

CHARTER SCHOOL EXECUTIVES:

Toward A New Generation of Leadership



November 2008

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Executive Summary

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is the national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. Our ultimate goal is to increase the number of high-performing charter schools available to all families, particularly low-income and minority families who lack access to quality public schools. The Alliance provides assistance to state charter school associations and resource centers, develops and advocates for improved public policies, and serves as the united voice for this large and diverse movement.

The charter movement is facing a severe shortage of quality school leaders. Based on historical trends, dramatic growth data, and high projected need and demand, we can predict that the next 5-10 years will bring an unprecedented scale-up in charter schools nationwide, along with an acute shortage of leaders well-equipped to head those schools. More specifically:

- The need and demand for quality charter schools already far outstrip supply.
- The growth of the charter movement is unlikely to slow.
- More than half of current charter school leaders are projected to leave the industry within the next 5-10 years, primarily for retirement.

Depending on the rate of growth and the pace of school leader retirements, the charter movement will likely need between 6,000 and 21,000 new leaders in the next 10 years.

The role of the charter school leader is demanding and complex, with great passion, resourcefulness and resiliency among the essential qualifications for the job. In addition to such vital

traits of character, successful charter schools require leaders who have an uncommon set of competencies, combining strong instructional leadership with solid business skills and management know-how.

Current efforts to build the supply of capable charter school leadership will fall far short of meeting the sector's needs in the coming years for reasons including the following:

- Conventional educational leadership programs do not address the unique nature, demands and responsibilities of charter schools;
- The most advanced and promising leadership preparation programs for the charter sector are producing highly qualified candidates but in relatively small numbers compared to the needs of the rapidly scaling movement;
- The decentralized structure of the charter movement, governed mainly by state law, makes a single centralized solution difficult;
- The extraordinary diversity of school missions, sizes, and types – and the diverse professional backgrounds of successful current charter leaders – argues for more flexible paths to charter leadership than are easily found today; and
- There remains a distinct need to attract a more diverse cadre of leaders who more closely reflect the student and family populations served by charter schools.

Meeting this leadership challenge requires action on numerous fronts and at all levels of the charter movement, from the school level to federal policy:

- **Charter school leadership recruitment** must improve in at least two key ways: a) in

expanding the pool of diverse, high-caliber candidates completing existing leadership development programs for the charter sector; and b) in encouraging a steadily growing stream of desirable candidates to consider leading charter schools, whether approaching that goal vertically (advancing within existing charter organizations and on existing leadership preparation paths) or laterally (coming from other professions).

- **Leadership preparation and training** must be radically retooled, taken out of the traditional Colleges of Education and converted into modular, on-demand formats largely provided by business and professional schools as well as appropriate non-profit organizations.
- **Charter schools and networks** should themselves develop robust “grow-your-own” strategies that produce leaders fully grounded in the organization’s culture of success. This includes structuring a) clear career paths for teachers to move from the classroom to the school helm with leadership training opportunities along the way; b) succession plans to fill the shoes of the leaders who will leave the industry within the next 5-10 years; and c) compensation packages making charter school work a sustainable profession that encourages longevity and leadership growth within its own ranks.
- **Charter support organizations**, such as state charter school associations and resource centers, should play a larger role as brokers and/or providers of leadership development programs (from recruitment to ongoing professional development), particularly for freestanding charters that are not part of school networks.

- **Board training and development** must ensure that charter school governing boards are equipped for their responsibilities for hiring and evaluating school leaders, and for long-term planning of Board and leadership succession.
- **Public policy must support** the long-term expansion of quality charter leadership. The ability of charter schools to attract leadership talent is constrained by inequitable overall funding. Salaries and other compensation will not be competitive if facilities funding policies force charters to reduce classroom and staffing expenditures in order to pay for buildings.

We must continue to strengthen the diversity of charter school leaders to reflect the diversity of the movement.

Charter stakeholders at all levels – from individual schools to state and national organizations – must make concerted efforts to encourage and recruit minority professionals to pursue leadership opportunities in charter schools, and to ensure that those who embark on the challenge are supported through peer mentoring, strong networking and other means.

A new kind of leadership development system is needed.

Universities, foundations, charter management organizations and networks, and charter movement leaders should collaborate to create a new kind of leadership credential that can be delivered by a variety of local, state, and regional institutions which are themselves held accountable for performance. The ultimate evaluation of this system and its components should be student achievement gains in the schools its graduates lead.



Introduction: Project Background

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools received a one-year grant from the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation to explore how to expand the pool of high-quality charter school leaders in order to meet community needs for quality new schools and ensure continuity in existing schools. To accomplish this goal, the Alliance did three things:

First, the Alliance commissioned a quantitative research study by the National Charter School Research Project at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education, examining the characteristics of charter school leaders in three states and their professional development experiences, needs, and plans for the future. That work was then supplemented by the Center's further analysis of national data from the Schools and Staffing Survey published by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Second, the Alliance commissioned Dr. Eleanor Perry, founder of the Leadership for Educational Entrepreneurs (LEE) Program at Arizona State University, to lead a working group of school leaders and innovative organizations currently developing their own "next generation" of charter school leaders. The Working Group comprised a wide range of perspectives including that of non-profit and for-profit charter management organizations (CMOs); funders; non-profits developing leaders for charters and other public schools; and charter support organizations working largely with freestanding charter schools (unaffiliated with a CMO or school network). Through in-person meetings and conference calls, the Working Group shared experiences and developed recommendations. (Members of the Working Group are listed on page 31.)

Third, Dr. Perry and her colleagues sought opportunities for wider consultation at national and state charter meetings, including breakouts at the 2007 National Charter Schools Conference sponsored by the Alliance. These conversations provided rich context for the more structured research and Working Group efforts.

Drafts of the final report were reviewed by the Working Group and numerous Charter movement leaders prior to release.

Preface: A New Breed Of School Leader

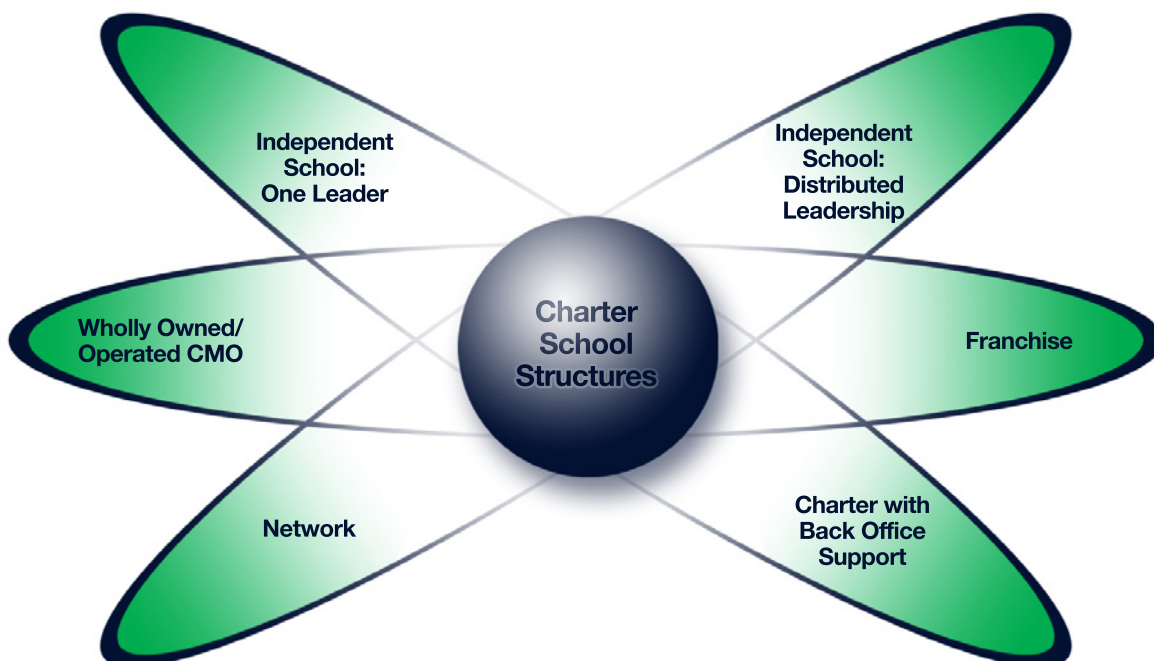
Leading a charter school is different from leading a conventional district-run public school.

A charter school leader may be a “principal” responsible for the instructional program, but given that charter schools have greater autonomy and contractual performance accountability than their district counterparts, a charter school principal’s responsibility is often broader than the instructional leadership shouldered by district school principals. Moreover, the charter school leader might also be a “founder” with the entrepreneurial instincts and tenacity needed to open a brand-new public school. Or the charter leader might be an “executive director” or “head of school” whose skills are chiefly managerial rather than academic, and who might have a background in the corporate or non-profit sector rather than the classroom.

Often, charter schools are led by a team of such persons in a dual or co-leadership structure – one

overseeing finances, operations and external relations, for example, while the other tends to the academic program. Sometimes school operations and back-office services are largely handled by a charter management organization, while the on-site administrator resembles in many ways the traditional “principal” of the district-run school down the street. In other cases, an affiliated or parent institution – such as a community organization that helped to start the school – may provide back-office support, thereby freeing the school leader to focus on instructional leadership.

In trying to carve a path toward a “Next Generation” of world-class charter school leadership, we must start by defining the territory. In this report, “charter school leader” will primarily refer to the person who has overall responsibility for the management of the charter school, and who is directly accountable to the school’s board of trustees.



“The job of the school principal has been explored at great length, with researchers finding that school leadership involves a complex array of responsibilities, ranging from very specific exchanges about the details of bus and class schedules to more global concerns about school policy, teaching and learning, and political relationships with school boards and communities. Many argue that charter school leaders, with fewer built-in support structures for budgeting, hiring, curriculum policy, or school policy, face a greater range of responsibilities.”

*Leadership to Date,
Leadership Tomorrow: A
Review of Data on Charter
School Directors*

National Charter School
Leadership Project, 2007

We will focus on the attributes and responsibilities of the executive in an autonomous public school – the role that marks a fundamental governance innovation in charter schools – whether that person is called a “head of school,” “executive director,” or “principal.”

We face one major constraint in trying to developing a solid empirical profile of the exemplary charter executive: Most of the extant research on leadership (charter and otherwise) focuses on effectiveness in leading the academic program – the role of the traditional principal. We cite some of that research in this report, acknowledging that there may be questions about its direct applicability to the “charter executive” role.

In looking toward a new, thousands-strong supply of strong charter school executives, the Working Group articulated two top priorities that reflect broader challenges within the charter movement as it grows:

Quality. Finding top-notch leaders, never an easy task, is made more challenging by the charter school movement’s urgent quest for quality. Knowing that the continued growth and sustainability of charter schools require offering students stronger opportunities than are available in traditional school systems, the charter movement has undertaken a number of quality-focused initiatives, such as:

- The Alliance convened a Task Force on Charter School Quality and Accountability in 2005 (and this report is a direct result of their recommendations¹).
- A federally funded consortium convened by the Alliance, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, and the Colorado League of Charter Schools released in June 2008.
- A Framework for Academic Quality, providing a common core of performance indicators as a resource for all charter schools, authorizers and other stakeholders.
- NACSA has published a set of Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing to guide and improve the critical work of authorizers.
- The Alliance has produced similar professional standards for charter support organizations.
- State charter associations are incorporating quality factors into their membership requirements and a few (most prominently the California Charter Schools Association) are producing accreditation schemes for schools.

With all this activity, the charter school movement has tacked sharply toward quality in the past several years. Yet all these schemes, frameworks, principles and standards are for naught if schools lack excellent leaders and staff to carry out their mission. Thus, a broad-ranging strategy to ensure quality leadership for the movement over the next decade is imperative.

Diversity. Another kind of challenge – and opportunity – is posed by the frequent demographic contrast between the leaders of charter schools today and the students they serve. About twice as many charter schools as traditional district schools are led by minorities (32.4 vs. 17.2 percent), according to federal statistics.² But such leaders are still a far smaller percentage than the children of color who make up nearly 60% of the public charter school population nationwide,³ so that is not a laurel to rest on. Moreover, the federal numbers likely refer to building principals (as they do in the district tally) or site administrators, who in many cases may report to an executive director or other chief executive, or to the headquarters of a management organization. Thus, the federal statistics do not necessarily reflect diversity at the highest levels of charter school leadership.

This phenomenon has the additional consequence of depriving the broader charter movement of leaders who look like the kids they serve. Very few African-Americans and Latinos lead for-profit or non-profit charter management organizations. Minorities are also underrepresented in charter authorizer leadership positions, and only one state charter association currently is led by a person of color.

The National Alliance convened a task force that examined diversity at all levels of the national charter movement. Their discussions suggested a series of conscious and unconscious barriers that might inhibit minority candidates from becoming successful charter

school leaders. For example, research by the North Carolina-based community lender Self-Help found that minority school leaders have a tougher time obtaining facilities financing than white borrowers, even when their schools are making Adequate Yearly Progress at a greater rate.⁴

Recruiting people of color into charter school leadership is complicated by a positive development: the wide range of professional opportunities now available in other fields. Decades ago, public school jobs were one of the few professional opportunities within the reach of minorities. Today, candidates of color can command professional respect and higher salaries in corporate positions. As Johnathan Williams, founder of the acclaimed Accelerated Charter School in Los Angeles, noted, “Some of the friends I’ve tried to recruit say, ‘That’s what I could have done 50 years ago.’ They associate public school teaching and leadership with the routines and constraints of district schools rather than the entrepreneurial opportunities of charters.”⁵

A new project being incubated through the Charter School Growth Fund will create new pathways to leadership, especially through minority-led charter management organizations. This will provide an important on-ramp for potential leaders of color who have been deterred by misinformation or more pernicious barriers.



The Art and Science of Charter Leadership

Leading a successful public charter school requires a combination of business skills and education expertise, in varying proportions depending on the school's organizational design. Charters are usually non-profit corporations. In addition to the curricular and logistical challenges that face any public school, charters must self-manage annual budgets that run in the millions, self-employ teachers and other staff, and strive for high achievement, often with disproportionate numbers of students whose prior school experience has been disheartening.

The charter movement's first fifteen years have been blessed by a remarkable group of educational entrepreneurs who have mastered both sides of the house, combining deep commitment to educational excellence with uncanny ability to get things done. Yet so far, science has not found a way to clone First Generation leaders like Yvonne Chan, who battled to convert Vaughn Avenue Elementary in Los Angeles into California's first conversion charter, or Mike Feinberg and David Levin, who incubated the KIPP model, or Don Shalvey, who created the first non-profit charter management organization, Aspire Public Schools. As the movement strains to expand so that all students on waiting lists can be served, and all the cities needing vigorous new public schools can get them, how will we produce a Next Generation of charter school leaders with this same passion and skill – but in far larger numbers?

A Fast-Growing Reform

There are currently about 4,300 charter schools serving 1.2 million students in 40 states and the District of Columbia. The pace of growth has been relatively steady for the past four years, with between

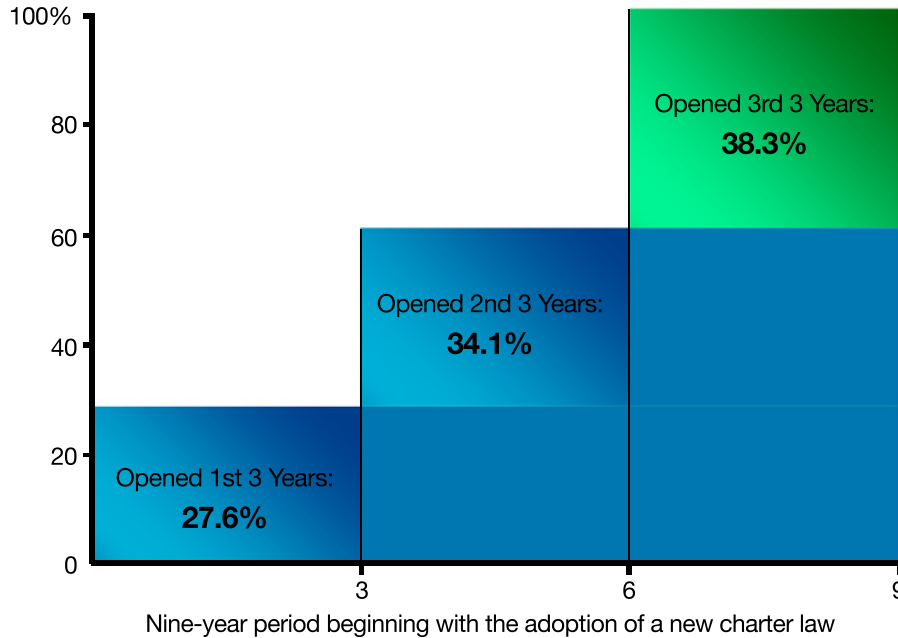
308 and 457 schools opening annually in that period. However, demand for charter schools is already outstripping supply, and the pace of new starts can be expected to accelerate:

- Approximately 365,000 students are currently on charter school waiting lists.⁶
- States are taking action to remove legal and regulatory barriers to growth, such as New York's doubling of its "cap" to 200 potential charter schools and the establishment of new state-level charter authorizers in six states during the past two years alone.
- The accountability and restructuring provisions of No Child Left Behind are identifying more clearly the schools that are chronically low-performing. Although charter schools are only one answer to that problem, the task of creating a healthy "new schools" sector is gaining traction as an integral component of reform.
- The private sector is making significant new investments in the growth of high-quality charter schools, through entities such as the Charter School Growth Fund and the New Schools Venture Fund, as well as through concentrated grant-making designed to "scale up" the charter sector in cities like Houston and Newark.
- Charter school growth within states is unlikely to slow, given recent trends: The number of schools created per state is significantly higher the longer a charter law is in effect, barring a slowdown generated by "caps."

The crystal ball is murky, given all the political and regulatory possibilities ahead, but if we assume a straight-line projection based on recent trends, we can predict the following:

- If we continue to open new charter schools in the

On average, growth increases over time



In states that have had charter laws for at least nine years, more charter schools generally opened in years 6-9 than in years 1-3.

same numbers each year for the next 10 years, the movement will need -- at a minimum -- another 4,000 talented individuals to found and lead new charter schools.

- However, if the movement grows at the 15% compounded growth rate it has achieved since 2000 – entirely likely given the factors mentioned above that might accelerate growth – we may need to find as many as 14,000 founders of new schools in the next ten years.
- Given the rates of retirement and turnover found in current research, we will also need to find between 2,000 and 7,500 replacement leaders in that same period, depending on the overall growth trajectory of the movement.
- In other words, while the most conservative projection requires 6,000 new charter school leaders by 2018, we may need to find 21,000 extraordinary individuals to lead successful charter schools in that period.

These numbers far exceed the capacity of all existing vehicles for supplying high-quality leaders. Moreover, because the actual need cannot be predetermined, the projections call for recruitment and preparation strategies that are highly flexible and responsive to changing demand.

Who Leads Charter Schools Today?

For some, charter schools conjure a picture of young and perhaps untested leaders. Available data suggest a more conventional picture – that of a well-seasoned leadership group, but one that is newer to running schools than their counterparts in traditional districts.

The National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP), part of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, surveyed charter school directors in nine states: three in the Great Lakes region that were surveyed directly for this project (Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin) and six

others studied independently by NCSRP: Arizona, California, Hawaii, North Carolina, Texas, and Rhode Island. Together, these states account for about 38% of current charter school enrollment, and present a balanced picture of incumbent leadership.

The Project supplemented this with further analysis of data in the most recent Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). That survey, administered in the 2003-04 school year, was based on a random national sample of 238 charter schools.

Leadership Models and Responsibilities.

Note that in both the NCSRP surveys and the national SASS findings, the terms “director” and “principal” are used virtually interchangeably – so some of what we might want to know about the division of responsibilities between academic and operational leadership functions remains elusive.

However, even within the “academic” category of leader, there appears to be a significant difference in charter vs. traditional leadership, one that deserves

Schools and Staffing Survey

Experience of school principals, by school type and selected school characteristics: 2003-04

Percentage who held selected school positions before becoming a principal						
School type and selected school characteristics	Department head	Curriculum specialist or coordinator	Assistant principal or program director	Guidance counselor	Library media specialist/ librarian	Athletic coach/ athletic director
All schools	35.4	24.1	62.1	8.1	1.6	31.1
All public schools	35.6	23.4	68.0	7.5	1.3	33.9
School classification						
Traditional public	35.4	23.1	68.2	7.5	1.2	34.1
Charter school	43.3	37.8	58.0	5.2	2.9	24.2
Community type						
Central city	34.4	33.6	78.2	8.7	1.6	20.3
Urban fringe/large town	35.0	22.8	71.9	6.7	1.1	32.9
Rural/small town	37.6	15.2	51.6	7.7	1.3	48.2
School level						
Elementary	31.3	24.9	66.6	6.9	1.3	25.7
Secondary	46.1	18.9	78.3	8.8	1.0	54.6
Combined	44.1	23.0	49.2	9.1	1.8	48.1
Student enrollment						
Less than 100	45.0	23.3	52.7	8.7	1.1	34.2
100-199	34.3	19.7	44.0	6.6	2.1	41.1
200-499	32.6	23.6	59.5	7.2	1.1	31.1
500-749	33.2	23.0	77.7	6.8	1.4	31.1
750-999	37.0	24.7	88.8	7.0	1.0	30.7
1,000 or more	45.4	25.7	92.4	10.0	1.4	47.4

further study. According to federal data, a mere 2% of principals in traditional public schools also teach. In charter schools, the figure is about 19%.⁷ So in addition to juggling an array of leadership responsibilities, a substantial portion of charter leaders are balancing classroom teaching as well – and we don’t have a good handle on how this affects the rest of their job.

What we do know is that there are multiple paths to charter leadership, and multiple choices once arrived.

Background and Preparation

NCSRFP found that charter school leaders have a broad range of training and experience, especially in the areas of organizational management, curriculum and instruction, and in the politics of their local communities. But despite their image of “alternative” leaders, their academic preparation is actually quite traditional: 80% of them have degrees in education, and about the same percentage have taken courses in education leadership, curriculum and instruction, education law, and child development. Just a fifth had taken courses in non-profit management, however, and their direct experience in school leadership is shallow: Of the national sample, “Almost one-third (29 percent) of charter school principals are new to administration and more than half (58 percent) are in their first four years of serving as a principal.”⁸

The data suggest a lot of on-the job learning in key areas. The Midwest survey found that “Almost one-third [of charter principals] report that engaging parents is a major problem, while close to one-quarter struggle with raising funds and managing finances. The third biggest problem is negotiating with local school districts.”⁹

Where Do Leaders Come From?

Regrettably, national data fail to answer this question with much rigor. The Schools and Staffing Survey, for example, asks about prior experience, but only in terms of common school/district roles (assistant principal, curriculum specialist, coach, and so on), while ignoring the fact that charter schools often have leaders from other backgrounds. We do know, for example, that the movement is proving to be an attractive draw for the highly motivated – and often relatively young – professionals coming through the “social entrepreneur” pipeline. Among the thousands of alumni who have now participated in the Teach For

Sponsor for student clubs/ debate teams	Average number of years as principal in any school	Average number of years as principal in current school
49.8	8.3	4.8
52.7	7.8	4.3
52.7	7.8	4.4
53.3	6.1	2.6
48.2	7.4	4.0
53.3	7.9	4.4
55.9	7.9	4.6
47.5	7.9	4.3
67.0	7.5	4.2
59.7	7.4	4.4
52.8	7.8	4.1
51.8	8.8	4.8
48.6	7.8	4.5
51.4	7.7	4.2
55.3	7.2	3.8
70.3	7.3	4.1

Charter leadership is multi-faceted and mission-driven, requiring great passion, resourcefulness and resiliency. One participant in a South Carolina focus group, a new start-up charter CEO, described himself as a “mono-maniac with a mission.” He explained, “I’m the principal, the janitor, the bus driver. If it’s broke, I fix it. I don’t have set hours to work. I work as much as I need to work. No Fair Labor Standards Act; just get it done.”

America program, 300 are leading some kind of public school – and 48% of these are leading charter schools, a happily disproportionate number.¹⁰

The NCRCS survey of Midwestern principals provides some insights about how people actually make the leap into charter leadership:

- Among those who currently lead public charter schools, just under a third created the position themselves; these are the “founders” who helped bring the school into existence and then stayed on in a management capacity.
- The other two-thirds arrived at their jobs in a variety of ways, with 44% being personally contacted by the school’s board chair or another individual from the school community. The rest came through other channels such as classified ads or professional search firms.
- A relatively small group – just 8% -- already worked in the school when the position became available.¹¹

Therein lies a paradox.

Members of the Working Group strongly endorsed the idea that “growing your own” in a successful charter organization is the best possible way of grooming future charter leaders. But as currently structured, the charter sector makes it difficult. About 80% of public charter schools are freestanding – that is, not affiliated with a charter management organization (CMO) or other network. Stressed for time and resources, and often small in size, these schools find it difficult to build the kind of internal structures and processes that produce leadership opportunities and succession possibilities. Later in this paper we present some suggestions for resolving this dilemma.

New Approaches in the Leadership Search

The charter movement has benefited from a flowering of initiatives over the last decade striving for new, cutting-edge approaches to leadership development. Often, but not always, these groups concentrate on serving the charter sector. Consider the range of types of organizations that are now on the hunt for new ways to find, groom, and sustain public school leadership, such as:

- Non-profits that address leadership and other “human capital” challenges within large public school systems, now devoting increasing attention to the charter sector. The most prominent is New Leaders for New Schools, joined more recently by initiatives such as The Mind Trust, a non-profit created by former Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson that aims to infuse new talent at all levels of Indianapolis public schools.
- Similar leadership development programs focused on the charter sector, run by organizations such as the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) and Building Excellent Schools. These highly competitive fellowship programs prepare future charter leaders through intensive preparation, mentoring, and extended training residencies in high-performing urban charter schools.
- Non-profit charter management organizations such as Aspire Public Schools and Green Dot Public Schools, and for-profit firms such as Edison Schools, that have developed their own internal programs for hiring and training principals. In one far-reaching instance, the expanding High Tech High network has created its own Graduate School of Education, authorized by the State of California to certify both teachers and school leaders (see School Leadership Concentration Goals on page 16).
- An innovative partnership involving three school networks (Uncommon Schools, Achievement First, and KIPP) and New York City’s Hunter College to create a new credential-bearing program calibrated to the exacting standards of the three networks. It will eventually certify teachers for other public schools as well¹² — and presents a provocative model that could be adapted to school leadership as well.
- University-based programs such as Leadership for Education Entrepreneurs (LEE) at Arizona State

University and a new, similar program at Rice University. These are degree-granting programs that prepare charter leaders by combining business studies with traditional coursework in academic issues.

- “Charter Support Organizations” (CSOs) such as the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence, whose Emerging Leaders Fellowship program is creating an “on-ramp” by preparing school staff for assistant principalships. The Center follows a medical school model with eight-week rotations in areas such as leadership, school culture, and assessment.
- The Broad Residency in Urban Education, sponsored by the Broad Foundation’s Center for Management of School Systems, which places talented early-career leaders into top-tier school district management positions, while providing ample professional development and access to a strong professional network. Fellows are also working in management capacities at a number of charter organizations such as KIPP, Victory Schools, Uncommon Schools, and Green Dot Public Schools.
- Examples from abroad, such as in the United Kingdom, where former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s administration created a National College for School Leadership in 1998. The academy not only educates school heads in how to lead instructional improvement toward attainment of national standards, but also functions as the credentialing authority for the National Professional Qualification for Headship, or NPQH, which will become mandatory for all newly-appointed head teachers by 2009.¹³

What do today’s most successful organizations in the field look for in filling charter leadership needs? There is notable overlap in the qualities they seek.

High Tech High School Leadership Concentration Goals

1. Prepare leaders for the complexity of leading urban schools with many stakeholders and limited resources in a climate of organizational and societal change.
 2. Help leaders develop a personal philosophy and approach grounded in the HTH design principles.
 3. Train leaders who will have the capacity to be school builders, mentors, and change agents.
 4. Train leaders to create programs that help students develop academic competencies through project-based learning and internships in the adult world beyond school.
 5. Train leaders to develop and implement structures and an environment for personalization.
 6. Prepare leaders to address the challenges of unequal access to education for special or educationally disadvantaged populations of learners.
-

For example:

KIPP, the Knowledge Is Power Program (a national network of free, open-enrollment, college-preparatory public schools in under-resourced communities throughout the United States) seeks leaders who are:

- Student-focused
- Relentless achievers
- People-oriented
- Self-aware
- Adaptable
- Critical thinkers and decision makers
- Strong communicators
- Organized
- Inspirational leaders
- Instructional leaders¹⁴

New Leaders for New Schools (a national non-profit organization that selects and trains passionate and results-focused individuals, from within education, as well as former educators, to become urban public school principals) notes that they “prepare and support individuals who have an unyielding belief in the potential of all children to achieve academically, a record of success in leading adults, and demonstrated instructional expertise in a K-12 classroom setting.” The organization’s selection criteria for the highly competitive program include:

- Belief and urgency that all students will excel academically
- Personal responsibility and relentless drive
- Results orientation
- Knowledge of teaching and learning
- Problem solving
- Project management to deliver results
- Adult leadership
- Communication and listening
- Interpersonal skills
- Self-awareness and commitment to ongoing learning¹⁵

Achievement First (a non-profit charter school management organization that aims to bring to scale a system of high-performing charter schools in New

York and Connecticut) has a core set of values for their school leaders including:

- Commitment to mission
- Focus on excellence
- People-orientation/Interpersonal skills
- Instructional leadership
- Constant learning
- Communication
- Organization & planning
- Problem-solving
- Character
- Vision and inspiration
- Management and delegation¹⁶

Building Excellent Schools (BES) (a national, year-long fellowship and training program that prepares leaders to create and head high-performing urban charter schools) defines exemplary Fellows as:

- High-capacity
- Strong communicators
- Strategic thinkers
- Highly flexible and urgent
- Relentless achievers: They get the job done, no matter what.
- Humble: Always willing to learn.
- Demanding of themselves and others: Good is not good enough; only great will suffice.¹⁷

Some of these attributes might commonly be found in any corporate or traditional district job description. But there's an "X factor" in each list: Belief that all children can learn. Vision. Focus on excellence. These all bespeak a kind of leader who is driven to break through bureaucratic barriers and ceilings of complacency, who can create and enforce a culture of high expectations, and has the smarts and people skills to get it done.

The first generation of charter founders provided shining examples in each of these areas. Surely, one of the great challenges facing the movement is to make the model work for "mere mortals" – so that leadership and teaching in charter schools is a sustainable career. But let's not kid ourselves: Founding and leading a charter school will always be a uniquely demanding job.

Can the current programs scale up?

The good news is that the programs noted above are breaking new ground in the search for effective public school leaders. The bad news is that their combined efforts, projected over time, will serve only a sliver of the need for the growing charter school movement.

Like any well-managed non-profit, each of the current "industry leaders" has a strategic plan that calls for ambitious but prudent rates of growth. But prudence may be a byproduct of necessity. What became clear from the Working Group's discussions was that these groups could grow faster if they could find more candidates likely to succeed in running strong charter schools.

Chris Clemons of Building Excellent Schools expressed a sentiment widely shared by colleagues from other leadership organizations: "Our growth is entirely dependent on the talent of our applicants. If we had 40 or 50 applicants right now with the skills, capacity, and beliefs we require, we would find a way for our organization to grow quickly enough to train them."¹⁸

Of course, the floodgates could simply be thrown open, but these programs have high standards and do not intend to lower them. KIPP announced a new class of just 12 school leaders for its 2007-08 Fisher Fellows program. Similarly, New Leaders for New Schools, which serves 9 urban districts, consistently

Achievement First:

“Our biggest barrier to growth is the human capital – finding great people to lead our schools.”

Envision:

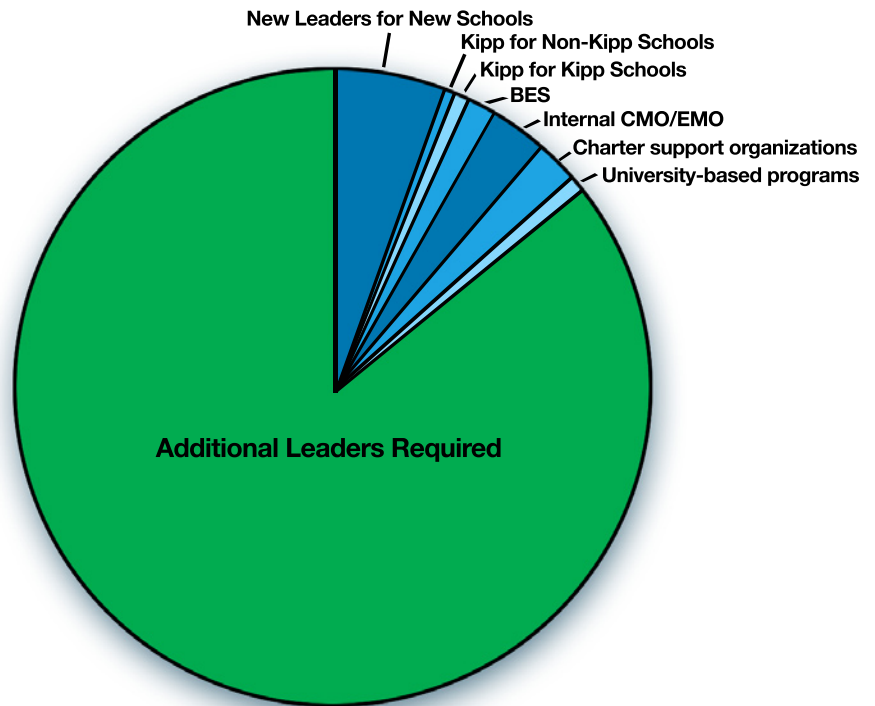
“Our greatest challenge in recruiting and developing charter leaders is finding experienced professionals who share our vision. Our number one growth constraint is people resources.”

Lighthouse on expansion plans:

“One of our main concerns continues to be the availability of high quality school leaders.”

USI expansion plans in NYC:

“We hope to launch two new ‘schools’ each year over the next five years. It’s possible we’ll grow faster, but it will all depend on the quality of leaders we can find and train.”



accepts only 7% of its applicants; over the past eight years they have screened more than 8,500 candidates to identify qualified New Leaders.¹⁹

Another structural impediment is that many of these organizations are heavily dependent on philanthropy to cover the costs of recruitment, training, and developing partnerships with school organizations. A more scalable approach would involve a greater share of compensation from the consumers of their services: schools and school districts.

As the National Charter School Research Project notes, current capacity of the

full-time leadership programs is “a drop in the bucket compared to the number needed” to fill even the existing slots.²⁰

For a Closer Look...

The National Charter School Research Project recently published results of its leadership surveys, including a detailed look at the goals and offerings of many leading-edge programs cited here, in *Closing the Skill Gap: New Options for Charter School Leadership Development*. It is available at www.ncsrp.org.

The Argument for the Status Quo

Before considering what actions should be taken to prepare for the needs of the next decade, let’s pause and consider the alternative: doing nothing. After all, some smart and well-intentioned observers might see the picture very

differently from the Working Group. The argument goes like this:

In the first years of the charter movement, schools were typically founded by charismatic leaders or energized parents and teachers, who assembled congenial boards and segued into leadership roles. This approach brought into public education a remarkable generation of intellectual talent – people who might otherwise be running hedge funds or leading web startups. Won't this work for the long run? And can't we simply rely on charter schools themselves -- their own boards and staffs – to find the right leaders when the time comes?

This is a powerfully appealing vision that resonates with all the things we value about charter schools -- their freshness and independence, their reliance on innovation rather than routine, their rejection of all things top-down and mass-produced. And nothing – nothing – we say here should blunt the attraction of charter schools for the socially motivated phenoms looking for a place to hang their MBAs in 2025.

Why should we give thought to “the pipeline” now?

We're entering a new era. We need more than a few – or even a few hundred – exemplary leaders if the charter movement is to thrive. We need many thousands. Growth depends more than ever on delivering high-quality education, right out of the starting gate, and doing it much more consistently across all schools – while minimizing the rocky starts and growing pains that often lower educational effectiveness and even imperil charters in their early years.

The job can't be dumbed-down. It's tempting to think that the alchemy of a few great charter leaders might be bottled and passed along to masses of average leaders. But that's a dream. To get consistently high-quality schools, we need a large number of high-caliber people -- and they need extensive and rigorous grounding, plus a challenging test-drive, before they're handed the keys to a school. This means analyzing the first-generation lessons learned (often by trial and error) and distilling them into “rules of the road” deliverable in a variety of settings. If we're seeking exceptional growth in student achievement and not just “good enough,” we need to start with more of the best talent at the helm of our schools.

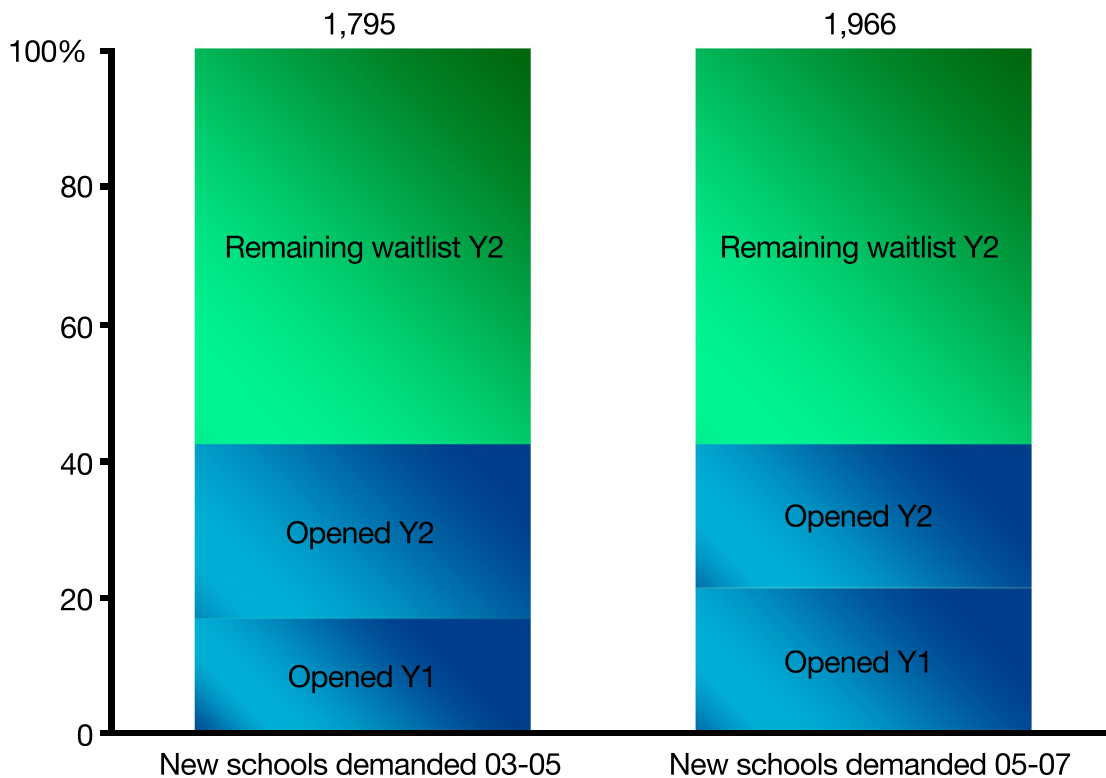
KIPP in Houston:

In March, KIPP announced a \$100 million plan to expand its number of schools in Houston five-fold over the next decade. The success of that plan, Mike Feinberg said, depends heavily on locating enough people to run the campuses. “There are three things that keep me up at night, in no particular order,” he continued. “Where do we find 42 great school leaders? How do we find 1,200 great teachers? And how do we create a central office that's excellent instead of turning into a beast?”

We're talking succession, not just startup. The most successful programs for charter-sector leadership have all assumed that the leader would be starting a new school (or starting a newly-chartered school). But as the chart below indicates, the leadership ranks in the next decade will include substantially more successors. This is not anticipated by the current practices of the movement. Charter school boards are not routinely trained to make high-stakes personnel decisions; very few executive search firms specialize in charter leadership; and authorizers typically do not require charter schools to create succession plans.

Not all pipelines are the same. For all its rambunctiousness, the charter sector shouldn't shy away from some organized planning. Creating a "system" to meet our leadership needs doesn't mean re-creating the intellectual and bureaucratic shortcomings of traditional leadership-prep programs. Any system to serve the next-generation needs of the charter community must have the hallmarks of chartering itself. It must work from the grassroots up. It must thrive on data. It must be accountable for improving student outcomes, not just graduating adults.

New Charter School Openings



In both time spans, 2.3 times as many school openings per year could have been supported by charter school demand.

We're not alone. Charters are not a voice in the wilderness when it comes to dissatisfaction with traditional paths for leadership preparation – paths still trod by many charter school leaders. Our challenges are well-reflected in a growing literature of discontent. Arthur Levine, former dean of Teachers College, Columbia University, delivered a blistering critique of such programs in 2005 and called for an end to the Ed.D. as we know it.²¹

Traditional educational leadership training provided by universities typically involves a set of foundational courses and several required courses specific to the student's concentration. More often than not, the course of study is housed within a college of education, affording little cross-fertilization with business, policy, public administration, communications, or other professional schools. Many courses are taught by members of academia who have never experienced the principalship.

While the typical preparation curriculum is “overloaded with courses on management and administration,”²² they're preparing candidates to function as middle managers in a traditional bureaucracy rather than as CEOs of an independent non-profit and start-up enterprise. The subject matter itself often bears little resemblance to what charter leaders will find on the job: Education Facilities 101 might cover preventive maintenance but would rarely address a charter leader's need to know about securing funding to build or renovate a school.

Perhaps the worst fit with the charter sector is the emphasis on process rather than outcomes – in particular, the essential outcome of student achievement. As Stein and Gewirtzman point out, “there are no formal accountability mechanisms to ensure that university program graduates learn

anything useful for their future practice. . . Whether or not they are able to lead instruction and improve student learning is not considered a reflection of the effectiveness of their preparatory program.”²³

A system of preparation for charter school leadership must radically challenge this notion and create incentives, rewards, and sanctions based on whether kids learn – with program evaluation grounded in a rigorous body of achievement data from the schools led by program alumni. In sharp contrast, New Leaders for New Schools sets ambitious student achievement goals for the organization and for each individual New Leader. Not only is data driven instruction taught during a New Leader's foundational training, but each New Leader is now asked to sign a six-year commitment to remain in a partner city with the goal of reaching 90 – 100% proficiency in schools that they lead.

So What Should We Do?

We propose to tackle the charter leadership challenge via two parallel tracks:

The first track requires making the most of existing systems and organizations, including some specific actions to be taken immediately by each of the major stakeholder groups within the charter movement.

The second track imagines a new kind of system for cultivating the leadership supply, which will require new resources and institutional innovation.

We begin with a set of principles that apply to both tracks. The Next Generation initiative should be grounded in:

- A commitment to student achievement as the central measure of evaluation for programs that develop school leaders

- Capacity to produce a growing stream of effective leaders
- Curricula guided by evidence rather than theory
- A balance of instructional knowledge and management skills that is appropriate to each candidate depending on his or her background
- Learning by working alongside exemplary leaders in appropriately challenging settings
- Mentorships and networking that sustain candidates as they move into leadership
- Common high standards, but flexibility in delivery

Track One: Making The Most Of The Tools At Hand

Increase the Number of High-Quality Candidates Entering Existing Programs

The most direct path to solving the leadership challenge is to help existing high-quality programs find a greater number of excellent candidates. Each program is already looking as hard as it can for such candidates, so what else might be tried?

Demystify. There is a considerable market of talent that could be tapped if the charter movement would do a better job of explaining itself. Let’s face it: Getting a bright young executive or attorney to think about moving into a traditional principalship is a tough sell. Working Group member Jacquelyn Davis put it succinctly: “Salaries are too low, there is no respect for the profession, and work conditions are awful.”²⁴ If we can demystify charter schools and put down a welcome mat for those with the skills, imagination, and determination to become entrepreneurial leaders, “charter executive” will be a job title eagerly sought. If smart, ambitious college grads know a few key points about charter schools – that they are public schools;

that they tend to serve minority and low-income kids; and that they offer unparalleled scope for creative leadership and opportunity for impact – they might hear recruiting messages more clearly, and charter leadership can become an attractive career path for the best and brightest.

Make Leadership a Destination. How many skilled and ambitious young people would turn toward charter teaching if they had a better understanding of the opportunities it might create? National and state organizations should consider some pilot efforts to target charter messages where they will directly reach a potential talent pool – for example, advertising in university towns where candidates might emerge from graduate programs; or through teacher professional journals, or societies of young entrepreneurs.

These organizations could also collaborate in publicizing the impact of exemplary charter school leaders in much higher-profile ways than we currently see. Such a campaign might include having “rock-star” charter leaders profiled in mainstream media, especially publications targeting minority professionals. A national Speakers Bureau could put top charter leaders on the road, recruit new talent at graduate business and professional schools as well as social-entrepreneurship conferences like those sponsored by Net Impact. And isn’t it about time for a prime-time drama featuring a heroic inner-city charter school leader?

Reach Young People. In fact, let’s plant the idea even earlier. The charter movement ought to be creating a much wider variety of programs to get young people thinking about joining its ranks as teachers and eventually school leaders. Such activities could include:

- Summer and school-year internships, as well as year-round volunteer opportunities, for high school and college students to work in charter schools and networks
- “Principal for a Day” programs open to charter and non-charter high school students
- Future Charter Leaders of America club
- Leadership Summits for high school and college students, respectively

Just as Teach For America has transformed the way many college graduates think about public education, the charter community needs to raise consciousness about our own leadership needs and opportunities – and to make leading a charter school a prominent, exciting, and “cool” career goal. Charter school leadership needs to become widely known as a different kind of opportunity from the traditional principalship as commonly perceived.

Grow Our Own: Produce More Leaders from Within Successful Schools

Developing human capital is a growing preoccupation of executives from General Electric to the smallest rural school district. The emerging shape of the charter movement suggests that developing leaders from within existing school organizations holds great promise.

But they may not be able to do it on their own – and a recent survey of 43 charter support organizations (see table below) showed that very few are offering much meaningful help.²⁵

Here are some suggestions for new approaches:

Hire Potential Leaders. Some of the most effective multi-campus charter systems insist on leaders who have imbibed their own successful school culture. One way to widen the pool of potential leaders is

School Leadership Services			
Please indicate whether your organization provides no services, minor services, or major services in the following areas related to school leadership. (n=43)			
	No Services	Minor Services	Major Services
School leader recruitment	36%	57%	7%
Leadership development/training	39%	36%	25%
Strategic planning	43%	48%	9%
Networking opportunities for school leaders	14%	50%	36%

to hire teachers who aspire to leadership. All of the leaders at YES Prep’s five Houston-area campuses are former YES teachers steeped in the network’s intense culture. Consider the kind of leaders that might emerge from any school that staffed according to YES Prep’s list of “key traits” for ideal teachers²⁶:

- Quick rebound time
- High energy mode
- Eagerness to take charge
- Willingness to deal with conflict head-on
- Outspoken
- Perfectionist/Driven

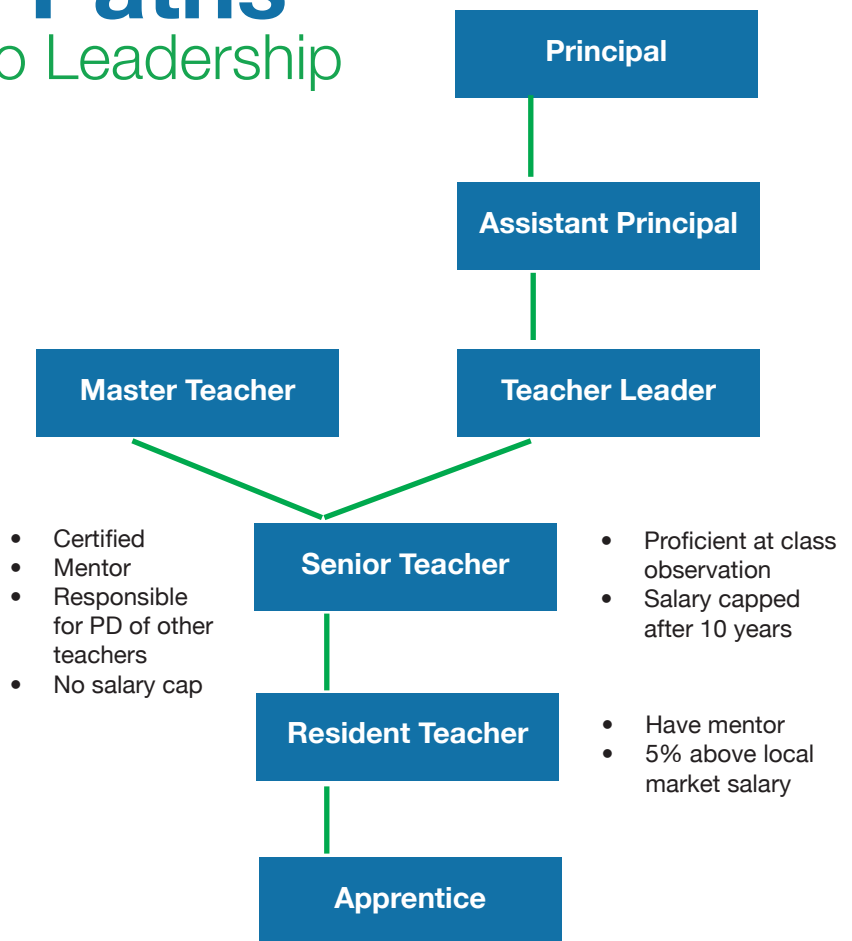
to serve on charter school boards of trustees, thus taking part in policymaking. In smaller charters, and those unaffiliated with networks or management firms, staff often wear multiple hats, and an “assistant principal” or “lead teacher” may routinely help with executive responsibilities. A school with a longer day or week can ask teachers to manage enrichment classes or Saturday sessions. An instructor who communicates well with parents might be appointed community liaison. Breaking out of conventional categories allows even a small charter school to let staff shine.

Create Defined Paths to Leadership.

Overall, charter schools attract a younger teacher corps than other public schools. But the flatter organizational structure of many charters may not provide an obvious route for those who want to move into leadership roles. Charter networks that employ hundreds of teachers may have an easier time creating defined career paths (as in the example below, from a large charter management firm). In cities with a concentration of freestanding charters, resource centers and other intermediary organizations can work with schools to create “pathways” that might offer promising leaders stints in several school settings before they assume full site leadership.

Rethink the Org Chart. Charters may offer far greater scope than other public schools for teachers to actually demonstrate and practice leadership on-site. A few states permit teachers

Paths to Leadership



Create Succession Plans. “Succession planning is often done looking at the rear-view mirror, when it should be done looking out the front windshield,” noted a corporate search executive quoted recently in the Wall Street Journal.²⁷ His advice is regrettably pertinent to the charter sector.

Even the smallest charter school should be thinking about leadership succession from Day One. Whether demanded by an authorizer or not, each school should be clear about how its board of trustees and management will be sustained over time. To that end, the board should decide within the school’s first year (a) what to do in case of a need to replace the leader on an emergency basis due to illness or non-performance; (b) how to ensure orderly succession when the initial leader moves on; and (c) how the board will replenish its own ranks over time.

This is not a far-off need; it’s likely to become urgent for many schools in a relatively short period of time. In the NCSRP Midwest survey, charter school leaders averaged 51 years or older, and one-third expected to retire from their current position.²⁸ And in a focus group conducted by Working Group leader Eleanor Perry, fewer than one-third of participants had a succession plan in place at their school.²⁹

To maintain a steady flow of capable leaders for the future, a school’s leadership succession plan should show step-by-step detail on how the school would execute a smooth transition, including (1) a professional development plan that includes job assignments to prepare candidates properly for their new position, (2) meaningful assessments and feedback specifying what needs to be done for successful promotion, (3) a clear picture of the competencies required such as the skills, values, and behaviors required to succeed, plus opportunities to develop those competencies, and (4) a plan to cultivate more than one qualified person for the job.³⁰

Deploy Charter Alumni. While we’re looking inside our own schools, let’s not forget our most important asset – charter graduates!

Because there are fewer charter high schools than elementary and middle charters – and because many of those high schools have reached their full grade span and started graduating seniors only in the past few years – it may come as a surprise that thousands of charter school graduates are now in college and the workforce. Those are modest numbers compared to the army of charter alums who will move into college and jobs over the next decade (that is, most of the 1.2 million now in school plus all those who’ve

Sarah Howard, Executive Director of the Academy of Communications and Technology Charter School in Chicago (which the Working Group visited), finds ways to engage her emerging leaders. She creates opportunities for teachers to lead summer school programs, after-school programs, athletic programs, and academic departments. Sarah notes that these activities encourage teachers to become more comfortable and interested in leadership roles while providing useful support for the principal.

made it since 1993).

These young people are our movement's best argument. And we should recruit them to help create the Next Generation of charter leaders. Some, perhaps many charter alumni will go into teaching and get on the leadership track themselves. But even those who do not should be participating in youth conferences and making the rounds of "young entrepreneur" events, talking about the leaders who created their schools and asking others of the younger generation to consider a rewarding, high-impact career in charter schooling.

Make Diversity a Priority. The project noted earlier, being created at the Charter School Growth Fund with the backing of the Walton Family Foundation, will direct significant resources toward recruiting promising African-American and Latino candidates for charter school leadership, while also developing new opportunities for management within the industry.

This commendable effort should be matched by local and state leaders, particularly the array of charter support organizations that are actively recruiting Next Generation leaders. Likewise, charter management organizations that will be among the major employers of leadership talent should redouble their efforts on the diversity front; their sustainability may depend on it.

Fix laws. Finally, attention must be paid to one important external constraint on the upward mobility of charter teachers: archaic state laws and regulations that establish input-driven certification requirements for public school leadership. States that require charter school principals to follow the familiar requirements for years in the classroom and academic preparation that pertain to traditional district schools, such as Idaho, Maryland, and Oregon, must remove these unnecessary hurdles to charter leadership. These are

of little relevance in the charter model and may keep some of our most talented candidates from taking the helm of a charter school.³¹

Unclog the Existing Pipeline

There are steps that each stakeholder group in the movement should start taking right away to make sure that thousands of talented individuals already working in successful charter schools have the opportunity and encouragement to pursue leadership from within our own ranks. These action steps are not the proverbial "low-hanging fruit," and some will require serious effort – but all can be done through existing policy and leadership structures and, for the most part, with available resources.

Charter School Boards:

- Ensure that school leader compensation is competitive with district salaries and greater than senior teaching positions in the school
- No later than the second year of school operation, develop a succession plan for the current leader
- Allocate resources to develop leadership opportunities for teachers

Authorizers:

- In approving charter proposals, make sure that staff and leadership compensation is sufficient to attract and retain top talent
- Address succession planning at charter renewal if it is not already in place
- Encourage charter proposals to delineate career paths for teachers
- Require proposals from charter networks to articulate a sound leadership pipeline program to ensure capable leadership for all schools in the network as it scales up
- Assess and make available information

about local, regional and national leadership development programs

Charter Schools/Networks:

- Keep up-to-date contact information for school alumni, and conduct alumni outreach to recruit strong candidates for careers in the charter sector
- Provide responsible summer internships for college students
- Identify teachers with leadership capacity and create pathways for their advancement
- Create opportunities for teachers to participate in school leadership
- Provide career counseling for teachers
- Develop clear succession plans to ensure continuous quality leadership over the long term

Charter Support Organizations:

- Monitor current and foreseeable leadership needs in the local or statewide charter market (as affected by retirements, performance problems or other factors)
- Actively recruit potential candidates, both traditional and non-traditional, and help them find paths to leadership through training and mentoring experiences
- Help schools develop strategic plans for strong, seamless leadership for new school openings and key transition points
- Identify top charter leaders in each state and facilitate mentoring relationships between them and incoming leaders – including opportunities for emerging leaders to take part in extended training residencies at the schools of exemplary leaders

Track Two: Creating A New System

Successful charter leaders come from many different backgrounds and arrive with different kinds of gaps in their experience – so a strong preparation program should be geared to delivering what they need, when they need it. For example, Candidate A, who has led a successful social service agency, may need solid grounding in academic standards, testing and assessment issues. Candidate B, who’s taught in public schools for 20 years, may need immersion in budgeting because, even with a good business manager, the principal of a charter school must know how to allocate resources.

Although the Working Group believes that there is a need to define professional standards for those entering charter leadership, the new system should eliminate rigid traditional distinctions between “pre-service” and “in-service” learning. Even incumbent leaders have periodic needs for skill-sharpening and knowledge updating – needs that can be addressed through an on-demand, modular delivery system. A veteran educator, superbly prepared for the classroom and doing a conscientious job of managing a startup charter, may suddenly find herself in a new role as the school tries to acquire a permanent building – and may find herself swimming in jargon about lending rules and tax credits. Another leader, doing a credible job, may develop a keen interest in school law because a parent is threatening litigation over possible violation of a privacy statute.

Cases like these are the rule rather than the exception in the charter world. The traditional in-service approaches, with principals herded to a district meeting and lectured at, or attending night school to gain three more credits to move up the salary scale, won’t cut it in the charter environment. We believe



that the future of the charter movement demands an entirely new, flexible and dynamic system of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development.

We believe that the essential knowledge and skills of charter leadership should be distilled into a credential – or set of credentials – that would assure charter school boards of trustees that an incoming leader is up to the job, and that an incumbent leader is keeping abreast of current, necessary knowledge.

Who Would Award the Credential? Unlike the current system, which is the creature of education colleges, the Next Generation system would work through a variety of institutions and media. Defining the credential would itself be a highly interactive, peer-informed process. Delivering the content – and managing the aligned fellowship, mentoring and residency programs – could be handled by non-profits, universities (including business and public-administration schools), charter management networks, charter support organizations, or new consortia of freestanding charters.

The Proposal, in Brief

The following proposal is a suggested path to implementation of the Next Generation system, and must be implemented in stages: first planning and development; then a pilot phase involving 3-5 sites; and finally, full national implementation. Even with ample funding and movement support, the system will take five to ten years to develop fully.

1. **Create a new, national credential for executive management** of public charter schools, developed by leaders of high-achieving charter schools and the most accomplished networks of schools. The credential could be developed in collaboration with top-tier executive management programs at graduate business or management schools that have significant experience with charter schools, and should be validated through a high-profile public consensus process. The credential will recognize preparation in all critical areas of leadership, but will be attained through modular, customizable coursework and experiences, recognizing and adapting to

the variety of candidate backgrounds.

2. **Make the credential widely available** through a variety of intermediary organizations that can provide classroom training, fellowships with exemplary charter school leaders, mentoring and other support for the first critical years of school leadership. This “delivery system” could be locally or state-based, with existing charter resource centers playing a major role; it could be regional, with a single provider such as a foundation or university covering a multi-state area; or it could involve one or more national organizations. A pilot program might begin with a diverse group of 3-5 such organizations and evaluate the strong points and challenges of each, as well as the utility of the credential itself, before moving to full national implementation.
3. **Create a system of stringent, transparent, performance-based accountability** for provider organizations. Develop systems for tracking the success of credential holders in raising student achievement, as well as processes for holding credential-granting institutions accountable for the success of their programs in promoting that paramount goal.

Who Would Develop And Manage Such A System?

There are pros and cons to endowing a single institution with responsibilities for standard-setting and credentialing, as is the case in the U.K. (Indeed, resistance to centralization is why so many in the Working Group and its focus group sessions objected to the notion of a “West Point for Charter Leaders” first floated by the National Alliance’s earlier Quality Task Force.) Clearly, no one wishes to replace the existing bureaucratic system with another one just for charter schools.

In fact, the closest parallel to the proposed system is found in the corporate sector, where companies often run their own “universities” to train employees on their own products and services, and also send employees to external providers to get certified against industry-wide performance standards such as the ISO 9000 requirements for quality management systems.

Two major functions must be addressed in a well-coordinated national credentialing program for charter school leaders:

- **Standard-setting:** Combining research and a wide-ranging consensus process to create a widely recognized and respected common credential for charter leaders.
- **Administration:** Creating a process through which organizations apply for the right to award the credential, as well as the related process for holding those organizations accountable for performance. This implies ongoing monitoring and evaluation as well as a periodic high-stakes review. (In this respect the administrative body would closely resemble a high-quality charter authorizer.)

Both functions could be performed by one organization, or they could be divided. In either instance, the sponsoring entity would need to have not only capacity but also prestige. The importance of this process could be highlighted by a major grant award from the U.S. Department of Education, and/or by a visible and well-funded RFP process run by a consortium of major private philanthropies.

Additional Research Needed

Finally, if the needs of this growing movement are to be addressed with confidence, the research community – backed by public and private dollars –

needs to focus specifically on the distinctive nature and dynamics of charter leadership.

The federal Schools and Staffing Survey, which is the primary source of most national information about the people who lead and teach in our schools, now provides a wealth of data about charter personnel. Some of that data is cited in this report, through the analysis of the National Charter School Research Project. However, SASS data follow the traditional paradigm of “principals” who lead campuses within a district system and make no distinction among the various types of charter leadership. Similarly, there is no breakdown between freestanding charter schools and those managed by non-profit or for-profit charter management organizations, where leadership models and patterns of compensation and time use might look quite different.

While there is an impressive body of research on the habits and practices of effective principals, it mostly addresses them as middle managers of district organizations, rather than as executives of autonomous public schools. Research journals and industry publications contain frequent exhortation about the need to redefine the principal’s role, but mostly assume that their readers are leaders of

academic programs who need to acquire some new managerial skills (for example, teacher evaluation or community relations). Rarely do researchers consider the “school head” model, already found in the charter sector, which may or may not have direct responsibility for the academic program but must set expectations for all staff, and must also oversee budget, board relations, fundraising, facility and capital planning, and other management responsibilities. In many ways, this role far more closely resembles the traditional superintendency; research working from this paradigm would be welcome.

So, while the literature is now saying more about the incremental skills an educator must acquire in order to become an effective school leader, we still know too little about what it takes for a manager from another sector to become an effective charter school leader. We know of lawyers, corporate executives, and non-profit managers who have created and led strong charter schools, but we have yet to distill lessons from their experience about how to make that transition work effectively for many more candidates. That’s an essential step toward widening and filling the pipeline of Next Generation leaders.

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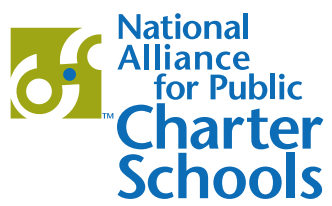
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Endnotes

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