful LEAs’ most significantly indicated priorities. Three characteristics were selected at a rate that placed them as having moderate significance: *attendance, implementation of mission and vision,* and *student culture.* Two of these three characteristics were also indicated as priorities by respondents of Successful LEAs: *implementation of mission and vision* (moderate significance) and *student culture* (significant significance). Data show correlation between characteristics that were prioritized by Successful LEAs and characteristics that were ultimately identified as successful.

### Significant: Greatest Successes

*Academic achievement* was one of the most often selected characteristics of success by Successful LEAs. Two of the three respondents who did not indicate *academic achievement* was a success were from the same LEA; one of whom also did not select *academic achievement* as a priority. Additionally, their LEA had some of the
lowest academic results in the relevant years of data collection, though they were still higher than the home district. Overall, though, this identification of success was in alignment with the Review of Existing Data that demonstrated that in comparison to the home districts, Successful LEAs averaged 24 percentage points higher rates of proficiency in ELA and 27 percentage points higher in Math.

While only 33% of respondents from Successful St. Louis LEAs indicated academic achievement was a success, 83% of respondents from Successful Kansas City LEAs did. The only respondent from Kansas City who did not, did indicate academic achievement was a priority. One hundred percent of respondents who indicated academic achievement was a success, also indicated it was a priority.

Enrollment was also indicated as a significant success for Successful LEAs. This aligned with qualitative data from the Review of Existing Data that demonstrated Successful LEAs, on average, grew by 9% during the relevant years. Enrollment was unanimously indicated as a success in St. Louis respondents’ selections but was only moderately present in Kansas City respondents’ selections. Executive Directors/Superintendents (100%) and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students (80%) from both regions were more likely to see enrollment as a success, versus Principals/Heads of School (0%). Eighty-three percent of respondents who indicated enrollment was a success also indicated it was a priority.

Data show that while both academic achievement and enrollment were significantly indicated as successes overall, there was a significant difference between regional views. Kansas City respondents indicated academic achievement was a significant success, whereas St. Louis respondents did not. However, all St. Louis
respondents saw enrollment as a success, and enrollment was only moderately indicated as a success in Kansas City. This suggested that region may have an impact on how outcomes were viewed by the LEA, and what was ultimately viewed as successful (or as later discussed, a struggle).

Interestingly, these differences in regional perceptions do not align with the qualitative data from the Review of Existing Data. With regard to academic achievement, both regions demonstrated similar success. For enrollment, both regions grew by a similar percent of their enrollment during the relevant years. This equaled growing by more students (on average) in Kansas City LEAs, though, because they were larger on average. This point did not align with the fact that enrollment was seen as less of a success in Kansas City than in St. Louis Successful LEAs.

Moderate Significance: Greatest Successes

In addition to academic achievement and enrollment, Successful LEAs selected three characteristics with moderate significance: attendance, implementation of mission and vision and student culture.

Respondents with different roles indicated attendance was a success with different frequencies. Both Principals/Heads of School indicated attendance was a success, while nearly half of Executive Directors/Superintendents and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students roles did. Additionally, perception of attendance as a success varied by the size of LEA. One hundred percent of small Successful LEAs (<500 students) indicated attendance was a success, and only 33% of large LEAs (>900 students) did. Finally, Successful LEAs that opened prior to 2008 did not select attendance as a success (33%) as often as those that opened after 2008 (67%). Whether or
not a respondent viewed *attendance* as a success varied by the size of the LEA, when it opened, region, and respondents’ roles. *Attendance* was not indicated as a significant priority for Successful LEAs, but it was a strong success in the Review of Existing Data. Successful LEAs exceeded the average home districts’ attendance percentages by 17 percentage points in St. Louis and 15 percentage points in Kansas City.

Similar to *attendance*, a respondent’s role had an impact on how they viewed *implementation of mission and vision*. Both Executive Directors/Superintendents indicated *implementation of mission and vision* was a success, while only about half of Principals/Heads of Schools and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students roles did. Successful LEAs that opened prior to 2008 did not select *implementation of mission and vision* as a success (33%) as often as those that opened after 2008 (67%). Eighty percent of respondents who indicated *implementation of mission and vision* was a success also selected it as a priority, showing that Successful LEAs perceive that this priority translated into their success. One respondent who indicated this characteristic was a priority did not select it as a success.

All but one respondent who selected *student culture* as a priority also indicated it was a success. Like *implementation of mission and vision*, both Executive Directors/Superintendents indicated *student culture* was a success, while only about half of Principals/Heads of School and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students did. Large LEAs (>900 students) were somewhat more likely to select *student culture* as a success (60%) than small LEAs (<500 students) who selected it 50% of the time. Finally, Successful LEAs that opened prior to 2008 did not select *student culture* as a success (33%) as often as those that opened after 2008 (67%). These data suggest that views on
whether or not student culture was a success was dependent on an LEA’s size and region, one’s role, and when the LEA first opened.

Similar to characteristics indicated as a significant success, there were differences between how St. Louis and Kansas City respondents viewed their moderate successes. While Kansas City respondents frequently selected attendance as a significant success, it was not selected as often by St. Louis respondents who actually had a slightly higher average proportional attendance rate. On the other hand, St. Louis respondents selected both implementation of mission and vision and student culture as significant successes, while Kansas City only indicated moderate significance. These data further support regional variation in perceptions of success.

Additional Successes for St. Louis

In addition to the five characteristics identified as successes by all Successful LEAs, Successful LEAs in St. Louis identified three additional characteristics as significant successes: effective school leadership, finances/business management and parent involvement.

It was interesting that Successful LEAs in St. Louis identified effective school leadership as a success, since they did not indicate it as a priority, but did indicate that professional development of administrators needed significantly more priority.

Finances/business management was a priority for both regions, but only St. Louis respondents selected it as a success. Finances were a success for both regions, though, as demonstrated in the Review of Existing Data; both regions maintained an average 31% financial surplus.
Both Executive Directors/Superintendents indicated *finances/business management* and *parent involvement* amongst their LEAs greatest successes. *Parent involvement* did not show up in Successful LEAs’ priorities or as needing more priority.

**Table 39 - Additional Successes of Successful St. Louis LEAs (% of Respondents Selecting Successes)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective School Leadership</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances/Business Management</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

**Additional Successes for Kansas City**

In addition to the five characteristics identified by all Successful LEAs as successes, Successful LEAs in Kansas City identified an additional characteristic with moderate success: *ability to adequately compensate teachers and administrators*. Outside of regional indicators, there were no additional trends present.

**Table 40 - Additional Successes of Successful Kansas City LEAs (% of Respondents Selecting Successes)**

|                                | Successful LEAs |
|                                | All             | St. Louis | Kansas City |
| Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators | 33%             | 0%        | 50%         |

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**
Summary of Greatest Successes for Successful LEAs

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended question, five characteristics were identified as Successful LEAs’ greatest successes in the founding years: *academic achievement, attendance, enrollment, implementation of mission and vision* and *student culture*. The characteristics respondents identified as their greatest successes depended on a variety of factors: whether or not the characteristic was also identified as a priority, region, respondent’s role in the LEA, when the LEA first opened, and enrollment size.

Respondents were more likely to indicate a characteristic was a success if they had also indicated it was a priority for the LEA during the founding years. Fifty-seven percent of the characteristics selected as priorities by respondents of Successful LEAs were also identified as their greatest successes: *academic achievement, enrollment, implementation of mission and vision*, and *student culture*. *Academic achievement* and *enrollment* were also confirmed to have been successes in the Review of Existing Data. Successful LEAs’ priorities of *curriculum, parent involvement* and *staff culture* were not identified as successes for Successful LEAs, but *parent involvement* was a significant success for LEAs in St. Louis. This indicated that Successful LEAs were able to translate priorities into success.

One respondent selected all five characteristics identified by all Successful LEAs as characteristics of success for his/her LEA. This respondent represented an LEA with the highest academic outcomes of all of the Successful LEAs and served in the Executive Director/Superintendent role during the relevant data years. Several respondents selected
four of the five characteristics as successes. This suggested strong alignment in characteristics that predict charter school success in Missouri.

A respondent’s region was likely to have an impact on whether they identified their LEA as successful in different characteristics. Respondents from St. Louis more often saw enrollment, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture as successes. Respondents from Kansas City more often saw academic achievement and attendance as successes.

A respondent’s role also impacted which characteristics they selected as their LEA’s successes. Executive Directors/Heads of School were more likely to select enrollment, implementation of mission and vision and student culture as successes. Heads of School/Principals were more likely to view attendance as a success, and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students were more likely to view enrollment as a success. This could be connected to the job descriptions for different roles. Executive Directors were more likely to focus on big picture outcomes for the school, such as implementation of mission and vision, whereas the Assistant Principals/Deans of Students may have been focused on how to recruit and retain students: enrollment.

LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to identify academic achievement, attendance, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture as successes than those that opened prior to 2008. LEAs that opened prior to 2008 and after 2008 indicated enrollment evenly. This may be, in part, because data for attendance prior to 2009 were not available in many areas, indicating it may not have been prioritized by DESE and therefore not a priority for LEAs.
An LEA’s enrollment during the second relevant year correlated to which characteristics a respondent selected as their LEA’s greatest successes. Respondents from large LEAs, those with more than 900 students, were more likely to select student culture as a success, while respondents from small LEAs, those with fewer than 500 students, were more likely to indicate attendance was a success.

Three of the twenty available characteristics were not selected by any respondents from Successful LEAs: administrators’ expertise and competence; professional development of administrators; and hiring, supporting and retaining teachers. One of the three (hiring, supporting and retaining teachers) was selected with minor significance as a struggle; to be discussed in Greatest Struggles.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated two characteristics were their greatest successes during the founding years: academic achievement and enrollment. Both overlap with the successes identified by respondents from Successful LEAs. This did not correlate to data gathered in the Review of Existing Data in relation to academic achievement. In the Review of Existing Data, LEAs that Did Not Meet the Criteria for Success averaged 4 percentage points lower average proficiency than home districts. Only on the cusp LEAs exceeded (by 16 percentage points) the home district’s average of students’ proficiency on state standardized tests.

The characteristic of enrollment as a success was mostly supported by the Review of Existing Data which showed that, on average, all LEAs except closed LEAs were successful in this characteristic.
Both academic achievement and enrollment were indicated as two of six priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Of the characteristics indicated as priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, 67% of those characteristics were not also included as successes. These data suggest LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were less successful than Successful LEAs at achieving their desired outcomes.

Minor Significance: Greatest Successes

The two characteristics selected as the greatest successes by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were identified with minor significance: academic achievement and enrollment. Academic achievement was identified as a success more often in St. Louis than in Kansas City, which aligned with data that LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis achieved proficiency rates in excess of Kansas City LEAs by 4 percentage points in ELA and 2 percentage points in Math.

Additionally, Heads of School/Principals were more likely to select academic achievement as a success (61%) than either Executive Directors/Superintendents (20%) or Assistant Principals/Deans of Students (29%). Respondents from small LEAs (21%) were significantly less likely to select academic achievement as a success than respondents from midsize or large LEAs (67% and 57% respectively). Finally, LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to indicate academic achievement was a success (58%) as compared to LEAs that opened prior to 2008 (29%).

Many factors influenced whether respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success considered academic achievement a success: region, size of LEA, role, and when the LEA first opened. Thirty-three percent of respondents who indicated
academic achievement was one of their LEA’s greatest successes did not also indicate academic achievement was a priority in the founding years. This may suggest that LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not achieve outcomes as a direct result of what was prioritized.

Enrollment was also identified as a success by survey respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Respondents with different identifiers varied in their view of enrollment as a success. First, respondents from LEAs in Kansas City were more likely to select enrollment as a success as compared to respondents from St. Louis LEAs. Additionally, Executive Directors/Superintendents were least likely to identify enrollment as a success (0%) as compared to Assistant Principals/Deans of Students (43%), Heads of School/Principals (56%), or respondents in Operations roles (100%). Respondents from LEAs that opened prior to 2008 were more likely to select enrollment as a success (57%) as compared to those that opened after 2008 (42%). The size of the LEA had a minor impact on a respondents’ views of enrollment success, with 57% of respondents from large LEAs selecting enrollment, while 50% of respondents from small LEAs and 42% of respondents from midsize LEAs indicated enrollment was one of their greatest successes.

The most significant factors to determine if a respondent selected enrollment as a success were a respondent’s region and role. LEA size and the year they opened had a moderate impact. Thirty-eight percent of respondents who indicated enrollment was one of their LEA’s greatest successes did not also indicate enrollment was a priority of their LEA in the founding years. These data provide further evidence that LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not see outcomes as a direct result of what was prioritized.
Additional Successes for St. Louis

In addition to the two characteristics identified as successes by all LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis identified one additional characteristic with minor significance: *curriculum*. *Curriculum* was selected as a success by more respondents in each LEA subcategory from St. Louis than Kansas City. *Curriculum* was also indicated as a priority by St. Louis LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, with moderate significance.

Most significantly, on the cusp LEAs from St. Louis indicated curriculum was a success, with 55 percentage points fewer respondents from Kansas City LEAs making the same selection. *Curriculum* was indicated as a success most often by respondents from midsize LEAs (50%) and those who served as Assistant Principals/Deans of Students in St. Louis (60%). Both respondents from Kansas City who selected *curriculum* as a success were also from midsize LEAs.

**Table 41 - Additional Successes of St. Louis LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (% of Respondents Selecting Successes)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

Additional Successes for Kansas City

In addition to the two characteristics identified as successes by all LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in Kansas City selected seven additional characteristics, ranging from significant significance to
mild significance. Four of the seven characteristics identified as Kansas City LEA’s that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were also indicated as priorities, all of minor significance: attendance, finances/business management, staff culture and student culture.

The most selected characteristic of success for Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success was staff culture. Though staff culture was not often selected by on the cusp LEAs from Kansas City as a success, it was significantly selected by open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success and closed LEAs. Executive Directors/Superintendents from Kansas City LEAs were least likely to indicate staff culture was a success (0%), compared to Principals/Heads of School (75%) or Assistant Principals/Deans of Students (100%). Data indicated that roles with more direct contact and supervision of staff more often perceived staff culture as a greater strength.

Four of the characteristics identified by Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were identified with moderate significance: attendance, facility acquisition/development, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture.

Attendance was not indicated as a priority or needing more priority by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in either region. Qualitative data from the Review of Existing Data indicated it was a success for some LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, especially on the cusp LEAs. In Kansas City, they met this criterion 100% of the time. The other two subcategories had far lower rates of success in Kansas City, with only an average attendance rate of 71%, with 56% meeting this criterion for success. The selection of attendance as a success varied between the roles: 75% of Principals/Heads of School selected it, while 50% of Executive Directors/Superintendents and 50% of
Assistant Principals/Deans of Students did. Sixty percent of respondents from small LEAs from Kansas City indicated *attendance* was a success.

Most factors did not seem to play a significant role in a respondent’s selection of *facility acquisition/development* as a success, with the exception of their roles in the Kansas City LEA. One hundred percent of Executive Directors/Superintendents and 75% of Heads of Schools/Principals selected *facility acquisition/development* as a success, as compared to 0% of Assistant Principals/Deans of Students. A respondent’s role was also the only significantly varying factor for how respondents from Kansas City LEAs viewed their success relative to *student culture*. One hundred percent of Assistant Principals/Deans of Students and 75% of Principals/Heads of School indicated *student culture* was a success as compared to 0% of Executive Directors/Superintendents.

Finally, respondents from small LEAs (80%) viewed *implementation of mission and vision* as a success, though respondents from midsize and large LEAs did not.

In addition to the aforementioned characteristics, Kansas City LEA respondents selected two characteristics with minor significance as successes: *finances/business management* and *hiring, supporting and retaining teachers*.

*Finances/business management* was selected as a priority by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success from both regions. The selection of *finances/business management* as a success by Kansas City respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success was supported by qualitative data from the Review of Existing Data. They met this criterion for success more often (61% of the time) than those in St. Louis (41%). *On the cusp LEAs* from Kansas City selected *finances/business management* as a success significantly more often than other subcategories of LEAs, but
it was the only subcategory for which fewer LEAs in Kansas City actually met this criterion for success (50%) than in St. Louis (83%).

Additionally, the selection of finances/business management as a success varied by roles of respondents. One hundred percent of Executive Directors/Superintendents and 50% of Principals/Heads of School selected finances/business management as one of their greatest successes, while 0% of Assistant Principals/Deans of Students did. Outside of the fact that respondents from Kansas City were more likely to select it, there were no additional trends related to the selection of hiring, supporting and retaining teachers as a success.

Data from Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success continued to support the trend that the role of a respondent impacted how they viewed their LEA’s successes. The large number of additional characteristics identified as successes in Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria of Success highlighted that there was less alignment amongst respondents between LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria of Success in defining their successes than between respondents of Successful LEAs.

**Table 42 - Additional Successes of Kansas LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (% of Respondents Selecting Successes)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility Acquisition/Development</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances/Business Management</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

### Summary of Greatest Successes for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended question, two characteristics were identified as successes by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: *academic achievement* and *enrollment*; an additional eight characteristics were only indicated within one of the two regions: *attendance; curriculum; facility acquisition/development; finances/business management; implementation of mission and vision; hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; staff culture and student culture.*

Of the eight characteristics identified as successes, only *enrollment* was identified as somewhat successful in the Review of Existing Data for all LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. *Academic achievement* was a success for *on the cusp LEAs*, but not other subcategories. For attendance, only 47% met this criterion for success; for finances/business management only 49% met this criterion for success.

When comparing respondents’ perspectives of their LEAs’ successes in the founding years to that which was prioritized, the researchers found alignment, although to a lesser degree than for Successful LEAs: *academic achievement, enrollment, attendance, curriculum, finances/business management, and student culture* were identified as both priorities and successes for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. One, *staff culture*, was identified as a characteristic needing more priority.
The characteristics respondents identified as their greatest successes depended on a variety of factors: region, respondent’s role, when the LEA opened, and enrollment size. A respondent’s region was likely to impact whether they viewed a particular characteristic as successful. Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis indicated academic achievement was a success, as well as curriculum. Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in Kansas City indicated enrollment was a success, as well as attendance, facility acquisition/development; finances/business management; implementation of mission and vision; hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; staff culture and student culture.

The role of a respondent also impacted which successes they identified as successes for their LEA. Executive Directors were more likely to identify district-level characteristics as successes, such as facility acquisition/development and finances/business management. Assistant Principals/Deans of Students were more likely to select curriculum, enrollment, staff culture, and student culture as successes. Principals/Heads of School were more likely to select academic achievement as a success, but they also had some alignment with both Executive Directors/Superintendents and Assistant Principals/Deans of Students in their selections of enrollment, staff culture, facility acquisition/development, finances/business management and student culture as successes. Attendance was the only characteristic aligned between several roles, potentially due to how this characteristic impacts various functions of the LEA: finance, student culture, instruction, etc.

The year an LEA opened impacted respondents’ selections of successes for both regions. LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to select academic achievement as
a success whereas LEAs that opened prior to 2008 were more likely to select enrollment as a success.

Both midsize and large LEAs were more likely than small LEAs to view academic achievement and enrollment as a success. Small LEAs were more likely to choose implementation of mission and vision.

All twenty of the available characteristics were selected as a success by at least one respondent from each LEA, spreading out the results across many. This may indicate a lack of cohesion amongst respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Further, there were also four characteristics of success identified that were not identified as priorities, indicating that respondents did not necessarily correlate priorities with successes.

Comparison: Greatest Successes of Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

The success of an LEA, as perceived by survey respondents in this study, highlights the similarities and differences between Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Through the differences, and as supported by the Review of Existing Data, the researchers further highlight the characteristics predicting charter school success and failure.

Academic Achievement

Respondents from Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success agreed that academic achievement was one of their LEA’s greatest successes, with the exception of closed LEAs. It was one of two characteristics selected by a significant number of respondents from both LEA categories. Qualitative data supported
that academic achievement was indeed a success for both Successful and on the cusp LEAs, but did not support it was a success for open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success or closed LEAs. All LEA subcategories, except for closed LEAs prioritized academic achievement.

Respondents from Successful LEAs in Kansas City were more likely to select academic achievement as a success, while LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis were more likely to choose academic achievement as a success. This was particularly true for on the cusp LEAs from St. Louis where 100% of respondents indicated this characteristic was one of their greatest successes.

Principals/Heads of School were more likely than either Executive Directors/Superintendents or Assistant Principals/Deans of Students to select academic achievement as a success: it was selected by 61% from both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Small or midsize Successful LEAs were more likely to select academic achievement as a success, while midsize or large LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success more frequently chose academic achievement as a success. LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to choose academic achievement in both LEA categories.

Region and size of LEA impacted the likelihood a respondent might view academic achievement as a success. LEA category, role, and the year the LEA opened did not point towards different results.

Attendance

When comparing data between Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, data showed opposing perspectives related to attendance as a
success. Successful LEAs indicated *attendance* was a success; LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not. Successful LEAs did not prioritize *attendance* collectively (though 50% of respondents from Successful LEAs in Kansas City did) and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did indicate *attendance* was a priority. This contrast was supported by qualitative data showing that Successful LEAs were indeed successful with *attendance*, while LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were not.

Of the LEA subcategories, *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* most often indicated success with *attendance*, especially in Kansas City. This was not supported by the Review of Existing Data with only 58% of Kansas City LEAs meeting this criterion with a 76% average attendance rate.

Principals/Heads of School in Successful LEAs were more likely to select *attendance* as one of their LEA’s greatest successes; Executive Directors/Superintendents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were most likely to view *attendance* as a success. Small, Successful LEAs and those that opened after 2008 were more likely to select *attendance* as a success, while large LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success and those that opened prior to 2008 were more likely to select *attendance* as a success. Overall, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that opened prior to 2008 were more likely to indicate *attendance* was a success than those that opened after.

Respondents from LEAs in Kansas City were more likely to select *attendance* as a success, with the exception of *closed LEAs*. Many factors impacted respondents’ selection of *attendance* as one of their LEA’s greatest successes: whether or not their LEA was successful (according to the researchers’ definition), region, respondent’s role, size of LEA (as measured by enrollment), and the year the LEA opened.
Enrollment

*Enrollment* was the second of two characteristics indicated as a success by a significant percentage of respondents from both LEA categories. This was supported by the Review of Existing Data: *enrollment* was a success for most LEAs and was the least common reason an LEA was classified as not having met the criteria for success. It was also a priority for every LEA category except *closed LEAs* in Kansas City who indicated it was a success. Only *on the cusp* LEAs did not indicate *enrollment* was a success during the founding years.

Respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis were more likely to indicate *enrollment* was a success than those in Kansas City. Conversely, respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria of Success in Kansas City were more likely than those from St. Louis to select *enrollment* as a success. Executive Directors/Superintendents from Successful LEAs were the most likely role to view *enrollment* as a success, but Principals/Heads of School were most likely to select *enrollment* as a success for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Successful LEAs aligned across the different timelines for opening, but respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that opened prior to 2008 were more likely to select *enrollment* as a success than respondents from those that opened after 2008. Finally, large LEAs from both LEA categories indicated *enrollment* was a success more frequently than midsize and small LEAs.

Eighty-three percent of respondents from Successful LEAs who indicated *enrollment* was a success also indicated it was a priority, significantly more than the 63% of respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success who did the same. This
may suggest that Successful LEAs were more likely to achieve success in characteristics that were prioritized.

**Implementation of Mission and Vision**

Successful LEAs considered *implementation of mission and vision* a success; LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not. Only *open LEAs that did not meet the criteria for success* (especially in Kansas City) selected it as a success with significant frequency. The identification of *implementation of mission and vision* as a success for Successful LEAs was in alignment with their proactive prioritization of this characteristic. Respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis were more likely to recognize *implementation of mission and vision* as a success. In Kansas City, though, it was more often identified as a success for respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected *implementation of mission and vision* as a success nearly as frequently and occasionally more frequently (as was the case in *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*) as Successful LEAs in total.

Executive Directors/Superintendents from both LEA categories were more likely to view *implementation of mission and vision* as a success than those in other roles. While there was no significant difference between the perspectives of different sizes of Successful LEAs, there was a difference in LEAs that Did Not MeetCriteria for Success; small LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were most likely to select *implementation of mission and vision* as a success.

Successful LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to select *implementation of mission and vision* as a success than those that opened prior to 2008.
Conversely, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that opened prior to 2008 were more likely to view this characteristic as a success than those that opened after.

Of the respondents from Successful LEAs that indicated *implementation of mission and vision was a success*, 80% of them also indicated that it was a priority. In contrast, only 50% of respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that indicated *implementation of mission and vision was a success* also indicated it was a priority. These data further support the possibility that Successful LEAs had greater success at reaching that which was prioritized.

**Student Culture**

*Student Culture* was selected as a success by respondents from Successful LEAs but not by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, except for *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*. It was a priority for both LEA categories, though. Respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis were more likely to indicate *student culture* was a success than respondents in Kansas City. Conversely, respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in Kansas City were more likely to select *student culture* as a success than those in St. Louis, particularly *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* and *closed LEAs* in Kansas City.

Executive Directors/Superintendents from Successful LEAs were more likely to view *student culture* as a success, whereas Principals/Heads of School from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success more often selected *student culture* as a success. Large LEAs from both LEA categories were more likely to select *student culture* as a success than were small or midsize LEAs. Similarly, LEAs that opened after 2008 in both LEA
categories selected student culture as a success more often than LEAs that opened prior to 2008.

**Successes by Groupings**

In addition to the closed-ended question on priorities, respondents were asked an open-ended question related to successes and struggle. It asked: “Was there anything else you would like us to add with relation to characteristics that made your LEA successful or not?” Respondents were given the option to write in an answer. With relation to successes, eleven new responses were provided, with one of showing a pattern (repeated more than once). Two closed LEAs rated community support and involvement as a success. All open-ended responses were incorporated into the analysis of groupings.

**Table 43 - Successes by Grouping (% Respondents Selecting Success)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th>On the Cusp</th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Closed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful LEAs</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>STL</td>
<td>KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Enrollment</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Vision</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Significant Successes, by Grouping

Successful LEAs identified the groupings of Academic Achievement, Attendance/Enrollment, Business Management, and School Culture as significant successes. This aligned with the individual characteristics identified as successes: academic achievement, enrollment, student culture, and staff culture. Academic Achievement was selected more often in Kansas City than in St. Louis, despite the reality that both regions were academically successful. On the cusp LEAs also indicated Academic Achievement was a significant success, which was also supported by the Review of Existing Data.

Successful LEAs also identified Business Management as a significant success, despite the fact that no individual characteristics from this grouping were identified as priorities, characteristics needing more priority, or successes. Successful LEAs identified this grouping as needing more priority, while also selecting it as a success. In St. Louis, respondents indicated most frequent success in finances/business management (the same individual characteristic from the grouping that most identified needed priority), while respondents in Kansas City indicated the most frequent success in the ability to adequately compensate teachers and administrators.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also identified Business Management as a significant success (their only one). This did not surface in the analysis of individual characteristics, except that finances/business management was a priority. Similar to Successful LEAs, this grouping emerged as both a success and grouping needing more priority, even though the individual characteristics were not selected with
any significance as successes or needing more priority. This demonstrated that the aggregate of Business Management did well, but no one individual characteristic was the stand out success. The same was true in needing priority: in the aggregate, this needed more priority, but no one characteristic in particular did.

Of Successful LEAs’ three other groupings of significant success, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected all three as moderate to minor successes. Forty-five percent of respondents indicated Academic Achievement was a success, yet only 16% met the criteria for success. When looking at only open LEAs that met criteria for success and closed LEAs, only 8% met criteria for success. Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also indicated the individual characteristic enrollment was a success, and this aligned with their selection of the Attendance/Enrollment grouping as a moderate success. School Culture was also indicated as a minor success, which did not align with respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success’s selections of characteristics individually. Respondents identified some success in all five individual characteristics of School Culture, with the strongest representation from Kansas City’s selections of staff culture and student culture that, when aggregated, indicated moderate success in School Culture.

**Moderate Successes, by Grouping**

As indicated previously, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated Attendance/Enrollment and School Culture were moderate successes as groupings. Successful LEAs identified Mission and Vision as a moderate success, as well. This was in alignment with their identification of the individual characteristic implementation of mission and vision as a success.
Minor and Insignificant Successes, by Grouping

As indicated in the section on Significant Successes, by Grouping, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected Academic Achievement as a minor success. No other groupings emerged as successes. In fact, three were selected with insignificant frequency: Curriculum/Instruction, Leadership, and LEA Oversight. Not identifying these as successes strongly supports data showing that respondents indicated all three needed more priority.

Table 44 - Insignificant Successes by Grouping (% Respondents Selecting Success)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>Total STL KC Total STL KC Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum/Instruction</td>
<td>11% 0% 17%</td>
<td>33% 38% 22%</td>
<td>56% 80% 25% 38% 44% 25% 9% 10% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>33% 67% 17%</td>
<td>33% 33% 33%</td>
<td>56% 80% 25% 31% 22% 50% 18% 20% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA Oversight</td>
<td>11% 0% 17%</td>
<td>27% 25% 33%</td>
<td>22% 20% 25% 23% 11% 50% 36% 40% 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion: Greatest Successes

In total there were five characteristics that emerged as respondents’ perceptions of greatest successes in Missouri LEAs during LEAs’ first six years: academic achievement, attendance, enrollment, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture.

Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success agreed that academic achievement and enrollment were their LEA’s greatest successes.
The frequency of the selection of all five characteristics varied significantly between the two LEA categories, ranging from a difference of 17 percentage points (student culture) to 22 percentage points (academic achievement). There was a distinct difference in open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success in comparison to the other subcategories. They selected all five of these characteristics as successes (as did Successful LEAs), while on the cusp LEAs and closed LEAs only selected one as a success (academic achievement and enrollment respectively).

In alignment with the individual characteristics, Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success both selected Academic Achievement and Attendance/Enrollment groupings as successes. Successful LEAs also indicated Mission and Vision was a success.

When individual characteristics were grouped, Business Management and School Culture were newly identified as successes by both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. This demonstrated that the smaller pieces of these groupings did not stand out as successes, but when grouped together, demonstrated some success.

Data show there was more difference than similarity between what respondents from Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated were their LEA’s greatest successes in individual characteristics, but when characteristics were grouped together, there was more common ground. Data aligned between the Review of Existing Data and survey results in that Successful LEAs demonstrated success through both analyses in the characteristics of academic achievement, attendance and enrollment; LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated they were successful with
enrollment and the Review of Existing Data supports this, although it did not support their view of success with relation to academic achievement.

Further, there was alignment in what Successful LEAs indicated were priorities and where they were successful: academic achievement, enrollment, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture. This indicated Successful LEAs reaped the benefits of their priorities as they became their greatest successes.

**GREATEST STRUGGLES**

To effectively understand which community- and school-level characteristics led to charter school failure, the researchers also sought to understand what charter school leaders believed were their LEA’s greatest challenges. The final survey question asked respondents to reflect on the characteristics that were the greatest struggles for their LEA during the founding years. Survey respondents were asked: Which of the following categories encompass the LEA’s greatest struggles during the 1st-6th years of operation? They were given the same twenty characteristics as options to select, with an added option to write in “other.”

Similar to the question related to an LEA’s greatest successes, respondents were permitted to select as many characteristics as applied. Respondents from Successful LEAs selected between two and ten characteristics, with a mean of five. In addition to the twenty characteristics available to them, one respondent added one characteristic as a write-in: CMO involvement and management. Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected between two and seventeen characteristics, with a mean of five. In addition to the twenty characteristics available to them, one respondent
added three characteristics as write-ins: *changes in neighborhood, mobility of students* and *transportation*.

The researchers analyzed the greatest struggles independently, in comparison between Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, and in correlation to priorities or characteristics needing more priority. This revealed whether prioritized characteristics or characteristics that were not prioritized resulted in struggle.

Struggles in the founding years supported the researchers’ understanding of characteristics that predict charter school success and failure by exposing that which was the most difficult for LEAs in the founding years. By comparing and contrasting the struggles, the researchers exposed common struggles in need of support and those unique to each LEA category. The following struggles were identified by survey respondents:

**Successful LEAs Struggles:**
- *Discipline*
- *Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers*
- *Teacher Expertise and Competence*

**LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success Struggles:**
- *Academic Achievement*
- *Discipline*

### Table 45 - Struggles (% Respondents Selecting Struggle)

*STL=St. Louis, KC= Kansas City*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Cusp</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td>STL</td>
<td>KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Successful LEAs

Successful LEAs indicated three characteristics were their greatest struggles during the founding years: hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; discipline; and teacher expertise and competence.

Moderate Significance: Greatest Struggles

Successful LEAs identified one characteristic as a struggle (and one needing more priority) with moderate significance: hiring, supporting and retaining teachers. This was a characteristic that was also indicated as in need of more priority by Successful LEAs (44%).

Respondents’ role had minimal impact on their indication of this as a struggle: 60% of Assistant Principals/Deans of Students indicating hiring, supporting and retaining teachers was a struggle versus 50% of Executive Directors/Superintendents and 50% Principals/Heads of Schools. Respondents from Successful LEAs that opened after 2008 indicated hiring, supporting and retaining teachers was a significant struggle 83% of the time; none of the respondents from LEAs that opened prior to 2008 selected hiring, supporting and retaining teachers as a struggle. A respondent’s indication this characteristic was a struggle also varied by region. Sixty-seven percent of respondents
from LEAs in Kansas City highlighted this struggle while only 33% of respondents from LEAs in St. Louis did.

Though 56% of respondents from Successful LEAs indicated hiring, supporting and retaining teachers was one of their greatest challenges during the founding years, none of the respondents who selected this struggle indicated it was a characteristic that needed more priority in the founding years. Forty percent of respondents who indicated hiring, supporting and retaining teachers was a struggle also indicated this characteristic was a priority of their LEA during the first six years.

**Minor Significance: Greatest Struggles**

Successful LEAs identified two characteristics as a struggle with minor significance: discipline and teacher expertise and competence, though the Review of Existing Data did not indicate discipline was a struggle for Successful LEAs. Discipline was considered a success for Successful LEAs in the Review of Existing Data, as Successful LEAs had the lowest rate of Discipline Incidents per 100 students (0.96), which was 3.3 days (77 percentage points) lower than LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Neither characteristic was indicated as a priority or needing more priority by Successful LEAs in the founding years.

More respondents from LEAs in St. Louis selected discipline as a struggle than Kansas City respondents. A respondent’s role had little significance in whether or not they selected discipline as a struggle: 50% of Executive Directors/Superintendents and Principals/Heads of School selected it, while 40% Assistant Principals/Deans of Students did.
None of the respondents who identified discipline as a struggle indicated it was a characteristic that needed more priority, though 33% of the respondents did indicate discipline was a priority for their LEA in the founding years.

The final struggle identified by respondents from Successful LEAs was teacher expertise and competence. This aligned with the struggle in hiring, supporting and retaining teachers, as it stands to reason that if the wrong teachers were hired, were not effectively supported, and ultimately left (necessitating starting over with a new hire), the teachers would not have built up expertise and competence. Similar to hiring, supporting and retaining teachers, teacher expertise and competence was identified as a struggle by more LEAs in Kansas City than St. Louis, suggesting challenges with teaching staff were a greater factor in Kansas City than St. Louis. Seventy-five percent of respondents who identified this struggle also indicated hiring, supporting and retaining teachers was a struggle. Both were later classified within the same grouping: Teaching Staff.

Principals/Heads of School were most likely to select this characteristic as a struggle (100%), whereas only 50% of Executive Directors/Superintendents and 20% of Assistant Principals/Deans of Students did. One hundred percent of small and midsize LEAs selected teacher expertise and competence as a struggle while only 17% of large LEAs did. Finally, those LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to view teacher expertise and competence as a struggle (50%) in comparison to those that opened prior to 2008 (33%).

Of the respondents who indicated teacher expertise and competence was a struggle, none also identified it as a characteristic that the LEA should have given more priority. However, 50% of the respondents who selected this characteristic as a struggle
also identified it as a priority of their LEA in the founding years. This may suggest that respondents viewed *teacher expertise and competence* as a struggle because it was prioritized but not a success.

**Additional Struggles for Successful St. Louis LEAs**

In addition to the three characteristics identified by all Successful LEAs as struggles, respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis identified an additional characteristic as a significant struggle: *finances/business management*. Interestingly, *finances/business management* was also identified as a strength by Successful St. Louis LEAs and emerged as a significantly successful characteristic in the Review of Data. One respondent selected this characteristic as both a strength and a struggle, potentially indicating that while it was difficult for the LEA, it ultimately was one of their greatest successes. Both respondents from St. Louis that indicated this characteristic was a struggle were from the same LEA, possibly suggesting it was not a regional struggle but an LEA-specific one.

**Table 46 - Additional Struggle of Successful St. Louis LEAs (% of Respondents Selecting Struggle)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finances/Business Management</strong></td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

**Additional Struggles for Successful Kansas City LEAs**

In addition to the three characteristics identified by all Successful LEAs as struggles, Successful LEAs in Kansas City identified an additional characteristic as a
moderate struggle: *professional development of teachers*. All three respondents who selected this characteristic as a struggle were from the same LEA and served in the same role: Assistant Principal/Dean of Students.

All three characteristics that were selected with any significance as struggles by Kansas City LEAs (*hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; teacher expertise and competence; and professional development of teachers*) were ultimately grouped together in the grouping: Teaching Staff. These data indicated challenges with Teaching Staff were pronounced in Successful Kansas City LEAs.

**Table 47 - Additional Struggle of Successful Kansas City LEAs (% of Respondents Selecting Struggle)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development of Teachers</th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

**Summary of Greatest Struggles for Successful LEAs**

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended question, three characteristics were identified as Successful LEAs’ greatest struggles during the founding years: *hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; discipline; and teacher expertise and competence*. Only one was selected as either a priority, needing more priority, or as a struggle by Successful LEAs: *hiring, supporting and retaining teachers*. It was identified as needing more priority.

The characteristics respondents identified as their greatest struggles depended on a variety of factors: region, respondent’s role, when the LEA first opened, and enrollment...
size of the LEA. Region most frequently correlated to which struggles a respondent selected. Respondents from Successful LEAs in St. Louis selected discipline and finances/business management as a struggle, while respondents from Successful LEAs in Kansas City focused primarily on struggles related to teaching staff: hiring, supporting and retaining teachers; teacher expertise and competence; and professional development of teachers. The community-level characteristics identified as struggles varied significantly by region.

A respondent’s role had less of an impact on their view of their LEA’s struggles than did region, though Principals/Heads of School from both regions indicated teacher expertise and competence was a struggle. The other two significant struggles were selected with similar frequency by the different respondents’ roles.

Respondents from LEAs that opened prior to 2008 were more likely to identify discipline as a struggle. LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to identify hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers and teacher expertise and competence as struggles. Two of the twenty available characteristics were not selected by any respondents from Successful LEAs: attendance and implementation of mission and vision; both were indicated among their greatest successes.

**LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success**

Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success identified two characteristics as their greatest struggles: academic achievement and discipline. Neither characteristic was indicated as needing more priority, though.
Minor Significance: Greatest Struggles

*Academic achievement* was one of two characteristics selected by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as a struggle, which was supported by the Review of Existing Data’s findings. *Academic achievement* was selected as a struggle by more respondents from Kansas City than St. Louis, while *discipline* was selected by more respondents from St. Louis than Kansas City. *Academic achievement* was also indicated as a priority and as a success, although the Review of Existing Data did not determine that *academic achievement* was a success for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, with the exception of *on the cusp* LEAs.

Executive Directors/Superintendents were more likely to indicate *academic achievement* was a struggle (60%) than either Principals/Heads of School (33%) or Assistant Principals/Deans of Students (29%). Additionally, respondents from large LEAs viewed *academic achievement* as a struggle (57%) more often than respondents from small LEAs (50%) and significantly more often than respondents from midsize LEAs (25%). There was also a noticeable difference between respondents who worked for schools that opened prior to 2008 (64% indicated it was a struggle) rather than after 2008 (36% indicated it was a struggle).

Of the respondents who indicated *academic achievement* was one of their LEA’s struggles, 21% of them also indicated it was one of their LEA’s greatest successes. Fifty-seven percent of them also indicated it had been a priority of the LEA in the founding years and 29% of them suggested that it needed more prioritization. Perhaps most notable was that only 40% of *closed LEAs* indicated *academic achievement* was a struggle,
though 90% of their academic outcomes as measured by standardized assessments were well below the home district’s average.

Discipline was selected as a struggle fairly consistently by founding school leaders. However, the size of the LEA had minimal impact: 58% of respondents working in midsize LEAs considered discipline a struggle versus 43% in both large and small LEAs. Additionally, 71% of respondents working in LEAs opened after 2008 selected discipline as a struggle whereas only 43% of respondents from LEAs opened prior to 2008 did.

Of the respondents who indicated discipline was one of their LEA’s greatest struggles, 44% of them also selected discipline as one of their LEA’s early priorities, indicating more priority was needed. Only 19% of respondents, though, who indicated discipline as a struggle also indicated that discipline needed more priority in the founding years. These data may indicate that the priorities of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success may not have effectively achieved the desired outcomes (successes) for the LEA.

Additional Struggles for St. Louis

In addition to the three characteristics identified as struggles by all LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, LEAs in St. Louis identified an additional characteristic with minor significance: board leadership. This also emerged as needing more priority by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, but for Kansas City respondents, not St. Louis respondents. St. Louis respondents from on the cusp LEAs indicated this needed more priority, but the other two subcategories did not.

Principals/Heads of School (50%) were most likely to select board leadership as one of the LEA’s greatest struggles. Closed LEAs from both Kansas City (100%) and St.
Louis (50%) indicated *board leadership* was a struggle; 44% of *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* in St. Louis also selected this characteristic. Additionally, of the responses from *closed LEAs* in St. Louis, at least one respondent from 67% of the *closed LEAs* indicated *board leadership* was a struggle. These data may suggest that while strong board leadership was not indicative of success, ineffective board leadership may contribute to an LEA’s struggles, especially for *closed LEAs*.

Additionally, 60% of respondents from St. Louis LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated *board leadership* either needed more priority or was one of their LEA’s greatest struggles. Only one respondent from St. Louis who indicated *board leadership* was a struggle also indicated it was a priority for their LEA. This data suggested challenges with *board leadership* may have had a significant impact on charter schools not achieving success.

**Table 48 - Additional Struggle of St. Louis LEAs That Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (% of Respondents Selecting Struggle)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th>St. Louis</th>
<th>Kansas City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

**Additional Struggles for Kansas City**

In addition to the three characteristics identified as struggles by all LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, LEAs in Kansas City identified two additional characteristics as struggles: *ability to adequately compensate teachers and administrators* and *parent involvement*. Small LEAs were more likely to identify *ability to adequately compensate teachers and administrators* as a struggle (80%) than either midsize or large
LEAs. Additionally, 75% of respondents that said this characteristic was one of their LEA’s struggles also said it needed more priority.

In Kansas City, parent involvement was also a greater struggle for small LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (60%) than either midsize or large LEAs. It was indicated as needing more priority by 75% of the respondents who also said it was one of their LEA’s greatest struggles. These data suggest that respondents from Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were likely to identify struggles as those characteristics that also needed more priority in the founding years.

Table 49 - Additional Struggles of Kansas City LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (% of Respondents Selecting Struggles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages shown in St. Louis and Kansas City are the percentage of the region only and not respondents in total.**

Summary of Greatest Struggles for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Of the twenty characteristics available for the closed-ended question, two characteristics were identified by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as struggles during the founding years: academic achievement and discipline. Characteristics identified as struggles depended on a variety of factors, most significantly the LEA’s region.

Variation in the selection of struggles was most often correlated with region.

Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in St. Louis more often
selected discipline and board leadership as struggles, while respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success in Kansas City more often selected academic achievement, ability to adequately compensate teachers and administrators, and parent involvement as struggles. This suggested the region impacted the community-level characteristics identified as struggles.

At least one respondent from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected each of the twenty available characteristics as struggles. This suggested that even though a majority of respondents (73%) in this LEA category indicated their LEA was successful, there was recognition of the challenges the LEA faced.

Comparison: Greatest Struggles of Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Overall, data for the greatest struggles were less correlated to indicators beyond LEA category: fewer significant trends arose. There were few trends related to LEA size, year they opened, or respondent’s role.

Academic Achievement

Only one respondent from Successful LEAs indicated academic achievement was a struggle for their LEA in the founding years, which aligned with their overall success in academic achievement as evidenced in the Review of Existing Data. Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success more often indicated academic achievement was a struggle in the founding years, as was verified in the Review of Existing Data. Most respondents who selected academic achievement as a struggle were from Kansas City.
Most significantly, *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* considered *academic achievement* a struggle. While this correlates with the Review of Existing Data in that they did not exceed the home district’s performance in a notable way, *closed LEAs*’ perception did not. They did not consider themselves struggling with *academic achievement*, but data strongly suggested otherwise.

**Discipline**

Respondents from Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success agreed that *discipline* was among their LEA’s greatest struggles, especially respondents from St. Louis. Respondents from Successful LEAs that opened prior to 2008 (100%) were more likely to see *discipline* as a struggle than respondents from LEAs that opened after 2008. Conversely, respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success that opened after 2008 (71%) were more likely to consider *discipline* a struggle than those that opened before.

*Discipline* was not indicated as a characteristic needing more priority by a significant number of respondents who identified it as one of their LEA’s greatest struggles from either Successful LEA respondents (0%) or respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (19%). These data may indicate a disconnect of the correlation between this characteristic as a priority and the outcome.

**Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers**

Though Successful LEAs indicated *hiring, supporting and retaining teachers* was a struggle and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success largely did not, there were similarities when analyzing the specific respondents who selected this characteristic as a struggle.
Respondents in the role of Assistant Principal/Dean of Students were more likely to select *hiring, supporting and retaining teachers* as a struggle in both Successful LEAs (60%) and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (43%). Additionally, LEAs that opened after 2008 from both LEA categories were more likely to indicate this characteristic as a struggle than those that opened prior to 2008. Though Successful LEAs more often selected this characteristic as a struggle than LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, there were some commonalities between the types of respondents who selected *hiring, supporting and retaining teachers* as a struggle from both LEA categories.

**Teacher Expertise and Competence**

*Teacher expertise and competence* was identified by Successful LEAs as a struggle, while LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not select this characteristic with any significance. However, when comparing both LEA categories there were some similarities and differences between respondents.

First, respondents from Successful LEAs in Kansas City were more likely than respondents from St. Louis to select *teacher expertise and competence* as a struggle; the opposite was true for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Another distinct difference between the two LEA categories was in connection to when the LEA opened. Successful LEAs opened after 2008 were more likely than those opened prior to 2008 to select *teacher expertise and competence* as a struggle. However, the reverse was true for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria of Success.

Whether a respondent worked for a Successful LEA or an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, they were more likely to consider *teacher expertise and competence*
a struggle if they were in the role of Principal/Head of School than respondents in other roles.

Only two respondents who identified teacher expertise and competence as a struggle (both from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success) identified this characteristic as one that needed more priority. This may indicate a disconnect of the correlation between this characteristic as a priority and the outcome.

**Struggles by Groupings**

In addition to the closed-ended question on priorities, respondents were asked an open-ended question related to successes and struggles. It asked: was there anything else you would like us to add with relation to characteristics that made your LEA successful or not? Respondents were given the option to write in an answer. With relation to struggles, sixteen new responses were provided, with one showing a pattern (repeated more than once). Four closed LEAs cited challenges with their sponsor (withholding funds, losing focus, and changing). These responses were incorporated into the analysis of groupings.

**Table 50 - Struggles by Grouping (% Respondents Selecting Struggles)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>Total STL KC</td>
<td>On the Cusp Open Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>11% 33% 0%</td>
<td>42% 38% 56%</td>
<td>33% 40% 25% 54% 33% 100% 36% 40% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>56% 100% 33%</td>
<td>70% 67% 78%</td>
<td>67% 60% 75% 85% 78% 100% 55% 60% 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Significant Struggles, by Grouping

Successful LEAs did not identify significant struggles, by groupings. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for success identified two: Business Management and School Culture. Both groupings were also identified by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as priorities, needing priority and successes. This supports the idea that while certain individual characteristics within these two groupings went well, others did not. Therefore, the review of the individual characteristics more specifically identified the characteristics that predict charter school success and failure.

For LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, in the Business Management grouping, individual characteristics needing priority and struggles were fairly evenly distributed between regions and characteristics. Successes mostly came from Kansas City’s facility acquisition/development; priorities were focused on finances/business management. In the School Culture grouping respondents identified discipline as a struggle, with more emphasis on staff and student culture as successes. Staff culture also showed up as an area needing more priority and student culture was the most frequent priority. The researchers will dive more into the repercussions to not attending to all elements of School Culture in the final chapter: Conclusions.

Successful LEAs also identified the Business Management and School Culture groupings as moderate struggles, both of which were also priorities, groupings needing more priority, and successes. The struggle of School Culture aligned with respondents’
selections of discipline as a struggle (primarily in St. Louis). Their priorities were more aligned with parent involvement, staff culture, and student culture. School Culture characteristics needing more priority were more evenly distributed, and student culture was the characteristic most frequently identified as a success.

The individual characteristics of Business Management were not identified as significant struggles, but when grouped showed LEAs in St. Louis had either challenges with facility acquisition/development or finances/business management that, when combined, indicated a struggle. In priorities for Business Management, Successful LEAs most often chose ability to adequately compensate teachers and admin (primarily in Kansas City); in areas needing more priority, Successful St. Louis LEAs selected finances/business management; and in successes St. Louis again selected finances/business management and Kansas City LEAs selected ability to adequately compensate teachers and admin. Again, data demonstrated that understanding the individual characteristics provided more insight in this case, than looking at groupings.

Moderate Struggle, by Grouping

Teaching Staff emerged as a moderate struggle for Successful LEAs, in addition to Business Management and School Culture. Successful LEAs selected the individual characteristic hiring, support, and retaining teachers as needing more priority and a struggle. Teacher expertise and competence was also a struggle for Successful LEAs. The Teaching Staff grouping was also a priority and an area needing more priority. This indicated that for Successful LEAs, they gave this priority but not enough.

The same was true for respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success who indicated this was a minor struggle as well as a priority and area needing
more priority No specific individual characteristics stood out as the reason this grouping was identified in all areas except as a success.

Minor Struggle, by Grouping

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success identified a fourth grouping as a struggle: Academic Achievement. This aligned with the Review of Existing Data that demonstrated this was a struggle for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. This grouping was also identified as a priority and success, but not as a grouping needing more priority. St. Louis respondents more often indicated this was a success, while Kansas City respondents more often indicated this was a struggle.

Insignificant Struggles, by Grouping

Both LEA categories did not indicate Attendance/Enrollment, Curriculum/Instruction, Leadership, LEA Oversight, or Mission and Vision were struggles. For the most part, this correlates to the full survey analysis of all priorities, characteristics needing more priority, and successes, with the exception of Leadership. Both LEA categories identified Leadership as an area needing more priority, which would have suggested they would have also considered it a struggle.

Table 51 - Insignificant Struggle by Grouping (% Respondents Selecting Struggle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success (Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the Cusp</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STL</td>
<td>KC</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STL</td>
<td>KC</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Conclusion: Struggles

Five individual characteristics were selected by both LEA categories as struggles: discipline; hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers; teacher expertise and competence; and academic achievement. Only discipline was a shared struggle by both LEA categories.

When grouping characteristics, both LEA categories shared three struggles: Business Management, School Culture, and Teaching Staff. Business Management and Teaching Staff were also indicated as needing priority for both LEA categories. School Culture was indicated as a priority for Successful LEAs but in all four areas for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Discipline was the lead reason that School Culture was a struggle for both LEA categories, while other characteristics dominated in successes, priorities, and characteristics needing more priority.

Respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also indicated Academic Achievement was a struggle. This was in contrast to their selecting Academic Achievement also as a priority and success.
The contrast of the struggles of Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success was much more clearly delineated when looking at individual characteristics. When characteristics were grouped, both LEA categories seemed to share the same struggles. It was in the nuance of the individual characteristics that the researchers most clearly see the differences between factors that predict charters school successes and failures.

**On the Cusp LEAs’ Data**

During the Review of Existing Data, the researchers quickly realized there were three subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: *on the cusp LEAs*, *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*, and *closed LEAs*. The first subcategory, *on the cusp LEAs*, did not meet the outlined criteria for success but were very close. As previously described, *on the cusp LEAs* met four out of the five criteria. Though they were disqualified from being considered Successful LEAs, they were so close to meeting the criteria the researchers acknowledged that if they had drawn the lines for criteria somewhat differently or looked at different relevant years, *on the cusp LEAs* may have been included as Successful LEAs.

That said, the line had to be drawn somewhere. The line was not moved because doing so would have created similar dilemmas no matter where it was placed. This fact did not change the reality that much could be learned from analyzing *on the cusp LEAs* separate from the other two subcategories that were much further from meeting the criteria for success and in consolidation with Successful LEAs. Therefore, the researchers reconfigured some data to include *on the cusp LEAs* as part of both LEA categories.
(Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success) to compare how shifting this subcategory impacted the overall results.

**Impact of Shifting On the Cusp LEAs to Successful LEAs: Priorities**

Removing *on the cusp LEAs’* data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success and adding it to Successful LEAs did not significantly change data for either LEA category. However, some additional trends in priorities emerged that should be considered when determining the characteristics that lead to charter school success.

**Successful LEAs, Including On the Cusp LEAs: Priorities**

The researchers examined and compared data of Successful LEAs before and after the addition of *on the cusp LEAs*. Only one characteristic no longer qualified as a priority for Successful LEAs when *on the cusp LEAs* were added to Successful LEAs: *staff culture*. All other characteristics remained priorities, indicating *on the cusp LEAs* shared most of the same priorities in the founding years and that an emphasis on *staff culture* may have been the defining missing characteristic that would have given an *on the cusp LEA* the extra push it needed to meet all criteria for success. The percentage of respondents who selected many of the priorities changed slightly, only impacting the level of significance for two characteristics: *student culture* (moving from a significant to a moderate priority) and *implementation of mission and vision* (moving from a moderate to a minor priority).
Table 52 - Comparing Priorities of Successful LEAs With and Without On the Cusp LEAs (% Respondents Selecting Priorities)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
<th>Without On the Cusp LEAs</th>
<th>With On the Cusp LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Culture</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Mission and Vision</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Culture</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, Without On the Cusp LEAs: Priorities

After moving data for on the cusp LEAs from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs, much of the data stayed the same. All six of the characteristics previously identified by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success remained priorities. Additionally, all but one characteristic (attendance) remained in the same level of significance. Attendance changed from a moderately significant priority to a significant priority by removing on the cusp LEAs from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

This data further highlighted the difference in prioritization between Successful LEAs (and on the cusp LEAs) with those that were far from the mark (open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success and closed LEAs). While only 50% of open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success and closed LEAs selected academic achievement as a priority, 89% of Successful LEAs selected this priority. Though the number decreased to 78% when adding on the cusp LEAs to the Successful LEA category, the differences
between datasets signals a strong connection between successful outcomes for charter schools and the prioritization of academic achievement.

**Table 53 - Comparing Priorities of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success With and Without On the Cusp LEAs (% Respondents Selecting the Priority)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th>With On the Cusp LEAs</th>
<th>Without On the Cusp LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Culture</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Impact of Shifting On the Cusp LEAs to Successful LEAs: More Priority Needed**

The impact of moving on the cusp LEAs’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs was more pronounced for characteristics needing priority than for characteristics prioritized.

**Successful LEAs, Including On the Cusp LEAs: More Priority Needed**

Moving on the cusp LEAs’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success and adding it to Successful LEAs had a more significant impact on Successful LEA’s More Priority Needed than Priorities. Three characteristics no longer qualified as needing priority for Successful LEAs when on the cusp LEAs were added to the Successful LEAs: administrators’ expertise and competence; curriculum; and hiring, retaining, and supporting teachers. Because these were only minor priorities for
Successful LEAs, and on the cusp LEAs did not indicate they needed more priority, they were not identified as significant when the two LEA categories were combined.

Two characteristics remained when adding on the cusp LEAs to Successful LEAs: professional development of administrators and board leadership. Professional development of administrators decreased in the level of significance to being of only moderate significance. Board leadership, though, increased in the level of significance. Respondents from on the cusp LEAs selected this characteristic as needing more priority more often than respondents from Successful LEAs, but both demonstrated alignment in that they both indicated this was a need.

One new characteristic emerged: staff culture. Respondents from on the cusp LEAs did not select staff culture as a priority, as demonstrated in the previous section, which meant that priority was no longer significant when the two categories were combined. Here, respondents from on the cusp LEAs’ selections of staff culture as being a need for more priority pulled this characteristic in as needing more priority when the two categories were combined. This demonstrated that on the cusp LEAs had retrospective awareness of how neglecting this priority negatively impacted their success.

**Table 54** - Comparing Need for More Priority of Successful LEAs With and Without On the Cusp LEAs (% Respondents Selecting Characteristics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Without On the Cusp LEAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, Without On the Cusp LEAs: More Priority Needed

Moving on the cusp LEAs’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs had a less significant impact on characteristics needing more priority for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Successful than Successful LEAs. Prior to moving on the cusp LEAs, there were two characteristics that were identified as needing more priority: board leadership and staff culture. After moving on the cusp LEAs to Successful LEAs, both characteristics remained identified as needing more priority, though staff culture moved from being a characteristic in significant need of more priority to moderate significance. Of all LEA subcategories, on the cusp LEAs had the most respondents select staff culture as needing more priority. This data trend will be further discussed in Chapter VII: Conclusions.

Table 55 - Comparing Need for More Priority of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success With and Without On the Cusp LEAs (% Respondents Selecting Characteristics)
Impact of Shifting On the Cusp LEAs to Successful LEAs: Successes

Moving on the cusp LEAs’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs also affected perceived successes. The characteristics for success identified by respondents from Successful LEAs remained the same, less one (student culture). The characteristics identified as successes by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were significantly affected, with the exception of one characteristic (enrollment).

Successful LEAs, Including On the Cusp LEAs: Successes

Moving on the cusp LEAs’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs had a moderate impact on Successful LEAs. Four of the five original characteristics for Successful LEAs were still selected as successes when on the cusp LEAs were added: academic achievement, attendance, enrollment and implementation of mission and vision. Academic achievement was still identified as the number one success by Successful LEAs with the addition of on the cusp LEAs; in fact, it was slightly more significant (72% versus 67%). Enrollment decreased from being a significant success to a moderate success. Attendance and implementation of mission and vision also dropped buckets from moderate success to minor success.

The biggest change was that student culture was no longer indicated as a success, indicating on the cusp LEAs did not feel successful in this characteristic. In the broad picture of data, though, adding on the cusp LEAs to Successful LEAs did not cause major shifts in trends predicting charter school success.
### Table 56 - Comparing Successes of Successful LEAs With and Without On the Cusp LEAs (% Respondents Selecting Characteristics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs Without On the Cusp LEAs</th>
<th>Successful LEAs With On the Cusp LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Achievement</strong></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation of Mission and Vision</strong></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Culture</strong></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, Without On the Cusp LEAs: Successes

Moving *on the cusp LEAs*’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs impacted LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success more significantly than Successful LEAs. Prior to moving *on the cusp LEAs* into the Successful LEA category, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success identified two successes, both with minor significance: *academic achievement* and *enrollment*. After adding *on the cusp LEAs* to the Successful LEA category, *academic achievement* was no longer identified as a success, *enrollment* emerged as a moderate success, and two additional characteristics emerged as minor successes: *facility acquisition and development* and *student culture*.

The change of *academic achievement* from a success of minor significance to no significance at all aligned with what the researchers found in the Review of Existing Data where Successful LEAs and *on the cusp LEAs* met or exceeded academic outcomes of the
home district, with a few exceptions in one content area during one of the relevant years for three on the cusp LEAs.

Table 57 - Comparing Successes for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success With and Without On the Cusp LEAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With On the Cusp LEAs</td>
<td>Without On the Cusp LEAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility Acquisition and Development</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Culture</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Impact of Shifting On the Cusp LEAs to Successful LEAs: Struggles

Moving on the cusp LEAs’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs impacted both LEA categories by shifting identified struggles: decreasing the number of struggles identified by Successful LEAs and increasing the number of struggles identified by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

Successful LEAs, Including On the Cusp LEAs: Struggles

Adding on the cusp LEAs’ data to Successful LEAs had a more significant impact on identified struggles than successes. Discipline was the only struggle that remained once on the cusp LEAs were added, and it remained with the same frequency. Hiring, supporting and retaining teachers fell from being a moderate struggle to no longer qualifying as a significant struggle after adding on the cusp LEAs. The same was true for teacher expertise and competence. The combination of discipline remaining the only
significant struggle with the absence of student culture as a success suggested that
student culture (or overall student environment) may be a key contributing factor to
Successful LEAs’ success.

Table 58 - Comparing Struggles of Successful LEAs With and Without On the Cusp
LEAs (% Respondents Selecting Struggles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successful LEAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>without On the Cusp LEAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, Without On the Cusp LEAs: Struggles

By moving on the cusp LEAs’ data from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success to Successful LEAs, the number of struggles increased from two (academic achievement and discipline) to three, adding board leadership. Additionally, both academic achievement and discipline increased from a minor significance struggle to a moderately significant struggle; on the cusp LEAs’ respondents selected both characteristics less often than respondents from either open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success or closed LEAs. Board leadership emerged as a new struggle for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, which was supported by interview trends (to be discussed in Chapter VI Results: Interviews).
Table 59 - Comparing Struggles for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success With and Without On the Cusp LEAs (% Respondents Selecting Characteristics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With On the Cusp LEAs</td>
<td>Without On the Cusp LEAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions for Manipulating On the Cusp LEAs’ Data

*On the cusp LEAs* were nearly successful, and it was feasible that they may have been determined to be successful if different criteria were analyzed, cutoffs for meeting criteria had been changed, or different relevant years had been selected. Understanding *on the cusp LEAs* as a separate group and in connection to both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success helped the researchers understand the implications of prioritization (or lack thereof) and the outcomes that resulted from those choices. Analyzing Successful LEAs’ data with and without *on the cusp LEAs*’ data highlighted what they have in common and the subtle differences that led to some being definitively successful and others being on the cusp of success. Most importantly, prioritizing (or not) staff culture and student culture appear to have been an important characteristic distinguishing between Successful LEAs and *on the cusp LEAs*. That said, having their data separate for the full analysis did not so drastically alter data as to skew the ultimate results and recommendations offered by the researchers in Chapter VII Conclusions.
Chapter VI
Results: Interviews

In the third and final phase of the study, the researchers collected and analyzed data from interviews of school leaders working in Missouri charter LEAs during the founding years. The analysis sought to expand understanding of school- and community-level characteristics that predict either failure or success. In comparison to the survey which collected qualifiable data from more respondents from more LEAs, this portion of the study was a deeper dive into the research questions and also provided qualitative data. While the topics aligned with the survey, interviewees were asked to go more in depth and expand on their thinking. Interviewees were selected to represent all LEA categories and included two sponsors.

Analysis focused on the groupings of characteristics, sorting those characteristics as prioritized, in need of priority, successful, or struggles. Often, though, an interviewee’s explanation of their thinking placed a characteristic into several of these categories, so the analysis focused on the holistic intent of their answers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES

To ensure interview data represented the perspectives of founding school leaders from all LEA Categories, regions, and size, the researchers carefully selected the participants. In total, sixteen people participated in this phase of the study.

- 4 from Successful LEAs
- 4 from on the cusp LEAs
- 4 from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success
- 2 from closed LEAs
The regions were represented equally within each LEA category, with the exception of closed LEAs; only founding leaders of closed LEAs in St. Louis were available. One sponsor from St. Louis and one with Kansas City LEAs were selected. School leader interviewees also represented different sized LEAs.

- Successful LEA interviewees were from two small (one was almost midsize and one was very small), one midsize, and one large LEA.
- On the cusp LEAs interviewees were from two small and two midsize LEAs.
- Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success interviewees were from one small, two midsize, and one large LEA.
- Closed LEAs interviewees represented the extreme ends of the size spectrum: one had 159 students, while the other had 1,290 students.

Seven of the LEAs represented were K-8 charter LEAs (one also had PK and one stopped at 6th grade). Three started as 5-8 and added 9-12 later. Another started as K-6, added a high school later, then closed it. One was an alternative high school. Two started as K-8, then added a high school later, as well.

Interviewees also represented the two different growth models when starting a charter LEA: slow or fast. A slow-grow LEA was one that started with a small number of students and a limited number of grades and added a new grade each year until fully grown. One that grew fast started with a higher number of students in a larger number of grades. Of the Successful LEAs, two of them grew slowly. The other two started fast: 573 students K-5 in one, and 700 students in K-8 in another. Both pointed out that starting fast was a bad plan and had negative consequences. On the cusp LEAs all used a slow-
grow plan. *Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* varied in their growth plans. One started fully grown because they converted from being a private school. Another used a slow-grow plan. Another started slow, but then ramped up and expanded to multiple campuses. Another also planned to start slow, but then sped up the pace in the second year. The two *closed LEAs* used very different models for growth. One grew as quickly as possible. The other used a unique slow grow model that started with non-consecutive grade levels.

Race and gender were not known when interviewees were selected. Fifty percent were male; fifty percent were female. Seventy-five percent were white; twenty-five percent were Black.

Interviewees’ experiences in education varied as well. In Successful LEAs, two of the four had extensive experience in public education when coming to the charter LEA; one started as a teacher during the relevant years and progressed to leadership; one had no experience in education. Interviewees from *on the cusp LEAs* were mostly experienced public-school leaders when coming to the charter LEA; one was a teacher who later grew into a school leader. Two interviewees from *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* had public education experience; one had transitioned from a private school; and the other had no experience in education. Both from *closed LEAs* had their first school leadership experiences at that charter, but had been teachers before.

The interviewees’ LEAs missions varied. Successful LEAs varied from being a “core knowledge school with a focus on project-based learning” to “reinvigorating our world by really trying to create systems and a culture of equity and justice” to “creating college graduates” or “citizens ready for a trade.” The variation in missions continued
through LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, with missions focused on social justice, creating college graduates, providing a better option than the local district, fine arts, alternative school, and being a central stabilizing part of the community.

The two sponsors were from different parts of the state, but both sponsored many charter LEAs. One sponsored 11 LEAs in total:

- 2 never opened
- 2 were closed
- 7 remain open
  - Of the three open LEAs that qualify for this study, one was a Successful LEA and two were on the cusp LEAs.
- 4 did not qualify for this study

This sponsor indicated that only two (one of which did not qualify for this study) were successful by the 5th and 6th years. The one that he characterized as successful was characterized by the researchers as an on the cusp LEA. Another qualified as a Successful LEA, which the sponsor also thought was true, but he was not in place during their fifth and sixth years so could not speak to their success at that point in time.

The other sponsor sponsored 13 LEAs in total:

- 6 LEAs in Kansas City
- 7 LEAs in St. Louis
- 3 were closed
- 1 transferred to another sponsor, but was soon thereafter closed
- 9 remain open
  - Of the eight open LEAs that qualified for this study, two qualified as Successful LEAs, and six qualified as open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success
- 1 did not qualify for this study

This sponsor clearly recognized the Successful LEAs as successful. For the open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success, he pointed to different elements of their LEAs that were successful but recognized they were not comprehensively successful. He said one was close to succeeding academically, another had a strong culture, another had some
campuses that were successful and others that were not, and another had a unique mission of serving students with some of the greatest needs.

SUCCESSFUL LEAs

Priorities/Successes

Interviewees from Successful LEAs and sponsors shared similar perspectives on the characteristics most associated with Successful LEAs. During the interviews, most interviewees did not distinguish between priorities and successes, but they tended to consider them in support of each other.

Eight of nine of the groupings were identified as priorities/successes:

- Academic Achievement
- Business Management
- Curriculum/Instruction
- Leadership
- LEA Oversight
- Mission and Vision
- School Culture
- Teaching Staff

Only Attendance/Enrollment was not identified as a priority/success. This may have been an oversight or a characteristic taken for granted as a success, because Successful LEAs were, indeed, successful in both attendance and enrollment. The Review of Existing Data demonstrated they averaged a 9% rate of enrollment growth during the relevant years and maintained a 92% average proportional attendance rate (as compared to the home districts’ 76% average). Further, the individual characteristics attendance and enrollment as well as the Attendance/Enrollment grouping were identified as both priorities and successes on the survey.

For the other eight groupings, the details of the interviews led to deeper understanding of the characteristics that predicted their success.
School Culture

School Culture was the most consistently identified priority/success. One hundred percent of interviewees indicated this as a priority. One of the six did not mention it explicitly as a success, but did reference the commitment of staff in many other areas. The same LEA also only mentioned it, almost in passing, as a priority. The other five, though, had strong emphasis here.

Interviewees focused on two specific elements of School Culture: community building and high/consistent expectations.

An interviewee from a small LEA focused on community building, primarily. When asked to give advice to new leaders she encouraged leaders to engage with and build connections and relationships in the community (families, partners, politicians, and board), ensuring ownership and strong engagement. The benefit of this was that the community was anchored in the mission and that was what helped them weather the tough times: “That's been sort of our…North star and our anchor … through thick and thin and we've definitely had a lot of thick and thin.” She did point out, though, that so much emphasis here left them too little time to attend to the technical details (operations, compliance, business, etc.).

Both sponsors also agreed that community building was essential to success. One repeatedly emphasized the importance of a clear and compelling mission and vision that met the needs of the community and secured the community’s investment. “I think when you look at where you’re successful… it’s where they’re meeting a felt need, where that school was providing something that wasn’t there before.” Parent buy-in to the mission and community partners’ investment was also incredibly important. Both sponsors
emphasized getting the right people on board and attracting people who have a passion for the mission. In order to do that, Successful LEAs provided professional development for teachers for relating well to kids. Overall, a connected and committed community amongst the staff, students, parents, and the broader community was essential and had to include engaging community leaders and politicians in the cause.

In addition to community building, several interviewees highlighted the importance of orderly, consistently normed schools and high expectations as essential foundations for successful School Culture. One LEA focused on establishing student and staff culture of shared norms and expectations: “we have a consistent classroom management system where the same behavior receives the same type of redirect or the same consequences in order to really both affirm positive habits and also adjust habits of kids taking away from their learning or the learning of others.” This LEA focused on extensive professional development of teachers for this purpose: “a lot of it was intentional time and vision setting by leaders on the front end, but then results in teacher, professional development and norming, and then results follow in through and follow up with accountability systems to make sure that those things are in place.” The norms and expectations of this LEA also included shared values, fun events aimed at community building, and high expectations. Another Successful LEA agreed an orderly School Culture leads to success: you need “order and climate… Because I think without order you can’t do anything.” Prioritizing structure and consistent norms led to success for these LEAs.

The structures and norms of the Successful LEAs emphasized high expectations. One LEA was built on the expectations that “all students can and will go to college.” The
same LEA implemented an AP-for-All program, demonstrating to students at a young age that they could take college level courses and achieve at a high level. Successful LEAs emphasized the importance of students understanding the culture and expectations: WHY their teachers/school hold them to those standards, even when others do not.

Thinking he was discussing a Successful LEA, a sponsor talked about an on the cusp LEA having high expectations as an essential element to success, as well: “they worked with their teachers on creating a culture … where students know that they are going to be put on a path of opportunity. And we believe, and we expect you to get there.”

In addition to community building and consistent norms and expectations, Successful LEAs talked about the importance of staff culture: “Little by little I started to get the staff that cared about kids.” Further, staff became more closely connected to each other building strong relationships. Another LEA encouraged new leaders to prioritize staff culture and the people on the team, saying staff turnover was a big challenge. This advice came from a tough lesson learned by this particular LEA. This tough lesson also seems evident in the surveys as Successful LEAs indicated staff culture was a priority, but not also a success.

According to interviewees, Successful LEAs prioritized and succeeded in School Culture by building community, establishing shared structures and norms, and prioritizing staff culture. In the survey, Successful LEAs selected School Culture as a priority, success, and a challenge. They specifically highlighted student culture, parent involvement, and staff culture as priorities. Survey respondents’ selection of parent involvement as a priority ties strongly to interviewees’ prioritization of and success in
community building. Interviewees also advised future charter leaders to prioritize staff culture, a characteristic survey respondents indicated was a priority.

Survey respondents highlighted student culture as a success, and discipline as a challenge. The interviewees’ emphasis on order and shared norms (especially in classroom management) aligned with the survey in that discipline was listed as a struggle for both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Successful LEAs saw the benefit of order and shared norms as a mechanism to improve discipline, and in turn, build a safe and healthy School Culture and learning environment.

Teaching Staff

Teaching Staff was repeatedly emphasized by interviewees. Five of the six indicated it was a priority/success. Multiple LEAs emphasized the importance of hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers: “we did a good job of …prioritizing getting great teachers and teachers who were passionate about our mission.” One founding school leader advised upcoming school leaders to prioritize having a good plan for hiring teachers. Another spoke about the importance of being honest in interviews about expectations, ensuring fit to the LEA. He stated this had become a priority after they had significant turnover during some of the founding years. Yet another LEA talked about prioritizing good HR systems for hiring, especially after the disastrous first year when over half the staff had to be replaced.

Successful LEAs also spoke about professional development of teachers and the importance that had in connection to School Culture. One focused on establishing structures to ensure people spent time on academics and culture: “professional development was almost entirely built around establishing school culture. And that
ranges from practicing lessons with classroom management, to practicing…discrete skills, to preparing lessons that are welcom(ing a student to) class... And I just think that amount of time preparing things on the front end makes a big difference.” Teachers were supported throughout the year with sustained professional development that reinforced expectations and helped teachers meet them. Leaders prioritized observing and ensuring alignment across the LEA.

A sponsor also spoke about the importance of a Successful LEA hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers in support of School Culture: “they were very intentional about whom they hired and professionally developing and orienting the new hires, and then continuing to develop them in service, in the areas of how you relate to kids, how you create a classroom that builds character and model that, et cetera.” Several interviewees spoke of the challenge of not hiring and supporting the right teachers, as staff turnover was quite a challenge for many LEAs in the founding years. Therefore, they emphasized the need to prioritize hiring well and supporting them once they got there.

When talking about their successes, LEAs focused on the practices that worked with regard to hiring well and supporting teachers once they were hired. One founding LEA leader brought quality staff from his previous district, so he had a strong initial core of teachers. He ensured the teachers viewed themselves as leaders. He said they stayed because they were a part of building the LEA and felt invested in the outcomes and the future of the LEA. They also stayed because the current leader (who had been there all along) “continued to feed and nurture folks. They just have a real love for her and her leadership.” Leadership was essential in the retention of teachers and staff, overall: “all
but one (current) leader are people that opened the school or joined us in the first year people that came in as teachers, ...they developed and they grew.” A sponsor also highlighted *professional development of teachers* as essential for Successful LEAs.

Interview data were aligned with the survey where this grouping emerged as a priority, needing more priority, and a struggle. For survey respondents, Teaching Staff was not indicated as a success. Specifically, survey respondents selected *hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* as needing more priority and a challenge, which was supported by interviewees talking about the challenge of *staff turnover* in the founding years. *Hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* was a priority and a challenge for interviewees, for the most part. They talked about some of their successes in this characteristic, but did not emphasize that they were successful here, overall.

**Mission and Vision**

Interviewees often connected their priorities/successes in School Culture and Teaching Staff to Mission and Vision. Mission and Vision was central to the School Culture. In the hiring process, alignment with Mission and Vision was central to finding the right Teaching Staff and supporting them to achieve the Mission and Vision. One leader discussed at length the importance of having their community anchored in the mission and having that mission serve as their North Star. A sponsor discussed that the key to success was *implementing a clear and compelling mission and vision* that met the needs of the community. Interviewees expressed that Mission and Vision has to be the foundation for School Culture and the guiding light for Teaching Staff.

Other leaders emphasized how important the leader was in establishing Mission and Vision and activating the full community to realize that vision until it was
established. One said “I think the (principal) was the most important role in the building. And you set the tone, you set everything...I kept saying there’s more to do and if I don’t do it, who has the vision. If I take it away with me now?” A sponsor also discussed that it required more than just having a strong mission and vision, but that all elements of an LEA needed to drive toward it. He discussed that a Successful LEA not only had the vision, but was very strategic about putting things in place to reach that vision, effectively implementing the mission and vision.

Interviewees’ indication that Mission and Vision were a priority/success aligned well with the survey data, where this was also selected as a priority and success.

Leadership

Many interviewees agreed that the leader was an essential driver of all of the previous three groupings: School Culture, Teaching Staff, and Mission and Vision. Survey respondents indicated Leadership needed more priority. Because Leadership drives these other essential characteristics, professional development of administration and administrators’ expertise and competence are appropriate levers to give more priority in order to achieve success.

One founding leader emphasized the importance of retaining leaders and having those leaders being fully present in the LEA. He discussed it being important the leader stays put and spends time in school, with a focus on making sure the LEA was operating effectively; leaders “with their head down in the school ... they are the successful ones.” A sponsor supported this idea by saying that strong, consistent effective leadership leads to LEA success. He said the top LEA leader must be driven by the mission and lead others towards it. Longevity and bringing the vision through many years was essential to
success according to both founding school leaders and their sponsors. The other sponsor emphasized the importance of *administrator expertise and competence* and ability to manage people. He stated, Successful LEAs have “strong leadership at the top of a strong administration that was capable, that knows how to manage people and put together an effective operation.”

One successful leader advised future founding school leaders to “keep a sense of egolessness... it's not about any one person. And, the leadership, the board, the people involved just have to keep, it's almost a radical humility that we have to keep and really work at, which can be very hard.” She also emphasized the importance of building a support network of other leaders who help you in areas about which you have less expertise. Seek help from others. Finally, she advised that this requires, “An amount of fortitude sort of emotional, physical, mental fortitude that is...unique; it's a unique role and set of skills and sort of not just technical skills, but the ability to stay with it and have this commitment to something bigger.” Similar to ensuring that Teaching Staff are clear on expectations from the beginning, founding school leaders advised future school leaders to fully understand the immense challenge it will be to start a charter LEA and be ready to accept the level of work it takes to be successful.

**Curriculum/Instruction**

One of the tasks of a founding LEA leader was selecting a direction for the Curriculum/Instruction. Both sponsors indicated that a strong *curriculum* was essential to charter LEAs’ successes. One emphasized the need to have a documented curriculum. When talking about one LEA specifically, he said, “They really have done a phenomenal job of creating a documented curriculum that was very tightly aligned, embraces problem
based, learning, thinking skills, et cetera, and combined (that)with a strong professional development program.” The process of documenting their curriculum mattered, but also supporting that curriculum with the professional development to execute it well was important. The other sponsor focused on understanding student needs, designing a strong curriculum to meet those needs and measuring progress towards those goals so you can course correct on the way.

While both sponsors talked about curriculum design, founding school leaders felt that an established curriculum led to success more than designing one’s own. One talked about developing curriculum in alignment with MO standards, but said in retrospect this was a bad plan. He advised future founding school leaders to purchase curriculum; do not try to build one’s own while building the LEA. “In hindsight I'd never open a school again and then have staff trying to do that while you're also trying to teach every day. It was just...too heavy to lift.” This spoke to the need to support School Culture and Teaching Staff by taking care of staff and maintaining a sustainable work load.

In the survey, respondents selected Curriculum/Instruction as both a priority and a characteristic needing more priority. The work of starting an LEA was multifaceted and could pull a leader in many directions, but survey respondents were clear that this needed more priority than it was given. It was possible that had they purchased the curriculum and provided professional development on teaching it, they may have felt that it had adequate priority.

Business Management

Business Management was not as often indicated as a priority or success of Successful LEAs as previously discussed groupings. That said, interviewees were clear
about what Successful LEAs had in place: a good *facility* and strong *finances*. This was supported by the Review of Existing Data that showed Successful LEAs maintained an average surplus of 31%, far in excess of the state-required 3%.

One school leader talked about how wise it was to have started with low overhead by operating in a church basement because it set them on the path to have a good financial position: “For five years. we were in basically a basement, a church basement. It had a very low overhead, which just allowed us to focus on our program, on our instruction and building our community and families and making sure that we were figuring out those things, those operational things. We didn't know that was a smart move, but it turned out that, not having to worry as much about that piece, even though it was a very humble beginnings, as far as our facilities, it was a good move.”

A sponsor agreed that conservative spending was a good strategy leading to success. Successful LEAs have “tight and strong financial management in the first five years, are conservative with spending.” Another LEA leader talked about not depending on outside funding. “Funding for us has never been an issue. I do not get donations at all because I think with donations comes a stigma and… (assumption with how to use the money).” This leader built a strong financial foundation on state funding alone.

*Facility acquisition/development* was also essential for success. A sponsor stated a good facility was more than just a building, but it “contributes to the operations and the success that teachers can have. And the culture of the place was shaped very much by the physical surroundings that the children and the staff operate in...the buildings you're in affect you.” The same sponsor also emphasized the importance of good *strategic planning* in regard to all elements of the business, including finances and facility.
LEA Oversight

In addition to strong Leadership, interviewees talked about the importance of strong LEA Oversight. This response came primarily from the sponsors who agreed strong governance leads to charter LEA success. One stated, a Successful LEA has “an involved governing board that truly hold(s) the LEA accountable for both finances and academic success.” They stated board leadership should oversee the charter and address concerns before the sponsor was really even aware of it. To sponsors, it was important that the board held the LEA’s leadership accountable.

One founding leader also advised founding charter leaders to have a strong governing board, saying they need to have your back, run interference, and share vision. Survey respondents indicated that board leadership was a characteristic needing more priority, not one that was successful.

Academic Achievement

Of all of the groupings, Academic Achievement was the least often referenced grouping for priority and success by interviewees, yet it was indicated as both a priority and success by survey respondents. The Review of Existing Data also demonstrated this grouping as a success for Successful LEAs: on average they exceed the home district’s academic results by 29% in ELA and 27% in Math.

This was discussed only by one charter LEA and one sponsor, with relation to Successful LEAs. The LEA said “priority one was pairing academic remediation with grade level instruction.” That same LEA pointed to their successes in succeeding on standardized tests, reducing (almost eliminating) the academic deficits with which
students enrolled, and seeing students succeed on AP exams and the ACT. The sponsor said strong _academic achievement_ for students leads to LEA success.

**Needs More Priority/Struggles**

In addition to recognizing where Successful LEAs prioritized and succeeded the most, interviewees reflected on the areas needing more priority and challenges, some of which have already been alluded to in the previous section. There was no LEA that indicated they had fully achieved what they set out to achieve by the years in question: their fifth and sixth years of operation. All of them spoke with humility and clarity about how far they still had to go at that point, as well as growth they can make still (some of them 20 years after opening).

They identified only two groupings as needing priority/struggles:

- Business Management
- Teaching Staff

**Business Management**

Interviewees most often emphasized Business Management as the grouping that was a significant struggle and needed more priority. Founding school leaders spoke of the challenges of the _technical operational details_ about which they had little experience or gave little attention: federal programs, state compliance, daily operations, facility details, etc. One LEA said that not having anyone with a background in public K-12 education was one of their biggest struggles. They had no public education financial expertise, special education compliance knowledge, federal programs knowledge, facility know-how. She said, “if you can kind of figure out systems for operations to make it all smoother and easier, you're not having to put so much energy into that” and that would
leave more energy to give to the program and community. She did say that the one positive consequence not already knowing about Business Management was that the staff were not so entrenched in how it was always done; they came to it with fresh eyes and were not beholden to unsuccessful practices from the past. Another founding charter leader advised future leaders to have operations in place before you’re open because then “you don't have time for it because you're dealing with just making sure you have curriculum in place and your teachers are happy and your teachers are feeling prepared and not all of that (operations). And then all of a sudden the doors open and those little operational details are just killing you.”

Yet another founding leader shared that their practices related to human resources caused them significant challenge. They did not have the proper protocols in place and just believed people when they said they were certified and believed the work history indicated on their resumes. They had to remove over half the staff after the first year because of problems later identified.

A sponsor also supported the idea of having the business and operational components in order before opening, as he talked about the importance of strategy with relation to all areas of founding a charter LEA: finance, facility, curriculum, board leadership, effective leadership, teacher expertise and competence. A new charter LEA needs a strong plan in business, operations, academics, and with relation to people. This concept was echoed by a founding leader who then transitioned to a charter advocacy organization. He talked about ensuring you have your own plan and strategy and sticking to it: “figure out your model, stick to your model. Don't let people push you to be larger than you want to open and you feel prepared to open.” Interviewees were clear in the
need to have a strong, strategic business and operational plan in place before opening, so LEAs’ attention (once open) could be focused on the human side of the business: students and staff.

Another challenge for interviewees was opening too quickly, with too many students. One LEA was pressured by their educational management organization (EMO) to open with more than 500 students K-5. The original plan had been to open more slowly with only 300 students in grades K-5. He cited this as a significant struggle. Another also cited too fast an opening as a struggle. She struggled with opening as a full K-8 with 700 students. “I should not have tried to open up a K-8 school the first year.”

Successful LEAs talked about the challenges of expansion once open. One talked about how expansion led to reduced outcomes (in the short-term) as they had to scale up the program. He also talked about how expansion contributed to staff turnover because they had to divide up their existing staff and hire new leaders. This led to significant staff turnover dissatisfied with the new leadership. When adding a high school he said, “I think figuring out updated standards, updated prep, needed updated structures, what it meant to build a college access department when kids needed to start college counseling and scholarship applications and things like that was a really big challenge that I think we're still figuring out.” The high school expansion was beyond the relevant years, but interesting data to consider.

Another interviewee whose high school expansion also happened beyond the relevant years discussed the challenges of adding the high school. Part of the struggle was the location of the facility. “It’s where all the drinking establishments are…” and they needed to build a fence to secure their property. Part of the struggle was that it angered
the community when they did that.” Interviewees highlighted the challenges that Successful LEA leaders faced with Business Management as did survey respondents who indicated Business Management was an area of struggle and needing more priority when characteristics were grouped.

**Teaching Staff**

Teaching Staff was also an area that interviewees from Successful LEAs indicated needed more priority/was a challenge. As mentioned previously, *staff turnover* was a significant challenge in the founding years. One interviewee had to dismiss a significant number of teachers because they had not confirmed accuracy on resumes and work history/teachers were not qualified. She also said there was a challenge in building Teaching Staff independence to “become thinkers.” Another interviewee talked about how high *staff turnover* caused challenges in the area of School Culture because they had to re-teach expectations and norms to new teachers.

A sponsor emphasized the challenge (for all LEAs) to find qualified and competent teachers. He emphasized the need to prioritize hiring quality teachers. Successful school leaders advised having a strong hiring plan and being very upfront with hiring candidates about expectations to ensure fit to the organization.

Interviewees’ responses align with survey data that identified Teaching Staff as a priority, needing more priority, and a challenge. Survey respondents did not select it as a success. Specifically, survey respondents highlighted *hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* and *teacher expertise and competence* as challenges.
Conclusion

Successful LEAs were more likely to be more successful in many areas than LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success by definition: they were the LEAs doing well. For this reason, the researchers sought to understand in depth through interviews the characteristics that led to their success. While interviewees indicated success in eight of nine groupings, interviews revealed what success looked like within those broader groupings.

School Culture and Teaching Staff were the most frequently emphasized characteristics of success. In relation to School Culture, interviewees focused on either community building or orderly, consistently normed LEAs that embraced high expectations for all. Staff culture was also an important part of School Culture that suffered due to staff turnover in the early years.

Priorities and successes related to Teaching Staff were found mostly in relation to hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers (although retaining was more a challenge). Interviewees demonstrated a strong connection between School Culture and Teaching Staff; the Teaching Staff must embrace, build, and reinforce School Culture. For this reason, Successful LEAs advised very carefully selecting teachers by having a strong hiring plan and being transparent about the expectations and mission during the hiring process, ensuring a good fit for both the teacher and the LEA. Professional development of teachers (PD) was also an essential component highlighted by Successful LEAs, specifically PD in relation to School Culture. High staff turnover was damaging to School Culture not only because it ruptured staff culture, but also because it required starting over with PD and teaching new staff norms and expectations.
Interviewees also connected their success to coordinating Mission and Vision with School Culture and the Teaching Staff. *Hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* to work towards the Mission and Vision led to the desired School Culture.

In Successful LEAs, these connections were driven by strong Leadership who facilitated the realization of the Mission and Vision. All systems and structures worked toward School Culture and a strong Teaching Staff in order to achieve the Mission and Vision. This process took many years, so interviewees emphasized the importance of having consistent *administrators with expertise and competence* over a long period of time, with limited turnover. Interviewees also described Successful Leadership as being present in the building/engaged, good managers of people, part of a broader network of support, and having fortitude. They encouraged new school leaders to have humility and focus on the mission.

With relation to Curriculum/Instruction, Successful LEAs were indicated to have a documented *curriculum*. In retrospect, Successful LEA founding leaders encouraged others to utilize an established *curriculum* and not build their own during the founding years.

Interviewees also emphasized that founding Successful LEA leaders needed to have strong Business Management, especially knowledge of the *technical and operational aspects* of operating a public school. This was an often-neglected area of expertise that took away from being able to implement the desired program with fidelity in the early years. They acknowledged that having a good *facility* and strong *finances* were essential to success.
A strong board was also essential to their successes. With regard to LEA oversight, Successful LEAs had strong board leadership, but did point out that EMOs and operating under the home district’s LEA were challenges.

Academic Achievement was mentioned as a success only by a sponsor and one LEA. This may be because Successful LEAs did not yet consider themselves successful in this characteristic during the fifth and sixth years of operation, even though the Review of Existing Data indicated they were. This correlated with their emphasis on high expectations.

ON THE CUSP LEAs

Priorities/Successes

On the cusp LEAs were very close to being classified as Successful LEAs, and shared many of the same priorities and successes, as indicated in survey data. The subtle differences, though, may illustrate those areas that led to them not meeting the mark. In interviews, they indicated five of the nine groupings were priorities/successes:

- Academic Achievement
- Business Management
- Curriculum
- School Culture
- Teaching Staff

All of the groupings identified by interviewees from on the cusp LEAs were also identified by Successful LEAs, although Successful LEAs also identified three more: Leadership, LEA Oversight, and Mission and Vision. Both LEA categories, though, put the most emphasis on School Culture and Teaching Staff as priorities and successes.
School Culture

School Culture encompassed several individual characteristics. Interviewees focused on three: student culture, staff culture, and parent involvement. When describing their LEAs’ student culture, three of the four interviewees focused on positivity. They used adjectives such as joyful and empowered, loving, happy, and safe to describe their student culture. They also focused on developing strong relationships with students. One said, “I would say number one was the relationships that we have with our students. We saw our kids each and every day. We knew, I knew, every child by name and every parent by name, all 220…I would say our best shining success- it’s been the lifetime relationships that I’ve built and that I think all of our staff built.” Another interviewee focused on building relationships also, but emphasized the need for that to be coupled with structure and discipline: “It wasn't just structure and discipline and order. It was the expectation for teachers that they would create good, healthy relationships with their students and the parents.” He coupled this with an insistence that all hold high expectations for students. He said, “Our children were happy at school. They felt safe and they felt that the expectations were high and they tried to rise to those expectations.” For all respondents, student culture depended on a joyful caring environment with strong relationships with students.

While interviewees indicated student culture as both a priority and success, this was contrary to survey data. Survey respondents indicated student culture was everything but a success: priority, area needing more priority, and a struggle.

In addition to student culture, on the cusp LEAs interviewees prioritized and demonstrated some success with staff culture. One LEA interviewee connected staff
*culture* to *student culture* saying it was important “how a leader was really making sure that the adults in the building are set up for success, thriving. I think a school where the adults are thriving, the students are learning more and thriving as well.” He emphasized that “whatever vision you have, you can't value teachers and the adults in that building enough.” Another school leader came in during the fourth year and found the LEA needed a major turnaround. She prioritized *staff culture* as an essential component of that turnaround and found that staff built strong relationships with each other. This was as important as *building relationships* with students and families. Another LEA interviewee talked about how important it was to invest teachers in the process of building the LEA: “teachers that were very much bought in to the whole thing because it started from the ground up. There was a lot of autonomy- collaborative autonomy. It wasn’t individuals doing their own thing, but rather everything was a kind of a group conversation or a group vision.” Another talked about how staff enjoyed a “disciplined, organized operation where they felt supported.” This was because they had *high expectations for students and staff*, but also provided a *discipline* process that led to *orderly* classrooms where teachers felt they could effectively teach. All of them emphasized *staff culture* as an essential priority and characteristic of their successes. They focused on valuing staff, building relationships within the staff, investing staff in leadership and collaboration, and supporting them by creating a supportive culture where they could all depend on each other.

One did talk about how *staff culture*, while a priority also presented a challenge. It was difficult to establish systems to support people. They struggled to figure out how to replicate the work of their awesome folks, how to prevent staff burnout, and design
sustainable systems that would outlive their people. So, while staff culture was a priority, it was also a challenge.

While interviewees indicated staff culture as both a priority and success, this also was contrary to survey data. Survey respondents indicated staff culture was not a success or priority, but that it needed more priority.

Finally, interviewees emphasized the importance of parent involvement. One emphasized the importance of building a strong connection between school and the home. Another focused on involving families in the development of the LEA: “families were very much invested. Families are a significant part of the decision-making and the planning and communication that goes into (our LEA).” Another focused on ensuring parents were on board with the expectations the charter had for students and supported those high expectations at home. This indication of parent involvement as both a priority and success is, again, contrary to survey data. Survey respondents indicated parent involvement was everything but a success: priority, area needing more priority and a struggle.

Even though interviewees contradicted survey data in relation to individual characteristics, the idea that School Culture as a larger grouping was a priority and success was supported by survey data. Survey data demonstrated the grouping School Culture was a priority and success, as well as needing more priority and a challenge. This indicated that School Culture was one of the most challenging and important elements of founding a charter LEA. This may be the most important thing to get right.
Teaching Staff

Interviewees focused on the concept of *hiring, supporting and retaining teachers* as the primary characteristic they prioritized. To begin with, it was most important to hire well. Three of the four interviewees emphasized hiring the right people. Two talked specifically about the importance of hiring teachers with experience. One said, “These people had a lot of experience. They had good judgment. They knew how to handle kids and (the principal) knew how to handle the parents, which was another matter altogether.” He contributed much of their success to having brought experienced staff that they knew with them to start the LEA. Otherwise they did have challenges finding quality staff because they were not known and operated in an area of the city known for crime and poverty.

Second to hiring, interviewees said they emphasized *professional development of teachers (PD)*. Three of the four talked about PD. One took staff to Teacher’s College in New York City every summer. The same LEA prioritized having teachers take the lead in their learning and in the LEA. Another interviewee focused on not trying to grow so fast that you cannot effectively develop your staff: “Slow growth was very important...because it gives you time to slowly build your staff, which was the key ingredient in being successful.” He said they do less PD than most charters, but they focus on the basics and help teachers get very good at teaching the basics. From here, he talked about the importance of staff retention: “we had a very…stable staff that had been there for a long time. And that really came in the beginning of that fourth year. And that's really when we really turned, it turned a corner,” indicating that was when their academic achievement became strong.
Another interviewee did not indicate this was a success, but talked about how difficult it was to scale up and expand because it was difficult to scale up meaningful PD on a larger scale. They were not able to see each teachers’ individual PD needs and meet them; instead, they put all on an aggressive path for development that ultimately burnt staff out leading to them leaving, and the LEA having to start all over again.

Interviewees and survey respondents agreed that Teaching Staff and the individual characteristic hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers was both a priority and success for on the cusp LEAs.

**Curriculum/Instruction**

Curriculum/Instruction was indicated as a priority and success by both survey respondents and interviewees. Three of four interviewees highlighted Curriculum/Instruction as a priority/success. All agreed that having a strong curriculum was important. One sponsor emphasized the need to have a documented curriculum. How that came to be, though, varied between the interviewees’ LEAs. One prioritized fundamentals and utilized a very traditional, self-described “old fashioned” curriculum. He said, “We from the beginning and still are a school that believes that if you can get our students to know, to have the skills and the knowledge and the basics in language and math, they'll be all right as students later on. They can always pick the other stuff later on. But if they don't get those basic skills and knowledge early in those critical areas, especially language development, they're going to struggle as students.” He believed that textbook writers have more experience and time to create curriculum, so one should leave the curriculum writing to them. It was too much for teachers who did not have the experience doing it to do: “The textbook series ... was put together by professionals. It
was all scoped and sequenced. It would work. … The one thing that we believe was it's not the conception. It was … the execution. If the teachers go in there and do a good job of teaching what they have to teach with, and it's a reasonable system for a reasonable curriculum, they'll be successful.” He also emphasized the importance of stability in curriculum versus starting over with new curriculum every few years, which would require re-training teachers. “I think it's been very important to us that we, once we got it figured out, we stayed with it.”

Another talked about developing their own curriculum, while yet another talked about trying to find the balance between creating their own and using a professionally-developed curriculum: “we spent quite a bit of time taking a look at the curriculum and asking ourselves what’s the right balance of teacher created curriculum, but also providing some guardrails and some resources and support.” They explored programs and ways to document the pieces of the curriculum that veteran teachers had developed.

**Academic Achievement**

Interviewees tied their priorities/successes in Curriculum/Instruction to Academic Achievement. One was founded on the mission and priority of doing a better job than SLPS at academic achievement. He recognized this would take time but achieved progress: “We didn't have any success until our fourth year. Our first set of map scores were miserable 17% and 21%, or even maybe lower than that 13%. They were bad. The second year they came up and ...it takes time to get everything in place … In our fourth year we had very high scores.” Another said they prioritized “student outcomes over and above and over everything in the form of, proficiency on state testing proficiency on interim assessments” (almost to a fault). They won an award for closing the achievement
gap at one particular point in time and saw the program working. Another said they knew they were successful because they had “really good academic scores, not just by the state but also in our school data.”

All data point to on the cusp LEAs prioritizing and being successful with Academic Achievement: survey data, interview data, and Review of Existing Data. Existing data showed on the cusp LEAs exceeded the home districts’ results by an average of 16% in both ELA and Math.

Business Management

The final priority/success identified by on the cusp LEA interviewees was Business Management. Two LEAs focused on this grouping and primarily emphasized prioritization and success in the area of finances. One talked about getting no start-up grants but borrowing $75,000 to get started. He said the first couple of years were tough because one “ha(s) to make sure you generate enough money to get by, but it worked out well.” They were in the black in the first year and were able to pay back their start-up loan. Another talked about paying off debt from the early years and putting the LEA on a path to healthy finances. She said finances needed to be a priority because when she took over in their fourth year, they had a significant debt ($400,000) and were on financial probation. By prioritizing finances, though, they ended with a $3.5 million surplus by the end of 2011 (2 years after relevant years, but the process started before the relevant years). She accomplished this, in part by cutting bussing which freed up about $300,000 in the annual budget.

One interviewee also talked about facility acquisition/development. He said, “we found a good facility. It needed to be remodeled and everything, but ... we were lucky it
was good and slowly turned it into a good facility; over time we purchased it.” He advised future school leaders to ensure they have a good facility before opening. Another respondent advised future school leaders to keep as much in-house as possible: facilities, cooking, cleaning, etc. It may cost more, but she said it’s worth it.

As was evident in the interviews, survey respondents most strongly prioritized finances/business management above all other individual characteristics grouped under Business Management. This also aligned with the Review of Existing Data where 75% of LEAs met this criterion and had an average 22% financial surplus in the relevant years.

Needs More Priority/Struggles

As a subcategory of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, it made sense that on the cusp LEAs had more areas needing more priority/struggles than priorities/struggles. Interviewees highlighted six of the nine groupings as needing more priority/struggles.

- Business Management
- Curriculum/Instruction
- LEA Oversight
- Leadership
- School Culture
- Teaching Staff

Three are somewhat interconnected (Teaching Staff, School Culture, and Leadership) but will be discussed separately.

Teaching Staff

Some on the cusp LEAs interviewees’ struggles with Teaching Staff began with difficulty hiring competent teachers. One said “staffing would become an increasing problem-finding people. I would say a good percentage of candidates in any applicant
pool rule out working (in the area where the school is located).” He also talked about the challenge of finding people interested in their more traditional curriculum because teachers weren’t sure basal readers, etc. were the right move, until they saw it work.

Another talked about the difficulty of finding competent teachers. She said, “I wouldn’t put my dog in their classroom. We had to break all those contracts and pay them off… What I told the board was if you keep them, you won’t be open, another year at the max.”

Two others talked about how, as their organizations grew, they found themselves having to hire more first-year teachers because the pool of teachers available was so limited. The newer teachers required much more support and professional development.

From here, a common theme was staff burnout, which ultimately led to turnover. One said, it was “just an immense amount of work that was expected of people that I think, at any given time we could have, we could have looked at that and said, was there a way to shift what we expect from people, but not compromise academic outcomes? And I don't think we ever really did that.” He advised future school leaders to give more priority to sustainability from a work-life balance perspective. Another agreed that the bandwidth of people needed more priority, indicating that people only have so much to give and would often burn out or move on when infant LEAs are trying not to lose what they brought to the table. One talked about how their professional development program contributed to burnout. They had unrealistic expectations about the rate of teacher growth and development: “we were trying to develop teachers at a rate that was probably entirely unrealistic in some ways.” He added, “we probably needed an entirely different frame for teacher growth and development and what our expectations were for that. But instead, it was kind of, here's the bar, no matter where you're at, it's where you got to try to get.
And, I think we just burned-out teachers and coaches going through that process.” He talked about how they used a growth model to measure success for students, but did not do the same for teachers.

This burnout, then led to *staff turnover*, which caused stress on the LEA during the founding years. This led to “difficulty in our first three or four years getting a stable, good, solid staff.” In response to the turnover, two interviewees indicated the need to have given more priority to mechanisms and structures that would have led to their LEAs’ sustainability over time and when staff turned over. One said their successes early on were largely related to having hired great teachers, but even within the first six years, it became apparent that they needed to translate the work of their great people into systems: “we recognized that we had to really put an emphasis on systems. They were always there, but they relied really heavily on the amazing people that they hired.”

Difficulty hiring and heavy workloads led to staff burnout, which led to *turnover*, which meant an LEA had to start the cycle all over again. Data from surveys supported that this grouping needed more priority, but survey respondents did not indicate Teacher Staff was a struggle for on the cusp LEAs.

School Culture

Interviewees indicated the process of burning out staff and *staff turnover* had a significant impact on School Culture. One talked about how School Culture “was damaged by the loss of many elementary school teachers because the teachers are the ones who carry and embody the culture.” Another talked about how staff burnout and turnover reduced teachers’ satisfaction and engagement. He also emphasized that School Culture struggled with *expansion* because they had not systematized School Culture, but
they were depending on individual teachers to make it happen. Not only did they struggle with systematizing School Culture, but also with making their structured environment a joyful place: “I think the biggest challenge was probably how to create a culture where kids wanted to run into a school, where kids across the school felt joyful and engaged in the school community.” Another interviewee reinforced the importance of systematizing School Culture with much emphasis. She emphasized it was a priority and a big challenge to replicate the work of their awesome folks, prevent staff burnout, and design sustainable systems that would outlive their people. One leader advised future school leaders to prioritize the adults in the building first because they were the key to success with students. “Student centered was to be adult centered at certain moments.”

Similar to the interviews, survey respondents also indicated staff culture was a characteristic in need of significantly more priority. Survey data also showed that student culture and parent involvement were two individual characteristics within School Culture that needed more priority and were struggles for on the cusp LEAS, although they were not nearly so often discussed by interviewees.

Leadership

In conjunction with the struggles in Teaching Staff and School Culture, similar themes emerged for Leadership. One interviewee discussed the challenge of burning out leaders because there was just too much work to be done. Another talked about how she took over a charter LEA on probation and at risk of closure. The founding LEA leader was not effective and, she, the new LEA leader was working unsustainable hours: “my hours were literally every day, I would get there at 5:00am and I’d probably leave at 7:00pm on a good night. And I was doing weekends. I was (working) on vacation. I
mean, there (were) very few days of downtime.” Fortunately, she stayed, and the LEA made so much progress they met criteria to be categorized as an on the cusp LEA in their 9th and 10th years. A third interviewee talked about events that happened beyond the relevant years, but they seem important here. He talked about how School Culture was damaged when their school leaders turned over because it created large staff turnover.

In the survey, respondents indicated that professional development of administrators was the characteristic needing most priority in the Leadership Grouping and that the grouping, as a whole, needed priority.

Business Management

The second most strongly emphasized grouping needing priority/struggle was Business Management (second to Teaching Staff struggles with turnover and burnout), although interviewees’ struggles were different. One talked about feeling like the model was unsustainable. “We didn't have a school model that felt sustainable over time. So from the student:staff ratio, financials, a combination of the model just didn't feel like it was one that would sustain effectively…In some ways, I always felt like it under-resourced schools.”

The leader who facilitated a turnaround listed finances as both a struggle and success. When she took over, the LEA had significant debt, but they were able to establish a healthy surplus over time by cutting transportation. She also talked about her facility being a struggle. They were operating in an old, run-down, too small church. Another interviewee also listed both finances and facility as a struggle. They were in an old building and trying to outfit it with finite resources.
Another talked about the challenge of having no support from any other organization. They did not have an EMO and struggled to find a sponsor. For most, though, finances/business management and facility acquisition/development were the primary struggles for interviewees. Survey respondents did not select these individual characteristics as needing more priority or struggles, but they did select the Business Management grouping.

Curriculum/Instruction

Curriculum was discussed by three of the four interviewees, but did not have the same emphasis as previous groupings. One said, in retrospect, they would have more clearly defined curriculum and instruction earlier: “we knew basically what we wanted to do ...We didn't have it nailed down as much as we probably should have. There was some evolution in that first period. I don't think it was a critical deficiency, but it would have made things easier.” Another stated they should have prioritized Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as much as state test proficiency: “I don't know that … all of the student outcomes that we decided were most important (state test proficiency, some of these different metrics) were (enough). We weren't also thinking about social, emotional learning, and growth and development...We lost sight of the whole child.” The third talked about how the sustainability of Curriculum depended too much on the specific people writing the Curriculum and expecting them to have the ability to effectively do so. “Teachers were creating everything from scratch with a few resources, and that worked really well for the teachers who are veteran teachers who had gone to the teacher’s college training, who knew what to do and what they were doing. It did not work well for novice teachers who were going to ‘Teachers Pay Teachers’ (the online marketplace
where teachers can purchase instructional materials created by other teachers) or all the things that teachers do to just keep their heads above water.” Interviewees had a common theme in that they struggled with Curriculum/Instruction, but for very different reasons. Survey data did not indicate Curriculum/Instruction was in need of more priority or a struggle for on the cusp LEAs.

**LEA Oversight**

Only two on the cusp LEA interviewees indicated LEA oversight needed more priority or was a struggle, but this characteristic was included because there were several areas emphasized: investing in board training, not working with an educational management organization (EMO), and finding a sponsor. One talked about having no support systems and struggling to find a sponsor. This was a significant challenge for this founder. The other interviewee talked about needing more support from the board and the sponsor. She had a very ineffective board: five of them were related to each other and ran the school in their church. Management and oversight was significantly lacking and none of the board members had experience with education. The Board President owned the building (church) where the LEA operated and rejected her suggestion of moving to a better facility because didn’t want to lose income from the LEA. They didn’t know how to monitor the LEA effectively or how to evaluate the leader. They had a cordial relationship, but not a productive one. She emphatically stated that more board training was needed. She felt like she had no support within the organization, but she was flying solo trying to figure it out and build connections to other school leaders to learn what she needed to know. She also wanted more support from her sponsor. Her sponsor “was not there… (I needed) somebody I could lean on to get best instructional practices, how to
work with urban learners, but that was not there as a resource. I wish that would have been better because as an administrator in there, you are by yourself and you need those (people to support you).” What she did have, though was an EMO, and she cautioned new founding LEA leaders not to work with an EMO. Her EMO was originally engaged by the board because none of them had educational experience, but the EMO did not provide great support or context for how to effectively operate the LEA. They did not do what they promised to do; it felt more like they were just collecting a check.

Even though only 50% of on the cusp LEA interviewees discussed LEA Oversight, it was included because it spanned so many areas of LEA Oversight. Further, board leadership was indicated as needing priority by 56% of survey respondents.

Conclusion

On the cusp LEAs identified fewer groupings as priorities/successes (5) than did Successful LEAs (8). They also identified significantly more groupings as needing more priority/struggles (6) than did Successful LEAs (2).

Both School Culture and Teaching Staff were significantly represented in interviews as both priorities/successes and needing more priority/struggles. Student and staff culture were central to their successes, but staff culture dominated the conversations related to struggles. With relation to Teaching Staff, it appeared hiring, developing and retaining staff was most certainly a priority, but a struggle nonetheless.

Curriculum/Instruction was referenced as a both a priority/success and needing more priority/struggle, as well. It was prioritized, and they felt mostly successful, but they offered three ways they could have done better: have a more strategic plan, add in
more social-emotional learning, and systematize or document the Curriculum so it can live beyond the current employees.

Business Management was also referenced as a both a priority/success and needing more priority/struggle. They prioritized both finances/business management and facility acquisition/development, but they were still a struggle for some on the cusp LEAs.

On the cusp LEAs interviewees identified Academic Achievement as a priority/success, not a struggle. This aligned with all other data collected in this study.

Leadership and LEA Oversight were identified as needing more priority/struggles, not successes. The biggest concerns for Leadership were turnover and lack of support for the leader. This lack of support for the leader trickled over into LEA Oversight, as leaders looked for support from sponsors and board members.

**OPEN LEAs THAT DID NOT MEET CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS**

**Priorities/Successes**

Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success shared some of the same priorities/successes as on the cusp LEAs and Successful LEAs, though fewer overall and with one distinct difference: Attendance/Enrollment. Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success indicated four groupings as priorities/succesess:

- Academic Achievement
- Attendance/Enrollment
- School Culture
- Teaching Staff

As with the other LEA subcategories, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success put the most emphasis on School Culture. In contrast to Successful LEAs, open
LEAs that did not meet criteria for success did not demonstrate as many connections between what they prioritized and where their LEAs were successful.

School Culture

Three of the interviewees indicated that their LEA either prioritized (one) or saw success (three) with School Culture during the founding years. The LEA that prioritized School Culture specifically prioritized student culture and parent involvement. They invested early in a school-wide behavior management program so teachers were all utilizing the same system within the classroom. It was largely based on incentives for students that included recognition at assemblies and prizes (such as $5 gift cards). They also looked for ways to build incentives into their staff culture by offering incentive bonuses. To help promote home visits (one of their key strategies for parent involvement), teachers were offered financial incentives to complete each visit. “The other thing we did to make it fun for teachers was they get paid a certain amount per visit. And they get that check on Black Friday… And they saw it as their Christmas money and they would tell parents, ‘We are in a contest and you would really help us out if you just let us come in a minute.’”

Home visits were a key success for that particular LEA and as the interviewee stated, created strong relationships between the teachers and the parents that supported their ongoing work together throughout the year. “Being able to build relationships with parents (made us successful). I had a dad who came up for a conference with a 7th grade teacher and he said to me, ‘Is this the same teacher who came to our house?’ and I said, ‘Yes’. He said, ‘You don’t need me. Just put her and my daughter in a room. They’ll work it out.’” Other strategies that helped this LEA promote parent involvement were
requiring twenty hours of volunteer time to the school and having a parent-advisory committee. “And we met parents who just tearfully would share with you some of the things our kids have been through and we would talk, really try to keep in touch with them.” She went on to say that having parents as part of the decision-making process helped the LEA make decisions that were in the best interest of their parents’ needs. Volunteer time included all of the things they wanted the parents to do like attend conferences and come to family nights. To encourage parents to volunteer, they made it part of the re-enrollment process (discussed in struggles).

Two of the other LEAs also indicated student culture was a success during their founding years. One LEA emphasized counseling and creating behavior interventions. The other mentioned that they were successful with bringing students into the School Culture by consistently and strategically working on student support. “We were able to bring in new students who had been having difficulties at other schools and we would often see their behavior improve over time once they were acclimated to our culture.” This was especially true at their first campus, though as later discussed was a greater challenge once they expanded to other sites. This LEA interviewee also mentioned that staff culture at their first campus was particularly strong, though one of their challenges was also staff culture due to “reform whiplash.”

Finally, one of the LEAs mentioned community investment as a success. It was also identified as a success by their sponsor. The need for the LEA to open was clear when they began and people in the community wanted to see it succeed. The interviewee described the challenges parents brought to the planning committee and later, how much better the LEA became at supporting their students’ needs.
Even open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success were seen as a better option by many parents, as described in interviews of LEA leaders and sponsors. This was often due to the School Culture of the LEA and the parents’ belief that the education was better than what their child could get at the district option down the street.

Attendance/Enrollment

Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success were the only subcategory of LEA to indicate this priority or success through interviews. This aligned with survey results where respondents from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success selected attendance and/or enrollment as priorities and/or successes with some of the highest percentages of respondents.

During the interviews, attendance and enrollment were most often discussed as priorities due to the connection to state funding. Interviewees agreed that it was vital to their success to fill open seats through enrollment and encourage strong attendance for state reports. Without success in either, there would have been serious consequences for the LEA. Three of the four interviewees viewed attendance as a success. One LEA discussed attendance as a success in comparison to what was expected, given the situations many of their students lived in. Many of their students came from traumatic situations where attendance was not a priority, and yet they had relatively strong attendance.

Enrollment was also indicated as a success by interviewees, though one interviewee indicated that their prioritization on enrollment was to the detriment of their program overall. “Year four through six we were just growing so fast… and because of
that, demanded a lot of emphasis on enrollment.” So, though enrollment was a priority, it led to a struggle with expansion for this LEA.

It was evident that interviewees from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success prioritized enrollment and attendance because it was tied to their LEA’s need for funding.

**Academic Achievement**

Only one of the four open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success indicated academic achievement was a priority, and one (different from the first) indicated it was a success for their LEA. One interviewee focused on academic achievement in their advice to new charter school leaders saying, “I think the biggest thing was you better prove to the state that you're worthy of being open with strong academics or to them test results.”

One of their priorities was literacy during the founding years, though the interviewee did not indicate it was one of their successes and the Review of Existing Data shows that even by year ten, this LEA was not performing better than their home district by at least five percentage points. In fact, they were performing five percentage points below the home district in ELA.

The LEA interviewee that indicated academic achievement was one of their successes did so with the caveat that it was not a sustained success and that their success was not evident on all of their campuses to the same degree. “I would say that the first campus that opened up was by far the strongest campus. And at least in the time that I was there, we were offering a better educational option than the closest nearby (home district) options.” She goes on to say that even though their other campuses were not reaching their internal metrics for success, they were (at least initially) better than the
district option down the street. “We weren’t amazing or perfect by any means, but I do
know that our scores were better than what that child would have received if they had
gone like two blocks down to the (home district) school, down the street.” According to
the Review of Existing Data, the LEA was mildly stronger in three of the four data points
related to student proficiency on the state assessment (MAP) during the two relevant
years; by one, two and seven percentage points. She went on to describe the challenges in
their academic achievement, to be discussed in the next section.

Teaching Staff

Finally, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success indicated that the
grouping Teaching Staff was one of their greatest successes, though none indicated it was
prioritized by their LEA during the interviews. The survey results differed somewhat in
that they did not show any characteristics within the Teaching Staff grouping as either
priorities or successes by open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success.

One LEA interviewee simply said they had good teaching staff, but then went on
to describe challenges with their teachers. The other interviewee who indicated this
success specifically described hiring as an overall struggle, but that their method for
hiring as a team built strong collective responsibility and collaboration for teachers. “If
we needed a new second grade teacher, the final word in the final interview came from
the other second grade teachers… Because one of the first things I would say to them…
look you helped hire them. Our first job was to help them be successful.” This method
made hiring teachers one of their greatest successes and helped to support the overall staff
culture (though this was not indicated by the interviewee as one of their successes).
Needs More Priority/Struggle

*Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* were far from being successful according to the criteria outlined in this study. It makes sense then, that they exhibited far more struggles than successes; and more than *on the cusp LEAs*. *Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* identified seven of the nine groupings as needing more priority and/or struggles during their founding years.

- Academic Achievement
- Attendance/Enrollment
- Business Management
- Curriculum and Instruction
- LEA Oversight
- School Culture
- Teaching Staff

Unlike *on the cusp LEAs*, they did not identify Leadership as needing more priority/struggle and added Academic Achievement and Attendance/Enrollment. Not all groupings were discussed with the same frequency or intensity, but they were brought up by at least two of the leaders interviewed.

Business Management

The greatest challenge interviewees from *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* identified was Business Management. All four LEA interviewees identified multiple struggles within this grouping. The first, and most frequently discussed was finance.

Financial strain was one of the greatest challenges for this LEA subcategory. One LEA struggled at times to pay their bills or offer the programs they wanted to offer. He said, “You gotta have some cash. You can't, you can't just rely on the state's money.” Financial strain also prevented LEAs from hiring sufficient staff, which left many
stretched to their capacity. “Everyone then was working their a*s off and doing, as you said, they're shoveling the snow when they could be doing something else that could bring in more potential.” Finally, interviewees indicated the lack of knowledge amongst their staff pertaining to finances was challenging in those early years. One LEA reported challenges with adequately reporting information to the state. Another said they didn’t understand the cash flow and it caused other problems early on.

Though all four discussed the struggles associated with Business Management, two interviewees discussed the need to prioritize this grouping. One interviewee indicated that they needed significantly more time to strategically plan before opening, which she cautioned was especially challenging because she had just recently returned to the area and did not understand the educational landscape. Part of the planning she would have prioritized was a sustainable growth model. Expansion became a challenge in year two when the LEA decided to offer a significantly larger program. “I would never advise anyone to triple their grade level in the second year. I just feel some of the struggles we have gone through we would not have gone through had we started with K-3 and then just added (one grade a year after) because we would have been able to spend more time focused on our curriculum and our entrepreneurial theme.” She went on to describe the tension between responding to parents’ needs (who wanted more grade levels for siblings) with their need to focus on building a great program as they grew. Eventually, this LEA opened a high school, in their ninth year. (This was the first relevant data year for this LEA in this study.) After four years, the LEA closed the high school due to the financial challenges of sustaining a small high school.
Expansion was a significant challenge for another LEA as well. The interviewee said, “...the expansion plan was probably, in my opinion, driver number one (challenge) and then driver number two were the changes made to the curriculum and the level of autonomy that teachers were (no longer) given.” The LEA opened three additional sites, one each year beginning in their fourth year.

Both interviewees agreed that growing the LEA too rapidly divided their attention and made it much more difficult to focus on any given priority, especially the internal programming that (they said) mattered most. The LEA that expanded to three additional sites within the first six years saw many negative repercussions as a result of the rate of their expansion. One was in connection to the facility. None of their new facilities were large enough to accommodate the fully grown academic program. Rather than planning to spend time developing a strategy to correct this problem at a later time, the interviewee lamented that the LEA did not instead design their growth plan with the full model in mind and slow down their expansion to support their strategic planning.

Three of the interviewees offered advice to help future charter school leaders mitigate their own challenges in Business Management. One suggested investing in hiring someone who understood the finances and could manage it effectively for the LEA. One interviewee suggested giving yourself plenty of time to plan, while another suggested having a financial cushion prior to opening an LEA. The final piece of advice offered was to ensure that the LEA was operating with a responsible financial model throughout. “The biggest one was to just to make sure you have a sustainable model in terms of finances.” Two of the interviewees cautioned that state funding may not be enough, either because you aren’t meeting your enrollment targets or because the
programming you want to offer (or in the case of supporting high needs for students with IEPs, must offer) costs more than you can realistically afford.

School Culture

School Culture was another grouping that repeatedly came up in interviews as a struggle for open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success. Though the survey respondents indicated discipline was the concern (54%), interviewees more often utilized the term “student culture” to describe challenges in this grouping.

Two interviewees specifically discussed challenges related to student culture within the first six years. One interviewee spoke to the significant challenges related to high-needs students disrupting the environment due to their (staff’s) inability to meet their (students’) needs. “I don't want to say it was a distraction because everyone has the right to quality education. I think though, it diverted our attention. We had to constantly scramble and pivot to figure out, okay, what do we do? We've never had this situation before.”

Another interviewee noted that student culture was a challenge at their newer schools, likely a result of their rapid expansion. “I wish that they had not grown so quickly and focused instead on improving quality at the first campus and identifying what was working and making sure that they were able to reproduce that in a consistent and reliable manner before opening up new campuses.” She went on to describe the challenge in their staff culture as a result of expansion as well, due in part to a struggle with hiring experienced staff and training them effectively in their model.

One of the sponsors emphasized that Successful LEAs identify a need in the community and then work to meet that need. This idea was emphasized as a struggle
during one interview from an open LEA that did not meet criteria for success. “Make sure the interest was there, that the community actually wants you to be there and was interested in the model that you’re providing. Because if they’re not, you’re going to struggle with enrollment and then you’re going to struggle with finances. You have to make sure you have the market for what you’re offering.”

*Parent Involvement* was discussed as a great success by one of the interviewees. However, she also admitted to incentives that helped encourage parent participation by giving the volunteer time “some teeth.”

*We kind of did something that I was later told was a little bit illegal. We said those parents who meet that criteria (20 hours of volunteer time) are eligible for spots right off. You’re guaranteed a spot. If you aren’t able to do it, you can still come here, but you’re back in the pot... We only did that for about the first seven years.*

The requirement for volunteering remained even after removing the connection to enrollment. Though *parent involvement* was identified as a success, it was also initially a struggle.

School Culture was indicated as a priority/success by interviewees from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success and all of the interviews highlighted at least one School Culture challenge as well. How School Culture challenged the LEA varied, but *student culture* was a characteristic specifically identified as a success and struggle by multiple interviewees, perhaps suggesting that it was one of the most integral characteristics to the overall outcomes of each LEA.
Teaching Staff

Three of the interviewees discussed challenges with Teaching Staff. Most often discussed was hiring great teachers. One of the interviewees said that their “(greatest challenge) was trying to find really good teachers”, both then and now. She let 100% of her teaching staff go after the first year because there were so many problems.

Another interviewee said that hiring was always a challenge, but that it became especially difficult to hire experienced, high-quality teachers after they expanded. One of the sponsors also identified hiring experienced teachers as a significant struggle for new LEAs, specifically pointing out that most new LEAs cannot afford to pay for the most experienced, high-caliber teachers that would really help them achieve their academic goals. One interviewee said they struggled to recruit quality teachers because few were interested in teaching in a new LEA. He surmised that the risk of jumping into an unknown LEA rather than working for an established LEA was one few were willing to take.

Professional development of teachers was another challenge identified by interviewees. One leader said they didn’t have the right people in place to get their literacy and academic program going. Another leader said they struggled to effectively train their teachers, though in part this struggle was due to changing (and competing) priorities. “I think teachers kind of had reform whiplash after a while, everything was always changing.” She went on to say that they had a hard time retaining their teachers with all the changes and then struggled to hire new ones to replace those that left.

Many of the characteristics within the Teaching Staff grouping were highlighted as struggles during the founding years of these open LEAs that did not meet criteria for
success: hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers; professional development of teachers; teacher expertise and competence; and teacher/staff retention.

Academic Achievement

Academic Achievement was selected by 62% of survey respondents as a struggle, though only two discussed it during their interview and with a different lens as to the reason their LEA struggled. One leader shared that their LEA struggled with academic achievement as a result of inexperienced teachers and ongoing expansion. “I think the big challenge was getting the same level of quality at the newer campuses because they opened so quickly and the staff usually tended to be less experienced and they would have a harder time figuring out our curriculum and our systems.” She noted that the educational quality was best at their initial campus and that “the educational quality was a bit lower at (the new) schools”.

The other interviewee suggested their struggles with academic achievement were largely due to them serving students in middle and high school and that their students came to them significantly behind.

Because we didn’t grow them up or we’d have them for several years, the issue was then we had to then take credit for whatever performance they did. And, the testing was an issue. Because we had kids that might’ve been with us six months to maybe two or three years.... and when they’d take the state test, consequently, there was never much gain at all. And, so that was of course held against you as being a charter because it's one of their requirements for the state.

Challenges with making academic growth with individual students as well as reaching state benchmarks for achievement were both struggles for this LEA.
As evidenced by the Review of Existing Data, struggles with academic achievement was true for a majority of LEAs in this subcategory; only 17 out of a possible 60 (28%) data points met the target for success (proficiency at least 5% above the home district) in open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success. This demonstrated academic achievement was a significant struggle for this group of LEAs, even though it was not broadly discussed.

Attendance/Enrollment

Even though Attendance/Enrollment was identified by interviewees as a priority/success, it also registered with leaders as a struggle. One LEA interviewee discussed the challenges of recruiting students early in the process, especially as an unknown entity. Feelings within the city were hostile from some concerned that charter schools stole enrollment from the home district, even though they were frustrated with a lack of a quality education from the home district. Another leader described the challenges of recruiting enough students to fill seats of their ever-expanding LEA. “And the focus on growing so quickly put a lot of strain on us financially because we were not able to meet our enrollment targets each year, but the way our budget was structured and the way our fees were structured with our national management company… it really put us in the hole financially every time we didn’t hit the enrollment target.”

Only one LEA discussed challenges related to attendance (versus enrollment). He said that many of their kids came from traumatic situations where school was not a priority. They struggled with attendance (85%), though it was still better than the home district average at the time.

Attendance and enrollment were important to LEAs, as discussed in
Priorities/Successes due to their tie to funding. Struggling to meet enrollment targets or attendance goals had a direct impact on the amount of money received from the state; which was one of the most frequently discussed challenges during the interviews with candidates from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success.

Curriculum and Instruction

Though two interviewees identified this grouping as a struggle, their reasons behind that struggle were very different. One indicated a challenge with effectively planning and supporting the vastly different learning needs of students with significant needs, like those with IEPs or those with high-risk needs. The other indicated a struggle with building consistency in their learning program and indicated that frequent changes to the curriculum caused struggle for kids and teachers. “We had a lot of changes in curriculum. The curriculum became more scripted with much less teacher autonomy.” Part of the changing curriculum was due to the inexperience of the teaching staff, though the interviewee believed removing teacher autonomy had a distinctly negative impact on the overall program.

LEA Oversight

The final grouping identified as needing more priority/struggle from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success was LEA Oversight. Two of the four school leaders identified it as a struggle during their founding years, though each experienced this challenge in a different way.

One of the interviewees’ LEAs began during the time when the charter LEA was part of the home district. As the LEA, the home district received and distributed the charter LEA’s funds as it did to all buildings under the LEA. This caused significant
challenges for most LEAs during this timeframe, as was also true for an interviewee from a Successful LEA. This leader discussed the challenge as it related to finances. “The public school…played around with, our money. One, they didn't give it to us in a timely manner...They didn't give us all the money that they were supposed to. They withheld some, and we had to take them to court to prove that.” They won in court and were then able to operate as their own LEA.

Another interviewee began as a private alternative school that contracted with their home district to support the students with the greatest needs. They did not serve a typical student population and they struggled to operate as a charter LEA beholden to state standards. “The standards that were for regular schools were also placed upon us.” The leader reflected that in retrospect, they should not have become a charter because it was too difficult to convert from being private to meeting the state requirements; while also continuing to serve their mission.

LEA Oversight presented challenges for LEAs, though through different mechanisms of oversight; one struggled with the home district during a time when they had more influence over charter LEAs. The other struggled with state requirements.

Conclusion

Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success identified fewer groupings as priorities/successes (4) than did on the cusp LEAs (5). They also identified more groupings as needing more priority/struggles (7) than did on the cusp LEAs (6) and significantly more than Successful LEAs (2).
School Culture was the most significantly represented grouping in priorities/successes and was also strongly represented in needing more priority/struggles. Student Culture was described as both a success and a struggle, as well as a priority. 

*Parent involvement* and *staff culture* were also considered successes by a couple of LEAs and a struggle by at least one LEA. For the most part, interviewees identified different characteristics under the School Culture grouping as struggles, but all agreed that at least one characteristic was a challenge.

Business/Management was the grouping most significantly identified as in need of more priority/struggle by *open LEAs that met criteria for success*. Challenges associated with *finance* and *expansion* came to light as two characteristics that impacted many of the LEAs. *Finance* and *expansion* were often associated with other characteristics of struggle as well: *attendance, enrollment, EMOs, academic achievement,* and *staff and student culture."

Attendance/Enrollment was a priority for one LEA and a success for another. However, *student recruitment* was identified as a struggle by two interviewees who connected this challenge to overall struggles with *finance.*

Teaching Staff and Curriculum/Instruction were linked with Academic Achievement in interviews with leaders from *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*. Challenges with *hiring and supporting teachers* to the point they demonstrated *teacher expertise and competence* had a negative impact on implementation of Curriculum/Instruction. This negatively impacted *academic achievement,* particularly for high-needs students. *Expansion* also played a negative role in *academic achievement* for at least two LEAs as they tried to scale their program to additional learning sites.
Finally, LEA Oversight was identified as a struggle by two LEAs, though for very different reasons: home district management and state expectations. A third LEA discussed expansion as their most significant struggle and at one point connected that to the vision of the EMO, so it was possible that LEA Oversight was a challenge for that LEA as well, even though they did not explicitly state the struggle.

CLOSED LEAs

The final category of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success was closed LEAs. Though more research has been done to understand why charter LEAs fail (as described in Chapter II Literature Review) than why charter LEAs succeed, the researchers determined this study on why charter LEAs succeed was incomplete without investigating the full spectrum of charter LEA successes and failures.

The researchers interviewed two respondents from closed LEAs, both served as Principals/Heads of School during the founding years of their LEA and left prior to closure (after years one and two). Both LEAs were closed before their renewal in the fifth year. Both interviewees are still working in education today. Additionally, both sponsors provided insight into the characteristics that most impacted closed LEAs in the founding years.

Priorities/Successes: Closed LEAs

Unsurprisingly, both interviewees from closed LEAs had a difficult time identifying the successes of their LEA during the founding years. Additionally, neither sponsor offered specific insights into the priorities or successes of closed LEAs.
Therefore, the trends identified in the priorities/successes section came only from LEA interviewees and not the sponsors.

Given that the LEAs were closed prior to renewal in the fifth year, it was apparent there were many struggles in the founding years. When asked what their LEA prioritized, both interviewees almost immediately began to talk about challenges they noticed even before their LEA opened for the first year.

One priority from both interviewees was School Culture, though not the same characteristics within School Culture were prioritized. School Culture was the only grouping identified in all four LEA subcategories as a priority/success. One LEA identified their focus on student and family relationships as one of their priorities, but also noted that while it was a success, it was also a struggle due to the challenge of prioritizing too many things in support of that priority. “We prioritized all things to all people and I think as a result of that, trying to be everything for families, it was spread too thin.” She went on to explain the mission and vision of the LEA: “the primary purpose was to provide a community-centered school.” Initially they hired three social workers to support this work, but the roles were cut after the first year due to budget constraints (to be discussed in struggles). Though the interviewee indicated the struggle to keep this priority, she also said that “really taking care of the kids” was the thing she looked back on with the greatest pride.

The other interviewee indicated other aspects of School Culture as their LEA’s priority, specifically hiring and community involvement. He said initially hiring employees from the neighborhood where the LEA was located was incredibly important, as well as hiring as many staff of color (particularly teachers). “I purposely hired my staff
from the area. The kids would know that… would see them. I tried to hire as many
teachers of color as I could. So in a classroom, students saw people that look like them.”

The second element of School Culture that this interviewee identified as a priority
was community support/involvement. He said they aimed to, “make the school a central
part of the community”. (This was something both closed LEAs had in common in their
mission: serving as an anchor for community.) Their ability to provide a computer lab for
parents in the evening and on the weekends was one of their greatest successes, “And one
of the things that we did was open up the doors. We had two computer labs and we
invited people in the neighborhood, especially parents of our students to come in just to
check, a place they could go and check their email.”

Though both closed LEAs specifically sought to serve the full community through
their mission and vision, neither school leader explicitly shared ways that they engaged
the broader community. However, one closed LEA felt that one of the best things his
LEA did was engage parents in the decision-making process. “One of the positive things
about the…. organization was that they were real big on shared decision making. I had a
group of about 10 people that when we decided we were going to do things, we ran
anything by those parents and we would allow them to determine whether or not that
would be something that would be positive for their students.” He went on to discuss his
own social identities (white, male) and the importance of relying on the parent
community to support the LEA. “I really wanted to empower the parents to be able to
make those kinds of decisions.”

While School Culture was identified by both interviewees as a priority and
success of their LEAs, it also came up strongly as needing more priority and a struggle.
Closed LEAs failed to collectively identify any priorities/successes that were not significant challenges as well.

**Needs More Priority/Struggles**

Though only one grouping was identified as a priority/success of closed LEAs, eight of the nine groupings were identified as needing more priority/struggles; all except Attendance/Enrollment.

- Academic Achievement
- Business Management
- Curriculum/Instruction
- Leadership
- LEA Oversight
- Mission and Vision
- School Culture
- Teaching Staff

Though Attendance/Enrollment was not identified by the interviewees as needing more priority/struggle, the Review of Existing Data showed that this was also a struggle for closed LEAs. Neither of the LEAs in which the interviewees worked met the targets identified in this study for either attendance or enrollment, indicating that while the interviewees may not have identified this grouping as needing more priority/struggle, both attendance and enrollment needed more priority and/or was a struggle for closed LEAs. It was possible, though, that neither attendance nor enrollment were challenges during the first year or two at either LEA, which was the time that both interviewees worked for their respective LEA.

**Business Management**

Business Management was the grouping most discussed as needing more priority and causing significant struggles in the founding of closed LEAs. It was discussed by
both LEA interviewees as well as both sponsors. The characteristic most commonly identified as a concern was finances.

The sponsor interviewees’ points supported the struggles identified by the LEA interviewees. One common thread between closed LEAs was the difficulty in funding all that was needed to make their vision a reality, particularly staffing and facility. One sponsor indicated new LEAs had the hardest time paying for the experience needed to build a truly effective program. This was supported by what the LEA interviewees said as well. One interviewee said, “I know the founder was working very hard to make a vision a reality and still balancing what we have funds for and juggling money.” She went on to talk about the deep cuts to the budget during the first year from what was originally planned to what was actually feasible given budget constraints. This resulted in significant staff reductions outside of the primary classroom teachers. Particularly devastating for this LEA was the loss of their three social workers, who the interviewee saw as integral to their vision of success. She said, “Then due to financial reasons, we had to cut their roles… I asked our CEO to let us keep one social worker and there was one in particular who had relationships with kids and families in every grade. And I was like, if we can just keep her… but the decision was made to cut all three workers. Then we were without any support and that was really hard. That was really challenging.”

Another common thread between the two LEA interviewees was the challenge with operating without enough resources. One interviewee reflected on the challenges in getting the kind of academic achievement his teachers were aiming for, but felt frustrated by the complete lack of resources to do so. “We weren’t given the tools necessary to do that. Let’s just focus on reading. None of my ELA teachers had the resources that they
needed to help the students grow.” He went on to describe asking his personal network for leftover curriculum materials or books to build classroom libraries. “We didn’t have what we needed to help us to grow and read.” The other LEA interviewee expressed similar frustration and described the challenges of gathering the necessary resources prior to the LEA opening. “I told her in April, this was the curriculum I want. Then it’s June and it’s not delivered yet and then I found out that (they) haven’t been ordered yet because we’re waiting for this other grant.”

Facility also posed challenges for both closed LEAs. One of the interviewees described the opportunity of moving into a newly renovated space, but that it came with an exorbitant cost that took directly from his annual budget. He described the $800,000 rent payment and EMO fees, both expenses he would not have prioritized if given the opportunity to make different choices. The other interviewee had different facility challenges. Their first facility was always meant to be a temporary solution when they could not secure a property of their own. The LEA leader described the challenges of operating in the space as significant, “We were on top of each other. We were crowded. It was tight. It was difficult.” Their second facility was supposed to be ready prior to the start of the second year, but construction delays left the LEA without their new home until October. They began year two operating in a space far too small for their size and moved over a long weekend into their new space.

Finally, both interviewees discussed the lack of systems and strategic planning as significant challenges they faced in their founding years. One interviewee described a number of challenges that resulted from the decision to open with three non-consecutive grades. This decision made instruction, culture, and staffing all more difficult to navigate.
The other interviewee suggested that any new charter school leader should take ample time to plan before opening with students. When discussing the process of another charter LEA he was familiar with, he praised their strategic planning. “They had already spent a good amount of time doing their due diligence, looking for a building, preparing to support their demographic as far as students were concerned, and had a very strong vision and mission.”

In addition to facility, finances, and strategic planning, closed LEAs also had a need for a leader who understood all the nuts and bolts of school operations. One sponsor highlighted the importance of having a strategy tied to being able to manage the complexities of the business.

Many of the characteristics within the Business Management grouping influenced other challenges as well, causing a ripple effect throughout the LEA.

Mission and Vision

Having a strong Mission and Vision was identified prominently as impacting the success of Successful LEAs by both LEA interviewees and sponsors. On the flip side, both interviewees from closed LEAs and sponsors alike identified challenges with Mission and Vision as needing more priority/struggle. One sponsor reflected back on the Mission and Vision of a closed LEA and said that what they said they were focused on was,

really good stuff. But in the end, it was all lip service... They didn't ever embody those things in the kids and even in the teachers. They had a lot of [LEA-specifically identifying information] that didn't have any meaning to anybody. You never got the buy-in... If they were really honest, they would say, ‘The kids
weren’t as enthusiastic about our visions and the parents weren’t as (enthusiastic as) we thought they were going to be... And, (the school) never really got off the ground because of that.

One interviewee specifically joined her LEA because of the Mission and Vision. She was invested in the revitalization of the neighborhood where the LEA was opening and believed deeply in the idea of an LEA being a center of the community. However, she also described significant challenges with the vision of the LEA when it began to operate in reality. “The vision and scope of the school was big and I think we needed to get the education part, the day-to-day experience of our learners right and then figure out what’s the next piece... We bit off more than we could chew.” She also described the conflict between the vision statement and the actions being taken by the CEO, specifically citing the decision to cut all social workers who were seen as inherent to the vision of the LEA during the design phase.

The other interviewee felt the LEA didn’t prioritize students under the EMO, but instead focused on profit. “As charter schools open up, I think number one, they need to know who they are and what their goal and focus was because I don’t believe that (EMO) had a goal... an academic goal. I think that they were interested in making a fast dollar.” He went on to describe concerns with the founder of the LEA and their lack of clarity as to the overall Mission and Vision, saying it should have been clear in the planning stages before students ever entered the building.

Both LEA interviewees discussed challenges with enrolling students to fill empty seats rather than prioritizing filling empty seats with students/families who were invested
in the mission of the LEA. One interviewee said, “(It was) probably to our detriment that we opened up as soon as we did and really accepted any student in the building.”

All interviews placed emphasis on the importance of knowing the Mission and Vision of the LEA prior to opening and using that Mission and Vision to guide decisions. Both LEA interviewees offered advice related to knowing who you are and what goals you have for the long-term, but also for the first year. One interviewee asked, “What are our year one wins? … We have a 5-year charter… we know what being successful for renewal and moving forward to continue to grow the school. But what does success look like in year one because we’re not going to be the year five school in year one.” The other interviewee expressed concerns that the true goal and purpose of their LEA was for the EMO to make money. “As charter schools open up, I think number one, they need to know who they are and what their goal and focus was because I don’t believe that (EMO) had a goal… an academic goal. I think that they were interested in making a fast dollar.”

Survey data did not indicate implementation of mission and vision as a characteristic either needing more priority or as a struggle of closed LEAs, but both LEA interviews repeatedly shared reflections pointing to the challenges within their LEA’s implementation of mission and vision with specific anecdotes to support their reflections.

**LEA Oversight**

During all four interviews, concerns related to LEA oversight came up repeatedly, but with slightly different interpretations. Both sponsors agreed that strong board leadership was critical to success and that weak boards were a significant driver of failed LEAs. In addition to both sponsors, one of the LEA interviewees specifically addressed concerns with board leadership. This interviewee and sponsors alike were concerned
with a lack of accountability from the board. “We did not have strong board governance, at all, in any kind of way. It was a group of ‘yes men and women’, and I say that knowing that they care and they wanted the LEA to do well, but they also just didn’t know what their job was as board members to hold the staff, the CEO and myself accountable, to be strategic… to be executing toward a set plan.” One sponsor expressed concern that boards of some of his least successful LEAs had been hand-chosen by the founding leader. The other sponsor specifically indicated the need for the board to recognize that they were above the founding leader and therefore should be holding them accountable, saying that too much deference to the founder was a problem. The interviewees all mentioned love and care of the people involved on charter school boards, but that it was not a sufficient substitute for effective governance. One school leader said, “Being well-meaning was not enough, caring a lot about kids and families… it’s just not enough.”

In addition to oversight of LEA leaders, sponsors were concerned with the lack of board training that most boards have, none was required in the state of Missouri. Both sponsors were also concerned with their board members’ general lack of educational knowledge, especially when coupled with their lack of training. One sponsor went on to talk about the difference between the sponsor and the board and what effective governance looks like, insisting that the role of the board was critical to charter LEA success and ensuring the LEA was meeting their targets.

Everyone comes in saying we’re going to make this wonderful school and it’s going to be great and if we can't do that, we don’t deserve to be around. Well, come five years later when you’re not doing that great, you’re saying well, but we deserve to be around because we’re really trying hard…. Boards need to do a self-
assessment of your school. Is… the school that you’re overseeing doing what you said it was going to do? And if it’s not, you should be thinking about, should it continue or should it be radically changed? Not have that be left up to the sponsor to do. That’s your job as a board.

Additionally, he described effective school governance as taking leadership, recruiting diverse perspectives and talent for the board, and asking critical questions of their leaders during each opportunity to do so.

One of the LEA interviewees indicated that in addition to concerns with their board’s oversight, the sponsor relationship was very problematic. “Our sponsor was attempting to revoke sponsorship and our founder told all the kids and families that we were closing. They did appeal and were able to stay open because the sponsor, the university, decided that they were prematurely revoking sponsorship after just two years.” As a result of the communication from the sponsor that the LEA would be shut down, many of the founding students and staff left and did not return when the sponsor decided to keep the LEA open. The interviewee described it as a devastating turn of events that significantly impacted the third year of the LEA.

The other LEA interviewee described challenges with the EMO, indicated they lacked specific priorities (at least as they related to academics). He also shared a significant concern about possible funding mismanagement and ethical concerns, which were evident to him even in the first year. “I think for the corporation, the priority was profitable. Now they’ll call themselves a nonprofit, but there were just too many things that led me to believe that profit was their concern.” He questioned whether or not the
fees they were required to pay the EMO really served as an investment to benefit the LEA or if it was just a way for the company to make money.

Within the LEA Oversight grouping, board leadership was the characteristic with most consensus as a struggle, in alignment with survey data where 55% of respondents from closed LEAs selected the characteristic as one of their greatest struggles. Challenges with sponsors and EMOs also had an impact on closed LEAs.

Leadership

Though LEA oversight had consensus from all four interviewees as an area needing more priority and/or causing challenges, Leadership was also indicated explicitly by three of the four interviewees and was supported by additional contextual evidence: both interviewees left their LEA soon after opening.

One interviewee left their LEA after the first year, “I was there for one year and quite honestly, I started to see some big red flags early on, what (the EMO) was doing there… and decided after that first year that it was going to go down and I didn’t want it to take me with it.” The other interviewee left after the second year of operation. In addition to the challenges of the LEA, she cited feelings of inadequacy to manage the challenges, “I want you (CEO) to start looking for a great person because I’m not it.” This sentiment was supported by survey results where 45% of respondents from closed LEAs indicated that administrators’ experience and competence needed more priority. Later in the interview, she added, “I needed coaching. I needed support. I needed more development and we just didn’t have any mechanism for what that was going to look like across all of the different roles.” Prior to this leadership role, the interviewee had not been a school leader. Additionally, the CEO did not have any educational experience.
One of the sponsors expressed concern with administrators’ experience and competence as well, saying that the founding LEA leader often has the vision, but doesn’t know how to manage people.

(They) may have some experience in education, perhaps at the teaching level, but many of them honestly have never managed people. They’ve not been in a role where they must manage people and run a school and... they may be clueless about educational administration and just the nuts and bolts of running an office and dealing with DESE and finances and all that stuff. They need a lot of help. And of course, they don't have enough money to provide the expertise that they don't have...having to hire people, do all the budget work, answer the phone, upload the stuff that DESE needs, etc.

Often, there was a single founding LEA leader at the beginning, managing all the responsibilities of the business and the school program. The sponsor went on to describe the capacity of the person in charge being limited, “They often have to have two roles, the superintendent and the principal, which was way more than any one person should have.” An LEA interviewee echoed this sentiment, “You do not have the capacity to coach and develop teachers and run the school and do discipline and everything. There’s no assistant principal, there’s no Dean of Students. There’s you and it was a lot.”

Additional priority given to Leadership may have had a positive impact on closed LEAs’ outcomes, whether by investing in the professional development of the administrators or hiring leaders with experience. Additionally, retaining leaders may be another critical component of success.
Teaching Staff

Teaching Staff was indicated as a struggle/needing more priority by fewer interviewees. One interviewee from a closed LEA and one sponsor specifically discussed the challenges that arose within closed LEAs as a result of Teaching Staff.

Both interviewees indicated a challenge with hiring high-quality teaching staff. The sponsor pointed out that the most skilled, most knowledgeable teachers often don’t want to work in new LEAs because they can’t pay as well. The teachers who do come are less experienced. The LEA interviewee was specifically concerned with not having enough qualified staff to meet the various needs of students with significant needs, especially students with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans).

By hiring more inexperienced teachers, it was often left to the LEA administrators to find ways to provide professional development for teachers. Given their own struggles with capacity and administrator competence and expertise, it was a difficult situation. One LEA interviewee reflected a desire to have developed a better plan for supporting teachers throughout the year. “I wish we had been more thoughtful on the front end about what coaching and support was going to look like and who was going to provide it. I found myself scrambling through my network of educators to say, ‘Hey will you start as a mentor for this teacher’.... I just think those systems needed to be in place before day one.” This was further supported by the survey where professional development of teachers was selected by 55% of closed LEA respondents as needing more priority.

In the event that an LEA was able to hire sufficiently qualified teaching staff, retention of those teachers becomes another concern. One LEA interviewee described significant challenges with retaining staff into the second year of operation. “She quit the
first day of the second year.” She later stated that she understood why the teacher quit, given the large number of challenges the LEA was facing. She went on to say that teacher absences were a problem and the inconsistencies caused by substitute teachers being in and out of the building led to additional challenges.

**Academic Achievement**

The Review of Existing Data indicated strongly that closed LEAs failed to achieve the academic criterion, but the interviews had a mixed response.

One of the sponsors strongly suggested Academic Achievement as a characteristic that needed more priority and one of the greatest struggles of less successful LEAs. When asked what he wished LEAs had prioritized, but didn’t, he responded,

I wish that the ones that did not do well would have prioritized student outcomes instead of… feeling like they were running a nice social service agency, that they would have been more focused on not just MAP data…but that they were looking at some measure of growth… And when they weren’t learning, that they had a plan for fixing it, not just hoping the teacher would be better. Hope was not a strategy.

Despite being closed within the first five years, one of the LEA interviewees indicated that in their second year Academic Achievement was a success. “We made a 17% increase from that first year of MAP testing to the second year and the math wasn’t as high, but it was somewhere in the teens in terms of growth in the grade in percent proficient and advanced.” The Review of Existing Data showed the LEA performed significantly below the home district by year four: fourteen percentage points behind in both ELA and Math.
The other LEA interviewee suggested that their academic growth was more than he was expecting. “We took a Terra Nova test at the beginning of the year and took it again at the end and we showed a 0.75 year growth in reading, which was much more than I thought it would be.” He went on to say that though the growth was more than they expected, it was not sufficient. “But we wanted at least a full year growth for a lot of our students. Saying that ¾ of your goal was not good enough. But I think we did very well based on the resources that we had.”

Only 36% of respondents from closed LEAs indicated academic achievement on the survey as a struggle. Fewer (27%) indicated that it needed more priority. The Review of Existing Data, coupled with the sponsor reflections support Academic Achievement as a grouping that both needed more priority within closed LEAs and was one of their greatest struggles.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

Curriculum and Instruction was identified by both LEA interviewees as a struggle and one sponsor. The sponsor indicated a lack of documented curriculum was a sign to him that there was a major problem. One LEA interviewee believed curriculum needed additional priority. “We didn’t have a strong hold on a curriculum that we knew that would be appropriate for our students. We certainly didn’t test our students ahead of time to see where we need to focus in on.” Though the other LEA interviewee discussed challenges with curriculum, it was largely in the context of resource acquisition and not as connected to instructional practices. She did however indicate a significant struggle related to instruction of students with IEPs. Thirty-three percent of the LEA’s student population in their first year of operation had an IEP. “Just trying to have the services and
therapeutic... and that took a lot of energy, in the small space with a small staff that I feel like didn’t give me the time to really coach great teachers.” She went on to describe specific challenges within the student population that required additional academic support not easily come by in the first year.

School Culture

The final grouping identified by closed LEAs as needing more priority/struggle was School Culture. Both sponsors indicated School Culture was a warning sign that an LEA was in trouble. “I guess that the visceral warning sign was when you’d start seeing chaos. When you would start seeing that the School Culture was kind of falling apart, usually that also meant that the instructional piece was falling apart as well.” He went on to describe the challenge of evaluating a school from the sponsor lens, “I think that the (initial) indicators are often the culture pieces, not the academic pieces, but then the academic pieces follow.” The other sponsor talked about how he knew there was a problem when he visited buildings and saw a more chaotic less engaged student culture. For him also, that was an indicator that the academic program was struggling.

Though both LEA interviewees also indicated School Culture was a priority/success, it was evident from both interviews that there were many indicators of struggle as well. One respondent said parent involvement was a success and gave anecdotes to support that, but in the next breath said, “The parents did get involved, not as much as we’d like to have had them be involved.” He later described some of the challenges with parents enrolling because it was a better option for their kid than the school down the street, but then once the child was enrolled, they would disengage. This challenge was evident within the other LEA as well. “Sometimes when people choose a
new charter school, sometimes you’re running from something, you had a terrible experience…and (we) had other kinds of families who were coming just because they’d had such a terrible experience and they wanted anything that was better.” This was further supported by concerns highlighted in Mission and Vision.

Aside from parent involvement, other characteristics of School Culture were also a challenge. One interviewee described the surrounding community and the challenges that arose from serving a high-poverty area. “We had some inherent problems at my school, we were in a very rough neighborhood.”

The other interviewee focused predominantly on challenges with capacity and systems and structures to support the LEA. She described a need for the LEA to better define what needed to be prioritized and what not to prioritize. She lamented that the staff only had so much capacity and if they were spending time “driving a kid halfway across town and waiting for an hour for mom to show up,” then other work wasn’t getting done. “We were spread too thin.”

In addition to discussing the challenges with staff capacity, the interviewee also described challenges with retention: staff retention, leader retention, student retention, to the detriment of the overall School Culture. “A lot of our founding kids left, I left, most of the founding teachers left. And it was a totally different school that third year with a new principal and a new team of teachers.” To help prevent other LEAs from suffering the same struggles, she encouraged leaders to build a team to support their LEA’s vision and to counter your own strengths.
Conclusion

Closed LEAs identified the fewest priorities/successes (one) and the most groupings needing more priority/struggles (eight), though all nine presented challenges for closed LEAs.

School Culture was the only grouping represented as both a priority/success and needing more priority/struggle by both LEA interviewees. Among the priorities and successes were student culture and parent involvement, though they were also discussed as struggles. In addition to parent involvement and community support/involvement were also indicated as struggles. Finally, the leaders discussed the impact of ineffective systems; lacking capacity; and retention of staff, students, and families as negative factors of overall School Culture.

Business Management, Mission and Vision, and LEA Oversight were significantly represented by interviewees as needing more priority/struggles. Within Business Management, interviewees focused on finances/business management, particularly as it related to staffing and facility acquisition/development as well as lack of resources, systems/structures, and strategic planning. Mission and Vision challenges derived largely from the LEA lacking clear priorities and a plan to implement them (implementation of mission and vision and strategic planning). Additional challenges were identified as a result of families running from other schools, not to the mission. Finally, LEA Oversight was largely focused on board leadership, but challenges with EMOs and sponsors also came to light.

Leadership and Teaching Staff were discussed less significantly by interviewees than other groupings, but still strongly present. Leadership struggles focused on the
administrators’ expertise and competence as needing more priority as well as the leaders’ overall capacity. Leader retention was also identified as a struggle and was supported by the evidence of both closed LEA leaders leaving within the first two years of their LEA being open. Teaching Staff was largely focused on each of the three components in hiring, supporting and retaining teachers.

Finally, Academic Achievement and Curriculum/Instruction were represented the least within the interviews. Academic Achievement was seen as a strength by one LEA, but between the Review of Existing Data and results from the sponsor interviews, it was clear this was a struggle for the LEA, as it was for all closed LEAs. One LEA identified a need for more priority with regard to curriculum and the other identified a need for stronger instruction, particularly as it related to students with IEPs.
Chapter VII
Conclusions

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND FINDINGS

As founding charter school leaders, the researchers often wondered what it was
that led to some founding charter schools establishing a strong foundation for success in
the early years. They wondered what it was they did differently than those charter LEAs
that had difficult starts from which they often never recovered. For this reason, the
researchers set out two answer two, intertwined questions:

● Which school- and community-level characteristics predict chart school success
  in Missouri?
● Which school- and community-level characteristics predict chart school failure in
  Missouri?

The study began with a review of the existing literature for the purpose of better
understanding what was already known about the topic. The researchers then conducted a
study in three distinct phases: The Review of Existing Data, Survey Analysis, and
Interview Analysis.

The Literature Review revealed that very little comprehensive research had been
completed on charter LEAs’ success specifically in the founding years. Many studies
focused on elements of a charter school that make it successful in serving students, but
few have focused specifically on the attributes most essential to the success of the start-
up organization. Primarily, the academic programs of charter schools are the focus of
scholarly research. Most research focused on practices of successful or failed LEAs
beyond the founding years. In this study, though, the researchers sought to isolate the
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characteristics that built a foundation allowing a school to be successful beyond the first five years, to the point that one can study long-term trends in academic results. While the research on characteristics leading to foundational success in the early years was limited, the Literature Review highlighted some trends from which the researchers could draw to design the study to answer their specific questions related to founding years.

**Successful LEAs**

**Literature Review**

Findings demonstrated that open charter schools attributed their success to six school- and community-level characteristics: 1) effective leadership, 2) strong mission and vision, 3) effective hiring, support, and retention of teachers, 5) school culture/parent involvement, and 6) business management.

**Review of Existing Data**

Successful LEAs conclusively met all criteria for success (renewal, academic achievement, enrollment, attendance, financial). Data demonstrated that they were not just a little better than the home districts, but significantly outperformed them in all areas.

**Survey Data**

In the founding years, Successful LEA respondents indicated they had most often prioritized the individual characteristics *academic achievement, enrollment, student culture, and implementation of mission and vision*. The same characteristics were identified as their greatest successes. Data show strong correlation between characteristics that were prioritized by Successful LEAs and characteristics that were ultimately identified as successful.
None of the four primary priorities and successes listed above were also indicated as needing more priority or as a challenge. Respondents clearly identified *academic achievement, enrollment, student culture, and implementation of mission and vision* as the characteristics and priorities that predict charter school success in Missouri.

*Curriculum, parent involvement, and staff culture* were prioritized, but not indicated as successes. *Curriculum* also needed more priority, indicating more needed to be done. *Parent involvement* and *staff culture* did not rate, in surveys, as individual characteristics needing more priority or struggles. When individual characteristics were grouped together under School Culture, the grouping was considered a priority, success, and struggle. The School Culture grouping as a struggle aligned with respondents’ selections of *discipline* as a struggle. Their priorities were more aligned with *parent involvement, staff culture,* and *student culture.* School Culture characteristics needing more priority were more evenly distributed, and *student culture* was the characteristic most frequently identified as a success. All but three respondents from Successful LEAs, though, indicated *staff culture* was either a priority or a characteristic needing more priority, indicating *staff culture* was important to Successful LEAs either proactively or in retrospect. *Staff culture* was a characteristic Successful LEAs had the foresight to prioritize and they had some success, but they believed more needed to be done. Their focus on prioritizing people emerged as one of the most important characteristics for Successful LEAs.

When grouping individual characteristics, Business Management emerged as a success, although not a priority. This grouping included *finances/business management and facility acquisition/development.* This grouping, while considered a success by
Successful LEAs also emerged as needing more priority and a struggle. In the aggregate, the characteristics of Business Management needed more attention, even though individual characteristics did not come to the forefront as needing more attention than Successful LEAs gave. *Attendance* was also indicated as a success, not a priority.

On the other side, Successful LEAs also identified the characteristics in need of more priority: *administrators’ expertise and competence; board leadership; curriculum; hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers;* and *professional development of administrators.* Two fit into the Leadership grouping: *administrators’ expertise and competence,* and *professional development of administrators.*

The individual characteristic *hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers* was also indicated as the most significant challenge for Successful LEAs. Coupled with the challenge of *teacher competence and expertise,* this meant the Teaching Staff grouping emerged as needing more priority and a struggle.

Despite the Review of Existing Data’s evidence to the contrary, Successful LEAs also perceived *academic achievement* and *discipline* as struggles.

*Additional Factors Affecting Successful LEAs’ Survey Results*

Even though the Literature Review revealed class size, teacher qualification, charter management organization affiliation, and length of operation did not have an impact on either success or failure, the researchers took care to analyze survey data by many additional indicators to determine if additional indicators affected survey respondents’ selections of characteristics predicting success: region, size of the LEA, the role of respondents, and the timeline of the LEA’s opening. Region was not a significant factor in determining the priorities, successes, and struggles of Successful LEAs. There
were nuanced differences, but nothing that would inform future founding charter school leaders. The same was true for the different sizes of LEAs, except that small LEAs prioritized enrollment more than the other sized LEAs.

With relation to the roles of respondents, there were some minor and perhaps understandable distinctions between responses from different roles. Executive Directors/Superintendents more frequently prioritized implementing the mission and vision and finances. They indicated board leadership needed more priority and selected enrollment as a success. These characteristics tie to the Executive Director’s role of driving all elements of the organization toward the mission and vision and being the primary steward of the financial resources. Further, an Executive Director has the most direct relationship with the board, so would best speak to the need for more priority here. Principals/Heads of School more frequently prioritized attendance and student culture, finding success in attendance and struggle in teacher expertise and competence. These characteristics also more directly tie to the role of a Principal as they manage the day-to-day student culture and development of teachers. Assistant Principals/Deans of Students indicated more priority and success in enrollment, which may also tie to their role.

LEAs that opened after 2008 were more likely to identify academic achievement, attendance, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture as successes than those that opened prior to 2008. They were also more likely to identify hiring, supporting, and retaining teachers and teacher expertise and competence as struggles.
Interview Data

Interview data provided more depth to the answers provided on surveys.

Interviewees had strong alignment in characteristics they discussed and their impact on their success. Interviewees selected eight of nine of the groupings as priorities/successes:

- Academic Achievement
- Business Management
- Curriculum/Instruction
- Leadership
- LEA Oversight
- Mission and Vision
- School Culture
- Teaching Staff

Only Attendance/Enrollment was not identified as a priority/success, although Successful LEAs were, according to the Review of Existing Data and surveys, successful in both attendance and enrollment.

Interviewees placed great emphasis on School Culture and Teaching Staff in conjunction with Mission and Vision. All three were discussed as inextricably linked priorities and successes of Successful LEAs. According to interviewees, Successful LEAs prioritized and succeeded in School Culture by building community, high expectations, establishing shared structures and norms, and prioritizing staff culture. They focused on building community where everyone was deeply invested in the Mission and Vision, and that mission was filling a need identified by the community, not outsiders. To do this, Successful LEA leaders prioritized staff culture, as well. In order to achieve success, they had to ensure the people were cared for, involved, and working together well.

Successful LEAs also emphasized prioritizing Teaching Staff in alignment with the Mission and Vision. Data indicate it was essential to hire for fit to the mission; be up
front about expectations; bring in experienced, known staff; and provide professional
development, especially teaching expectations related to School Culture.

In addition to being a priority for Successful LEAs, Teaching Staff was also in
need of more priority and an immense struggle. Specifically, *staff turnover* was a
problem for Successful LEAs, necessitating starting over in *professional development for
new teachers* and taking a step back in *teacher competence* as new teachers had to be
trained. This turnover had a negative impact on School Culture as new staff were
integrated into the *staff culture*.

In addition to teacher turnover, interviewees discussed the challenge of
Leadership turnover, but not to the same extent. They indicated Successful LEAs had
longevity in leadership, but some experienced challenges when that was not the case. To
effectively drive the overarchingly important Mission and Vision forward, interviewees
identified Leadership as the essential coordinator of the previous three groupings: School
Culture, Teaching Staff, and Mission and Vision. It was important the leader stayed for
many years, strategically planned for all elements of the LEA to support the mission,
maintained a sense of humility, was present in the building and engaged in all elements of
the program (versus focusing on promoting the school), had knowledge of the many
different areas of school management (or at least sought ways to build their knowledge),
and had the fortitude to withstand the intense challenges of starting a new school.

Curriculum/Instruction was also a priority of Successful LEAs, but was not
identified by interviewees as a success. Many talked about the importance of having a
documented curriculum, written by professional curriculum writers, not charter school
staff. This was in part to protect *staff culture*: it was too much to ask them to build the
school and write a quality curriculum at the same time. This may have contributed to one of their biggest struggles: *staff turnover/staff burnout*.

Interviewees were also clear that Business Management was a priority and success, specifically in relation to *finances/business management, facility acquisition/development*, and *strategic planning*. Without those three things, the organization would have had an unstable foundation with no plan for where they were going and how to get there.

Another trend amongst Successful LEA interviewees was that they continually sought to improve. They did not blame their problems on others, throwing their hands up as if it was out of their control. They felt the possibility for improvement and strove for it.

Successful LEA leaders also highlighted characteristics needing more priority/struggles in the area of Business Management: *technical know-how/operational details* and *growing too fast*. Frequently, interviewees talked about how ill-prepared they were for the details of operating the business of the school: federal programs, DESE reporting, human resources, compliance work, daily logistics, facility management, etc. This shortcoming pulled attention away from supporting teachers and students because people were having to figure out the operations on the fly, and there was no capacity to do so. This led to burnout and less attention given to areas they wanted to prioritize more. They suggested having this figured out prior to opening. In addition to having to figure out the technical know-how after opening, some grew too fast, starting with too many students in too many grades or expanding too quickly. All Successful LEA leaders and sponsors encouraged future charter school leaders to grow slowly.
Sponsor interviewees also highlighted the importance of a good board for LEA Oversight. They emphasized the need to hold leaders accountable and for the board to do training in order to do so. With relation to LEA Oversight, Successful LEA leaders warned against working with an education management organization (EMO), as they stated doing so was a big challenge. The EMO forced some to expand too quickly, took too big a financial cut, and provided little to no support in return. Academic Achievement was the least often emphasized, although one sponsor and one LEA did highlight that an LEA is not successful if student outcomes are subpar.

In addition to recognizing where Successful LEAs prioritized and succeeded the most, interviewees reflected on the areas needing more priority and challenges. While proud of the work they had done, no interviewee indicated they had fully achieved what they set out to achieve by the years in question: their fifth and sixth years of operation. All of them spoke with humility and clarity about how far they still had to go at that point, as well as growth they can make still (some of them 20 years after opening).

**Successful LEAs’ Conclusion**

Successful LEAs shared clear priorities, successes and challenges. There was strong alignment in what they prioritized and what they achieved. School leaders from Successful LEAs were reflective and embodied a growth mindset. They were not aiming to merely be successful or better than the home district. They aspired to be great. They did not point to others and talk about how others limited their potential to be great. They talked about the things that were in their control and how their actions affected the outcomes. And they were never satisfied ... they always strove to improve.
### Table 60 - Overview of Successful LEAs’ Priorities and Successes Across Three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic Groupings</th>
<th>Individual Characteristics</th>
<th>RED - % Met Criteria (details)</th>
<th>Survey - % survey respondents selecting this characteristic</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Achievement</strong></td>
<td>Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)</td>
<td>100% (exceeded Home District by avg. 24% ELA, 27% Math)</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance/Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>100% (92% average attendance)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>100% (9% rate growth)</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Management</strong></td>
<td>Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facility Acquisition/Development</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finances/Business Management</td>
<td>100% (31% Surplus)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student: Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum/Instruction</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Administrators' Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective School Leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Development of Administrators</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEA Oversight</strong></td>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After compiling data from all phases of the study in alignment with the Literature Review, the researchers determined that Successful LEAs most attribute their success to Mission and Vision, School Culture, and Business Management.

Beginning with the Literature Review, a strong Mission and Vision was essential to a charter LEA’s success. This study reinforced the importance of Mission and Vision, across the two applicable phases of the study. Interviewees often referenced Mission and Vision as the glue that bound everything else together: School Culture, Teaching Staff, and Business Management.

Prioritizing and succeeding in School Culture was identified by the Literature Review and all phases of this study as essential to success. The Literature Review focused on parent involvement. While this study showed Successful LEAs prioritized parent involvement, it was not a great success, nor was it the area they gave the most attention. Student culture was the characteristic most often prioritized and considered a
success, but when all individual characteristics were combined, this grouping emerged as one of the most important priorities of Successful LEAs. Further, it was clear that staff culture was an essential priority to success that made the difference between a Successful LEA and on the cusp LEAs, specifically.

While not identified as a priority by survey respondents from Successful LEAs in this study, Business Management did emerge as a success in surveys and all other phases of the study. This could not have happened by accident and without adequate priority being given. Further, Successful LEAs aligned the characteristics of the business of the LEA to best serve the Mission and Vision. This is an essential component to establishing a successful charter school. Existing literature supported this concept, identifying Business Management as the most often cited characteristic associated with failure. This indicated that the absence of problems was essential to success.

By all measures, Academic Achievement was an important characteristic defining Successful LEAs, but it was not the lever pulled to make them successful. It was the result of the other characteristics put in place to build the foundation of the charter LEA: Mission and Vision, School Culture, and Teaching Staff. There was no one effective academic model or way to achieve the desired results when isolated on its own; the other characteristics as the supporting pieces were most important. In fact, interviewees referred to academic achievement as the result, the intended consequence of having a strong Mission and Vision and a School Culture focused on taking care of the people.

Curriculum/Instruction and Teaching Staff also emerged as priorities for survey respondents and interviewees, but not as successes. While they did not achieve the
success they strived for, the prioritization of these characteristics undoubtedly positioned them to be more successful than had they not tried prioritizing them in the first place.

Need More Priority/Struggles

Table 61 - Overview of Successful LEAs’ Characteristics Needing More Priority and Struggles Across Three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic Groupings</th>
<th>Individual Characteristics</th>
<th>RED - % Did Not Meet Criteria (details)</th>
<th>Survey - % survey respondent selecting this characteristic</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td>Need More Priority</td>
<td>Struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facility Acquisition/Development</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finances/Business Management</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student: Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum/ Instruction</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Administrators’ Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective School Leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

304
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA Oversight</th>
<th>Professional Development of Administrators</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>67%</th>
<th>22%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Vision</td>
<td>Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Culture</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Culture</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff</td>
<td>Professional Development of Teachers</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Highlighted percentages indicate this grouping was selected as either needing priority or struggle. *

Teaching Staff emerged as being in need of more priority or a struggle across all phases of this study for Successful LEAs. Participants indicated it was a challenge to hire competent staff willing to do the level of work it took to start a new school. Staff burnout and turnover was a challenge for many. This, then led to other challenges, such as needing to hire again, starting over with professional development, and maintaining the School Culture.

Business Management emerged as needing more priority and a struggle by all data points except the Review of Existing Data which showed Successful LEAs had healthy financial surpluses. Individual characteristics did not emerge as needing more priority or struggles, but when grouped, Business Management was a challenge.
Interviewees highlighted the challenge of effectively managing the many elements of a full school district (LEA): federal programs, facility management, human resources, etc.

**LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success**

**Literature Review**

Overall, findings showed that charter schools were subject to closure primarily in relation to four main school- and community-level characteristics: 1) financial, 2) mismanagement, 3) academics, and 4) facilities. Results were mixed with relation to student achievement, with evidence that schools were closed for other reasons, prior to demonstrating significant academic difficulties.

**Review of Existing Data**

Failing to meet the academic criterion was the most significant contributor to an LEA being categorized as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, except for on the cusp LEAs who had a bigger problem with finances and attendance than academics. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success averaged 4 percentage points lower average proficiency than home districts. Only on the cusp LEAs exceeded (by 16 percentage points) the home district’s average of students’ proficiency on state standardized tests.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had significantly lower financial surpluses than Successful LEAs and spent more per student. These additional expenditures did not translate into academic results or improved attendance. LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also failed to meet the attendance criterion by significant margins. Enrollment was the least likely reason an LEA was categorized as an LEA that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.
Results from the Review of Existing Data showed that on the cusp LEAs missed the criteria by the smallest amounts, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success were often performing at a level similar to the home district and closed LEAs were significantly below the criteria for success.

Additional analysis of existing data also found LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had higher discipline incidence rates, higher student mobility, and a less diverse student population (both racially and socio-economically) than Successful LEAs. On the cusp LEAs were the exception and more similarly aligned to Successful LEAs.

Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had similar percentages of English Learners (% EL), and students with IEPs, indicating these were not factors predicting success or failure.

Survey Data

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success selected six priorities during their founding years, four of which were the same as characteristics prioritized by Successful LEAs: academic achievement, curriculum, enrollment, and student culture; all were prioritized to a lesser degree. In addition to these four characteristics, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also prioritized attendance and finances/business management. Of the six priorities, two characteristics were identified as successes: academic achievement and enrollment. Only two of six priorities for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were considered successes. This demonstrated LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were less successful than Successful LEAs at achieving success in the characteristics prioritized.
When individual characteristics were grouped, School Culture and Business Management were also identified as priorities and successes by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. *Student culture* was the only individual characteristic within School Culture to be indicated as a priority. *Finances/business management* was the only identified priority within Business Management. When individual characteristics were grouped, Teaching Staff also emerged as a priority. None of the individual characteristics that make up the Teaching Staff grouping emerged independently as priorities, but when grouped together all LEA categories and subcategories except *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success*, selected this as a priority. Teaching Staff, though, was not considered a success by survey respondents.

*On the cusp LEAs* were most aligned with Successful LEAs. They shared five of the seven priorities of Successful LEAs: *academic achievement, curriculum, enrollment, parent involvement,* and *student culture*. They did not share Successful LEAs’ priorities of *implementation of mission and vision* or *staff culture*. They also prioritized two that Successful LEAs did not: *attendance* and *finances/business management*. The only priority they listed as a success was *academic achievement*. The distinctions between *on the cusp LEAs* and Successful LEAs were significant because they highlighted the finer, more nuanced characteristics that delineated between great schools (Successful LEAs) and good schools (*on the cusp LEAs*). Because *on the cusp LEAs* were close to meeting the criterion for success, it is possible that had they prioritized *implementation of mission and vision* and *staff culture* rather than *attendance* or *finances/business management*, they may have met the mark.
Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success were aligned less to Successful LEAs’ priorities, sharing four: academic achievement, curriculum, enrollment, and student culture. They did not share three: implementation of mission and vision, parent involvement, or staff culture. They also prioritized one that Successful LEAs did not: attendance. They considered themselves successful in all of the same areas as Successful LEAs, despite having different priorities and the concrete evidence from the Review of Existing Data: academic achievement, attendance, enrollment, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture. They selected all five of these characteristics as successes (as did Successful LEAs), while on the cusp LEAs and closed LEAs only selected one as a success (academic achievement and enrollment, respectively). This demonstrated that open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success lacked clear self-awareness and honest reflection with regard to their success. Failing to accurately identify their shortcomings and then address those shortcomings likely led to their continued struggles to achieve success.

Closed LEAs were significantly less aligned with Successful LEAs, sharing only three of their priorities: academic achievement, enrollment, and student culture. They did not share four: curriculum, implementation of mission and vision, parent involvement, or staff culture. They prioritized two that Successful LEAs did not: attendance and finances/business management, as did other LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. Only one of their priorities translated into success: enrollment.

In addition to their priorities and successes, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success reflected on the characteristics needing more priority and their struggles. They identified staff culture and board leadership as needing more priority. Neither was
selected as a significant struggle. Only board leadership was selected by both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success as needing more priority. The other four characteristics needing more priority selected by Successful LEAs were not selected by LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: professional development of administrators; administrators’ expertise and competence; curriculum; and hiring, supporting and retaining teachers.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also indicated four groupings needed more priority: Business Management, Leadership, School Culture, and Teaching Staff. Only one (School Culture) was not also selected by Successful LEAs as needing more priority, indicating this was an essential characteristic lacking for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success.

Struggles identified by respondents from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not align with the characteristics they indicated needed more priority: academic achievement and discipline. Successful LEAs agreed discipline was a struggle.

In addition, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also identified several groupings as struggles: Business Management, School Culture, and Teaching Staff. In the groupings, they did correlate their struggles to characteristics needing more priority, with the exception of Leadership, which was not indicated as a struggle.

LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also indicated struggle with Academic Achievement, which contradicted their selection of Academic Achievement as a priority and success but correlated strongly with the Review of Existing Data. Despite recognizing the challenge, they did not indicate this should receive more priority, and
therefore, likely did not give it more priority. This, then, led to continued struggles with Academic Achievement.

When grouping characteristics, both Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success shared three struggles: Business Management, School Culture, and Teaching Staff. Business Management and Teaching Staff also needed more priority for both LEA categories. School Culture was a distinguishing characteristic, in that LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success considered it a priority, success, and struggle. Successful LEAs only selected it as a priority and struggle. The contrast of the two LEA categories’ struggles was clearer when looking at individual characteristics, not the groupings.

The common theme to emerge between what Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated needed more priority was that the individual characteristics in need of more priority, with the exception of curriculum, had to do with developing people. The specific needs were in developing and supporting teachers, the board, and administrators. All of that connected to the need to prioritize staff culture overall. Successful LEAs prioritized staff culture on the front end, and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success indicated more priority was needed in retrospect. All LEAs agreed that many of the individual characteristics related to people needed more attention in the founding years.

This emphasis on the human side of charter LEA start-up was reinforced by the groupings, but the business side emerged here as well. When clustering individual characteristics related to Business Management, it was clear that Successful charter LEAs recognized the need to give more priority to the human side of the business.
Additional Factors Affecting LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success’s Survey Results

The subcategory of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had profound impact on their survey responses. *On the cusp LEAs* were especially interesting when considered in comparison to Successful LEAs. They failed to prioritize two characteristics that proved to be essential to Successful LEAs: *implementation of mission and vision* and *staff culture*. They gave less priority to *enrollment* and *student culture*, but prioritized *attendance* (which Successful LEAs did not). *Staff culture* emerged as needing more priority by *on the cusp LEAs*, but not for Successful LEAs. Even though *on the cusp LEAs* prioritized *attendance, enrollment, and student culture*, they did not list these as successes. Survey respondents did not perceive that their priorities resulted in successes, although existing data did demonstrate they were successful in *attendance* and *enrollment*. Perhaps changing their priorities, especially *staff culture*, and connecting that which is prioritized to outcomes would have given them the extra push needed to go from good to great.

*Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* were a very different subcategory. They prioritized *attendance* and *curriculum* more often than the other two subcategories of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, and selected *finances/business management* and Teaching Staff significantly less often than the other two. Of the three subcategories, they indicated they were most aligned with Successful LEAs’ successes (in all five areas): *academic achievement, attendance, enrollment, implementation of mission and vision, and student culture*. This was a distinct difference between *open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success* and the other subcategories. *On
the cusp LEAs and closed LEAs each only selected one as a success (academic achievement and enrollment respectively). Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success did not seem grounded in facts about their success. Of those five characteristics, the Review of Existing Data demonstrated they did not perform better than the home district in academic achievement or attendance.

Closed LEAs were different in that they prioritized academic achievement the least, which showed in the Review of Existing Data, but not in respondents’ own perceptions of their success as expressed in the survey. They prioritized facility acquisition/development, while the other two subcategories did not. They showed more alignment in what they prioritized and what they considered successes, but those priorities were not the ones that would ultimately lead to their biggest success. They had the biggest struggle with board leadership.

By region, the differences in survey respondents were more pronounced than for Successful LEAs. Kansas City respondents were more likely to prioritize characteristics related to people: effective leadership and staff culture. In St. Louis, they were more likely to prioritize curriculum, finance/business management and facility acquisition/development, more often tending to the business. This led to St. Louis’ specific need to prioritize staff culture more, while Kansas City did not have as much need. Despite not prioritizing it, Kansas City had more success in finances/business management than St. Louis did, as demonstrated in surveys and the Review of Existing Data.
The size of an LEA seemed to impact priorities minimally. Midsize LEAs were less likely to prioritize enrollment or finances/business management than small or large LEAs. The timeline they opened in also had minimal impact.

The respondents’ priorities and perceptions of successes and struggles aligned with their typical job duties. Executive Directors/Superintendents more often prioritized finances/business management and they found their successes in finances/business and facility acquisition/development. Principals/Heads of School, on the other hand, prioritized attendance, student culture, and staff culture. Their successes, though, were in academic achievement and enrollment. They did not translate their priorities into successes. Assistant Principals/Deans of Students prioritized staff culture and listed successes as curriculum, staff culture, student culture, and enrollment.

Interview Data

On the Cusp LEAs

On the cusp LEA interviewees indicated School Culture, Teaching Staff, Curriculum/Instruction, and Business Management as both priorities/successes and needing more priority/struggles. School Culture and Teaching Staff were the most significant. They were successful with student and staff culture but struggled with staff culture. With relation to Teaching Staff, hiring, developing, and retaining staff was the priority, but a struggle nonetheless.

They achieved some success with Curriculum/Instruction and offered three ways they could have done better: have a more strategic plan, add in more social-emotional learning, and systematize or document the curriculum so it can live beyond the current employees. In Business Management they prioritized both finances/business management...
and facility acquisition/development, but they were still a struggle for some on the cusp LEAs.

Academic Achievement was a priority/success for on the cusp LEAs, not a struggle. This aligned with all other data collected in this study. Leadership and LEA Oversight were identified as needing more priority/struggles, not successes. The biggest concerns for Leadership were turnover and the leader's feelings of isolation. This lack of support felt by the school leader trickled over into LEA Oversight, as leaders looked for support from sponsors and board members.

Open LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success

Open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success identified fewer priorities/successes than did on the cusp LEAs. They also identified more groupings as needing more priority/struggles than did on the cusp LEAs and significantly more than Successful LEAs. As with the other LEA subcategories, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success put the most emphasis on School Culture.

School Culture was both a priority/success and needed more priority/struggles. Specifically, student culture was a priority, success, and a struggle. Parent involvement and staff culture were also considered successes and a struggle, though not discussed as a priority or in need of more.

Open LEAs that met criteria for success most often identified Business/Management as in need of more priority/struggle. Finance and expansion were the most difficult and were often associated with other characteristics of struggle as well: attendance, enrollment, EMOs, academic achievement, and staff and student culture.
Student recruitment was also identified as a struggle in connection to finance and the need to be fully enrolled in order to receive adequate funding.

Interviewees from open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success connected challenges in Teaching Staff and Curriculum/Instruction to Academic Achievement. Challenges with hiring and supporting teachers led to diminished teacher expertise and competence which had a negative impact on implementation of Curriculum/Instruction. This negatively impacted academic achievement, particularly for high-needs students. Expansion also played a negative role in academic achievement as LEAs tried to scale their program to additional learning sites but were not solidified enough in their program to effectively do so.

Finally, LEA Oversight was identified as a struggle with relation to home district mismanagement, trouble meeting state expectations, and an overbearing EMO that was often seen as having other priorities (like making money) instead of supporting the school’s mission and vision.

Closed LEAs

Closed LEAs identified the fewest priorities/successes (one) and the most groupings needing more priority/struggles (eight), though all nine presented challenges for closed LEAs.

School Culture was the only grouping represented as both a priority/success and needing more priority/struggle. Interviewees emphasized student culture and parent involvement as priorities and successes, though they were also struggles. Broader community support/involvement was also indicated as a struggle. Further, ineffective systems negatively impacted School Culture because they lacked the capacity and
systems to meet the demands of starting a charter school and struggled with retention of staff, students, and families. In addition to the challenges within the staff culture, they often found families were running from other schools, not to the mission of their school. This meant they had no real interest in the School Culture and, therefore did not contribute to it.

Business Management, Mission and Vision, and LEA Oversight needed more priority and were struggles. Interviewees highlighted the challenge of finances/business management in relation to staffing, facility acquisition/development, lack of resources, lack of systems/structures, and no strategic planning. Mission and Vision was a challenge because they lacked clear priorities and a plan to implement them (implementation of mission and vision and strategic planning). The challenge of LEA Oversight was largely focused on having substandard board leadership, but challenges with EMOs and sponsors also came to light.

Leadership and Teaching Staff were discussed less significantly by interviewees than other groupings. They needed to give more priority to administrators’ expertise and competence, and leader retention was a struggle. This was evident in the fact that both interviewees left their LEA within the first two years. Teaching Staff struggles largely fell within the three components in hiring, supporting and retaining teachers.

**LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success Conclusion**

School leaders from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had less common ground amongst themselves than those from Successful LEAs. Their reflections indicated priorities, successes, and struggles in a broad range of characteristics with less
cohesion amongst participants, therefore diluting the results and showing a less clear path. They far less often correlated their priorities and successes, demonstrating less of a strategic plan to coordinate the charter LEA’s efforts toward clear goals. They also more often indicated their struggles were out of their control, the result of other forces: the unavailability of competent teaching staff, difficult students or students coming in below grade level, the state imposing rules that limited progress, an EMO failing to adequately support, and so on. They did not connect their struggles to having had the wrong or ineffectively executed priorities/plan.

The different subcategories had distinctly different experiences to share. On the cusp LEAs were successful by many measures, but fell short of the greatness of Successful LEAs. They outperformed the home district in most areas and highlighted areas from which future founding leaders can learn, specifically that an increased focus on staff culture and implementation of mission and vision were the missing elements of their success. Open LEAs that did not meet the criteria for success did not outperform their home districts for the most part. They represented more of the same, and that is not what charter schools set out to achieve. Closed LEAs were achieving significantly below the home district, and for this reason, were held accountable for those failings and were closed. All together though, the subcategories helped the researchers to understand the difference between great LEAs (Successful LEAs) and those falling short of greatness.

Priorities/Successes

Table 62 - Overview of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success’s Priorities and Successes Across Three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic Groupings</th>
<th>Individual Characteristics</th>
<th>RED - % Met Criteria (details)</th>
<th>Survey - % survey respondent selecting this characteristic</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

318
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Success Description</th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Priority/Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Achievement</strong></td>
<td>Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)</td>
<td>16% ELA/26% Math (average 4% below HD in both)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>OTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance/Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>Attendance (47% (74% average vs. HD 78%))</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance/Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>Enrollment (68% (5% rate of growth))</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Management</strong></td>
<td>Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>OTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Management</strong></td>
<td>Facility Acquisition/Development</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Management</strong></td>
<td>Finances/Business Management (49% (16% Average Surplus))</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>OTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Management</strong></td>
<td>Student: Teacher Ratio (5% rate of growth)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum/Instruction</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>OTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Administrators’ Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Effective School Leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Professional Development of Administrators</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEA Oversight</strong></td>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission and Vision</strong></td>
<td>Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Culture</strong></td>
<td>Discipline ((4.25/100))</td>
<td>(4.25/100)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>OTC, closed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Across all phases of the study, LEAs that Did not Meet Criteria for Success demonstrated no consistent priorities/successes. They achieved the most success in Attendance/Enrollment. The Review of Existing Data and surveys support this, but interviews did not mention it.

Business Management also showed strong priority/success in that they demonstrated success in finances/business management by establishing healthy surpluses and as indicated by survey respondents when consolidating the individual characteristics under the broader grouping. Only on the cusp LEAs discussed Business Management as a priority/success in interviews. Existing literature, though, does not support the notion that LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, in total, are often successful in Business Management. Previous literature identified three of the individual characteristics of Business Management as the primary reasons LEAs are closed: 1) financial, 2) mismanagement, and 3) facilities.

School Culture also emerged as a priority/success for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success, for the most part. In the aggregate, as a grouping, survey
respondents selected individual characteristics as priorities/successes, as did interviewees. That said, their discipline incidence rate was more than 4 times that of Successful LEAs.

Needs More Priority/Struggles

Table 63 - Overview of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success’s Characteristics Needing More Priority and Struggles Across Three Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic Groupings</th>
<th>Individual Characteristics</th>
<th>RED - % Did Not Meet Criteria (details)</th>
<th>Survey - % Survey respondent selecting this characteristic</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td>Need More Priority</td>
<td>Struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)</td>
<td>84% ELA/74% Math (average 4% below HD in both)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Enrollment</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>32% (5% rate of growth)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facility Acquisition/Development</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finances/Business Management</td>
<td>51% (16% Average Surplus)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student: Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum/Instruction</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Administrators’ Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

321
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>18%</th>
<th>15%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective School Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development of Administrators</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA Oversight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Vision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>(4.25/100)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Culture</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Culture</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development of Teachers</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Expertise and Competence</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Highlighted percentages indicate this grouping was selected as either needing more priority or struggle.*

Across all three phases of the study, data demonstrated three areas consistently in need of more priority/struggles for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success:

Business Management, School Culture, and Teaching Staff. Business Management was not focused on one element, but highlighted needs and struggles in several areas: *finances/business management, facility acquisition/development, development of systems,* and *expansion* most prominently. School Culture also needed attention to all of the elements housed in the grouping, with specific attention needed in *staff culture* and
discipline. For Teaching Staff, it was clear that *staff turnover and burnout* was at the core of all of the problems. When teachers left, they had to start over on *hiring*, building *staff culture, professional development of teachers*, and *teacher expertise and competence*.

Leadership was also indicated as needing more priority, but not as a struggle. Further, Academic Achievement was clearly a problem, but not often cited in surveys and interviews as a struggle. This was supported by the Literature Review, as well. Failing schools do have serious academic deficiencies, but that is not a prominent reason cited for closing. More often than not, operational deficiencies surface first and are the reason schools are closed.

**CHARACTERISTICS THAT PREDICT CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESS OR FAILURE**

Through the three phases of this study, the researchers sought to understand the characteristics that predict charter school success and charter school failure. Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had priorities, successes and struggles in common, but there were also significant differences to demonstrate that which drew the line between and predicted success or failure.

Across all three phases of the study, the characteristics that predicted success were Academic Achievement, Business Management, School Culture, and Mission and Vision.
First and foremost, success was connected to a clear and compelling mission and vision that informed and engaged all aspects of the school. Families, staff, and community members built the school together toward a common purpose. This guiding mission was the foundation for a School Culture in which the full community could thrive in partnership. School Culture was a central predictor of success, and Successful LEAs prioritized people over all things else. If a charter school prioritized people (students and staff especially), they were far more likely to be successful. In Successful LEAs, the Mission and Vision also guided the management of the business. In the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 64: Characteristics that Predict Success or Failure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Success LEAs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priorities and Successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Achievement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance/Enrollment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Management</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum/Instruction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mission and Vision</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Culture</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Staff</strong></td>
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</table>


founding years, charter schools that were modest in their spending established a strong financial foundation from which they could acquire and renovate quality facilities to support their program. Some started with more humble beginnings, but strategically worked toward the facility that would best support their program. Successful LEAs had a strategic plan to build the school slowly and carefully, not taking shortcuts or expanding to quickly. They carefully identified their priorities, executed a plan to reach their goals, and saw the connection between that plan and their success.

Finally, Academic Achievement predicted success, but was more the product of the successful foundation laid by a mission-driven school culture and business.

Curriculum/Instruction and Teaching Staff were also characteristics predicting success in that they were priorities of Successful LEAs. In fact, though, they also needed more priority and were a struggle. School Culture was also a struggle in addition to being a conclusive priority and success.

In addition to learning from Successful LEAs’ priorities and successes, there was much to be learned from leaders’ reflections on that which needed more priority in the founding years and why certain characteristics were a greater struggle than others. Even for some of the characteristics predicting success, the researchers identified significant challenges in carrying out those priorities. School Culture, Business Management, and Teaching Staff were significant challenges for Successful LEAs. School Culture suffered at the hands of *staff turnover* because starting a charter LEA is incredibly challenging and often proved to be too much for many to take on. Teaching Staff suffered also as turnover required having to do more hiring and training new staff into the program and the School Culture. Finally, in the area of Business Management one of the biggest challenges came
from the difficulty of creating what is ultimately much more than a charter school; a founding charter leader is creating a Local Education Agency (a school district) that has all the same obligations that very large district organizations have. Those immense obligations have to be met with an often small staff. This leads to competing priorities creating challenges related to effectively managing the many complex requirements of managing an LEA.

All the challenges aside, the Successful LEAs still achieved success through Academic Achievement, Business Management, School Culture, and Mission and Vision, so awareness and readiness for the challenges is more likely to ensure future founding leaders more effectively prioritize the characteristics that predict charter school success.

The characteristics that predicted failure emerged from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success who, in contrast to Successful LEAs had no clear priorities/successes across all three phases of the study. Their most consistent priorities/successes were in Attendance/Enrollment, Business Management, and School Culture, but none were consistent across all three phases of the study. Unlike Successful LEAs, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success had no clear priorities/successes. This further supports the finding that having a clear Mission and Vision and strategically planning toward it are characteristics that predict success. The absence of a clear mission and vision, and strategically prioritizing towards that mission and vision has been correlated to failure.

Further, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success also demonstrated a disconnection between their perception of success and characteristics conclusively shown to be failures. This disconnect or lack of self-awareness was also a characteristic that
predicted failure. Without an honest awareness of the areas in which they needed to improve; they could not implement a strategic plan to address the deficits.

More importantly, characteristics that predict failure can be correlated to the characteristics needing more priority/struggles for LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success: Business Management, School Culture, and Teaching Staff. Two of the three were also priorities/successes, indicating that their efforts were not adequate. Academic Achievement was also identified despite only surfacing in interviews from closed LEAs, not the other two subcategories. Even though most LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not believe Academic Achievement was one of their failures, the researchers concluded it was. This exception was made because the existing data were so clearly subpar.

The characteristics related to failure aligned with the challenges faced by Successful LEAs: struggling to manage the operational complexities of running an LEA, regular staff turnover, and having to continually re-hire and re-train staff. The difference was that the failing schools did not have a clear and compelling mission to which an inspired and motivated community was dedicated and willing to do the hard work of it all. Further, it was clear that failing schools did not prioritize people. They prioritized staying open by getting adequate test scores, attendance, and enrollment to satisfy those holding them accountable and to bring in enough money to pay people.

The differences between Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were evident in each phase of the study. The table below is a visual representation of the characteristics that were determined to predict charter school success or failure. Those indicated in blue were represented within all elements of the
study, providing clear and consistent evidence of their importance for Successful LEAs. Green boxes indicated strong representation in parts of the study or in how they interacted with those characteristics in blue. In red, were clear struggles that led to LEA’s missing the mark for success, and those elements in orange were indicated as priorities/successes on one hand, but ultimately proved to be unsuccessful for a majority of LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success. It is with this picture in mind that the researchers developed a set of recommendations to support future charter school success.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In support of future founding charter school leaders, the researchers have evaluated the characteristics that predict charter school success and failure. Guided by the data gleaned from the Literature Review and the three phases of the study, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Above all else, have a clear, compelling mission in which the full community is invested and engaged.
2. Be strategic and take it slow.
3. Prioritize people above all else.
4. Stack your people deck.
5. Be prepared to build a school district, not a school.
6. Own it.
7. Never be satisfied.

First and most importantly, have a clear, compelling mission in which the full community is invested and engaged. For Successful LEAs, mission is central to
everything else. In the hands of a strong leader, it guides the school culture, the teaching staff, and the business. The school culture must center on engaging the full community (students, families, staff, neighbors, local organizations) toward a common purpose that meets the needs of the community, not the school founder. The teaching staff and leaders are an essential part of building the mission and the school, and they will stay with the school because they believe in the mission and the role they play in reaching the vision. That staff retention will be essential to maintaining the school culture and developing a strong academic program. Without a stable staff dedicated to the mission, the foundation of the school will be weakened. Professional development must work strategically toward the mission by establishing a shared school culture as well as academic practices. The business must also work toward the mission and vision. Allocation of resources, expansion plans, and facility choices must support the mission, with a clear strategy for reaching not just fiscal goals, but the overarching purpose of the school.

To this end, the researchers recommend founding school leaders have a strategic plan and take it slow. Begin with a strategic plan that clearly identifies the mission and outcomes toward which the LEA strives: begin with the end in mind. Planning backwards, identify the priorities, structures, and actions necessary to achieve the goals. Too often, LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success did not see the connection between their priorities and outcomes: they did not have a plan. Successful LEAs did connect their actions to the outcomes, and that led to more success. In addition to strategically planning backwards, slow growth predicted success. Time and again, participants in this study bemoaned the struggles associated with growing too quickly, with too many students or expanding to too many campuses. That expansion spread staff expertise too far and wide.
before adequate systems and programs had been developed to support effective replication in other places. The culture and the program were still too new in practice to be spread elsewhere. A strong program takes time. A healthy school culture takes time. Building strong teaching and leadership staff takes time. No matter how strong it is on paper, the reality of making it happen effectively takes time. So, take it slow, and have a methodical plan to do so.

Taking it slow leaves time and space to prioritize people above all else. This research clearly demonstrated that Successful LEAs prioritized characteristics connected to the human side of the charter school: building community, student and staff culture, and teaching staff. And, with that priority, still more was needed because this was also a significant challenge, specifically staff culture. More initial priority was given to student culture, and there was benefit in that, but staff culture, turnover, and burnout were the biggest challenges. Because it is difficult to attract highly competent staff to a new school, one must take care of and hold on to the staff they have (assuming they are working toward the mission). If a founding leader plans to solve the staff recruitment and turnover problems by paying more versus focusing on staff needs, the researchers caution against this. Paying more will bring in people interested in doing a job, not the mission. Pay well, but do not make this the reason people sign on to building the new charter school.

In addition to hiring people committed to the mission, the researchers recommend “stacking the people deck” in their favor. While the term “stack the deck” implies cheating, that is not the case here. The researchers recommend future founding charter leaders bring with them people they know, people they trust, people with experience, and
people who will help round out their strengths and areas of weakness. This is not cheating; this is essential to providing a solid foundation to an organization fragile in its infancy. While the researchers recommend taking it slow, this does not mean starting at ground zero with inexperienced, unknown people. Capitalize on established relationships and transfer them to the new school, saving the time and energy of starting over with new people and ensuring a higher level of competence at the starting point.

In addition to a strong emphasis on hiring the right people and taking care of them, founding leaders are strongly encouraged to understand they are building a school district, not a school. Many successful leaders and leaders from LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success spoke about how much more burdensome the operation of the district was than they anticipated. They did not have the expertise or know-how to manage beyond a typical principal role or taking care of the needs of a single school building. In addition to managing the building, founding school leaders must manage federal programs, human resources, the facility, legal issues, state reporting, educational records, the board, policy development, transportation, food services, technology implementation, finance, payroll, AP/AR, purchasing, recruitment, marketing/PR, accountability, etc. The researchers suggest a new founding leader does two things. First, pour through the websites of the state and federal education departments. Read all the rules and regulations and determine who on your team understands them all, has a plan to meet all requirements, and is being held accountable for making it happen. Second, visit the central office of a large district near you and ask what each person there manages. Interview each person, and ask yourself, does someone on my team know how to do all of these things and have a plan in place to do so? In addition to the person who will manage
all of these things, does the Superintendent of the new charter school also know how to do these things well enough to evaluate the effectiveness of the person in charge of each area? If not, the new school has the potential for big problems ahead.

Next, embrace the mindset the researchers are calling “own it.” This means two things. First, for each of the many complex components of starting a new charter LEA, someone has to “own” them. Of course, collaboration and support is essential, but it is important that everybody does not have to do everything. This will lead to burnout, so ensure different people own different parts. As we saw in this study, Superintendents focused on implementation of mission and vision and finances, while Principals focused on the day-to-day operations of the school building. Secondly, “own it” means you are the one responsible for what happens; no one else is. Successful LEA leaders were from great schools and identified where they needed to get better. The reality that they had not achieved everything they hoped to achieve was not assigned to someone else. They believed it was their responsibility to make change. They did not name students coming in behind grade level as the reason they hadn’t achieved the level of academic progress they aimed for. Instead, they talked about what they needed to do to improve. They “owned it.” They did not blame an ineffective board for their problems when coming in to turnaround the school; they fixed the problems themselves and gave the board guidance in how to do so. If they struggled with an overreaching EMO, they figured out how to separate from the EMO. If staff were ineffective, they listened to their needs and created (or found) professional development opportunities for them. When neighbors were a problem, they built relationships with them and solved the problem together.
Successful LEAs owned their success because they took charge of the solutions to address their problems.

Finally, the researchers suggest that founding charter school leaders are never satisfied and always strive to do better. Successful LEA leaders in this study built great schools, far exceeding the criteria for success, but they still intended to do more. They have not set the mark so low as to simply do better than a home district that is underperforming; they set the mark of outperforming the best districts in the state, in the country.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study was comprehensive and assessed characteristics that predict charter school success and failure through a review of the existing literature and three phases that pulled in public data, qualitative analysis of survey results, and a deeper dive through interviews. While triangulating the data ensured results were confirmed through multiple methods, the expansiveness of the study may have also been a limitation. The three phases had distinctly different data points, so matching them up had risk of falsely correlating one type of data to another.

Further, much data were unavailable: data prior to SY 2006-2007 in Kansas City and SY 2007-2008 in St. Louis. This meant two things with regard to the Review of Existing Data and categorization of LEAs. First, data collection was incomplete. Certain criteria were not able to be assessed, so some charter LEAs got a pass in certain areas. Second, many older LEAs were assessed based on their ninth and tenth years, so they had longer to establish a solid foundation than those assessed on their fifth and sixth years.
Another limitation was that school leaders from farther back in time were much more unavailable than those in place currently. This limited data collection related to closed LEAs, especially.

Survey and interview data were limited because they were collected through an event history lens. People’s perspectives may have changed in retrospect depending on experiences they had after the timeframe in question.

The researchers suggest collecting data about the founding years during the founding years, whenever possible. This would collect accurate perspectives unaffected by the revision that sometimes happens as time passes. It would ensure data were more available, being collected in real time, not after the fact. Finally, it would mean that the school leaders would be more easily found, as the trail to them would not be so cold.

The final limitation was that the definition of success, timeline for analysis, and benchmarks for having met the criteria were selected by two people: the researchers. While the criteria were based on the findings of the Literature Review, the specific benchmarks were established based on the researchers’ belief that, in order to be successful, charter schools must outperform the home districts. Further, the timeline was based on the emphasis of understanding success and failure during start-up, but that choice was one selected by only two people. Had the definition of success, timeline for analysis, and benchmarks been different, results may have also been different.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP STUDIES**

The deeper the researchers delved into this study; the more questions surfaced. Additional studies would add to understanding the characteristics that predict charter
school success and failure. Future charter leaders would benefit from understanding more about the following questions:

- Which characteristics predict charter school success or failure in other states? Across the nation?
- How do the characteristics of success and failure during start-up correlate to characteristics of success or failure for leaders attempting to turnaround an established failing district?
- How do state and federal policies and regulations limit or support charter schools’ effective implementation of the characteristics for success?
- How does operating under the home district’s LEA vs. beginning as an independent LEA affect charter school success or failure?
- How does operating under an EMO vs. beginning as an independent LEA affect charter school success or failure?
- How does staff turnover affect charter school success or failure, specifically?
- What do diverse charter schools do differently than less diverse charter schools?
- Who better closes the achievement gap: diverse charter schools or less diverse charter schools, and how?
- Delving into school culture specifically, which strategies and practices best predict success or failure?
- Which specific practices led to Successful LEAs retaining teachers and leaders?
- How does having systems and structures in place affect staff culture? Is it better to build them together, or have them established from the beginning?
• How does success vary between LEAs that developed their own curriculum and those that purchased a professionally developed curriculum?

While there are so many more questions to answer, answering the questions in this list is the next step in providing accurate and supportive information to founding charter school leaders as they embark on the immense challenge of building a charter school.
References


School Authorizers: https://www.qualitycharters.org/authorizing-by-the-numbers/charter-schools/


Appendix A: Key Terms and Definitions

REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

Criteria For Successful Schools

- **Initial Renewal**: was renewed after the first five years (open for at least 6 years)
- **Academic Data**: exceeded home district’s MAP % Proficient and Advanced by at least 5% during both relevant years in both ELA and Math
- **Enrollment**: Maintained or grew number of students enrolled during both relevant years
- **Finances**: Maintained a 10%+ financial surplus during both relevant years
- **Attendance**: Equal to or greater than the home district’s proportional attendance rate

LEA Categories

1. **Successful LEAs**: met all criteria for both relevant years
2. **LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success**: did not meet all criteria for both relevant years
   a. **on the cusp LEAs**: met ⅘ of the criteria for both relevant years
   b. **open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success**: met fewer than ⅘ criteria for both relevant years
   c. **closed LEAs**: LEA was no longer in operation

Relevant Years

**DEFINITION**: the years during which existing data were evaluated for each LEA

**SURVEY**

The main categories of Successful LEAs and LEAs that Did Not Meet Criteria for Success were capitalized throughout the written analysis. Subcategories of LEAs that Did
Not Meet Criteria for Success (on the cusp LEAs, open LEAs that did not meet criteria for success, and closed LEAs) were italicized throughout the written analysis.

**Size of LEAs**

- Small LEAs: < 500 students
- Midsize LEAs: 500-900 students
- Large LEAs: > 900 students

**Significance of Survey Results**

- **Significant**: if more than 60% of respondents selected the characteristic (blue in tables)
- **Moderately Significant**: between 50-59% of respondents selected the characteristic (green in tables)
- **Minor Significance**: between 40-49% of respondents selected the characteristic (yellow in tables)

**Individual Characteristics**

All characteristics were italicized in the written analysis. Twenty options were offered as multiple choice, with the option to write one in.

**Groupings**

All groupings were capitalized in the written analysis. The individual characteristics were grouped into 9 groupings.
## Appendix B: LEAs Excluded from Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA</th>
<th>Year Opened</th>
<th>Year Closed</th>
<th>1st Relevant Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>St. Louis</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biome Steam School</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kairos Academies</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette Preparatory Academy</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Charter LEA was founded by the researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Salle Middle School</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shearwater Education Foundation</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>Charter LEA closed before data were publicly available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soulard School</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Can ! Academies of STL</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Charter LEA closed before data were publicly available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurgood Marshall Academy</td>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>Charter LEA closed before data were publicly available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youthbuild St. Louis Center</td>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>Charter LEA closed before data were publicly available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tessara</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Charter was approved, but LEA never opened with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernare</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Charter was approved, but LEA never opened with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kansas City</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens of the World Charter Schools - Kansas City</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Name</td>
<td>Start Year - End Year</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Career Academy</td>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>Charter LEA closed before data were publicly available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Girls Preparatory Academy</td>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>N/A Had not operated for the minimum 6 years and had not closed prior to the 6th year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Charter School</td>
<td>1999-2000 2005-2006</td>
<td>Charter LEA closed before data were publicly available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Survey

Directions (at top of survey)
Thank you for taking part in this survey. This survey should be completed by persons who were employed at a Charter School in Missouri during their 1st-6th years of operation (in total or in part). If you were not with the LEA during their 1st - 6th years, please do not complete this survey.

Survey Questions

1. At which LEA did you work? (If you worked at more than one LEA during the first six years, please complete different survey for different LEAs) (open ended) If you were not with the LEA during their 1st - 6th years, please discontinue the survey.
2. During which year did you work at the LEA listed above? (Please indicate the years you were there.) (open ended)
3. What was your role/s at your LEA during years 1-6 (check all that apply)?
   ○ Executive Director/Superintendent
   ○ Principal/ Head of School
   ○ Assistant Principal/Dean of Students
   ○ Instructional Coach/Content Specialist
   ○ Teacher
   ○ Operations role
   ○ Other ______________
4. Would you characterize your LEA as successful by year 5 and/or 6 (or during your time there)?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No
5. Which factors led you to give the answer you gave for #4?? (open-ended)
6. Which of the following categories did the LEA have as top priorities during the 1st-6th years of operation? (CHOOSE UP TO 6- if more than six are selected, we will count only the first six) (check boxes)
   ○ Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators
   ○ Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)
   ○ Administrators’ Expertise and Competence
   ○ Attendance
   ○ Board Leadership
   ○ Curriculum
   ○ Discipline
   ○ Enrollment
   ○ Facility Acquisition/Development
   ○ Finances/Business Management
   ○ Parent Involvement
   ○ Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School
   ○ Professional Development of Administrators
   ○ Professional Development of Teachers
○ Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers
○ Effective School Leadership
○ Staff Culture
○ Student Culture
○ Student: Teacher Ratio
○ Teacher Expertise and Competence
○ Other _____________

7. Which of the following categories should the LEA have given more priority during the 1st-6th years of operation? (CHOOSE UP TO 6 - if more than six are selected, we will count only the first six) (check boxes)
   ○ Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators
   ○ Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)
   ○ Administrators’ Expertise and Competence
   ○ Attendance
   ○ Board Leadership
   ○ Curriculum
   ○ Discipline
   ○ Enrollment
   ○ Facility Acquisition/Development
   ○ Finances/Business Management
   ○ Parent Involvement
   ○ Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School
   ○ Professional Development of Administrators
   ○ Professional Development of Teachers
   ○ Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers
   ○ Effective School Leadership
   ○ Staff Culture
   ○ Student Culture
   ○ Student: Teacher Ratio
   ○ Teacher Expertise and Competence
   ○ Other _____________

8. Is there anything else you would like to add with relation to characteristics prioritized during the 1st-6th years of operation?

9. Which of the following categories encompass your LEA’s greatest successes from years 1-6? (check as many boxes as apply)
   ○ Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators
   ○ Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)
   ○ Administrators’ Expertise and Competence
   ○ Attendance
   ○ Board Leadership
   ○ Curriculum
   ○ Discipline
   ○ Enrollment
   ○ Facility Acquisition/Development
   ○ Finances/Business Management
   ○ Parent Involvement
○ Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School
○ Professional Development of Administrators
○ Professional Development of Teachers
○ Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers
○ Effective School Leadership
○ Staff Culture
○ Student Culture
○ Student: Teacher Ratio
○ Teacher Expertise and Competence
○ Other _____________

10. Which of the following categories encompass your LEA’s greatest struggles from years 1-6? (check as many boxes as apply)
○ Ability to Adequately Compensate Teachers and Administrators
○ Academic Achievement (as measured by State Standardized tests)
○ Administrators’ Expertise and Competence
○ Attendance
○ Board Leadership
○ Curriculum
○ Discipline
○ Enrollment
○ Facility Acquisition/Development
○ Finances/Business Management
○ Parent Involvement
○ Implementation of Mission and Vision of the School
○ Professional Development of Administrators
○ Professional Development of Teachers
○ Hiring, Supporting and Retaining Teachers
○ Effective School Leadership
○ Staff Culture
○ Student Culture
○ Student: Teacher Ratio
○ Teacher Expertise and Competence
○ Other _____________

11. Is there anything else you would like to add with relation to characteristics that made your LEA successful or not? (open-ended)

12. Would you be willing to do a follow up interview?
○ Yes
○ No
○ Maybe, please contact me to learn more

13. If you indicated willingness to participate in a follow-up interview, please provide your contact information here or email Sarah.Ranney@lafayetteprep.org, if you prefer to keep your responses anonymous.