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Missouri Charter Schools and Educational Reform

Phillip James Guy
Lindenwood University

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by

Phillip James Guy

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Dr. Sherry DeVore, Dissertation Chair	4-6-2011 Date
Dr. Terry Reid, Committee Member	4-6-2011 Date
Dr. Kevin Kopp, Committee Member	4-6-2011 Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Phillip James Guy

Signature: Phillip James Guy Date: 4-6-2011

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Abstract

In 1998, Missouri's two largest school districts, St. Louis and Kansas City, had become, in the eyes of many, completely dysfunctional. In court-ordered attempts to end desegregation and improve academically, each district built costly and extravagant magnet schools; however, low test scores and high dropout rates continued. These problems, and others, would cause both districts to lose their state accreditations in the next ten years. In an effort to put the focus back on student learning and force these districts to improve, Missouri lawmakers passed Senate Bill 781. This bill allowed charter schools to open and operate within the Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri, school districts. These tuition free, self-sufficient, public schools create a contract, or charter, between themselves and a sponsor outside the district umbrella. Charter schools have become the greatest educational experiment in the last two decades attempting to improve what has come to be seen as a failing public education system. The charter school movement continues to gain popularity as states, including Missouri, open additional charter schools despite very limited research measuring their effectiveness. This causal comparative research study examined Missouri charter school performance factors including academic performance, dropout rate, graduation rate, and rates of enrollment in post-secondary colleges and universities. Each factor was analyzed using a mixed study design by applying quantitative research methods including data comparisons between charter and non-charter public schools. Qualitative methods included interviews with key charter school stakeholders. The findings of this study were largely inconclusive; however, as one of the few research studies specific to Missouri charter schools, established a starting point for future research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

Educational reform is not a new idea in the United States. The reasons are as numerous as the methods that have been attempted. Each attempt can be traced to two amazingly simple yet controlling reasons: public perception and political agendas (Ravitch, 2000). Nationally, and in the state of Missouri, one response to the declining public perception of the educational system has been the emergence of the charter school. The conceptual beginnings of this movement can be traced as far back as the 1970s, but like many reform movements, its time did not come until years later (Wells, 2002). The first charter school opened twenty years ago and was followed by rapid nation-wide expansion. The charter school movement has become one of the most prolific educational movements in history expanding to 40 states and the District of Columbia in less than 20 years, currently educating over 1.4 million children (Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2009).

While politicians and educators have sought to provide a one-size-fits-all educational system, the charter school movement has grown from a low-key, grass-roots alternative to traditional public schools into a robust educational reform. The movement continues to be strengthened by Democrats and Republicans alike, and every president since Bill Clinton has supported charter school growth (Quaid, 2009; Stancel, 2001). As this momentum has grown, so have the notoriety and the questioning. Educational experts are beginning to ask whether charter schools are legitimate sources of educational reform or just another educational experiment that serve no better purpose than the public schools that already exist (Bracey, 2003).

In 1991, Minnesota became the first state to pass a law making charter schools a legal reality (Sarason, 2002). The concept of charter schools dates back to the 1970s when a New England educator, Ray Budde, suggested that small groups of teachers be given contracts, or charters, by their local school districts to explore new approaches to education (U.S. Charter School History, n.d.). A decade later, with the backing of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Philadelphia started a number of schools within the Philadelphia Public School District called charters (U.S. Charter School History, n.d.). What began in Philadelphia as a small experiment quickly expanded over the next fifteen years. By 1995, there were 19 states with charter schools, and just ten years later that number more than doubled to include 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (U.S. Charter School Legislation by State, n.d.).

The charter school movement has rapidly become a popular subject among educational scholars. Regardless of whether these scholars approve or disapprove of the movement, their books and articles have generally lacked the research to be much more than opinion pieces (Hill, 2006). Most have relied on circumstantial evidence to determine the academic performance of charter schools. According to Hill (2006), of the many papers written on the subject of charter schools, only 41 focused on student achievement. This research is inadequate considering in 2009 over 1.4 million students were enrolled in over 4700 charter schools nationwide (CREDO, 2009). Zimmer and Buddin (2007) noted, "As the charter school movement has grown, rhetoric from advocates and opponents has dominated the debate over effectiveness. Only recently have researchers been able to provide any quantifiable results…" (p. 232).

Only now, twenty years since the first charter school legislation was authorized, are sufficient longitudinal data becoming available in some states to accurately measure charter school effectiveness in terms of student performance (CREDO, 2009). A recent study on charter school performance conducted by the CREDO (2009), at Stanford University, addressed this concern concisely in their opening remarks:

> As charter schools play an increasingly central role in education reform agendas across the United States, it becomes more important to have current and comprehensible analysis about how well they do educating their students. Thanks to progress in student data systems and regular student achievement testing, it is possible to examine student learning in charter schools and compare it to the experience the students would have had in the traditional public schools (TPS) they would have attended….The scope of the study makes it the first national assessment of charter school impacts. (p. 1)

Although the virtues and faults of the charter school movement continue to be argued by educational professionals and politicians, the movement has, so far, continued to expand.

States appear to have become increasingly willing to participate in the charter school experiment primarily in larger metropolitan areas where the traditional methods of education appear to be succeeding least. In many cases, charter schools have been opened in the nation's biggest cities where failed desegregation remedies have created the largest educational vacuums (Weil, 2000). According to a recent U.S. Department of Education study (2004), charter schools are more likely to serve minority students from large urban districts with high poverty rates. Missouri's charter law allows only urban school districts to open charter schools which presently include only the Kansas City and St. Louis

school districts (Senate Bill 781, 1998). Both of these districts lost their accreditations in the past ten years, an unfortunate indignity very few other districts in the state have encountered (Fine, 2002; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2009b). The St. Louis School District remains Unaccredited while the Kansas City School District has regained the state's minimal accreditation standard: Provisional (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009j).

Unlike many states, Missouri's legal constraints for charter school sponsorship allows only the school boards of Kansas City or St. Louis school districts, Missouri community colleges located within the Kansas City or St. Louis districts, and four-year colleges or universities with approved teacher education programs and within certain geographical boundaries to sponsor charter schools (Missouri Revised Statutes, 2010a). In Missouri, the first public charter schools, 16 in all, opened in the Kansas City School District in 1999 (Stancel, 2001). In the ten years that followed, Missouri opened an additional 17 schools in the Kansas City district and 11 in the St. Louis School District (MODESE, 2009c; MODESE, 2009d). To date, there are 28 charter schools in Missouri sponsored by nine area colleges and universities and one charter school sponsored by the St. Louis School District (MODESE, 2009c; MODESE, 2009d).

Just one year after opening its first charter school, the Kansas City School District lost its state accreditation (Thomas & Machell, 2001). Despite the St. Louis School District's efforts, it too lost its accreditation in 2007 (MODESE, 2009b). Although Missouri charter schools operate independently of district school board control and the MODESE, there are some state guidelines they must follow. Charter schools are required to participate in the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), an annual statewide

assessment required for all Missouri students, and are required to collect the same student and teacher data as other public schools in the state.

Conceptual Framework

In spite of the short-lived and tumultuous nature of most educational reforms, charter schools have not only shown a tremendous staying capacity, but have continued to open and thrive over the past twenty years. Therefore, an appropriate lens to examine charter schools is through the conceptual framework of school reform. Researcher and author, Hassel (1999), cited five educational movements that most influenced the charter school movement. Some of these movements occurred simultaneously, others individually, and often have been the impetuous for additional school reforms, in addition to charter schools (Hassel, 1999). These five movements eventually merged into the intellectual and physical creation of the charter school concept and serve to explain why charter schools emerged and continue to flourish:

> (1) the push for more choice for students: giving every child a voucher to attend any school, public or private; (2) the related idea of competition: breaking school districts' monopoly over the provision of education; (3) school based management: delegating key school decisions to schools and classrooms; (4) the related push for deregulation: eliminating many of the rules constraining practice in schools; and (5) calls for greater accountability for results: setting high academic standards for schools and students and establishing consequences tied to performance. (Hassel, 1999, p. 5)

These movements appear to provide a logical pathway for successful school reform, yet it must be remembered that each of these movements has been tried at some point in time

and not always with positive results. Missouri's magnet schools are a good example of a failed reform initiated by more than one of these reform movements. Missouri's magnet schools offered choice, competition, and high academic standards yet failed in their attempt to improve Missouri's two largest districts.

The remaining movements, accountability, deregulation, and vouchers, have great historical relevance to the charter school reform movement. The fifth movement cited by Hassel (1999), accountability for results, is of particular interest. Individually, Missouri's charter schools undergo an annual assessment of their academic performance, yet the charter school movement itself has barely been tested nationally, or in Missouri (CREDO, 2009; Hill, 2006).

Since the publication of Hassel's book more than ten years ago, the numbers of charter schools, and students served by them, have more than quadrupled nationally. Student populations have increased from 250,000 students to 1.4 million, while the number of charter schools has increased from 1100 to more than 4700 (CREDO, 2009; Hassel, 1999). Despite this explosive growth, very little assessment or analysis of charter school effectiveness has occurred, yet the movement remains as strong as ever (CREDO, 2009; Hill, 2006). Missouri charter schools have not directly become part of any voucher system; however, the money follows a student who chooses to transfer from a traditional public school to a charter school. It should be noted that although Hassel's research is over a decade old, his research is routinely cited in many current charter school studies, suggesting many of his ideas regarding charter school reform are considered relevant today.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are defined:

Annual Performance Report (APR). The state of Missouri's yearly audit of each school district's overall performance based on a number of factors including student academic performance, student demographics, and attendance rates (MODESE, 2009a).

Educational fortitude. The desire of high school graduates to finish and continue their education past high school by enrolling in a technical college, a two-year college, or a four-year college or university.

End of Course (EOC) Exams. As of April 2009, per Missouri state requirements, all high school students must enroll in and take a subject-specific EOC exam in Algebra I, Biology I, and English II (MODESE, 2009e). The EOC exams are required by the state as part of the successful completion of these subjects and are the high school component of the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP); however, for the purposes of this study they will be treated as a stand alone assessment to avoid confusion. Unlike the MAP tests used in the lower grades, EOC exams are course specific.

Magnet school. A school designed to draw students from across the normal school boundaries by using specialized course offerings or extravagant infrastructure to attract these students (Dunn, 2008).

Missouri charter school. An autonomous public school that receives the same funding from the same sources as other public schools (U.S. Charter School History, n.d.). Charter schools are able to make site-based decisions concerning curriculum, structure, and areas of emphasis which are established in the charter agreement between the school and the authorizing entity. Charter schools are non-sectarian, non-religious,

and do not discriminate in their admissions process. Any student residing in the Kansas City or St. Louis school districts may choose to attend a charter school in the city in which they reside (MODESE, 2009c).

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). State required annual assessment taken by students in elementary and middle schools in the areas of Mathematics, Science, and Communication Arts.

MAP Performance Index (MPI). The MPI is a combined score of all students in a particular grade level who took a MAP or EOC exam. The index indicates the movement of students throughout all MAP achievement levels and reduces the total student performance to a single composite score that represents the performance of every student in all MAP or EOC levels in a tested subject for a defined grade span (MODESE, 2009a).

Similar public school. This refers to a non-charter public school with similar student demographics. Student demographics include student population, percentages of students on the free and reduced price meal program, and percentages of total minority population.

Traditional public school. Any publicly funded school in the Kansas City or St. Louis school district that is included in the district data and is not a charter school.

Statement of the Problem

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, proposed by President Bush, sought to improve public education in America. The act holds schools accountable for results on mandated statewide assessment programs. One of the four pillars of the NCLB legislation allows students who attend failing schools to transfer within their district into

a school that is successfully fulfilling the requirements of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). This includes allowing students to transfer into charter schools. The failing schools are reorganized using scientifically proven methods of instruction including the possible creation of more charter schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).

Newly elected president, Barack Obama, publicly stated during his presidential campaign that he would double federal funding for charter schools (Barack Obama, 2008). Currently, neither President Obama nor his cabinet has indicated that the standards established by NCLB will be changed. Politically speaking, charter schools have achieved something that rarely happens in today's highly partisan political climate. Charter schools have become popular across party lines, but like so many other political pets, the schools are praised more for their promise rather than any scientific merits. Henig (2008) noted, "Research and evidence have had an ambiguous role in informing public policy and citizens in the United States" (p. 3.). Henig's (2008) research focused on the growing quantity of competing information the public must continually decipher in an effort to determine the validity of the charter school movement. Regardless of whether one believes charter schools are an effective reform or not, charter schools have become highly popular at the political level. Hassel (1999) explained the reasons charter schools have universal political appeal for both Republicans and Democrats:

> Republicans find them [charter schools] appealing because they provide public schools with a limited amount of competition, operate without some of the onerous burdens of regulation, and must produce acceptable educational results as a condition for continued funding…. For their part, Democrats like the fact that

> charter schools create new options while adhering to the core values of public schooling (they are nonselective in their admissions, tuition free, and nonreligious). (p. 2.)

While Missouri has been one of the states requiring charter schools to provide data, very little research exists measuring whether charter schools are succeeding at reforming public education and improving student performance (Hill, 2006). Moreover, the political attachment, to what is considered an untested reform by many scholars, including Hill (2006) and Henig (2008), should be of great concern for both supporters and detractors. With accountability as a priority, the overarching question becomes: Do Missouri charter schools foster an educational environment which allows students to be more successful in a charter school rather than a traditional public school?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the academic strides of the charter schools in the state of Missouri. This study examined the charter schools' ability to improve the academic performance of the students served by charter schools as measured by student performance on the MAP and EOC exams. Other factors, defined as educational fortitude, which included; dropout rate, graduation rate, and post-secondary enrollment rate, were also examined and compared to non-charter public schools. Additionally, this study explored, qualitatively, the perceptions of select charter school stakeholders including those who helped craft the initial legislation and those who work directly in the charter schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent are Missouri charter school students meeting the state academic standards measured by the MAP and EOC exams as compared to similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

2. What relationship exists between the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend Missouri charter schools and the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

3. What relationship exists between the percentage of Missouri charter school students who pursue post-secondary education and the percentage of students from a similar public school in Kansas City or St. Louis who pursue post-secondary education?

4. What are the perceptions of charter school stakeholders on the impact of charter schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis districts?

Significance of the Study

In 2003, the United States outspent all other so-called Great Eight, or G8 countries, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United Kingdom, in per pupil expenditures on education; however, when compared academically, the students educated in the United States struggled against these same eight countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006). The general public has made two assertions about public education. The first assertion is that public schools are not succeeding at their academic mission (Bracey, 2003). Over the course of the past decade, Gallop Polls have routinely indicated that less than 50% of the population is satisfied with the direction of the education in the United States (Newport, 2009). The

second assumption is that school improvement is needed and necessary for the economic and social future of this country (Hanushek, Jamison, Jamison, & Woessmann, 2008). According to Ravitch, (2000) these two assumptions, regardless of their accuracy, have prevailed since the early 1900s, and very little has changed regarding educational content or methods over the past century.

Despite Ravitch's assertion, many educational reform attempts occurred after the end of the Second World War, a time that has often been considered a turning point from the agrarian and isolated past of the country to that of world intellectual and industrial power (Sarason, 2002). Few, if any, of these reform attempts have survived as a meaningful addition or replacement of the traditional public school. Charter schools, by contrast, continue to expand currently educating over 1.5 million students nationwide including more than 17,000 students in Missouri's two largest districts (U.S. Charter School, 2010a). In addition to the strong growth of charter schools, there appears to be little, if any, organized opposition to their continued existence or expansion nationally or in the state of Missouri.

Limitations

All scientific research contains limitations inherent in the research and out of the control of the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The following limitations were identified:

1. Students attending charter schools in Missouri have chosen these schools and have opted out of traditional, non-charter, public Kansas City and St. Louis schools.

2. The data produced from the MAP and EOC exams contain their own limitations inherent in all statistical instruments (MODESE, 2009g).

3. Due to Missouri law, charter schools are limited to the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts. Although these two districts, combined, educate approximately 7% of the student population in Missouri, these students live in large, inner city areas and any results derived from this demographic group may not be generalized to other areas of Missouri (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h).

4. It is not known whether students who took the MAP or EOC exams while in a charter school were in attendance long enough to give an accurate assessment of the charter schools effectiveness as an educational system. In other words, was the student fully immersed in the doctrine and methods of the charter school? This study examined student MAP and EOC performance, graduation rates, dropout rates, and post-secondary attendance rates from Missouri charter schools for the school years 2008 and 2009.

5. Since charter schools in other states operate on different criteria, the reported results of this study may not be generalized to charter schools outside of Missouri.

6. Despite every effort to match a Missouri charter school with a similar public school in Kansas City or St. Louis, student populations and demographics vary between those enrolled in traditional public education and those enrolled in a Missouri charter school. With 522 school districts and over 2000 public schools in Missouri, charter schools comprise just 28 schools within the districts of St. Louis and Kansas City. Though small in number, these schools represent an ever-increasing population within the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts.

7. Each Missouri charter school was paired with a similar non-charter, public school located within the same district which included only the St. Louis and Kansas City school districts. However, when creating matches, school geography within these districts

was not considered. Schools were matched based on student demographics which included student population, total minority percentages, and free and reduced price meal percentages.

8. In addition to the small number of charter schools, the student population within these schools averaged less than 600 students, K-12. At times, there were small charter school populations involved in the quantitative analysis, particularly with the high school comparisons which included graduation rate, dropout rate, and post-secondary education enrollment rates.

Summary

The language from NCLB suggests charter schools are an effective means of educational reform. The Legislation, in fact, endorsed charter schools as an effective alternative to a traditional public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). Parents, teachers, taxpayers, and students all have a vested interest in the effectiveness of the charter school movement. Despite the movement's rapid growth and expansion there exists a limited body of research on which to evaluate the academic success of movement; far too little considering the volume of students currently enrolled in charter schools (CREDO, 2009).

Charter schools are not the first, or the only, reform movement to provide school choice, competition, deregulation, or accountability; the movements from which the charter school originates (Hassel, 1999). Despite not being the only option, charter schools continue to be the most sought after to provide choice, competition, and deregulation. Accountability remains elusive as there is little empirical data on which to measure overall charter school success. This research will allow parents and students to

make informed decisions regarding the realistic achievement gains they can expect from attending a Missouri charter school. Additionally this study will provide political leaders and taxpayers evidence to support the continued funding and expansion of Missouri's newest educational reform.

In Chapter Two, a review of relevant literature was conducted. The methodology used for the study was described in Chapter Three. An analysis of data and summary of findings were detailed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Although there exists an abundance of literature about charter schools, most writings provide only historical accounts of the movement's beginnings and policy analysis (Henig, 2008). Empirical data measuring their effectiveness, academic and otherwise, remain limited (CREDO, 2009). Within this chapter, a more in-depth examination of the charter school beginnings within the confines of the conceptual framework of school reform is provided. The notion of school reform is such an expansive topic; there are so many types of reforms that have occurred, and continue to occur, that this study will limit its focus as much as possible to school reforms that directly influenced the creation of charter schools. These influential movements, for the most part occurred after the 1950s and were outlined by Hassel (1999) including choice, competition, school based management, deregulation, and accountability for results.

In addition to these five movements which created the foundation of the national charter school reform movement, it was necessary to examine the characteristics that make Missouri's two urban school districts, Kansas City and St. Louis, unique. These characteristics include student demographics and the history behind Missouri's court ordered desegregation remedies, both of which greatly influenced charter school legislation in Missouri. Missouri's magnet schools, when placed in their proper historical context, are relevant to understanding Missouri charter school law from which Thomas and Machell (2001) considered a by-product: "With the end of the state and locally funded desegregation program in sight, urban education issues became a high priority in the state legislature and led to the passage of the charter school legislation" (p. 5).

Finally, current political perceptions and pressures surrounding charter schools and their role in NCLB were examined.

If Missouri charter schools are going to stand the test of time, supporters should examine the shortcomings of past reform efforts. In particular, charter school supporters should review the magnet school movement, which was predicated largely on the notions of school choice and competition, and question what methods and differences set the charter school movement apart from the magnet school efforts. In addition to choice and competition, charter schools work outside of the authority of district school boards and the normal leadership hierarchy. The self-governance feature is what largely sets charter schools apart from other reforms and is fundamental to the movement itself. If charter schools, or their sponsors, lose the independence to reform education on their terms it is unlikely the movement can be sustained. This is a major concern for many charter school supporters as regulations have threatened the autonomy of charter schools in some states, though there is little evidence this has occurred in Missouri at this time (Hassel, 1999; Henig, 2008).

Within each of these main themes, sub-themes were explored including the Missouri political and social climate that created a desire for change, the differences between traditional public schools and charter schools, and the different pressures charter schools confront. As a function of individual state governments, each state with charter school legislation has created its own highly individualized and unique laws to regulate charter schools. It should be recognized that the historical analysis provided within this chapter is unique to Missouri's situation and other states may have different motivations and circumstances which led to charter school creation within their state. The analysis

that follows is by no means intended to be exhaustive; however, it should establish the historical and political context through which charter schools were created and continue to thrive in Missouri.

National Charter School History

Before Missouri's charter school history can be thoroughly examined, the national charter school movement, including relevant historical facts, should be known. Once the basic history is understood, then the five individual educational movements that combined to form the conceptual framework of this study become clear. This information will allow researchers to further understand the charter movement in its entirety.

The idea of charter schools is generally credited to former Massachusetts' schoolteacher, Ray Budde. During the early 1970s, Budde developed the idea of creating a charter, or contract, between an authorizing entity and charter school founders made up of teachers and parents (Bracey, 2003). Budde based his idea for schools on the charter concept between Henry Hudson and the East India Company during the early colonial American period (Bracey, 2003). After the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983, national interest in school reform, including the charter school idea, began to grow (Bracey, 2003). Budde developed his idea in the 1970s but did not formalize the charter school concept until 1988 when he published the paper, *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts* (Bracey, 2003).

Budde's timing was fortuitous and capitalized on the nation's educational pessimism following the publication of the *Nation At Risk* report and the media attention it garnered. Budde sent his paper for review, even sending a copy to then President H. W. Bush (Kolderie, 2005). The ideas expressed in Budde's paper gained popularity and

momentum when Albert Shanker, President of the AFT, delivered a speech on the topic of charter schools during a conference on school improvement in Minneapolis in which he cited Budde's work (Bracey, 2003). Two years later, in 1991, Minnesota became the first state to enact a charter school law; a law that was supported by both Democrats and Republicans in Minnesota's house and senate (Kolderie, 2001). Since 1991, all but ten states have passed some form of charter legislation leading to a sustained increase in the total number of charter schools and students served by them (U.S. Charter School, 2010b).

It is difficult to grasp exactly why Minnesota was the first state to embrace the charter school idea and pass the initial legislation, but the literature provided some clues. According to Weil (2000), Minnesota was a state with a reputation of experimenting with school choice legislation. In the late eighties, the state passed an open enrollment law allowing students to attend a different school outside their district boundaries as long as the school had room for the student and it did not increase racial segregation (Weil, 2000). The same law allowed students to attend private non-sectarian schools provided the district contracted with that school (Weil, 2000). The charter school concept quickly expanded to several additional states and gained national attention when, in 1994, the federal government, with President Clinton's urging, passed the Charter School Grant Program, creating a pipeline for federal funding of charter schools which led to the proliferation of charter schools (Kolderie, 2005). The purpose of this legislation was to fund start-up costs for new charter schools and help pay for student achievement measures (Leal, 1999). Passage of this legislation and the guarantee of additional monies

to existing and potential charter schools undoubtedly expanded the movement and increased the chances of survival for existing charter schools.

Twenty years after the passage of the first charter school law in 1991, new charter schools continued to open, nationally and in Missouri, making the charter school movement unique among other educational movements. Few educational experiments have lasted as long with such a positive overall perception (Henig, 2008). Educational reforms that change the curriculum, or the methods through which curriculum is delivered, continue to be tried each year, yet these methods are frequently abandoned for newer, fresher ways and means to educate students in what has become a never-ending debate over educational best practices (Ravitch, 2000). While it is likely instructional strategies are tried with varied success within charter schools too, this is not what distinguishes them from traditional public schools. Charter schools are a whole new paradigm within the public education system offering an alternative choice to students and parents, while creating competition with neighboring schools for both students and funding. Rarely has another educational movement been this effective at attracting supporters while remaining politically low-key.

The last educational reform in Missouri of this magnitude was court ordered, tremendously costly, and controversial. Yet, according to a recent CREDO (2009) study, almost three decades into the national charter school experiment, the movement is as strong as ever:

> In some ways, however, charter schools are just beginning to come into their own. Charter schools have become a rallying cry for educational reform across the

> country, with every expectation that they will continue to figure prominently in national educational strategy in the months and years to come. (p. 6)

Only time will tell whether the charter school movement is ultimately considered an academic success or not, but the continued growth of the movement is an undeniable accomplishment for charter school proponents.

Nationally, charter schools are found predominately in large urban cities which often serve large percentages of minority and economically disadvantaged students (CREDO, 2009; Hansel, 2007). Missouri is no exception. Missouri state law limits charter schools to the two largest school districts in the state, both of which serve a diverse, though predominately Black and poor, student population. The specifics of these demographics are examined in greater detail later in the chapter. It is no coincidence that charter schools are found in the largest, poorest districts in the nation. The mobility of the upper and middle class populations over the past several decades often coincides with the slow demise of large urban school districts (Dunn, 2008). Examining the historical roots of charter schools in each state is beyond the scope of this study; however, Missouri charter school history is manageable and fundamental to this study.

Missouri History

St. Louis and Kansas City school districts are often at the forefront of educational reform efforts fueled, in part, by the continued academic failure of each district. Both districts have consistently under-performed the rest of the districts in the state each losing their state accreditation during the past decade ((MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h; MODESE, 2009i; MODESE, 2009j). At the time charter school legislation was enacted, both districts were recovering from long and costly desegregation programs (Thomas &

Machell, 2001). In addition to the academic struggles, the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts have struggled politically as well.

The Kansas City School District went over thirty years without passing a bond or tax levy despite asking voters 19 times in a row to pass one (Dunn, 2008). Both districts have operated under the continued influence of poor public perception. Currently, the Kansas City School District remains under Provisional accreditation while the St. Louis School District is working to regain its district accreditation (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h). No other district in Missouri has operated under this same level of scrutiny, nor has any district spent as much money or effort trying to correct these deficiencies. During the peak of the magnet school reform of the late eighties and early nineties, 44% of the Missouri state budget was appropriated to these two districts even though, at that time, they educated only 9% of the state's student population (Hurst, 2000).

Early urban education and desegregation in Missouri. When Missouri entered the Union as the 24th state, it did so under dubious circumstances. It was omitted as a slave state as part of the Missouri Compromise, but by comparison to states in the Deep South, played only a minor role in the slavery movement. Missouri never seceded from the Union during the Civil War, and by the end of the war had amended its constitution to outlaw the practice of owning slaves (Dunn, 2008). Before the war, slaves only constituted 10% of the state population and were owned by less than 2% of the White residents (Dunn 2008). Immediately after the Civil War ended, laws were passed giving communities the option of educating Black students in separate schools. In essence, the

law did not make it illegal to educate Black students, but it did not require communities to educate them either (Dunn, 2008).

Blacks in Missouri were not afforded equal educational opportunities until 1945, when Missouri's constitution was revised requiring school districts to provide funding for separate but equal education (Dunn, 2008). Though Missouri remained heavily segregated, Moran (2008) noted, it was "…somewhat of a leader among states requiring segregated schools in providing African American students with equal educational opportunities. Whereas state funding for separate schools was grossly unequal in many states of the Deep South…" (p. 177).

It is unknown whether every segregated school in Missouri received equal funding and treatment, but in the urban cores of St. Louis and Kansas City, where over 70% of the Black population lived, segregated schools where given the same textbooks and curriculum as White students (Moran, 2008). Dunn (2008) noted the state threatened to remove funding from any district caught not spending its budget equally between White and Black schools. According to Dunn (2008), both the Kansas City and St. Louis districts provided education to Black students at a single school, while White students could attend one of several city schools. The way each district dealt with minority students promptly changed in 1954 with the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education.* Russo (2006) called the decision "… arguably the Supreme Court's most important case involving K-12 education, if not of all time" (p. 1039).

In the decades following *Brown,* both districts worked to end legal segregation. St. Louis, in particular, was considered a model district for implementation of desegregation procedures and was showcased in a 1962 report to the U.S. Commission on

Civil Right (Wolters, 2008). According to the St. Louis Post Dispatch, the St. Louis School District considered itself colorblind and went so far as to keep no formal records on the race of their students (as cited in Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). During that same period of time, the Deep South had made very little progress towards desegregating their schools, and "by 1964 barely one percent of the African American students in eleven southern states were attending public schools with Whites" (Wolters, 2008, p. 86). Despite Missouri's compliance with the *Brown* decision to end *de jure*, or legal, segregation, most students in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts remained heavily segregated due to factors mostly beyond the control of the school districts.

Although great legal progress was made towards providing more equitable and fair treatment towards minority students, economic and demographic trends conspired to cause both districts to remain segregated in the decades to follow. The Black student population in the Kansas City School District increased dramatically from less than 20% prior to *Brown* to over 70% by the 1980s (Wolters, 2008). Similarly, in the St. Louis School District, Black percentages increased from 30% to over 70% by 1977 (Wolters, 2008). Despite the increases in minority rates, total student enrollments decreased in both districts as more affluent White parents began to steadily move their children out of the city districts and into nearby suburbs in what became known as White Flight (Ciotti, 1998; Wolters, 2008).

Efforts to integrate Missouri's two largest districts. Spurred by judicial decisions in the decades following *Brown*, Missouri's largest districts began to search for remedies to integrate what had largely remained segregated schools. Despite the best

intentions of those involved, educational historians including Ravitch (2000), Moran (2008), and Dunn (2008) viewed the actions that occurred in Kansas City and St. Louis during the 1970s and 1980s as misguided. Many of the actions focused on equity with little regard for academic performance at a terrible cost to taxpayers and students.

Although most historians focus on the desegregation fiasco that unfolded in Kansas City, many of the actions by Federal Judge Russell Clark, who oversaw the desegregation of the Kansas City School District, were determined by outcomes of integration strategies in St. Louis (Monti, 1985). The first significant formal charges of illegal segregation practices occurred in St. Louis in 1972 when a group of Black parents filed suit against the St. Louis Board of Education (Monti, 1985). The suit alleged the school district had not done enough to desegregate the district after *Brown*, and that the resulting racial isolationism was not by accident, but rather from actions of the district (Monti, 1985). These actions included unfairly drawing school boundaries to intentionally segregate students and a highly segregated teaching staff (Monti, 1985).

Before the lawsuit could be decided by the courts, both parties agreed to a consent decree in 1975. The remedies imposed by the consent decree included a more integrated faculty, a realigning of the feeder schools into the high schools to create more integrated high schools, and the construction of magnet schools (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). According to Monti (1985), the consent decree garnered national attention as an alternative means for other districts to solve their integration problems, even inspiring law firms to offer their services to fashion similar consent decrees for other districts, but the success would be short-lived.

In 1977, the St. Louis branch of the NAACP filed a lawsuit claiming the district's actions to enforce the consent decree had been insufficient and discriminative busing and school boundary lines still existed (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). Federal District Court Judge James H. Meredith sided with the district finding no violations; however, the Missouri Court of Appeals reversed the decision and remanded the case back to Judge Meredith (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). Judge Meredith, in turn, required the district to submit a plan to remedy the situation and created a 20 person panel consisting of 10 Whites and 10 Blacks to review and help draft the final plan for remedy (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981).

The final plan was approved in May of 1980 and went into effect that fall for the 1980-1981 school year. The NAACP initially had hoped to include surrounding metropolitan districts in a busing remedy; however, based on the outcome of an earlier case, *Milliken v. Bradley,* in Detroit, Michigan, the NAACP would be denied this option. The Michigan Federal Court found neighboring districts were not responsible for the *de facto* segregation that existed in Detroit, and therefore could not be included in any desegregation remedy (Russo, 2006). Judge Meredith, likewise, disallowed suburban schools from the case ending the possibility of a metropolitan-wide busing remedy (Monti, 1985).

The final draft of the desegregation remedy was much the same as the consent decree; however, it also included the construction of six new magnet schools in addition to those that already existed, busing between schools to achieve integration, and a monitoring system to ensure the remedy was implemented properly (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). Part of the monitoring was to ensure that certain quotas within the

schools were met so there were not a disproportionate amount of Black students at any one school. Judge Meredith also ordered the state to pay for half the cost of the remedy, not to exceed $11,076,206 (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). Across the state, in Kansas City, a similar desegregation lawsuit was occurring with nearly identical results.

The Kansas City School District's formal desegregation charges began in 1975 after the Office for Civil Rights, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) conducted a year-long study in which they discovered what they believed to be intentional discriminative practices (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). The main argument by the HEW and the Office for Civil Rights was although the school district was legally desegregated, it had intentionally built and drawn new school boundaries that effectively continued to segregate the district (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981). After rejecting two desegregation remedies offered by the Kansas City School District, HEW and the Office for Civil Rights filed suit in 1975. The case was decided by Administrative Law Judge Rollie D. Thedford who ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and ordered a district-wide remedy. The district had hoped for a metropolitan remedy that would include surrounding schools (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981).

The school district followed the order by initiating a district-wide desegregation plan, but based on a recommendation contained in a report written by the Missouri Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, filed their own lawsuit. The suit named several defendants including Missouri, the state of Kansas, HEW, Housing and Urban Development, several neighboring districts, and other government agencies, claiming these entities and their practices created the segregation that existed

within the school district (Dunn, 2008). The results of this action would eventually crescendo into one of the nation's costliest desegregation rulings of all time.

The lawsuit, *Missouri v. Jenkins*, eventually landed in federal court under the disposition of Judge Russell Clark who had recently been appointed by Jimmy Carter. In 1978, Judge Clark reorganized the lawsuit in an unprecedented move by dropping the Kansas defendants from the lawsuit and naming the school district as the defendant (Moran, 2008). After years of investigation, preparation, and attempts to dismiss the lawsuit, it finally went to trial in 1983. By that time, the district had not passed a tax levy in decades which resulted in out-of-date textbooks, crumbling infrastructure, and low academic performance (Ciotti, 1998). Judge Clark, upon touring the facilities, commented that he had not seen a prison in such disrepair (Ciotti, 1998).

The district, still hoping for a metropolitan-wide desegregation remedy, which would include the surrounding suburban school districts, suffered a major setback in 1984, when Judge Clark, basing his decision on the *Milliken* precedent, released surrounding districts from the lawsuit. As a result, any remedy that would be imposed would have to come from within the district. According to Dunn (2008), this was a setback for both the district and the plaintiff who had worked together to create a metropolitan desegregation remedy that would have included 11 other school districts and involve over 100,000 students.

When Judge Clark finally ruled on the case in 1984, he found the district had been operating an unlawful, segregated school district. The remedy to correct the segregation would include unprecedented spending to either construct or renovate almost 70 schools and equip them with the latest technology, desks, and other amenities unsurpassed in any

other district throughout the state. (Ciotti, 1998; Dunn, 2008). The funding to pay for the remedy would come from the state and the local residents who saw their property taxes forcibly doubled over the next five years to build, equip, and staff several new magnet schools (Ciotti, 1998). The magnet school remedies in these two districts would become some of the most costly desegregation experiments ever attempted in public education with absolutely appalling and disastrous results (Ciotti, 1998).

Educational Movements: Charter School Creation

According to Hassel (1998), the charter school movement was born from five earlier reform movements. These movements were choice, competition, school based management, deregulation, and accountability for results. Each of these movements are interconnected and yet separate movements which eventually coalesced to form the charter school movement. The role each of these movements played in the creation of charter schools, nationally, and more specifically in Missouri, is explored in the subsequent pages.

To an extent, every school in the nation provides some degree of choice and competition between and among neighboring schools. Shifting population demographics over the past 100 years make school choice issues even more relevant to today's metropolitan populace. In the 1900s, over three-fourths of the population lived in rural America, but 100 years later, over 80% were located in metropolitan areas including suburbs (Diamond, 2005). The shift in population centers coincided with the efforts to desegregate inner-city schools and the creation of suburbs. More affluent residents made a conscious decision to move their children, and consequently, a large part of the school tax base, to the suburban school districts (Dunn, 2008).

At the same time, district budgets were gradually displaced with larger state and federal infusions of money in an effort to provide financial equality among districts; however, the money cost districts the ability to make local decisions (Hassel, 1999). According to Diamond (2005), by the year 2000, nationally, local district levies accounted for less than 50% of most schools' budgets. The loss of local school autonomy was likely unintentional and was a byproduct of the accountability movement which accompanied the increased funding from both state and federal governments wanting to see results for the dollars they were providing districts (Ravitch, 2000). This left districts with very little local control conceding many decisions to state and federal educational authorities.

In Missouri's two largest districts, this loss of school autonomy was compounded by an enormous infusion of court-awarded desegregation money and the strings that were attached to it to fund the proposed magnet school remedies. From the 1970s through the 1990s, the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts' populations decreased in terms of total student population and yet exploded in terms of per pupil expenditures which fueled the expansion of infrastructure and salaries (Ciotti, 1998). Administrators at both districts rapidly lost site of what was occurring within the schools they managed. Ciotti (1998) reported that in the Kansas City School District, "Warehouses filled up with equipment schools had ordered but later decided they didn't want…. Principals of some schools ordered replacements for desks and light fixtures that were in perfectly good condition" (p. 6). There is no question these districts represent extreme examples of the disconnect that often exists between district managers and the academic side in many schools, but this type of behavior is what created the push to return schools to their academic roots.

Choice. Part of the popularity among ardent charter school supporters, and those who merely tolerate the concept of charter schools, lies in the notion of school choice. In 2002, a *Phi Delta Kappan* poll showed almost 70% of parents with school age children favored some form of state legislation that would allow them to send their children to any public or private school (Diamond, 2005). The results of this poll marked the first time in the history of American education the magnitude of favor towards school choice. Diamond (2005) also pointed out by 1999, over 25% of all students were attending a school they chose "based on factors other than residence" (p. 341).

Charter schools are in many ways a compromise for those who support vouchers and privatization of education and those who want free, universal public education but support the notion of competition, created by school choice, if it improves the system as a whole. According to Weil (2000), the modern idea of public school choice is credited to economist Friedman, who, in the 1950s, proposed that every family be given a federal voucher which could then be used at any public or private school the parents chose. Friedman also questioned whether the government should be the direct provider of education. Friedman did not propose the government be entirely removed from the system, it would still collect tax levies, but would use the money collected to pay privately managed schools to educate the children (Saltman, 2000). The premise was that the opportunity to choose among many quasi-private schools would increase quality through competition (Saltman, 2000). According to Saltman (2000):

> Parents would shop for schools much the way they shop for bread or toilet paper, comparing price against quality. Friedman's market-based proposal,

> microeconomic language, and call for vouchers have formed the basis for the school choice movement. (p. xxii)

Friedman's idea was revisited in 1971, by Illich, in his book, *Deschooling Society,* where Illich blasted public education as a "…scam that protected the jobs of bureaucrats and teachers" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 398). Illich saw vouchers as both quality control between schools and a means of price control (Ravitch, 2000). He argued the more the government spent on schools the more destructive to the student and the economy schools became (Ravitch, 2000). During the 1980s, President Reagan's administration made three efforts to submit voucher proposals to Congress, but each effort came up short (Viteritti, as cited in Henig, 2008). Friedman and Illich's ideas to privatize education never achieved the political popularity necessary to experiment with vouchers, but during the 1990s, charter schools would emerge as a less controversial surrogate to vouchers in the school choice movement (Henig, 2008).

During the next several decades, following the ideas posed by Friedman and Illich, the notions of school choice and vouchers were eclipsed by larger more pressing educational dilemmas, including school segregation, school accountability, and a move to return school back to the basics (Ravitch, 2000). The 1960s through the 1980s were tumultuous times for education, but not in the sense of academics. Wells (2002) believed most of the energy toward education was spent trying to decide how to make education equitable for all students rather than how to make it meaningful. Wells (2002) was referring to the magnet schools which, historically, were more about providing an equitable education rather than an academic one. Despite the shortcomings of the magnet

school efforts, Henig (2008) called the magnet schools of the 1970s and 1980s "the first real explosion of school choice…" (p. 35).

Missouri magnet school choice versus charter school choice. One of the more peculiar components of the magnet school movement dealt with a quota system. Under Judge Clark's plan, each Kansas City magnet school was required to have four White students for every six Black students enrolled (Dunn, 2008). The idea of utilizing a quota to ensure the proper mix of diversity made sense within the realm of school integration, but in practice it often meant keeping Black students out of a successful magnet school unless enough White students enrolled. Unfortunately, the White students never returned to the district in any meaningful numbers and the quota system had a reverse discrimination effect on Black students. According to Dunn (2008), "Because the district could not come close to filling all of the 'White' seats in the magnet schools, many Black children could not attend the magnet school of their choice, even though space was available in the school" (p. 148). According to Dunn (2008), there were over 7000 Black students on waiting lists despite thousands of available seats.

The quota system offered further proof to parents that magnet schools were less about improving their child's academic success and only about equity. Missouri's charter schools have no such quota system in terms of ensuring a proper ethnic mix; however, charter school sponsors with three or more charter schools must ensure that one-third of the schools they sponsor recruit high-risk students (Senate Bill 781, 1998). Missouri law defines a high-risk student as any student who meets one of the following criteria: one grade level behind their peers, pregnant, a parent, homeless, or limited English proficient (see Appendix A).

Competition. Hassel (1998) listed competition among the five movements that influenced the creation of charter schools. Even before the advent of charter schools, competition was a reality among large metropolitan schools throughout the country. Neighboring suburban districts likely never overtly sought to draw students from other districts, but through municipal spending and planning they attracted families from the inner-city schools to newer facilities supported by upper and middle class incomes which supplied a strong tax base to support the schools (Dunn, 2008) On the other hand, the inner-city schools unabashedly sought to pull suburban students back into their districts utilizing magnet schools and an aggressive ad campaign (Dunn, 2008).

Missouri's desegregation lawsuits slowly evolved into magnet school reform; a remedy to create a competitive atmosphere in which families would voluntarily re-integrate the inner-city schools. The lure, or magnet, that would induce this voluntary integration would be a school so magnanimous that White students would return from the suburbs to attend, thus reversing decades of legal segregation in the inner-city schools. Despite the perceived success of the court decisions, Dunn (2008) and Monti (1985) suggested most parents in these cities were less concerned with integration and were more frustrated by the quality of the education their children were receiving. Unfortunately their voices were eclipsed by the court's needs to correct the injustice of segregation with little regard to quality (Ciotti, 1998; Monti, 1985). The U.S. Department of Education (2008) plainly stated the purpose of magnet schools is to "…achieve racial integration and resolve educational inequities" as its primary goal (p. 5). Both the Kansas City and St. Louis districts spent millions of dollars on facilities and advertisements in an attempt to entice students back across district lines marketing a first rate education and

incentives, which included free child care, as reasons to return (Dunn, 2008). Had Missouri's magnet schools succeeded in their stated intentions there would likely have been no need to open charter schools.

The magnet schools utilized a top-down approach attempting to pull higher-scoring students into what was an under-performing district. The idea was to decrease the percentage of low test scores; thereby, making the Kansas City School District appear to be improving (Hurst, 2000). Competing with well-funded nearby suburban districts was no easy task. Both districts required a serious infusion of money simply to restore the deteriorating infrastructure. Once Judge Clark found the district and the state liable for the existing segregation in Kansas City:

> …he invited district educators literally to 'dream' – forget about cost, let their imaginations soar, put together a list of everything they might possibly need to increase the achievement of inner city Blacks – and he, using the extraordinarily broad powers granted judges in school desegregation cases, would find a way to pay for it. (Ciotti, 1998, p. 2)

The teachers and administrators did indeed dream; desegregation costs approached $2 billion in the Kansas City School District alone between 1985 and 1997, when Judge Clark finally recused himself from the case (Dunn, 2008).

Despite the great expense and elaborate infrastructure, there did not seem to be any real push to improve instruction (Ciotti, 1998). The motivations of the magnet school movement were perhaps the exact opposite of the charter school movement that followed. The basic competitive premise of the magnet schools was to build the most luxurious

educational and athletic infrastructure in the United States with little regard to the actual academic education provided (Hurst, 2000).

Most of the competition Missouri charter schools offer bears little resemblance to the lavish magnet schools. Many of Missouri's early charter schools were started in the basements of churches, or other community buildings, with little regard for aesthetics or extracurricular activities; these schools focused on student achievement and life skills (Sluder et al., 2001). In contrast to magnets schools, the competitive nature of charter school is less overt and lies solely in the promise to provide a meaningful education regardless of the circumstance of the student. The charter document demands that the school, and therefore the students, be successful or the charter will be revoked and the school closed.

The purpose of this research is not to debate the effectiveness of the magnet school movement outside the state of Missouri. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2008), there are more magnet schools open today than ever before, and many magnet schools operate effectively providing a quality education to a diverse population; their stated goal. However, there is little debate among historians and educational researchers that neither the Kansas City nor St. Louis school districts succeeded in achieving this goal in their districts (Buchanan & Waddle, 2005). Moran (2008) concluded, "For thousands of students in St. Louis and Kansas City, the decades of judicial oversight and the implementation of ambitious desegregation plans brought little change to their daily circumstances" (p. 197).

School based management. One of the overarching principles that lies within the very nature of the charter school movement is the idea that each charter school will be

autonomous; free of most, if not all, state and district regulations. Budde's (1988) charter school was independent of district regulations and was free to use any means to educate its students provided the methods did not violate the charter. This autonomy cannot violate federal or state laws and is more about each school deciding what is taught, how it is taught, who is involved in the process, and whether the charter school has any curricular specialty. Generally these areas are addressed in the charter school's mission statement.

When Budde (1988) initially proposed the idea of charter schools, he envisioned a local school in which principals would be lead teachers, and the teachers would function as autonomous cohorts free to develop and implement curriculum as they saw fit. Budde (1988) also believed teachers should be full time, twelve-month, employees, and students would attend school at least eleven months out of the year. All stakeholders including parents, teachers, students, and community members were an important part of the educational process, each held accountable for their actions and decisions. However, when states began to pass charter school legislation, the resulting schools that opened bore little resemblance to Budde's vision. While Budde (1996) initially expressed disappointment in the charter reform most states were enacting, he later conceded that some reform was better than none. Hassel (1999) agreed with Budde that many states did not provide the necessary autonomy in their charter legislation, which Hassel believed would ultimately constrain charter schools from creating the system-wide school reform for which they were intended. Whether Hassel was correct or not remains to be seen.

According to Henig (2008), charter schools grew out of two movements; the first was the move towards privatization, but the second movement was less obvious and was

about making schools more user-friendly and local. Henig (2008) believed "…[charter school] roots lay in pragmatic notions about how public school systems might be incrementally reformed to make them less uniform and rigid" (p. 35). Henig (2008) explained that over the course of the past several decades factors including school consolidations, population increases, and organizational changes all combined to create "…hierarchical and insular democracies" (p. 36).

Missouri was one of the last states to enact charter school legislation, becoming the 37th state of 40 to do so by 1998. In just one year, the Kansas City School District was approved to open 16 charter schools representing the largest number of charter school approvals in the nation in such a short time (Stancel, 2001). The features which make Missouri's charter school legislation unique include the entities that are eligible to be a charter school sponsor and the admission process. Besides limiting charter schools to the two largest school districts in the state, Missouri lawmakers also restricted authorizing entities which include institutions of higher education with accredited teacher education programs, the primary sponsors. Hassel (1999) would have preferred to see anyone who wants to open a charter school have the ability to do so, though current research supports the limitations Missouri placed on sponsors (CREDO, 2009).

Missouri law also requires sponsors to give enrollment preference to high-risk students. If a sponsor grants three or more charters, at least one-third of the charters must be to schools that recruit high-risk students. A high-risk student is generally defined as a student who is one grade level behind his or her peers; however, there are other circumstances, including homelessness, which also qualifies a student as high-risk (Thomas & Machell, 2001). Finding eligible students in either the Kansas City or St.

Louis districts is no difficult task when one considers the sobering statistics. In 2009, less than two-thirds of the students in the Kansas City School District graduated, and less than half the seniors in the St. Louis School District graduated (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h). Over two-thirds of the students in each district are minorities and potentially eligible for the free and reduced price meal program; both indicators for high-risk students (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h). Besides these modest limitations, Missouri's charter schools are given a large degree of freedom to develop their curriculums and educational methods. They are not, however, exempt from state standardized testing, and are, therefore, subjected to at least a modicum of state scrutiny. This testing requirement is mostly for the sponsors since Missouri's charter schools do not receive any sort of accreditation from the state department of education, rather all sanctioning is provided by the sponsor (see Appendix A). The state cannot close, or place on probation, Missouri's charter schools; only the sponsor can.

Hassel (1999) would likely consider the legal constraints Missouri adopted for its charter schools to be somewhat stifling to explore and initiate the reform for which they were created, though other educational experts, including Palmer (2006), believed these constraints created highly accountable charter schools. Hassel (1999) contended strong state legislation weakens the ability of charter schools to operate as an effective means of educational reform. He concluded, "As they are now constituted, many state's charter school programs will have difficulty achieving the system-changing impact their proponents envision" (Hassel, 1999, p. 142). Hassel (1999) believed the more restrictive a state's charter laws are, the less effective the charter schools become, since not all educational reform ideas will be explored. Hassel would likely be greatly concerned by a

recent study by CREDO (2009) which called for nationwide standards to help establish the criteria for closures of charter schools that fail to meet the expectations set by the sponsor.

Despite Hassel's concerns regarding charter regulations, state laws may play less of a role in the success or demise of the movement than the entities whose job it is to oversee the operations of each school; the sponsors. Recent studies have suggested that charter schools in states with more stringent guidelines on charter school sponsorship are, on the whole, more successful (CREDO, 2009). The National Charter School Research project noted, "In the end, if the charter school movement fails to prove itself as a viable source of higher quality public schools, bad authorizing and oversight will probably be a major reason" (Lake, 2006, p.1). The CREDO (2009) echoed this sentiment stating "… the apparent reluctance of sponsors to close underperforming charters ultimately reflects poorly on charter schools as a whole. More importantly, it hurts students" (p. 8). It was likely this concern that led Missouri lawmakers to limit charter school sponsorship. States with similar charter laws have begun to show academic progress over states with less restrictive laws regarding who can be a charter school sponsor (Palmer, 2006). For this reason, Missouri is generally considered to have strong charter school sponsor legislation.

Deregulation. The idea of deregulating public schools, or the removal of rules and unnecessary bureaucracy which stifle educational innovation, goes hand-in-hand with the push for charter school autonomy. Although Hassel (1999) listed deregulation among the movements which led to the creation of charter schools, there exists no one specific movement in which to deregulate public schools; rather there exist many educational reform movements each with varying degrees of deregulation. Between 1950 and 1999

the nation's school districts gradually shrunk from over 80,000 districts to approximately 15,000 while overall student population increased dramatically (Corcoran & Goertz, 2005). According to Corcoran and Goertz (2005), the result of these shifting demographics created "…larger and more bureaucratic entities with weaker connections to the local populace" (pp. 31-32).

Educational reformers with wide-ranging ideologies have presented diametrically opposing viewpoints to improve the perceived lack of educational efficiency through either greater governmental control or little at all. The most extreme alternative would expand private education providers through the use of school vouchers (Henig, 2008) Proponents of these bold privatization measures include the aforementioned Friedman and Illich. Freidman and Illich suggested the government, in general, is inefficient in all things it does and particularly slow to adapt to industry changes, and therefore, unsuccessful at knowing what is in the best interest of tomorrow's private sector workforce (Ravitch, 2000). On the other hand, Fusarelli and Johnson (2004) proposed education cannot be subjected to standard market-based practices and that the poor would be at a huge disadvantage if education were privatized.

Full scale implementation of a voucher program envisioned by Freidman has yet to occur, but less controversial alternatives to his ideas have included scaled down voucher programs and charter schools. Voucher programs vary between states, but in general allow parents to enroll their child in any public or private school of their choice assuming the voucher would cover tuition and there is room available (Henig, 2008). Supporters of vouchers claim private and public schools would be forced to educate students better and for less money as standard economic principles based on competition,

price, and supply and demand would dictate (Weil, 2000). However, according to Fuarelli and Johnson (2004), a growing body of evidence suggested vouchers, being utilized in a handful of states, "do not necessarily promote efficiency and tend to increase racial and social segregation in education" (p. 123). According to Hochschild and Scovronick (2005), public support for vouchers has been weak at best; less than 2% of those surveyed in a 1999 poll supported the idea of using vouchers to improve public education. Vouchers have historically been overwhelmingly defeated when placed on state ballots, and of the few states that have passed voucher legislation have been burdened by legal controversy (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2005).

There are two primary concerns that exist among opponents of vouchers. The first concern involves the belief that vouchers would eventually lead to "an elitist and hierarchical educational system in which middle and upper-income White children attended one set of schools and poor and minority children another" (Henig, 2008, p. 41). The second concern among opponents of school vouchers is the constitutionality of allowing a student to attend a private school with public dollars, particularly private schools that promote sectarian beliefs. Despite these concerns, voucher supporters have managed to experiment in isolated locales across the country with mixed results.

In 1990, Wisconsin designed a voucher program designed to guard against discrimination toward poor and minority populations. The program established a limited number of school vouchers which could only be used in the Milwaukee area by low-income families (Henig, 2008). Nationally, vouchers have been slow to arrive and have been tried in just a handful of states including Ohio and Florida. The U.S. Supreme Court found vouchers allowing students to attend religious schools to be constitutional provided

the voucher program remained neutral towards both public and private schools ("Let's Not Play Favorites," 2003). However, these same voucher programs have been found to violate state constitutions, as was the case in Florida, when the state supreme court found the program to be unconstitutional (Henig, 2008). While vouchers have garnered little support outside the most ardent school choice and deregulation camps, support for charter schools has been widespread and across many groups with diverse interests (Henig, 2008).

Supporters of charter schools are quick to point out that charter schools offer choice, competition, specialization, and less bureaucracy without moving education towards privatization (Hassel, 1999; Henig, 2008). However, Hassel (1999) noted the degree of charter school autonomy varied widely between states depending on their charter school legislation. When Missouri charter school legislation was passed, Stancel (2001) considered it one of the strongest pieces of charter school legislation in the nation at that time. The strength was measured in terms of granting autonomy to the schools while preserving the necessary protocols to ensure the quality of the schools that would be opened.

Accountability. The school choice and competition movements could not gain solid ground until parents knew their child's school was less successful, academically, than another. Therefore, before there was a push for choice and competition, there was a push for standards-based education which, in turn, revealed the true extent of the decline of American public education. Ravitch (2000) described the poor state of the schools by emphasizing, during the 1980s, the average student was exposed to less than three hours per day of instructional time and received credit for many non-academic courses

including cheerleading, student government, and mass media. According to Ravitch (2000), "By the late 1980s there was a growing concern about the quality of the nation's public schools. The sustained assault on the academic curriculum in the late 1960s and early 1970s had taken its toll" (p. 408).

Between 1963 and 1980, student SAT scores fell to an all time low, but the true watermark of American public education occurred in 1983 with the publication, *A Nation at Risk* (Ravitch, 2000). The report, produced by the Department of Education under the Reagan administration, warned the United States had lost its competitive edge among the industrialized nations and ranked among the lowest particularly in math and science (Hanushek et al., 2008). The validity of the claims in the report remains, to this day, extremely controversial although it was not the first, or only report, to make such claims (Ravitch, 2000). Regardless of the legitimacy of the report, it was a shock to the American psyche. Bracey (2003) referred to the report as, *The Paper Sputnik*, an event that spurred lawmakers, educators, and others, including Albert Shanker into the proactive standards-based educational era that continues to this day.

The report launched what Wells (2002) labeled as "systemic reform" based largely on standards and assessments created during the 1989 National Governor's Association, headed by Bill Clinton. Wells (2002) stated, "That summit helped to launch what is now a massive movement in public education to create more standards and assessments and to hold schools and students more accountable…" (p. 4). While politicians debated the best means to improve school accountability and academic reform, the outspoken leader of the AFT, Shanker, advocated tirelessly for higher standards in American schools (Ravitch, 2000). Ravitch (2000) described Shanker as "the person who

influenced the nation's discussion of school quality more than anyone else" (p. 430). Shanker was present at the Governor's convention in 1989, where he pleaded for strong assessment tools beyond simple multiple choice questions (Ravitch, 2000). Shanker had already addressed the Minneapolis conference on improving public schools, embracing the previously unknown Budde and his charter school concept, and propelling it from mere theory into practice just two years later (Weil, 2000).

During the 1990s, particularly during the Clinton era, there was a distinctive shift in the way government viewed public education (Bracey, 2003). Governments, both state and federal, began to abandon desegregation programs and emphasis was shifted from mere resource redistribution to hard examination of the educational needs of the disadvantaged students. Wells (2002) explained this shift:

> … rather than focus directly on the needs of students who were most disadvantaged in the educational system, policy makers would try to improve the quality of the overall educational standards – that is 'excellence' – as well as an infusion of choice and competition. (p. 4)

The standards-based movement was predicated on the notion that standards-based accountability combined with choice would create a competitive atmosphere in which all schools would need to improve for continued survival (Wells, 2002). Right or wrong, educational theorists had convinced legislators and other stakeholders that failing districts had nothing to lose by trying the charter school experiment.

Student Demographics

Demographics vary widely between both traditional public schools and Missouri charter schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts; however, charter schools

have, in many ways, become magnet schools for the financially disadvantaged and highest at-risk demographics. Ironically, the original magnet schools built in Kansas City and St. Louis sought to attract the exact opposite demographic (Savoye, 2000). According to the district profiles, Kansas City and St. Louis school districts are predominately comprised of minority students (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h). During the past five years, approximately 80% of each district's students have been eligible for the free and reduced price meal program, placing both in the high poverty category established by the federal government's Title 1 program (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Ethnicity. Over 80% of all students in the St. Louis School District are Black (MODESE, 2009b), and Kansas City holds similar student demographics; however, a large influx of Hispanic students has been steadily displacing the Black population (MODESE, 2009h). In spite of this influx, over 60% of the students in the Kansas City district are Black and 20% are Hispanic (MODESE, 2009h). Poverty, as measured by free and reduced price meal counts, and minorities are typically lead indicators for high-risk students. These demographics, combined with some of the highest dropout rates in the state, suggest the majority of students attending the Kansas City and St. Louis districts are at-risk and therefore eligible to attend a charter school under the one-third provision.

Charter School Current Political Status

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law one of the most sweeping federal educational reforms in the history of this country. Shortly after signing the bill, appropriately called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), President Bush was quoted, "…every child, not just a few children, every single child regardless of where they live,

how they're raised, the income level of their family, every child will receive a first class education in America" (White House Press Release, 2002, para. 3). All public schools that receive federal funding must abide by the laws established by NCLB or expect to lose federal dollars. Most public schools receive about 7% of their funding from the federal government, which is spent on free and reduced price meal programs and special education (Baker, 1999). The cost of not complying with NCLB legislation is too large for most schools to ignore. Schools with exceptionally high numbers of students enrolled in the free and reduced price meal program, such as Kansas City and St. Louis, are particularly susceptible to the legislation's requirements.

The NCLB mandate was established on four pillars with the primary purpose of making education in America more equitable for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004a), the pillars are: "stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven educational methods, and more choices for parents" (para. 4). In general terms, the four pillars of NCLB seek to make schools and teachers more accountable for the results on state standardized tests. Money is both the motivator for successful schools and the hammer for schools that under-perform. The NCLB legislation could potentially lead to explosive growth of charter schools and voucher systems as public schools struggle to meet the requirements of this legislation.

According to NCLB, if a particular school continues to fail academically, parents will have choices about where their child attends school. Schools that do not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) for five consecutive years will be closed and reorganized, possibly as a charter school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). One

must assume a charter school meets the criterion of a scientifically proven method of instruction, a requirement of NCLB (Department of Education 2004a). This research hopes to add clarity to this area of concern.

Parents send their sons and daughters to charter schools for many reasons, but all are expecting a higher level of academic performance than what the Kansas City or St. Louis school district has provided. The charter school is a competitive alternative to the traditional public school and offers parents, students, and teachers a more democratic, autonomous option based on the understanding that the school's survival is dependent on success (Stancel, 2001). This is contrary to what has become a very structured and regimented educational system; slow to change, and generally not willing to partner with parental or community stakeholders (Stancel, 2001). In exchange for this autonomy, charter schools hold themselves to a higher degree of accountability and operate on a different set of principles with regard to accountability.

While traditional public schools have been held to increasingly higher standards of assessment via the NCLB legislation, there has been no real public alternative, or competition, for these schools. Little to no additional public choice has been available for parents or their children should their local public school fail to meet the demands of NCLB. Charter schools, however, have made a pact with a sponsor, students, and parents to provide an improved public education and, of course, parents have an alternative if they do not like the services. Additionally, a charter school operates under the threat of closure if the sponsoring entity's expectations are not met.

The future of NCLB and its role with charter schools remains uncertain. Prior to the election, President Obama suggested he would expand the federal role in education by

improving the assessments schools use to measure readiness for college and the workforce and decrease the odds of states watering down curriculum and assessment tools (Quaid, 2009). President Obama publicly stated his support for expanding charter schools in a speech to the Council of Chief State School officers (Quaid, 2009). Ironically, in that same speech, President Obama also suggested a longer school day and year (Quaid, 2009), of which Budde (1988) would have strongly agreed. The Obama administration has offered few specifics on how this would be accomplished, and the majority of the stimulus money earmarked for public education has instead been used to fill financial shortfalls due to a sharp decrease in local tax revenue (Quaid, 2009).

Summary

The history of the charter school movement, nationally, and in Missouri, is pertinent to understanding the current educational climate in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts. Missouri magnet schools, largely a by-product of the state desegregation efforts, failed to materialize the way the educational theorists and courts envisioned; thereby, leaving a large population of disadvantaged students in both Kansas City and St. Louis with few educational alternatives. Although the literature addresses historical and speculative information surrounding the charter school movement, there is much to be desired in the form of quantifiable data on the subject of charter school performance. A limited amount of research exists in terms of grounded, measurable data comparing the academic differences of students in charter schools and students enrolled in traditional public schools, none of which is specific to Missouri charter school performance. As supporters and opponents of the charter school movement seek to

further or undermine the charter school movement, it is clear that additional research is needed in regard to the academic performance of students in Missouri charter schools.

In Chapter Three, the methodology used for this study was explained. An analysis of the data was included in Chapter Four. A summary of findings, implications for practice, and recommendations were detailed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Missouri charter schools have been operating since 1999, yet the state did not collect individual charter school data separate from district data until 2008. Not surprisingly, little research, if any, exists measuring whether Missouri charter schools are succeeding in reforming public education and improving student performance. This study examined whether the charter schools in Kansas City and St. Louis have achieved significant, measurable, progress towards improving academic achievement. A mixed study design was determined to be the most effective method to analyze the Missouri charter school movement. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to establish and assess the qualitative aspects inherent in Missouri charter schools. Data from the MODESE were collected and analyzed to establish the quantitative component of the study. The study was approved by the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board and data collection began shortly thereafter (see Appendix B).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences that exist between the academic performances of students who attend charter schools in Missouri and students who attend a traditional, non-charter public school. The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent are Missouri charter school students meeting the state academic standards measured by the MAP and EOC exams as compared to similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

2. What relationship exists between the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend Missouri charter schools and the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

3. What relationship exists between the percentage of Missouri charter school students who pursue post-secondary education and the percentage of students from a similar public school in Kansas City or St. Louis who pursue post-secondary education?

4. What are the perceptions of charter school stakeholders on the impact of charter schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis Districts?

Research Perspective

Measuring whether significant academic differences exist between students attending a Missouri charter school and those in a traditional non-charter public school was achieved through a mixed study design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Charter schools included in this study had at least two years of data and are currently still open. The exception, with regard to data, is the inclusion of the newly implemented EOC exams in the high schools for which data were only available for 2009.

The quantitative portion of the study focused on comparisons between Missouri charter schools and similar Missouri non-charter public schools within the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts. The study examined student achievement, graduation rate, dropout rate, and the desire of graduates to enroll in a post-secondary two or four-year technical school, college, or university. Specifically, these comparisons were analyzed using a two-tailed unpaired sample *t*-test. Two-tailed *t*-tests were used because a null hypothesis was not established for any of the tests; however, it was expected that there

would be a statistical difference between the means of the charter and non-charter school data (Trochim, 2006). This statistical method was appropriate to measure the degree to which any significant difference existed between Missouri charter school students and traditional school peers. This analysis allowed for the recovery of significant differences between the two groups of data that may not be obvious or apparent without the use of a statistical instrument (Runyon, Coleman, & Pittenger, 1999).

The qualitative portion of the study consisted of three interviews with major stakeholders who had a fundamental understanding of Missouri charter school law, its history, and the impact on the public schools within the St. Louis and Kansas City districts. The participants were in positions to recognize features of the charter school movement that would be difficult to measure using traditional quantitative methods. These individuals were purposely selected because their knowledge of the Missouri charter school movement could help interpret the quantitative results of this study. Participants included a former Missouri legislator who helped sponsor and pass Missouri's original charter school law, a current principal at one of Missouri's charter schools, and a professor at a Missouri university who has been involved with Missouri charter schools since the beginning. His university continues to sponsor several charter schools in the state. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) noted researchers must utilize a qualitative component in order, "to obtain a more holistic impression of teaching and learning" (p. 430). Due to the many variables implicit within charter schools, this research would be incomplete without the qualitative component.

Research Design

Quantitative design. To complete the quantitative portion of the research design, a causal comparative method was used. A causal comparative method is appropriate in "…determining the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between or among groups of individuals" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 368). The *t*-test measured the degree of statistical difference between the means (averages) of the charter school data and the non-charter school data. The data, including MAP and EOC performance index scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment rates, collected from Missouri charter schools and non-charter schools represented the dependent variable. The independent variable was the type of school the students attended; charter or non-charter, within the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts. Runyon et al. (1999) described the independent variable as that which affects the dependent variable. The assumption of all causal comparative studies is that the dependent variable is influenced by the independent variable (Patten, 2004). This study then assumes the index scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment rates, are predominantly influenced by the type of school a student attends.

Qualitative design. A semi-structured interview process was used to gather qualitative data. Open-ended questions were created for each stakeholder (see Appendix C) and follow-up questions were asked during the interview for expansion and clarity of responses. The interviews were conducted in person and audiotaped with the exception of the former Missouri legislator whose schedule did not accommodate a face-to-face interview. It was determined that since this former legislator had been involved in writing the original legislation, his insight would be valuable despite not having the opportunity

to conduct a face-to-face interview. This interview was, therefore, conducted through electronic communication. Prior to each interview, participants were given a letter of introduction and a letter of informed consent which assured confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendices D & E).

Research Setting

The research was conducted using data from charter and non-charter schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts during the academic years of 2007 through 2009. However, data were only collected from students in grade levels 3, 5, 8, and high schools that participated in the Algebra I and English II EOC exams. Due to the confusing way in which the MODESE reports school and district data, some distinction should be made between the words *school* and *district*.

When referring to the Kansas City or St. Louis school districts, this title includes all of the public schools, pre-K through 12, within the Kansas City or St. Louis districts not including the charter schools. Though several charter schools exist within these district boundaries, from a data collection standpoint, the MODESE recognizes each of these charter schools as its own district. Some charter schools are small and might only comprise an elementary school, a middle school, or just a high school. Others serve students K-12; therefore, the MODESE disaggregates this charter *district* into three schools: an elementary, middle, and high school. This is an important distinction to understand for clarity when reviewing this study; charter schools were always referred to as *schools* in this study, regardless of the size and grade levels served.

Research Population and Sample

This study compared students within the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts who participated in the MAP and EOC exams for 2008 and 2009. This time span was chosen since the MODESE did not separate individual charter school data from combined district data until 2008. Therefore, charter schools, with at least two years of data were considered in this study. Charter schools with the required two years of data but had their charter revoked, and therefore no longer open, were not included in this study.

Data sampling was accomplished by examining the student demographics of a particular charter school grade level and identifying a non-charter school in the same district with similar student demographics. Demographic data included population size of the school and grade level compared, percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price meal program, and similar ethnic student populations based on a total non-White percentage. Every effort was made to match a charter school grade level to a similar non-charter school grade level in which none of these demographic variables varied outside of the standard quartile ranges. In some cases this was not entirely possible. This process of matching charter school grades to similar non-charter school grade levels involved over 100 non-charter schools between both districts and approximately 35 elementary, middle, and high school charter schools (see Appendix F).

One facet of this study was to measure whether charter school students' academic performance differed significantly from traditional school students on the MAP and EOC exams. Academic performance was measured by comparing student performance index scores on the MAP and EOC exams for grades 3, 5, 8, and high school. In 2008, students

in third through eighth grades took the Communication Arts and the Mathematics tests. In the spring of 2009, Missouri's high school students took an EOC exam in Algebra I and English II.

Student demographics. In the Kansas City School District, 31% of the students attended one of the 18 charter schools (Missouri Charter Public School Association [MCPSA], 2009). This was an increase of 37% over the past seven years. St. Louis realized a similar increase in charter school population by enrolling 26% of the city's students in 2008, increasing a staggering 389% over the past seven years (MCPSA, 2009). The Kansas City School District is comprised of 46 elementary schools, five middle schools, and 12 high schools educating approximately 22,264 students (MODESE, 2009j). The St. Louis School District currently has 52 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, two junior high schools, and 18 high schools educating approximately 26,542 students (MODESE, 2009i). Not included in the district demographics for Kansas City or St. Louis are approximately 40 elementary, middle, and high school charter schools, 23 in the Kansas City School District and 17 in the St. Louis School District. Of the 40 charter schools, 31 have been in existence for over three years, and all have the required minimum two years of data making them eligible for this study.

Instruments

The MAP and EOC index scores from the MODESE website were collected for use as the academic instrument to determine the difference between charter and non-charter school performance. Additional factors including attendance rates, graduation rates, and post-secondary attendance rates were also collected from the MODESE website. Interview questions for the qualitative portion were created with the purpose of

ascertaining specific information from each participant. The interview questions clarified specific charter school issues relative to the quantitative data (see Appendix C). Each participant was provided a letter of introduction (see Appendix D), a letter of informed consent (see Appendix E), and an advance copy of the questions prior to the interview. Interviews were face-to-face and lasted approximately one hour with the exception of the former legislator whose interview was conducted through electronic means.

Quantitative analysis. Quantitative data were organized and entered into an Excel spreadsheet and subjected to a two-tailed *t*-test to determine whether any significant difference existed between students educated at Missouri's charter schools and those educated at non-charter public schools. Since a null hypothesis was not established for any of the variables measured by this study, a two-tailed *t*-test was used. The *t*-test measured whether the means between each variable were statistically different from one another (Trochim, 2006). The significance level was established at the .05 level. Using Microsoft Excel to compute each *t*-score and then convert that score into a probability allowed for statistical examination for each comparison. According to Trochim (2006), a *p*-value greater than .05 ($p > .05$) would indicate no statistical difference exists between the two means, whereas a *p*-value of less than .05 ($p < .05$) would indicate a statistical difference does exist between the means. Due to the size and scope of this study, it was possible to use 100% of the charter school student data in grade levels 3, 5, 8, and the data for high school students who were enrolled in Algebra I and English II beginning in the 2007-2008 school year from both of the Kansas City and St. Louis districts.

Qualitative analysis. The qualitative portion of this study consisted of three interviews. Two of the interviews were open-ended, face-to-face interviews, and one of

the interviews occurred through electronic communication due to scheduling conflicts. Participants signed an informed consent form (Appendix E) prior to each interview which explained their participation was completely voluntary and their identity would remain confidential. The face-to-face interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The researcher remained neutral during the interview process and probed with additional questions at times to gain clarity and completeness of responses. After the transcription was completed, interviews were examined for similarities with emphasis on the past, present, and future of the charter school movement in the state of Missouri. Responses were also examined for additional trends including the perceived impact charter schools have had on the districts in which they reside.

Data Collection

Data collected for the quantitative component of this study were gathered from the MODESE website. In general, most of the information is available under each district's Annual Performance Report (APR). The MODESE collects data from each district including MAP and EOC exam results, attendance, dropout rate, graduation rate, student demographics, post-secondary attendance rates, and other factors (MODESE, 2009a). These data are organized and analyzed by the MODESE which then rates and accredits districts based on a district's performance in these areas and others. This information is available from each district's APR or report card (MODESE, 2009a). Student MAP and EOC scores are the primary benchmark used by the MODESE to grant accreditation and are used to establish progress towards meeting the national guidelines imposed by NCLB. The MAP and EOC exam scores and other pertinent data for this study were available online under each school's APR.

Data Analysis

Academic performance was analyzed by using data collected through the MODESE. Each eligible charter school grade level was paired with a similar non-charter school grade level within the Kansas City or St. Louis districts. The MAP data, school report cards, and each school's APR were retrieved from the MODESE website. Academic performance was measured by comparing MAP index scores for grades 3, 5, 8, and the high school EOC exam scores from a charter school and a similar non-charter public school. These scores were analyzed for any significant differences using a two-tailed *t*-test.

Analyzing student performance between charter schools and non-charter schools proved difficult due to the nature in which MAP and EOC exam scores are reported. Students who take MAP or EOC exams are ranked in one of five categories; level not determined, below basic, basic, proficient, or advanced. The number and percentage of students at each rank in a particular grade at a particular school are then calculated and recorded on various school data sites within the MODESE web pages. Although this data provided a snapshot of student achievement for a particular school, percentages are generally not the most reliable data for use in statistical analysis due to the inherent biases within percentages (Deacon, 2010). It was decided MAP and EOC exam index scores were a more appropriate way to compare performance between students in charter schools and non-charter schools.

The MAP performance index is a combined score of all students in a particular grade level who took the MAP. The score is best described by the MODESE (2009a) publication, *Understanding Your Annual Performance Report Version 9:*

> The index approach calculates the movement of students throughout all MAP achievement levels. The index is a single composite number that represents the performance of every student in all MAP levels in a tested subject for a defined grade span. Index points are calculated by first multiplying the percent of reportable students scoring in each achievement level for each subject and grade span by the values…. Multiply percent advanced by 9, percent proficient by 8, percent basic by 7, and percent below basic by 6. These products are then summed to produce the MPI [index], which ranges from 600-900. (pp. 3-5)

The index scores for the EOC exams were calculated using the same method. These index scores were utilized to represent the total student performance for grades 3, 5, 8, and high school students for each charter and non-charter school included in this study.

Additional student data required for this study, including graduation rate, dropout rate, and post-secondary enrollment rates, were available on the APR for each charter school and non- charter school. These variables apply only to charter high schools since graduation rate, dropout rate, and post-secondary enrollment rates are specific to high school students. Each of these variables were examined and compared against a non-charter public school with a two-tailed *t*-test. In each instance, creating a valid test to measure whether any significant difference existed between students attending a charter or non-charter school became much more difficult. These data were reported and collected in terms of numbers and percentages of students for each criterion. The fact that only high schools are eligible for this part of the study reduced the population significantly. At the time of this research, only four eligible charter high schools were

open in the Kansas City area and three in the St. Louis area. Unfortunately, the St. Louis data were incomplete for 2009 due to the newness of the district's charter high schools.

Generally speaking, using percentages in statistical instruments, such as a *t*-test, is not considered the best use of statistics due to the inherent bias in percentages; however, using similar population sizes and converting the percentages into arcsine values before entering them into the *t*-test for analysis can help mitigate this bias (Deacon, 2010). When selecting high schools with similar demographic variables to compare against each charter school, care was used to match a high school with approximately the same number of overall students in the graduating class. It was hoped that by selecting schools of similar size the percentages reported for graduation rate, dropout rate, and post-secondary attendance bias was reduced. Converting percentages to arcsine values before entering them into the *t*-test is explained by Scottish researcher, Deacon (2010):

> The most important assumption is that the data are normally distributed and are free to vary widely about the mean - there are no imposed limits. Clearly this is not true of percentages, which cannot be less than 0 nor more than 100. If you have data that are close to these limits, then you need to transform the original data before you analyse them. One simple way of doing this is to convert the percentages to arcsin values and then analyse these arcsin values. The arcsin transformation moves very low or very high values towards the centre, giving them more theoretical freedom to vary. (p. 7)

The confidence level, or α-level, was established at 0.05 for the *t*-tests, and any difference between the means beyond the 0.05 level indicate a high probability there is a significant

difference (Trochim, 2006) between the charter schools and traditional non-charter public schools.

Summary

The first charter schools in Missouri opened their doors in 1999. Since that time, the state of Missouri has been collecting data on these schools. The quantitative data included academic performance, graduation rate, and student demographics in addition to other information. These data were available on the MODESE website; however, until 2008 these data were combined within the Kansas City and St. Louis district data. Data alone cannot always relate whether a particular study is measuring all facets, including attitudes and values related to a particular movement (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Data were collected, organized, and subjected to statistical instrumentation which included multiple *t*-tests to measure the charter school movement relative to the performance of non-charter public schools in the same district.

A qualitative component was necessary to ensure any intangible findings were uncovered and examined. The qualitative component consisted of three interviews with charter school stakeholders whose insight allowed the quantitative results to be placed in proper context. The interview participants provided historical and current perspectives regarding the success and shortcomings of the movement.

In Chapter Four an analysis of the data was presented. The independent variable established for this study was the type of school attended; charter or non-charter. The dependant variables were the academic performance, graduation rates, dropout rates, and post-secondary attendace rates between students attending charter schools and non-charter schools. Research questions one through three were analyzed through quantitative

means using multiple *t*-tests. Responses from the interviews were discussed and related to relevant literature and research. All findings were summarized and interpreted in Chapter Five. Additionally, implications for practice and recommendations were detailed.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Data

The purpose of this study was to examine Missouri's charter school progress in the areas of academic achievement and educational fortitude. Educational fortitude included dropout rate, graduation rate, and the percentage of students enrolling in post-secondary schools after graduation. In addition, interviews were conducted to ascertain additional information, otherwise immeasurable, existing within the charter school movement.

The MAP and EOC exam index scores were used to compare academic differences between charter and non-charter schools. Educational fortitude, which was defined for the purposes of this study as the desire of students to finish and continue their education, was examined by reviewing dropout rates, graduation rates, and the percentage of students who pursued a post-secondary education after graduating. Examining the number of charter school students who pursue a post-secondary education compared to their non-charter school peers was included in this study since many of Missouri's charter high schools have adopted the mission that graduates will continue their education after high school. In each *t*-test conducted for this study, the school attended by the students, charter or non-charter, represented the independent variable. The data from each school, including MAP and EOC scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and post-secondary attendance rates, represented the dependent variables.

All data were subjected to multiple *t*-tests in an effort to measure the progress of Missouri charter schools as an effective means of public education. These results could help parents make an informed decision, based on quantifiable data, about whether to enroll their child in a charter school. According to Hill (2006) and CREDO (2009),

quantifiable data have been severely lacking from the charter movement. Due to the nature of charter schools, it was also anticipated that additional factors not easily measured through traditional quantitative analysis could be discovered through a qualitative analysis, which included interviews of major charter school stakeholders.

Quantitative Analysis

This study was largely designed to examine the differences between the academic performance of students attending charter schools and those enrolled in a non-charter public school in either the Kansas City or St. Louis school district. The academic performance for both sets of students, charter and non-charter, were examined by comparing grade level MAP and EOC index scores between charter and non-charter schools. The MAP and EOC index scores were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and examined using a series of two-tailed *t*-tests. The statistical confidence of the study was established at the standard accepted level of significance of .05 ($\alpha = .05$) (Trochim, 2006). A probability, or *p*-value, less than .05 would indicate a measurably significant difference existed between students attending a Missouri charter school and those attending a traditional non-charter public school. The MAP and EOC index scores were calculated by the state for each school at every grade level and discipline in which the MAP and EOC exam were taken. This study examined only the Communication Arts and Math MAP test results of students in grades 3, 5, and 8, and the performance of high school students who took English II and Algebra I EOC exams.

The MAP and EOC index score is a single composite score that represents the overall student performance of a grade level population taking a MAP or EOC exam (MODESE, 2009a,). The index score allows researchers to gauge cohort improvement at

a particular school as students progress from one grade level to the next (MODESE, 2009a); therefore, the index scores are useful and appropriate for this study. Using the index score for each grade level and discipline allowed a single number to represent total student achievement for students in each charter school and non-charter school. Using the index score allowed the academic performance of large groups of students with similar demographics to be represented by a single score.

Charter and similar non-charter schools were paired based on population size, socioeconomic status, and total minority populations (see Appendix F). At times finding grade levels with a similar number of students was not possible. However, using the index score reduced the population bias since the MAP and EOC index scores are a single composite number based on the performance of all students across all MAP and EOC achievement levels (MODESE, 2009a).

***t*-test analysis.** All data, including academic performance, dropout rate, graduation rate, and post-secondary enrollment rates were subjected to *t*-tests to investigate research questions one through three.

Research question 1. To what extent are Missouri charter school students meeting the state academic standards measured by the MAP and EOC exams as compared to similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

The application of a two-tailed *t*-test revealed no significant difference existed between the mean MAP exam index scores among Kansas City charter and non-charter school students in grades 3, 5, and 8, for the year 2008 (see Table 1). In 2009, the EOC exams were introduced as the high school component of the MAP. The EOC exams consist of a year-end cumulative test based on Missouri's curriculum for English II, and

Algebra I (designated as EII and AI, respectively). A second two-tailed *t*-test was subjected to the 2009 MAP and EOC data. The results of the *t*-test (see Table 2) showed there was no significant academic difference between elementary, middle, or high school students attending a charter school in Kansas City and their traditional public school peers. A MAP or EOC index score from a non-charter public school with similar student demographics was used for all comparisons (see Appendix F for examples of demographic comparisons).

Table 1

2008 MAP Index Scores of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in Kansas City

Grade	MAP content area	Charter schools mean index score	Non-charter schools mean index score	*p*
3	CA	710.6	698.1	0.4662
3	Math	711.0	706.9	0.7860
5	CA	713.2	712.0	0.9302
5	Math	703.5	698.7	0.7201
8	CA	723.9	727.1	0.8687
8	Math	678.6	688.9	0.6151

Note. Results derived from a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school MAP index scores and non-charter MAP index scores.
CA represents Communication Arts.

Table 2

2009 MAP Index Scores of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in Kansas City

Grade	MAP content area	Charter schools mean index score	Non-charter schools mean index score	*p*
3	CA	710.1	699.0	0.4691
3	Math	705.5	710.7	0.7345
5	CA	709.6	708.0	0.9127
5	Math	699.7	698.0	0.9092
8	CA	730.9	708.0	0.1661
8	Math	694.7	669.2	0.2096
HS	EII	727.5	740.9	0.6383
HS	AI	673.4	677.1	0.8719

Note. Results derived from a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school MAP index scores and non-charter MAP index scores. CA represents Communication Arts. EII represents the high school English II EOC exam. AI represents the high school Algebra I EOC exam.

An identical *t*-test analysis of St. Louis charter schools also revealed no statistical academic difference between students attending a St. Louis charter school and their peers attending a non-charter school. Data analysis included MAP index scores for grades 3, 5, and 8 for 2008 in Communication Arts and Math. The 2009 data comparisons were similar to the 2008 comparisons but also included high school English II and Algebra I EOC index scores. Although the *t*-test results showed charter school students performed no better, the analysis also revealed Kansas City and St. Louis charter school students did not perform any worse than their traditional school peers on the MAP or EOC tests (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3

2008 MAP Index Scores of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in St. Louis

Grade	MAP content area	Charter schools mean index score	Non-charter schools mean index score	*p*
3	CA	666.0	691.4	0.0920
3	Math	676.5	688.5	0.3776
5	CA	690.3	707.7	0.1717
5	Math	679.2	688.4	0.5680
8	CA	701.1	697.7	0.7119
8	Math	656.4	660.7	0.8184

Note. Results derived from a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school MAP index scores and non-charter MAP index scores.
CA represents Communication Arts

Table 4

2009 MAP Index Scores of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in St. Louis

Grade	MAP content area	Charter schools mean index score	Non-charter schools mean index score	*p*
3	CA	667.6	670.0	0.1381
3	Math	678.0	692.9	0.3067
5	CA	685.9	702.5	0.1338
5	Math	675.6	689.5	0.1368
8	CA	708.6	698.4	0.3299
8	Math	675.1	660.4	0.3788
HS	EII	707.3	732.7	0.2882
HS	AI	662.9	673.7	0.6516

Note. Results derived from a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school MAP index scores and non-charter MAP index scores.
CA represents Communication Arts. EII represents the high school English II EOC exam. AI represents the high school Algebra I EOC exam.

Research question 2. What relationship exists between the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend Missouri charter schools and the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

The dropout rates and graduation rates between Missouri charter schools and non-charter public schools were compared. As with the academic comparisons, Kansas City and St. Louis charter schools were matched to similar non-charter schools within their respective district. It was anticipated this research question would serve to establish a deeper understanding of school success not measured in terms of academic achievement, but rather educational fortitude. An empirical examination of the data showed a slightly higher graduation rate for both Kansas City and St. Louis charter schools; however, the *t*-tests revealed this was not a statistically significant difference (see Tables 5 and 7).

The dropout rates for Missouri charter schools also appeared to be slightly lower than traditional schools, but again, the *t*-test analysis revealed no statistical difference (see Tables 6 and 8). Currently, the St. Louis School District has two charter high schools compared to Kansas City's five charter high schools. Therefore, data were limited for the 2009 analysis in the St. Louis district and altogether unavailable for the 2008 school year. Despite limited data with questionable reliability, a *t*-test was conducted showing no significant difference (see Table 8).

Table 5

Graduation Rates of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in Kansas City

Year	Charter schools mean graduation rate	Non-charter schools mean graduation rate	*p*
2008	72.82	66.15	0.4921
2009	67.53	63.21	0.6685

Note. Graduation rates (percentages) were converted into arcsine values before being entered into Excel *t*-tests. Therefore, mean graduations rates represent an average of the arcsine values that were entered into Excel and subjected to a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school and non-charter school graduation rates.

Table 6

Dropout Rates of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in Kansas City

Year	Charter schools mean dropout rate	Non-charter schools mean dropout rate	*p*
2008	15.41	22.67	0.5742
2009	20.61	12.22	0.3594

Note. Dropout rates (percentages) were converted into arcsine values before being entered into Excel *t*-tests. Therefore, mean graduation rates represent an average of the arcsine values entered into Excel and subjected to a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school and non-charter school graduation rates.

Table 7

Graduation Rates of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in St. Louis

Year	Charter schools mean graduation rate	Non-charter schools mean graduation rate	*p*
2008[a]	-	-	-
2009	76.00	46.47	0.1111

Note. In 2008, only one St. Louis charter school graduated any students. The 2008 data were omitted from this study based on the limited data. Graduation rates (percentages) were converted into arcsine values before being entered into Excel *t*-tests. Therefore, mean graduations rates represent an average of the arcsine values that were entered into Excel and subjected to a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school and non-charter school graduation rates.

[a]Data were incomplete or nonexistent for 2008 graduation rate.

Table 8

Dropout Rates of Charter and Non-Charter Public Schools in St. Louis

Year	Charter schools mean dropout rate	Non-charter schools mean dropout rate	*p*
2008[a]	-	-	-
2009	21.19	30.69	0.4535

Note. Dropout rates (percentages) were converted into arcsine values before being entered into Excel *t*-tests. Therefore, mean graduation rates represent an average of the arcsine values entered into Excel and subjected to a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school and non-charter school graduation rates.
[a]Data were incomplete or nonexistent for 2008 dropout rate.

Research question 3. What relationship exists between the percentage of Missouri charter school students who pursue post-secondary education and the percentage of students from a similar public school in Kansas City or St. Louis who pursue post-secondary education?

During the 2008 and 2009 school years, there existed insufficient data to reliably compare the St. Louis charter schools to the district non-charter high schools. The MODESE (2010a) reported only three charter high schools existed in the St. Louis district during that time. The first charter school had not graduated any students at the time this study was conducted. The charter at the second high school was revoked at the end of the 2009 school year and graduate follow-up data for either 2008 or 2009 were not reported (MODESE, 2010a).

The final charter high school in St. Louis reported zero graduates continued their education at any type of post-secondary school. Without identifying this school, further investigation showed that less than 20 students graduated from this school in 2008, and 38 graduated in 2009. Additional investigation revealed less than 50% of the graduates

responded to the follow-up survey, not an unusual response rate; however, of those students who responded none were receiving additional post-secondary educations. Because of these reasons, only data from the Kansas City School District were used to answer question three.

Mission statements have become popular among public schools over the past few decades, but for charter schools, mission statements are in many ways an extension of the charter itself. The school mission statement describes the values the school founders want to establish in their school and outlines the expectations for potential students who choose to attend a particular charter school. In many cases the charter school mission statement establishes the features that make the school unique among other public schools. Examples of the unique nature of Missouri's charter schools include a school with a foreign language emphasis, college prep emphasis, and at least one with a building trades emphasis.

Three of the four charter high schools in Kansas City included declarations in their school mission statements that all graduates would attend a college or university. By contrast, none of the non-charter high schools in Kansas City or St. Louis that posted mission statements online had college admission as a part of their school mission. These charter school mission statements were the motivation for posing research question three; to discover whether charter schools have graduated a significantly higher percentage of college bound students in accordance with these school mission statements.

A simple observation of the average means for the Kansas City charter schools suggested a moderately higher number of charter students attempted post-secondary educations over their non-charter peers. The results of subjecting the data to *t*-tests

provided mixed results. A *t*-test analysis of 2008 data revealed no significant difference between students who pursued post-secondary educations after graduating from a charter school as opposed to their non-charter school peers (see Table 9). However, an analysis of 2009 post-secondary attendance rates yielded interested information.

Table 9

2008 Graduates Pursuing Post-Secondary Education in Kansas City

Post-secondary education	Charter schools mean rate	Non-charter schools mean rate	*p*
4 year colleges	33.27	26.79	0.6164
2 year colleges	32.90	25.24	0.2990
Technical colleges	5.68	9.99	0.2842
Total entering 4yr, 2yr, & technical colleges	61.37	40.21	0.2554

Note. Percentages were converted to arcsine values before being entered into Excel t-tests. Therefore, the mean rates of students entering post-secondary study is an average of the arcsine values entered into Excel and subjected to a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school and non-charter schools.

The two-tailed *t*-test, comparing the percentages of students enrolling in a two-year college after graduating from a Kansas City charter school and those attending non-charter public schools, showed a statistically significant difference between the means, ($p = 0.008149$). This number was beyond the established level of significance, $\alpha = .05$, which indicated in 2009, there was a significant difference between the percentages of students attending two-year colleges after graduating a Kansas City charter school relative to their peers in a non-charter public schools (see Table 10). Conversely there were significantly more students from non-charter schools who attended two-year technical schools in 2009 as opposed to their charter school peers (see Table 10).

Table 10

2009 Graduates Pursuing Post-Secondary Education in Kansas City

Post-secondary education	Charter schools mean rate	Non-charter schools mean rate	*p*
4 year colleges	32.31	30.35	0.8439
2 year colleges	34.35	24.62	0.0082
Technical colleges	0.00	9.39	0.0077
Total entering 4yr, 2yr, & technical colleges	54.97	42.97	0.3250

Note. Percentages were converted to arcsine values before being entered into Excel t-tests. Therefore, the mean rates of students entering post-secondary study is an average of the arcsine values entered into Excel and subjected to a two-tailed *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$. $p > \alpha$ suggested there was no significant difference between charter school and non-charter schools.

Qualitative Analysis: Interviews

In addition to providing the typical components of education it is not unusual for a charter school to have an area of focus which makes the school and the education unique. This focus is typically expressed in the school mission statement. The mission statement of the University Academy in Kansas City, for example, includes the language "…to prepare students to succeed in an institution of higher education and to participate as leaders in society…" (University Academy, n.d., para. 3). Academy Lafayette, also in Kansas City, has a unique French language immersion program as part of their curriculum and mission (Academy Lafayette Mission Statement, n.d.). As a final example of the specialized learning often provided by charter schools, the Construction Careers Center, in St. Louis, provides training in the building trades in addition to a standard academic curriculum (Construction Career Center Mission Statement, n.d.). These examples demonstrate the specific goals that are often included within the mission

statements as part of each charter school's core values. To measure whether these values are truly internalized by the charter schools, a qualitative analysis using interviews was necessary.

Research question 4. What are the perceptions of charter school stakeholders on the impact of charter schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis districts?

Interviews with three major charter school stakeholders were conducted to gather their insights and perceptions concerning the successes and shortcomings of the charter school movement in Missouri. The importance of using interviews was described by Fetterman "…as the most important data collection technique a qualitative researcher possesses" (as cited in Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p.455). Interviews were conducted to gain a greater understanding of Missouri charter school history and learn the key differences between Missouri charter schools, magnet schools, and traditional public schools.

The participants (referred to by pseudonyms) included a charter school building principal (Mr. P), a professor working at a university that sponsors several charter schools in Missouri (Dr. S), and a former Missouri legislator (Mr. L) who was directly involved in the writing and passage of SB 781, the law allowing sponsors to open and operate charter schools in Missouri. In the proceeding discussion the professor will frequently be referred to as a sponsor since he has been involved in the sponsoring process of Missouri charter schools since their inception. It should, however, be understood that a charter school sponsor is not a single person, but rather an entity, such as a university or school district. Each of these interviews yielded a great deal of insight that could not have been measured through quantitative means alone.

Although there were overlapping questions, each participant was asked questions tailored to his specific position and area of expertise within the charter school movement (see Appendix C). The interview responses were condensed for clarity and conciseness and were adapted to a narrative format. Common themes that emerged from the interviews were further analyzed in Chapter Five. It should be noted all participants shared a positive view towards the charter school movement. The principal and the sponsor were from Kansas City and, therefore, their insights are limited to that area.

Interview with charter school principal. One of the main principles of the charter school movement is that they receive a large degree of freedom from the state and federal government. In theory, this freedom would allow a charter school the ability to pursue experimental methods and specializations within the confines of the charter document. Although Missouri charter schools are granted a large degree of autonomy from the state, the MODESE plays a small role in charter school processes. This role was explored and described in further detail during the interview with the professor. All prospective charter schools in Missouri begin with a group of individuals who approach one of the potential authorizing entities including community colleges in either district, four-year colleges and universities with accredited teacher programs, and the Kansas City or St. Louis school boards. Potential founders must file all necessary paperwork and receive approval from the authorizing entity allowing the charter school to open.

Mr. P is employed at a charter school founded by a group of Kansas City School District alumni who remember the district as a good place to learn and wanted to establish a good school for students who were unable to leave the inner city, presumably for a more affluent school. Each charter school must adhere to the tenets established in

the charter and is held accountable to these principles by the sponsor. In this particular school, the founding board is accountable to the sponsor. The board hires a superintendent, and the hierarchy resembles most traditional schools.

The charter school principal interviewed for this study was chosen at random; however, there was a set of unwritten requirements established to ensure the candidate was considered knowledgeable about the research topic. It was preferred that the principal selected for this project had administrative experience beyond the charter school movement and a minimum of four years experience as a charter school administrator. Mr. P fit these criteria and in fact had administrative experience in both the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts. Mr. P's resume also included administrative experience in a large district in a neighboring state.

While working as an administrator in the St. Louis School District, Mr. P became disenfranchised with both the political aspects of working in a large district and the diminished feeling of being effective in the role as an educational leader. At that time, he was in charge of what he described as a "failing school." He explained the differences in pressures between a large non-charter school and his current role in a charter school, "The pressure [in a large district] was to look at the list of things they are in deficiency with and start trying to dance to that… it is more focused in a charter school; whereas, in a large school district it is more diffused." Mr. P continued, "…we have a specific mission and that mission drives the pressure." When Mr. P was hired, the school's board of directors explained they had three expectations for their school, "They said to me, a year's growth for a year's worth of instruction, no social promotion, and we are going to prepare the students for college." Mr. P felt the last expectation was quite a change from

a traditional school district where it is generally understood not every student is going to college, “Here everybody is going to college, 100 percent…. Your goal is going to make sure everybody is going to graduate.”

Meeting the expectations of the charter document, communicated through the school mission statement, is what the charter school movement is all about. There is perhaps no greater pressure for the administration and the teachers at any charter school than the real possibility of closure. Ultimately this is what separates the charter schools from traditional public schools and previous educational movements, including magnet schools. Failure to meet the expectations established by the charter document and communicated in the school mission statement is not an option for the administration and faculty working in charter schools if they wish to continue their career at that setting. Mr. P elaborated on the relationship between the sponsor and the school, “The University, as our sponsor, oversees our processes; they review us every so often to see if we get to keep our charter or if we don’t.” Charter schools can, and have been closed in Missouri in the past. Since each charter is unique, the sponsor can revoke a charter if the school is not meeting the criteria set by the charter document. Charters have been revoked due to one of three reasons; lack of student performance, low enrollment, or fiscal mismanagement (MODESE, 2010a). As Mr. P explained, “That’s real, you talk about pressure that has its pressure, but if you’re doing what you’re supposed to, and we are doing well, then you don’t have to worry about it.”

To achieve the demanding goals established by the school mission, individual student achievement is carefully monitored. Mr. P explained that the year begins by giving teachers standardized test data which shows where every student in their class is

academically. Students are continually tested using a mixture of Stanford 9 and MAP results to measure growth. Mr. P produced a spreadsheet he had created to track the progress of students through their high school career as an example of how closely achievement is monitored. In addition to individual student achievement, the graduation rate is also closely monitored. Though it cannot be assumed all charter schools in Missouri monitor student progress similarly, this particular school is data driven in every sense of the word.

Successful implementation of any school mission can only occur with a highly-motivated faculty. In an effort to find motivated teachers willing to work towards the common mission of the school, this charter school recruits prospective teachers through various means including a teacher fair hosted by the school and visiting with new teachers enrolled in local university teacher programs. Others apply to the school directly through the web-site. Mr. P remarked, "New teachers come and are surprised at how much work they do." Good teachers are rewarded for this work with a slightly higher salary than other local area teachers and have the possibility of earning a bonus if data show a measured amount of student growth for the students in that teacher's classroom. This produces additional pressure for the teachers, as well as for the administrators who created the matrix for bonus pay decisions.

The trade-off for the increased financial potential is that teachers do not receive contracts, or tenure. Good teaching is expected each year from every teacher, and ineffective teachers are dismissed. As explained by Mr. P, "Just because a teacher was successful four years ago they may not be successful this year. That pressure can be

really intense one-on-one." This type of pressure requires an administration and a faculty to maintain focus on the ambitious school mission.

Teachers at this charter school do not have any additional job requirements above and beyond contract time; however, teachers often provide tutoring, for which there is additional compensation. According to Mr. P, tutoring is generally used for remediation on one of the school's mastery learning tests. Mastery tests are essentially unit tests created by the teachers for their courses as a requirement for successful completion of the class. Teachers develop three versions of the mastery test and must reteach the information during tutoring time for those students who do not successfully pass the test the first time. All students must earn a minimum 80% on all mastery tests. Students who do not achieve this score have two more opportunities to pass the test. After two additional unsuccessful attempts to pass the mastery test, students must re-enroll in the course.

Though tutoring is provided, it is not required for students. Busing issues often make it difficult for students to attend tutoring. Mr. P explained the remedy the school created to make sure students are still successful in spite of these circumstances, "We have to utilize an eight-hour school day, so if we need to take away an elective and double book them in what they are suffering in… a deficiency in math [for example], we found that works over time."

The Kansas City School District boundaries are a somewhat arbitrary matter and can complicate after-school activities, including tutoring. Mr. P explained there is a region that is delineated by street boundaries from which they accept students. However, due to the Kansas City desegregation court order, the school must legally accept any

student in the Kansas City district who wants to attend, provided the school has room. This makes it difficult on the school and the students at times. Approximately five students ride the bus up to an hour, depending on traffic, to attend this charter school. There is a lottery system established in the law should more students apply for admission than what the school has room for (see Appendix A).

At the charter school, teachers are responsible for developing varied instructional methods and intervention strategies to reach students who are behind their peers academically, particularly in reading or math. It cannot be assumed that all charter schools use data to this extent to track student progress, nor can it be assumed traditional schools are not using similar methods. However, this particular school relied heavily on student data to determine many educational decisions. As Mr. P explained, "We are becoming bean counters. Anymore, we have to justify what is happening, and that is a pressure, to be able to bean count and justify what is happening."

Much greater importance is placed on standardized testing to establish a student's true knowledge base rather than years of attendance in school. Student data collection begins the minute a new student walks through the door of the school. New students are tested and base-line knowledge is assessed. This charter school has a unique placement system for incoming high school students. A new student must take a placement test that could show, for example, that although the student has enough credits to be a 10th grader, he or she possesses the knowledge of an 8th grader. Mr. P explained the burden this places on the school:

> You have to be honest about who you are accepting. If you don't have a consistent basis for doing that, you are not going to be able to achieve this mission

> of graduating 100% and [have] all of them prepared to go to college. We tell them they are welcome to come, but we are going to place them in eighth grade.

Maintaining the degree of rigor this school requires of its high school students is no easy task. Before this policy was established, students frequently enrolled as ill-prepared 10th graders leaving the faculty with only two years to prepare them for graduation and college in accordance with the school mission. Mr. P explained:

> Let's understand that's tough…. It takes kids probably a year before they get acclimated to the work level and rigor of it So, I finally convinced the powers-that-be to not send me anybody. That is the only way you are going to get no social promotion. Most [incoming] students know what we are about and know the expectations.

Much of the data driven approach utilized by Mr. P was learned while being a principal in a large school district in a neighboring state. Mr. P described his time at that district as being "in a good situation" and left only because he believed he could have a greater impact on more students in a larger school within the St. Louis School District. It was during his tenure as an administrator, in the neighboring state, that he developed the idea to collect student test data at the start of the school year.

Mr. P collects test and classroom data for each student and combines the data on a spreadsheet to discover any learning gaps. Students with minimal or no deficiencies are directed towards college opportunities, such as dual credit courses, while struggling students are remediated. Mr. P described how he felt when first introduced to this type of data-driven, student instruction, "I felt like, wow, this is magical. If you can use data to get at that [student achievement] then you are not just talking and pulling your hair out.

You can identify what is wrong and try to fix it." Believing that this system could be effective elsewhere, Mr. P accepted the opportunity to work at a large school in St. Louis. Mr. P explained,

> I did not know anything about it [the school], or I would have just stayed behind where things were wonderful, but I kept saying I could do more for more kids. So, I went over there [St. Louis] and gave solutions, but the politics and big systems get in the way like you would not believe.

That frustration ultimately caused Mr. P to reconsider his career path, but eventually he decided to stay in public education and accepted his current position at the charter school.

Mr. P commented about the history and success of the charter school law and its beginnings. His analysis of the movement contributed greatly to the national and state history outlined in Chapter Two. Mr. P related:

> …[the Missouri charter school movement] goes farther back. The big city school wasn't performing in spite of the money going in, and the desegregation plan was part of the flight of more prosperous, more Caucasian, citizens which meant that people who couldn't escape were the ones who were stuck here and nothing was happening. Eventually, the state revoked the district's certification, but [for the founders] this was a good system at one time, and they wanted to have a good school for inner-city kids who couldn't escape …that is what inspired them [charter school].

Mr. P's greatest challenge has always been, and continues to be, getting the students to meet the mission of the school: to graduate and attend some form of post-secondary education. For their part, all students must take a seminar class their junior and

senior years. Junior seminar students are registered and take the ACT and SAT while also completing 10 hours of community service. During the senior seminar, the focus is shifted to choosing a college or university they want to attend and apply for admission at that school. Before students exit the class, they must receive two college admissions letters and complete 15 hours of community service. All graduating students will have completed 25 hours of community service designed to build character and fulfill the entrance requirements of some colleges and universities. Ultimately, the onus is on the students as to whether they actually enroll and attend college; however, the school recently added a college liaison who will provide additional support to graduates once they enter college.

Mr. P underscored what the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts discovered during the experimental years with magnet schools:

> It turns out that no matter how beautiful the building is you still have to educate, and it turns out that the reason the students are here is that they are escaping somewhere else…. they are escaping because it is either unsafe or they are not learning, and our test data show that when they come here they are a little behind, but when they come here, the longer they are in our system, the better they do.

Despite the fact Mr. P already relied heavily on student test data to help determine how to best educate students, he believed there was still room to improve and to do a better job of using data to improve learning so that all students benefit, "I haven't been as careful as I could be, as careful as I am, as pumped as I am about it. I haven't reached every kid. My numbers still show that I lose some kids."

Mr. P believed the transient nature of the families who lived in the large city districts was the primary cause for not being able to help every student, a statement that would be reinforced by Dr. S in a later interview. Mr. P explained, "Parents move, and the kids have to move, too. It is a very transient district."

Student behavior at this school was considered by Mr. P to be better than other schools. Mr. P attributed the perceived above average behavior to the school uniform policy, "There is a lot of research that suggests that when a student is put in uniform everything improves." He also credited the small town and small school feeling that exists within the school to the behavior, "A lot of our kids are related to someone who has gone through our system, and some have had relatives who graduated from here… they keep coming because they find value in what we are doing." Mr. P noted that he often did not appreciate how well-behaved the students at his school were until he observed students from other area schools.

Mr. P provided an example of how he believed student performance at his school compared to a traditional non-charter school. In his opinion, "The charter schools provide a safe place where students can learn. It also provides a challenging curriculum that underpins what we are doing; no social promotion, a year's worth of growth for a year's worth of instruction." According to Mr. P, "Students will move to another school within the district having earned C's and D's at the charter school and begin earning A's."

Many Missouri charter school mission statements suggest parents will play an integral role in the charter school education. However, if Mr. P's school is any indication, the charter schools are only slightly more successful at getting parents involved than a

traditional school. Mr. P stated:

> There is nothing we are doing that's really compulsory. The original charter had a document that parent sign committing to attend parent teacher conferences, and all that. I think you find, in practicality, you can't enforce that because they're working and if they could come, they would come.

One of the limitations of this study was whether the charter school data reflected the charter school students who were in attendance long enough to absorb the charter school culture and academic methods. Mr. P was asked to comment about the number of elementary and middle school students who stay at the charter school long enough to finish their education. Based on anecdotal evidence, Mr. P believed any students who had left his school were more successful, academically, wherever they attended school next. He also stated, "The past four years we have graduated 100% of all of the students who showed up as seniors." When discussing dropout rates, the most compelling evidence is provided by the number of students who show up as 9th graders compared to the number who become sophomores. Mr. P said, "We only lost nine last year and a lot of those nine become freshman again. Most students who start school will stay and finish because it is safe."

In the final moments of the interview, Mr. P commented on the direction of Missouri charter schools and whether he believed the charter schools had achieved the degree of intended reform. He was also asked whether he believed the charter school legislation could be expanded to improve other Missouri districts. Mr. P responded:

> I don't really see anything different about a charter school as compared to a traditional school other than we are more overt about having a mission and

> satisfying that mission, Ray Budde, who started this whole thing, thought that is what school districts are supposed to be; school districts serve the community and produce the teachers, doctors, and lawyers…. It's not quite as overt anymore but any community that makes up its mind can have what we have.

When Mr. P was asked whether Missouri charter schools have been an effective means of improving student achievement for the entire district, his response indicated he monitors the subject closely. "There have been a lot of studies that are basically inconclusive. The studies show, for the most part, charter school [students] do slightly better or about the same as students who attend a traditional public school." A common concern in the inner city is that charter schools attract more academically-minded students giving them an advantage over their traditional counterparts, but Mr. P said he believed this is not necessarily the case in Kansas City:

> At least 2-3 research studies I have read suggest that charter schools do not pull students out of public schools because they [the charter schools] are limited by the numbers they can take. KC public school is shrinking and shrinking. Those kids are going somewhere, but it turns out that most of them actually go to surrounding area schools districts rather than come here because we are a small pipe and only have room for 1,100. My sense is that indirectly it's forcing the district to do better. They have a new superintendent who is pushing on all cylinders to close down some schools and do some things that is responsive to parents and students. The fact that charters are here providing that competition is causing that to happen, so the people who wrote the law shouldn't give up hope yet because it is slowly affecting what's happening.

Interview with charter school sponsor. The second interview was conducted with a professor, Dr. S, who worked at a university that sponsored multiple charter schools. As a point of clarification, a single person does not sponsor charter schools; however, for the purposes of this study, the professor was frequently referred to as a sponsor. Dr. S was chosen due to his longstanding involvement in the charter school movement and his extensive knowledge of Missouri charter school history. He was one of the first university personnel to become involved immediately after the initial legislation was passed and continues to be involved in the inspection and sponsorship processes of Missouri charter schools. Dr. S is considered to be one of the foremost experts on the Missouri charter movement for these reasons.

The university where Dr. S is a professor became involved in the charter school experiment directly after the legislation passed in 1998. Unlike many states that have a state board that approves school charters, Missouri law allows four-year colleges and universities with accredited teacher education programs to approve and sponsor potential charter schools. Universities are one of four entities that can sponsor charter schools in Missouri.

According to Dr. S, out of approximately 40 states that currently have charter school legislation less than 10 have the provision that allows higher education to sponsor charter schools. Missouri's charter school legislation mandates all sponsors give preference to high-risk students which Dr. S defined as students who are one year behind their peers academically. The law requires at least one-third of all students attending charter schools operated by a sponsor with three or more schools to be categorized as high-risk. Over half of the schools sponsored by this particular university met this

requirement, and since nearly all of the schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis districts serve a large percentage of high-risk students, meeting this requirement is rarely a problem.

When the initial charter school legislation passed in 1998, Dr. S was a professor of educational leadership and confessed that he and his colleagues knew very little about charter schools, "A colleague and I were put on an advisory board to investigate it. I was put on a committee to look at the initial charters, and from that I became chair of that committee." A year later, the university approved their first charter schools. It has been over a decade since the university approved its first charters and continues to receive requests for new schools. Dr. S said his university is open to sponsoring future charter schools if the proposed charter offers students a good school and the promise of being innovative; however, Dr. S stressed those decisions are not his to make and would be made by the board of governance at the university. The board recently voted to approve another charter school which is expected to open its doors next fall, 2011, after using this year to prepare; "We don't get the requests to open many new ones [charter schools] like we did in 1999-2001, but there still hasn't been a year that has gone by that there hasn't been a serious inquiry about charter schools."

Once a charter has been approved and opens for operation, the sponsor is legally obligated to monitor each school with a formal evaluation every other year. This particular university chooses instead to audit their schools each year utilizing organized monthly checks by examining different aspects of the school including certification, special education compliance, and fiscal matters. Based on the evaluation, the university

decides whether to renew a charter, place a school on probation, non-renew, or revoke. Dr. S further explained the role of a charter school sponsor:

> Our role is to make sure that all aspects of the charter are in place, such as using the correct codes for the budget… meeting the 80/20 certification ratio. They [charter schools] are allowed to have 20% non-certified teachers as opposed to tradition schools who are supposed to have no non-certified people at all.

Dr. S explained the section of the Missouri charter law, which allows for an increased number of non-certified personnel, is part of the essence of the charter school movement:

> [The reason] was to get away from state mandates and requirements and, especially in leadership roles, where they want to bring in someone from business or community service to lead, but also to get more of a variety within the instructional staff. Several schools would hire music teachers, or contract with a university, to provide lessons for the kids, which would not be a certified music instructor, but definitely qualified in those areas. So it gives them [charter schools] a little bit of freedom, and again, urban centers often have a difficult time finding a large number of qualified teachers because there is a teacher shortage, so I think it was to address that issue as well.

Dr. S was asked whether he believed Missouri charter school legislation has allowed Missouri charter schools to achieve the degree of autonomy necessary for them to function as Ray Budde would have envisioned. His response summed the purpose and the paradox of charter schools and public education:

> Anytime you have the state testing system as the primary indicator of success then you want those kids to do well on the MAP, which means [the teachers] are going

> to have to teach to the GLE [Grade Level Expectations], which means you're not going to have the autonomy to set up your own criteria for what makes an effective school. For example, we had a school that was set up with elementary high-risk kids primarily recruited from a low-income family subsidized daycare. This meant that 90% of them were free and reduced lunch, 90% were from single-parent households, [and] 90% were minority, which are all indicators for high-risk. They [the charter school] set up a literacy-based program thinking that urban-based kids need to learn to read and need to learn to appreciate reading. If you can get them literate and improve reading comprehension they would do well in middle school and high school. I believe that is true, but when you focus on literacy-based programs, the MAP scores did not increase like they expected them to. So, they revamped the curriculum to do more of the GLE com art, math, and not so much of the reading literacy. So, it kind of stifled creativity, but on the other hand they still do a good job, and they are assessing kids, and they are able to go in there and change A and do B now so the kids will have a better chance of being successful on the test.

Another school sponsored by his university, with a very alternative and unique curriculum, has managed to balance their alternative curriculum and still perform quite well on the MAP tests. Dr. S credits most of this school's success to the student population it draws and the large amount of parental involvement:

> It is a higher socioeconomic level kid, and those parents are very supportive of the program. They get a lot of parental involvement, a lot of community support, and

> those kids do very well, but it is by far the most creative and innovative program [we sponsor], and those kids do very well in all their tests.

The relationship between the MODESE, the charter schools, and the sponsors, is unconventional to say the least. Though Missouri law releases charter schools of state involvement, including the MODESE accreditation process, the MODESE remains informed, seemingly out of convention, rather than for any other reason. Dr. P related:

> DESE is not involved in the evaluation process, but we do report to DESE and try to keep them in the communication loop, but the whole idea of charter schools is that they are free of state regulations, so we do not ask them to come in and evaluate.

Missouri charter schools must participate in the state assessment program and meet certain achievement standards. Dr. S noted this paradox, "The whole idea is that they are free of state regulations, so well, they are part of the state system, and yet they are not. It's been a lot of different people working together to try to fine tune how that fits together."

The state does not have any input on whether a sponsor approves a charter as long as all criteria are met in the charter. Charter applications are sent to a state board for review as part of the authorization process. Dr. S reported, "It [the charter application] still has to go to the state board to make sure all the criteria are in the charter, so even though they can't say *no* they still have the opportunity to say *yes*." Dr. S stated that they work closely with DESE and there is rarely a week or a month that goes by in which there is not communication with DESE for various reasons. Charter schools are not free

of federal regulations including special education, title one reading, or free and reduced price meal programs, and other federal programs.

Although MAP tests are required and used as the primary indicator by the state to gauge student and school performance, Dr. S suggested these may not be the most effective means for charter schools assessment:

> The MAP is a good assessment and is one that we want our schools to do well with, but it is meant to be a snapshot of your district and it is not meant to be a snapshot of cohort groups. For example, if you have a charter high school you have no idea which freshman are coming to your building from the year before, and so it is very easy you could be doing just as good a job instructionally, but your MAP tests scores go down based on the cohort group of students you recruit. So that is an issue because you are not comparing apples to apples; it is a different set of kids, different cohort groups.

Dr. S noted using MAP scores to measure the progress of elementary students improved greatly when the state began assessing all grades 3-8 as opposed to just every other year. This change allowed schools to compare student progress from year to year. Dr. S also expressed concern with any study comparing charter schools with traditional school peers due to the nature of the charter schools:

> It is still very difficult to compare those [charter school] kids with other districts or other schools in the city because charter schools are so unique in who they recruit and where they recruit… we have some schools that are more alternative than others. They recruit some very high-risk kids.

Dr. S reiterated that the law mandates sponsors must give enrollment preference to high-risk students. Dr. S estimated that approximately two-thirds of the schools his university sponsored were specifically designated to serve high-risk students. Dr. S commented:

> [When] you are approving [charter] schools that are only recruiting low-performing kids, then when you compare them [charter school students] to the other kids they [charter school students] are going to score low if they [charter schools] are doing an honest job of recruiting high-risk kids, so again you are comparing apples and oranges sometimes.

Dr. S expressed some optimism that the growth model the state is looking at as a means of measuring student performance is one of the most promising ideas because it allows schools to get credit for making measurable gains for individual students rather than simply looking at how many students in a given school are proficient and advanced. The growth model is still very much in the conception stages and funding will likely influence its future more than anything.

Dr. S reaffirmed a statement made by Mr. P regarding the transient nature of charter schools:

> The thing that really throws that [growth] model into a frizzy in urban centers is the mobility. If you lose a third of your kids a year, which is not unheard of, within three years you could have a totally new student population.

This reality would make it very difficult for urban schools with high student turnover to compare growth even over a two-year span.

The transient nature of the urban student has been one of the greatest challenges of the movement, a sentiment felt by Mr. P. Likewise, Dr. S agreed, "Many [students] come to school with very poor readiness skills for learning, so you spend a lot of time on socialization and development of culture that will be supportive of their learning - and then they move." Dr. S remarked that charter schools have given these transient families additional choices when things go badly at their current school:

> The easy option [for these families] is to say "well let's find another school" and what they should do is stay there and take care of the issue, so you have a lot of transient student populations in the urban core. Charters have added to that problem because now those parents have additional choices, so not only do they move from neighborhood to neighborhood, but they can also change if they get in trouble at school, either academically or with behavior problems. A lot of times, the answer is to just leave this school and go to another.

This revolving door places pressure on all of the schools to try to educate students who conceivably may fail every year at a different school. Dr. S mentioned that Kansas City and St. Louis have an ever-increasing refugee population that most other districts in Missouri do not have to deal with:

> We have one school that has 11 languages spoken in it and this really impacts the quality of service for all the kids because they have such a high need. A 10-year old student might show up and might not have gone to school anywhere and should be in the third grade; that is really a challenge.

When Missouri first passed charter school legislation in 1998, it was not without opposition and critics. The initial reaction from the Kansas City School District and other

stakeholders was a mixed bag. Dr. S believed the Kansas City proper area was very supportive of charter schools and the whole idea of charter schools serving students. Several groups including the Learning Exchange, a non-profit educational consulting agency (Stancel, 2001), the Kaufmann Foundation, the Hall Foundation, and the KC Community Foundation, among others, provided grants and led funding initiatives to help charter schools get established during the first years. Dr. S acknowledged, "Traditional school leaders from rural schools surrounding the Kansas City area were concerned that the state was moving in a direction in which those school leaders did not 100% support."

Dr. S and his colleagues spent many hours engaged in a public relations campaign trying to garner support for the charter school movement. This campaign included presentations to uncertain metropolitan school boards and even trips which involved bringing metropolitan school leaders into the city to show them the charter schools. The purpose was to educate these districts regarding the objective of charter schools, which was to help students, not disassemble the public school system.

According to Dr. S, there remains a lot of opposition to charter schools across the country and locally in Missouri, "The greatest opposition comes from traditional public school educators; the school board association and the superintendents association are by far the most actively opposed to charter schools." There has been a continual, but unsuccessful push in the Missouri legislature for the past four or five years to allow for the expansion of charter schools throughout the state. This legislation has generally been opposed by the school board and superintendents associations, two groups that fought the initial legislation. The idea behind the legislation is that if choice is good, then it would be good for everybody throughout the state. Dr. S believed that if the law does pass good

schools would have very little to fear, but on the other hand, low-performing schools could lose students and the funding that goes with those students.

Many communities simply do not have the capacity or number of low-performing schools as in the big city districts to make charter schools work. Dr. S explained the difficulties many of the early charter schools and students experienced in the early years, "A lot of our schools started in the classroom sections of churches with no cafeteria, no gym, no extra-curricular activities; you would want those things for your kids if they are learning." The reality of what constituted early charter schools suggests just how low the public school system in Kansas City, Missouri, had sunk prior to the charter school legislation. The most recent attempt to expand the movement in Missouri would have allowed charter schools in any district failing to meet the NCLB standards. Dr. S expressed neither support nor opposition to the idea, "I think you will see that come up again in the next few years." The Kansas City and St. Louis districts were unique because each had many failing schools unlike most other Missouri districts.

Dr. S was asked to describe the difference between charter school choice and the choice the earlier magnet schools provided. During the magnet school era, there was some degree of choice for students provided there was room at one of the magnet schools; however, the district set the limits. According to Dr. S, "There was choice, but it was choice under the district umbrella and whether or not there were enough seats or capacity for those kids. So yes, the magnet program did provide some choice." Dr. S explained the quota system established by the courts, detailed in Chapter Two, which restricted the magnet school choice for the most disadvantaged students.

During the desegregation and magnet school era, many families left the district choosing to move to Kansas or the suburbs rather than stay in the district and give the magnet schools a chance. Dr. S related, "If you look at Kansas City and St. Louis going from 75,000 kids down to 20,000, going from a very diverse population down to a consolidated minority population, you get lots of issues that would impact the district." The reasons are complex, but Dr. S suspected the main reasons families ignored the magnet schools had to do with the culture and leadership surrounding them, "I think the magnet schools were still a part of a large urban bureaucratic district and families were more interested in finding options elsewhere, which means you had this constant decline in enrollment which led to constant finance issues." Dr. S thought the large role of the parochial and private systems in Kansas City and St. Louis also had a large impact on the districts as well. Although Kansas City and St. Louis greatly improved the schools by building elaborate infrastructures during the magnet school era, Dr. S suggested there simply was not enough choice for parents and students in terms of high-performing schools.

Despite the efforts of the Kansas City School District and the St. Louis School District, both lost their state accreditations. Dr. S doubted the loss of accreditation affected whether parents chose charter schools over traditional schools:

> When the charter schools came around in 1998 or 1999, parents were looking for some options. The district [Kansas City] had a reputation of being non-responsive, whether it was rightly so or not, parents were looking for change, and so parents didn't get too bent out of shape or concerned with accreditation or your

> MAP scores. They wanted what's good for their kid. They wanted their kid to be able to read and write and think and be able to finish high school and go on to college…. By the time the district finally lost its accreditation parents were already searching for other options.

Dr. S agreed with the statement made by Mr. P, and to some degree vindicated the hopes of the legislators, by stating the charter school movement has been good for the district overall:

> The schools have to compete against each other for students when they are recruiting, and parents have a choice, so I think to a certain degree the district has made efforts to be more responsive to the community and parent needs and tried to show that they are doing a good job… when you have choice, then you have competition, and it raises the bar for everyone.

Charter schools feel this competitive pressure and risk closure if they fail to meet the expectations established in the charter. Dr. S was asked if his institution has closed any charter schools, and if so, for what reasons. Dr. S cited different reasons for the schools his university has had to close in the past. Fiscal problems, recruitment issues, and weak instructional programs were the primary reasons for school closures.

According to Dr. S, the state formula for charter school funding has improved greatly over the years. This has allowed many charter schools that in the past would have struggled financially to remain open. It is not uncommon for charter schools to be managed by an outside third-party management company that helps oversee fiscal matters and other administrative responsibilities. Dr. S explained:

> The management companies do a lot of the administrative work which is common in charter schools across the nation …they do other contract services for schools, in general, for a fee. They will maybe give you start up money, own the facility, and rent it to you, do your payroll, write your policies, help you with your curriculum, purchase desks, etc.

Missouri charter schools are funded based on average daily attendance, the same as other public schools in Missouri. Charter schools will not be immune to the current and projected future state budget shortfalls; they, too, will have to make the same reductions and cuts necessary to survive. However, many charter schools do not fully participate in several of the ancillary activities in which the traditional public schools participate. This could include athletics or other elective credits, transportation, or lunch programs which allow charter schools a greater degree of financial flexibility that traditional public schools may not have.

Many of the charter schools sponsored by the university have made long-range plans to survive lean times. According to Dr. S, "Several of them [charter schools] didn't get themselves into positions like the area schools did. Most of them created 3-5 year plans on what to do if they get a 4, 10, or 12 % [funding] cut." Additionally, many of the charter schools Dr. S works with organize fundraisers, something Mr. P's school did. According to Dr. S, significant fundraising was a unique feature he was not familiar with coming from a traditional public school background:

> It wasn't just a little fundraiser for the basketball team, or a little chili dinner. They do substantial fundraising. For example, we have one school that figures out what they need to spend to have high quality teachers, low student-teacher ratios,

> and the guidance support staff these urban students need. Then, they go out with a goal. If the state gives us $7,500 and they need $10,500 per student, then they go out with a goal of making up that difference, so several of the schools have significant outside funding efforts that you don't see so much with the traditional public school.

In some ways the charter schools might financially be better off in this respect, but Dr. S cautioned that for a charter school to get those substantial dollars they must have a substantial need.

The majority of charter schools that have opened in Missouri since the passage of the legislation continue to remain open and operate. Dr. S considered the continued existence of the charter schools to be one of the greatest successes, "If you started 10 small businesses you would expect a good number of them not to make it 10 years." The charter school movement is now over 10 years old, and sponsors continue to open additional schools while only a small number have been closed. Dr. S considered the charter schools that have been closed a success too, since ultimately, the program is about educating students. The ability and willingness to close a school that is not providing a good educational service or exhibiting good stewardship of public dollars, are the most basic and important features of the charter school movement. Dr. S explained, "Most of the schools have been able to demonstrate that they can do a good job instructionally as far as taking a kid from where they are and making some gains with them."

Interview with former legislator. The interview with the former state legislator was not conducted at a face-to-face setting as would have been preferred. Instead, the interview was conducted through electronic means, and the following responses are Mr.

L's condensed words that have been organized for clarity and guarded to maintain confidentiality. Every effort was made not to alter the original context of the responses during this process. The former legislator offered very candid responses to the questions and revealed an intimate historical perspective for the initiation of the law that would not have been completely understood without his input.

According to Mr. L, the original purpose of Senate Bill 781 was not initially a charter school bill. The primary purpose of the legislation was to provide the legal framework for ending the federal court-ordered desegregation in the Kansas City and St. Louis districts. The bill would transfer primary control back to the districts and be more accountable to the taxpayers of Missouri. It was hoped that this would return the focus on results and save these children from a life of lost opportunities.

An effort had been ongoing for some time to phase out the court controlled desegregation program, and proponents of ending federal control, including Dr. William Danforth, needed to change several provisions of Missouri law to allow the conversion to state and local control. After several public hearings across the state, conducted by the Joint Committee on Desegregation, it was agreed to put the charter school provisions in the bill to create public charter schools as an innovative way to expand opportunities and options for the students of the two districts and as a strategic method of broadening the coalition in order to make sure the bill would pass. The initiative was designed to address the appalling performance rating and dismal graduation rate of the Missouri's two urban school districts.

The former legislator responded to the success of the movement as being, "about what he expected." He was not a part of the implementation and never expected charter

schools to be the salvation of these two, in his words, “profoundly dysfunctional school districts.” However, the legislator supported the idea of allowing families some options beyond the typical district schools. As Mr. L explained, “Putting charter schools in this very broad based piece of legislation was just one of many reforms that might, when taken together, make a difference for the children and families of these districts.” Despite charter schools not being the main focus of the legislation, the provision drew concerns from stakeholders.

Some public school advocates had concerns that charter schools, even public charter schools, would begin a slippery slope of public funding for private schools through educational vouchers. Mr. L stated, “I don't think that the AFT [American Federation of Teachers] union in St. Louis was ever thrilled with the idea, but in the end they did not try to block the bill.” Mr. L doubted anyone voted against the bill because of the charter school provision, “There was skepticism because of the perception that charter schools were a conservative right-wing effort to undermine public education and divert public money to private schools, but we convinced these legislators to give it a try.” These concerns were in part due to previous legislation introduced by a legislator who was a strong proponent of moving public money away from public schools and sending it to private schools.

The Kansas City and St. Louis school districts initially greeted the charter school legislation with skepticism and resentment, “I had to constantly remind the administrations of these districts that they are political subdivisions of the state [and] accountable to the taxpayers who heavily subsidize them and not autonomous entities who could continue to fail with no consequences.” The legislator was unsure whether this

original skepticism has changed, but felt there is more acceptances due to the success, although modest in some cases, of the charter schools. Mr. L recalled when the law initially passed there was little interest in making charter schools work, noting that the president of a university in Missouri that would have been eligible to sponsor charter schools turned down the opportunity with some disdain for the idea.

Summary

The desegregation efforts in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts marked a unique milestone in Missouri's educational history. The remedy imposed to correct this injustice brought forth the magnet school era; a costly and unsuccessful attempt at school reform. The failure of this remedy to integrate, or educate, left district stakeholders including parents, teachers, politicians, and community members, searching for an alternative method to revive these districts.

Charter schools were chosen as a possible solution to provide district-wide school reform. Proponents of charter schools hoped they would provide a meaningful education and a sense of competition: thereby, uplifting the entire district. The creation of a competitive atmosphere is a worthy pursuit, yet if the charter schools are not providing an education that is scientifically proven to be any better than non-charter schools, one must ask whether they have succeeded at generating any real competition. If not, are they simply creating additional failing schools within these districts much like the previous magnet school reform?

This study examined the academic progress of Missouri charter schools as compared to their non-charter school peers. Academic scores were analyzed for elementary, middle, and high school students. Graduation rates, dropout rates, and post-

secondary enrollment rates were also examined in an effort to determine whether students attending charter schools attained a higher degree of educational fortitude. All quantitative data were analyzed using a two-tailed *t*-test. The purpose of using such a test was to establish any statistically significant difference between charter school students and non-charter school students in the areas of academic performance and educational fortitude. The results of the application of this statistical method indicated no significant difference among charter school students and their non-charter school peers; however, possible reasons are discussed in Chapter Five.

The current progress of Missouri's charter school success or shortcomings was examined qualitatively through the use of interviews. These interviews yielded invaluable information that could not have been collected by other means and provided answers to many questions surrounding the purpose and determination behind the charter school implementation and historical relevance to Missouri inner-city reform.

The mixed study design utilized for this study provided both a concrete quantitative description of relative student performance while the qualitative component yielded information that must be considered before passing judgment on the current progress of Missouri's charter schools. There remains much to be studied regarding the progress of the charter movement in Missouri. In Chapter Five, options for future study and potential explanations for the results were addressed.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

During the 1970s and 1980s, Missouri opened and established magnet schools in the St. Louis and the Kansas City school districts with the hope of re-integrating inner-city schools. The premise was to entice suburban White students back from the neighboring metropolitan districts they had migrated to over the past three decades. The Kansas City and St. Louis school districts built extravagant infrastructures and promised a first rate education for those students who returned (Dunn, 2009). There is little debate that both districts succeeded at building the infrastructure; unfortunately, neither district was able to achieve an academic environment necessary to draw the suburban students back from the surrounding districts. Instead, academic performance continued to decline while the Black population increased due to the migration of more prosperous White students to the suburbs (Dunn, 2008). Federal court rulings in the 1990s began to signal the end of the desegregation remedies nationally and in Missouri (Moran, 2008). What remained in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts was a dramatic educational void coupled with a reduction of court-awarded desegregation money that completely phased out in 1999 (Ciotti, 1998).

The first Missouri charter schools opened in the fall of 1999 with the intent to create an alternative educational opportunity to the underserved students living in inner city St. Louis and Kansas City (Stancel, 2001). According to the former legislator, Mr. L, the authors of the charter school legislation hoped competition would benefit both charter and non-charter school students. Stakeholder hoped the success of the charter schools would induce the rest of the district schools to improve in order to compete with the new charter schools.

This study examined the progress of the now twelve-year-old charter school experiment in the state of Missouri. Charter school progress was measured by examining multiple variables in a mixed study design. The quantitative analysis compared student data between Missouri charter school students and students attending similar non-charter public schools in the same district; either the Kansas City, or St. Louis school district. Student data comparisons included MAP and EOC index scores, graduation rates, dropout rates, and post-secondary enrollment rates.

Index score comparisons included the Communication Arts and Mathematics components of the MAP for grades 3, 5, and 8 for the years 2008 and 2009 in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts. In addition to the elementary and middle school MAP data, high school Algebra I and English II EOC data were also examined for the year 2009; the only year it was available at the time of this study. This analysis included 11, 3rd grade charter schools, 14, 5th grade charter schools, and 11, 8th grade charter schools throughout the Kansas City School District for the 2008 and 2009 school years. During the 2009 school year high school, EOC exam data became available. English II data were obtained from seven Kansas City charter high schools and compared to seven similar non-charter public schools. In addition to the original seven, another high school was included in the examination of the Algebra I EOC data (n = 8). Each of these schools was matched to a similar non-charter public school with similar student demographics which included total overall minority population, free and reduced price meal averages, and class population size. In many cases, a particular charter school was matched to the same public non-charter school for each comparison; however, this was not always possible.

The St. Louis analysis included seven different 3rd grade charter schools, seven charter schools with 5th grade classes, and eight different 8th grade charter schools throughout the St. Louis School District for 2008 and 2009 school years. During the 2009 school year, English II EOC data became available and were collected from three St. Louis charter high schools. Algebra I data from four different charter high schools were examined and used for comparisons.

This study utilized a causal comparative method between Missouri charter schools and similar non-charter public schools. Multiple two-tailed *t*-tests were used to examine data collected for these two types of schools which included MAP and EOC index scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment rates. The independent variable was determined to be the type of school a student attended; either a charter school or a non-charter public school, within either the Kansas City or St. Louis, Missouri school districts. The dependent variables included the MAP and EOC index scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment rates for each type of school a student attended.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, a qualitative component consisting of three interviews was also included in the study. These interviews compared three charter school stakeholders; a charter school principal, a professor at a university that currently sponsors Missouri charter schools, and a former legislator who helped author the original charter school legislation. All research questions, with an emphasis on the fourth question were examined against the backdrop of five earlier reform movements, as cited by Hassel (1999), which combined to form the charter school movement. These movements included choice, competition, autonomy, deregulation, and accountability.

The quantitative analysis of the data showed no statistical difference between any of the dependent variables with the exception of students entering two-year colleges in the Kansas City School District during the 2009 school year. The *p*-value for this *t*-test was 0.008149, which according to Runyon et al. (1996), $p < 0.05$ is considered statistically significant. Despite the initial findings of the *t*-tests which suggested Missouri charter schools are providing no better or worse education than traditional public schools, there remains much to discuss. Qualitative evidence discovered during the interview process suggested the ability to measure charter schools academic strides may not be entirely possible with aggregate quantitative analysis. This chapter provided a summary interpretation of the findings and offered areas where this research could be continued and expanded.

Discussion of Findings

Research question 1. To what extent are Missouri charter school students meeting the state academic standards measured by the MAP and EOC exams as compared to similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

Hassel (1999) cited a strong push for accountability as one of the reform movements partly responsible for the development and need for charter schools. According to Finn, Manno, and Vanourek, (2000), charter school supporters often describe the role of accountability in charter schools as the "third rail of the charter movement, others the Holy Grail" (as cited in Bracey, 2003, p. 76). The very nature of charter schools often suggests their students will achieve at high levels or face closure. In many ways, it appears researchers and the general public have come to the assumption that a successful charter school will be more successful than a similar non-charter public

school. Bracey (2003) noted charter school accountability is often a complicated matter with ambiguous goals that are often "all but impossible to assess" (p. 86). As was discovered during this study, no two charter schools are the same and often student goals and expectations between and among these schools can vary dramatically.

The statistical analysis comparing charter school's MAP and EOC performance to similar non-charter schools suggested that Missouri charter schools are not outperforming non-charter schools in Missouri in any content area or grade level (see Tables 1-4). These same tests also indicated that non-charter schools are not outperforming Missouri charter schools either. This evidence seems to suggest that Missouri charter schools, though no less effective, are not providing any additional academic benefit for students who are enrolled in their schools. There are, however, some potential explanations for these undistinguished achievement levels.

While conducting the interview with the charter school sponsor, Dr. S suggested although the MAP and EOC exam data were good assessment tools, several Missouri charter schools recruited high-risk students with the intention of simply returning them to grade level with their peers. The purpose of recruiting this demographic is to adhere to the charter law which states one-third of all students in a sponsor's charter schools must be considered high-risk and, as well, to improve the graduation rate of these districts. Academic performance remains important and intrinsic within the mission statements of the charter schools that recruit these high-risk students, yet high academic achievement is not the primary goal of these particular schools.

As an example, Dr. P related one of the high schools sponsored by the university recruits and enrolls teenage mothers seeking to finish their high school diplomas. The

academic expectations for these students are much different than those enrolled in one of the college prep charter high schools. If Missouri charter schools are doing an honest job in their recruiting of high-risk students, perhaps comparing these charter schools to similar non-charter schools is not an entirely fair analysis. Both districts contain a handful of college prep charter high schools whose mission statements seek to prepare their students for a post-secondary education. However, when these college prep charter schools data were combined with others charters schools with less ambitious academic goals, the *t*-tests revealed no statistically significant academic gains against traditional public schools.

It should be noted that neither Algebra I or English II, the only high school course that EOC exams are required in, are considered upper level, college prep, courses. Perhaps a more rigorous study of the college prep charter schools would reveal higher achievement gains in upper level, college prep, courses. It was not the purpose of this study to discern the specific academic goals of each individual charter high school; however, there also was no evidence any of Missouri's elementary or middle school charter schools showed statistically higher achievement gains over similar non-charter school.

Another possible explanation for the *t*-test results of the MAP and EOC exam scores could be due to district-wide academic improvement. This study did not measure longitudinal academic gains for charter schools or non-charter schools in the district. This is a potential area for future research which may yet indicate academic gains by the charter schools. During the interview with the former legislator, Mr. L, it was explained that one of the greatest hopes of the charter school legislation was to improve education

as a whole in Missouri's two largest and, in his words, most dysfunctional districts. Mr. L and his colleagues wanted to give parents the choice of whether their children continued to attend a school that was part of a failing district, or try a different kind of school whose existence was based solely on accountability. Mr. L reserved comment on whether he believed they had achieved this goal; however, Mr. P and Dr. S both remarked they believed the charter schools had, in fact, caused improvement in the Kansas City and St. Louis districts overall. Dr. S believed the competition the charter schools created had caused the district non-charter schools to work harder to retain students.

Research question 2. What relationship exists between the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend Missouri charter schools and the dropout rate and graduation rate of students who attend similar public schools in Kansas City and St. Louis?

Research questions two and three pertained only to Missouri's charter high schools. It was anticipated the data would show a greater degree of educational fortitude among charter school students. Research question two focused on whether Missouri charter schools are succeeding at improving the graduation rates and subsequently lowering the dropout rates of high school students. Although graduation and dropout rates are not strictly aligned with academic performance, graduation rates in both districts have historically remained well below the state average, while the dropout rates of both districts have consistently been higher (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h).

Graduation rates among Kansas City and St. Louis charter schools were, on average, higher than similar non-charter school districts for both 2008 and 2009. The *t*-test analysis revealed these differences were not statistically significant, although it

should be noted, the 2009 St. Louis charter school probability was very close to being statistically significant. The average graduation rate at a St. Louis charter school in 2009 was 20 points higher than similar non-charter schools rates. Although the *t*-test measured no significant difference, $p = 0.11$, it was near the established level of significance .05. Charter school dropout rates, though also not considered statistically significant, still compared favorably to similar non-charter schools. During 2008, Kansas City charter schools had, on average, lower dropout rates than similar non-charter schools; however, in 2009, this trend was reversed.

Research question 3. What relationship exists between the percentage of Missouri charter school students who pursue post-secondary education and the percentage of students from a similar public school in Kansas City or St. Louis who pursue post-secondary education?

Three of Missouri's six charter high schools include in their school mission the statement that graduates will continue their education beyond high school. Of the six charter high schools, only four were included in the study, including all three of the schools with this ambitious goal. Although three-fourths of the charter high schools professed to guide their students towards a post-secondary education, the *t*-test analysis demonstrated that students attending these schools were statistically no more likely to attend a two or four-year college or university after graduating from a Missouri charter school.

Despite the lack of statistical evidence, an observation of individual charter school data revealed that at least two of the three schools posting mission statements with post-secondary enrollment emphases have managed quite well at sending above average

percentages of their graduates on to post-secondary educations. These two schools managed to enroll over 90% of their graduating seniors in some form of post-secondary education in 2008 and were almost as successful in 2009, though one only enrolled 71% of their graduates in post-secondary schools. These raw data are not presented or included in this study because individual school performance was not examined nor the purpose of this study.

This closer examination suggested some degree of success on the part of these schools towards achieving their stated missions. These percentages were well above the state average for students who enrolled in post-secondary schooling; approximately 70% for 2008 and 2009. These same two charter schools posted considerably higher post-secondary enrollment rates than the Kansas City School District, which never managed to send even 50% of its graduates on to post-secondary educations either year (MODESE, 2009h). Despite aggregate Missouri charter schools not demonstrating a statistically higher number of students pursuing post-secondary educations, the raw data from Missouri's charter schools with post-secondary enrollment mission statements, represents a notable achievement for any school.

Research question 4. What are the perceptions of charter school stakeholders on the impact of charter schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis districts?

The interview responses provided additional insight into the charter school movement and explained many of the quantitative findings. This study sought to examine Missouri charter school progress by examining many variables including academic achievement on MAP and EOC exams, graduation rates, dropout rates, and post-secondary enrollment rates. The statistical analysis compared statewide charter school

performance in these areas to similar non-charter schools with a broad brushstroke. Although this analysis was considered fair, it became clear during this research the charter school movement sought to impose change on the system as a whole by providing choice and competition to neighboring schools through individual autonomous schools. As discovered during the review of literature and the interview process, very few charter schools nationally, or in the sate of Missouri, have the same school mission and, therefore, the same set of goals for its students. The quantitative analysis revealed when viewing Missouri charter schools through a broad lens, stakeholders should not expect a higher level of achievement, nor should they expect to have a better chance to graduate or pursue a post-secondary education. Yet, when one examines charter schools on an individual basis with respect to the school mission statement, charter schools may be succeeding at achiving their own narrowly defined goals.

What also became evident during the quantitative analysis is that students attending Missouri charter schools are not any less likely to graduate, enroll in a technical, two-year, or four-year college or university, or perform any better or worse on one of Missouri's standardized assessment tests. This could be viewed as a possible success when one considers that many of Missouri's charter schools recruit high-risk students; a stark contrast to the previous choice movement before it. Qualitative perceptions obtained during this study suggested Missouri charter schools do have the academic best interests of inner-city students in mind regardless of their situation. When one examines Missouri charter schools in a more individual, and holistic manner, many of these schools appear to be successfully fulfilling their mission statements; whether it is

focused on sending students to post-secondary educations, or simply helping students earn a high school diploma.

Limitations of Findings

All statistics contain a certain degree of bias and uncertainty of measurement. The confidence level for all *t*-tests used for this study was established at the .05 level. Therefore each *t*-test has a 95% chance of correctly measuring any disparity that existed between the charter school and non-charter school variables tested (Runyon et al., 1999). These variables included MAP and EOC academic performance, dropout rate, graduation rate, and post-secondary enrollment rates. Despite the outcome of subjecting the data to a *t*-test there remains the possibility that the statistical instrument, *t*-test, is not able to measure what was sought (Runyon et al., 1999). The quantitative analysis of the data suggested there is very little chance that Missouri charter schools, when grouped together, are outperforming similar non-charter public schools.

The qualitative analysis suggested that each charter school is providing a unique education with highly variable goals and intentions. It should be remembered that each stakeholder who was interviewed had a favorable view of the charter school movement in Missouri. This presents an immediate bias, as no participants expressed a negative viewpoint of the movement. The purpose of the interviews was to provide a historical context of the movement and measure the perceptions of the movement from each stakecholder's perspective. Although three interviews were sufficient to ascertain this information, there is no question a larger interview pool would have provided more information and expanded the understanding and perceptions of this movement.

Relationship of Findings to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was selected to examine the relevance of charter schools, specifically Missouri charter schools, within the broad realm of school reform. The school reform movements that were most influential in the creation of charter schools were highlighted and detailed in the literature review and included choice, competition, school based management, deregulation, and accountability for results (Hassel, 1999). Of the five movements, accountability for results is perhaps the most important, and in many ways, is directly linked to a charter schools ability to provide a competitive, viable, school choice among other non-charter public schools. School based management and deregulation were least examined and not measured by any quantitative means.

Choice. Charter schools were not the first reform movement in Missouri to offer school choice to students and create competition among schools. The magnet schools, established during the 1980s and early 1990s as a remedy for inner city desegregation, sought to provide both. There are key differences between the magnet school movement and the current charter school movement. According to Dr. S, and Dunn (2008), the district bureaucracy combined with a court mandated quota system designed to ensure racial equity, interfered with any real opportunity for students to choose their school. There were never enough White students to ensure openings for Black students despite the available room. Black students continue to be the primary residents of both districts comprising well over half the student populations in St. Louis and Kansas City (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h).

By contrast Missouri charter schools appear to offer the students living in these districts real choice with very few restrictions. The only real stipulation that exists for Missouri charter schools is the one-third rule, which, in essence, states one-third of the students attending Missouri charter schools be classified as high-risk (see Appendix A for a complete description). District demographic data suggested the majority of students attending a public school in St. Louis or Kansas City likely meet this requirement (MODESE, 2009b; MODESE, 2009h).

Competition. Further study must be conducted to establish whether Missouri charter schools have created an effective competition among inner-city schools. If Charter schools in Missouri are unable to induce some level of competition among and between charter and non-charter schools, they will be unable to create the system changing force necessary to improve the districts as a whole. Unfortunately, this study alone cannot determine whether charter schools have stimulated any sort of district-wide educational improvement. The evidence obtained by this study suggested there is no statistical reason, based on the variables measured, to attend a Missouri charter school over a non-charter school. Despite these findings, the MODESE (2010b) reported charter school enrollments have more than doubled in the last seven years from just over 9,000 students to over 18,000. This information indicates district students are continuing to choose charter schools over the district schools; however, the reasons remain unclear.

Measuring the competitive force of Missouri charter schools was not the direct focus of this study; however, the study provided a foundation for future research to more deeply explore this facet. Although the findings showed no real educational advantage for students who attending a charter school over a non-charter public school in Missouri, this

could be interpreted as evidence that the movement has improved the district as a whole. It is possible that each district's non-charter schools have showed improvement in the areas examined by this study, and as a result, have realized the same degree of success as the charter schools; a parallel improvement among both types of schools. This study did not attempt to measure district-wide improvements; however, this is certainly an area that should be more deeply explored in future studies of Missouri charter schools.

S**chool based management and deregulation.** This study did not directly measure the degree of autonomy Missouri's charter school law provided to charters schools. This was largely due to an earlier study conducted by Stancel (2001) which more closely examined Missouri's charter school law and the autonomy granted to the charter schools intrinsic in the law. Anecdotal evidence obtained through the interviews suggested Missouri has created the necessary autonomy for charter schools to be successful at achieving individualized school goals. Although Hassel (1999) might disagree with Missouri's constraints on who can sponsor a charter school, current research has shown that states with limited sponsorship entities have shown greater charter school achievement gains (CREDO, 2009). Missouri charter schools operate outside the district leadership hierarchy, and therefore, are autonomous schools regulated for the most part by the authorizing entity. Decisions are site-based and made between the school and the sponsoring entity without the oversight of the district or the MODESE.

A**ccountability for results.** The CREDO (2009) found the reluctance of sponsoring entities to close low-performing charter schools to be one of the biggest weaknesses of the charter school movement. Bracey (2003), speculated that the failure to close failing charter schools could potentially be the downfall of the charter school

movement. This research did not examine individual school results, yet the data suggested that Missouri charter schools, though not outperforming non-charter public schools, are not under-performing them either. Historical evidence has shown Missouri's primary sponsoring entities, colleges and universities, have closed charter schools that have not met the criteria established by the charter document. This willingness to adhere to high standards towards accountability is essential to protect the integrity of Missouri charter school institutions. Charter schools that are allowed to fail without consequences undermine the sustainability of the movement itself.

Implications for Practice

The findings, based on quantitative and qualitative evidence, in many ways contradict one another. The quantitative portion of the study grouped each district's charter schools together with no regard for individual charter school mission goals. This method allowed for the collective charter schools to be compared against traditional non-charter public schools, but in doing so, one of the principle tenets of the charter school movement was violated. If each charter school is a truly autonomous entity with individualized goals and purposes, as the qualitative evidence suggested, then measuring the collective movement becomes more difficult.

Quantitative results of this research suggested students will not necessarily make large academic strides, or realize increased educational fortitude, as a result of attending a Missouri charter school. However, based on individual student needs, it is possible a student who chooses a charter school specific to his or her needs could prove beneficial. College bound students could potentially benefit from attending one of the college prep

charter schools, while high-risk students could potentially benefit from a charter school with an emphasis on student remediation.

The quantitative findings of this study should not necessarily discourage prospective students from attending a charter schools either. This study produced no evidence to suggest charter schools are providing less of an education than neighboring non-charter schools. Missouri charter schools are very much individualized, autonomous schools. Each school should be considered based on individual student needs and goals, rather than through an aggregate examination.

Qualitative analysis revealed that Missouri charter schools are very focused on fulfilling the school mission. This is not too surprising since charter school mission statements are often the benchmark for the approval, and continued sponsorship, of a charter school. This intense focus is directly attributed to the continued operation of the charter school but unites the faculty and other charter school stakeholders in a common purpose. During the interview with Mr. P, it became clear that once the mission was established by the founders, an innovative and unconventional approach was necessary to meet the goals of the mission. Not achieving the expectations established by the charter school mission was simply not an option for the charter school to remain open. Perhaps non-charter schools can benefit from the highly focused and mission oriented charter schools. Although many non-charter schools have mission statements, whether they adhere to the school mission or not is voluntary and inconsequential to the schools continued existence. Charter schools, however, often must invent new methods and instructional strategies to meet the goals established in the charter document and communicated in the school mission statement.

Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the overall findings of this study, which suggested students attending one of Missouri's charter schools will be no less likely to dropout, no more likely to graduate, enroll in a post-secondary education, or achieve at an academically higher level than students attending a similar non-charter public school, there is no indication that achievement goals have not been reached. This study sought not to measure the improvement of the Kansas City and St. Louis districts on the whole, but to determine whether the charter schools within these districts were achieving at a higher level. It is possible, though not measured by this study, that the districts overall have improved because of the completion that has occurred since charter schools first opened their doors. This was the goal and intention of the law according to Mr. L, the former legislator, "to force the district to improve through internal competition." Whether or not the creation of the charter schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts have caused the districts themselves to improve is a research question worthy of study. If there had been improvement within the districts since the opening of the charter schools, perhaps the charter schools are, in a large part, the reason.

Summary

This study concluded with fewer answers than questions. According to Stancel (2001), and the former state legislature, the intent behind the charter school movement was to create a positive, yet robust competition between charter schools and non-charter schools which would force the Kansas City and St. Louis districts to improve the education they were providing. It was hoped this competition for students and resources would spur both districts to re-evaluate how to best meet the needs of the students,

something, the literature suggested, had not occurred for decades in either district. It was anticipated Missouri charter schools were providing a statistically more valuable education than non-charter schools in the areas measured. In light of the findings, it became difficult to effectively assess the competitive force Missouri charter schools created within either district.

Charter schools are the latest effort in the progression of educational reforms, yet charter schools have shown a tremendous staying power and expansion that few reforms before have managed. As the movement continues to age, the long-anticipated data have begun to emerge. These data will allow researchers, taxpayers, parents, educational leaders, and legislators to evaluate and make decisions on the continued existence of charter schools. Despite the success and expansion of this educational movement, additional research should be conducted to broaden the understanding and quantify the benefits and shortcomings of this movement.

Appendix A

Synopsis of Missouri Charter School Law, Senate Bill 781 (1998)

GENERAL STATISTICS	
Number of Schools Allowed	Unlimited in specified jurisdictions
APPROVAL PROCESS	
Eligible Chartering Authorities – The school boards of Kansas City or St. Louis district, a four-year college or university located in Missouri with an approved teacher education program that meets regional or national standards of accreditation, a community college located in either district, and the state board upon appeal.	
Eligible Applicants	Any person, group or organization
Appeals Process	If any one of the sponsors rejects the charter school they can appeal to the State Board rejects the application then judicial review is an option.
Term of Initial Charter	No less than 5, no more than 10 years
OPERATIONS	
Automatic Waiver from Most State and District Education Laws, Regulations, and Policies	Yes
Legal Autonomy	Yes
Governance	Specified in charter
Charter School Governing Body Subject to Open Meeting Laws	Yes
Charter School May be Managed or Operated by a For-Profit Organization	Charters may not be granted directly to for-profit organizations. They may contract for services including management.
Transportation for Students	School districts required to provide transportation to pupils attending a charter school located in the district, with dual funding for charter and other public school students.
Facilities Assistance	A school district may incur bonded indebtedness or take other measures to provide for physical facilities for charter schools that it sponsors.

Reporting Requirements	Annual report cards to sponsor, local district and state
Funding Amount	100% of state and district operations funding follows students, based on average district per pupil revenue
Fiscal Autonomy	Yes
Start-up Funds	No state funding
TEACHERS	
Collective Bargaining/ District Work Rules	Not applicable, freedom from existing bargaining contracts
Certification	No more than 20% of full-time instructional staff may be filled by non-certified personnel.
Leave of Absence from District	Up to three years or as agreed to by teacher and district
Retirement Benefits	For charter employees who choose to remain employees of district only. All eligible for retirement package of their choice. If already teacher in a conventional district they can remain employee of district and remain with package.
STUDENTS	
Eligible Students	Not applicable, freedom from existing bargaining contracts
Preference for Enrollment	May establish a geographical area around the school whose residents will receive a preference. May also give a preference for admission of children whose siblings attend the school or whose parents are employed at the school.
Enrollment Requirements	A charter school shall not limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender; income level, proficiency in the English language or athletic ability, but my limit admission to pupils within a given age group or grade level.
Selection Method (in case of over-enrollment)	Lottery

Special Needs	Charter schools must assure the needs of special education children in compliance with all federal and state laws and regulations.
Accountability	Charter schools must be financially and academically accountable. The state board of education shall develop a method to measure student progress, starting with the collection of baseline data during at least the first three years for determining how the charter school is performing and to the extent applicable, participate in the essential skills tests and the nationally standardized norm-referenced achievement tests, as designated.
High-Risk Students	If a Sponsor grants three or more charters at least one-third of the charters must be to schools that recruit high- risk students. A high-risk student is are at least one year behind in satisfactory completion of course work, pregnant or a parent, homeless or has been homeless sometime within the preceding six months, has limited English proficiency, has been suspended from school three or more times, is eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch, or has been referred by the school district for enrollment in an alternative program.

(Sources: Missouri Revised Statutes, 2010a; Missouri Revised Statutes, 2010b; Center for Education for Reform, as cited in Stancel, 2001)

Appendix B

10-68
IRB Project Number

Lindenwood University
Institutional Review Board Disposition Report

To: Phillip Guy
Sherry DeVore

As IRB chair, I have reviewed the expedited IRB application you submitted and saw no human subjects concerns. The proposal has been approved.

Jeanie Thies 4/14/10
Institutional Review Board Chair Date

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Questions for Charter School Building Principal

1. Have you been an administrator in a traditional public school? If so, what different pressures does each of these jobs present?
2. What inspired you to work at a charter school?
3. What additional pressures does your faculty face that educators in the traditional public school setting do not? Do these additional pressures improve instruction or hinder it?
4. What is the leadership hierarchy for Missouri's charter schools? Elaborate on the relationship between your sponsor and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE). What issues does your school face from each of these entities?
5. In your opinion, has the Missouri charter school movement been effective in terms of improving student achievement? If so, in what ways?
6. What have been the greatest challenges and successes for your charter school since it first opened?
7. What behavioral and motivational differences do you observe between the students in a charter school and those in a traditional public school setting?
8. In your opinion, are Missouri charter schools meeting the needs of the students? What benefits does the charter school provide for their students, both measurable and non-measurable?

9. Should charter schools be allowed in districts beyond the Kansas City and St. Louis districts? Why? Why not? In your opinion, would the charter school movement be effective in the rural districts?
10. Are the students at this school required to attend any mandatory tutoring? If so, approximately how much time per week?
11. Are the teachers required to provide mandatory tutoring or other services for their students? If so, how are they compensated?
12. What additional requirements are compulsory for students and/or their parents who attend your school that would not be imposed by a traditional public school?
13. What is the admission/recruitment process for students? Approximately what percentage of your students continue/finish their education at your charter school as opposed to those who return the traditional public school setting?
14. What is the recruitment process for teachers? What considerations should potential teachers take into account if they want to work in a charter school?
15. In what ways do you expect Missouri charter schools budgets to be impacted in light of the current economic situation?

Questions for Charter School Sponsor

1. What motivated your institution to become involved in the charter school movement and to become a charter school sponsor?
2. What is your role in the continued authorization/evaluation process for the charter schools you sponsor?
3. Has your institution been involved in the closure of a charter school? If so, whose decision was it to close the school? What criteria were used to make this decision?
4. How often do you evaluate the charter schools your institution sponsors, and how is it done? Does the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) or any other organization help in this evaluation process? If so, in what capacity?
5. How have the community, district school board, and other district stakeholders responded to your efforts to open charter schools?
6. Will your institution continue to sponsor additional charter schools? Why, or why not?
7. Do you believe that Missouri charter school laws are adequate? Why, why not? In your opinion, how could the charter school laws be changed to produce more effective charter schools?
8. Do these laws allow Missouri's charter schools to achieve the degree of autonomy you believe necessary for them to function as the educational labs the charter pioneers envisioned?
9. How did the loss of accreditation of the Kansas City School District impact charter schools?

10. Do you believe the charter school model could be effective in other areas, particularly the rural areas, of the state? Why, or why not?
11. What have been the greatest challenges and successes for the charter schools your institution sponsors?
12. What budgetary pressures do charter schools face in light of the current economic situation?

Questions for Legislator

1. What was your primary motivation for introducing a bill to allow charter schools in the state of Missouri?
2. What roadblocks did charter schools supporters face? Who opposed the charter school movement and why?
3. Why were charter schools limited to just the Kansas City and St. Louis districts? In your opinion, do you believe this model could be effective in other parts of the state?
4. What was Kansas City and St. Louis' initial reaction to charter schools being established in their districts? Are these sentiments still the same, or have they changed over time?
5. In your opinion, have Missouri charter schools met, exceeded, or failed to meet the expectations, established by yourself, and other legislators, who voted for their existence?
6. In what ways do you believe the current budget crisis will impact the charter schools program?

Interview questions adapted from Stancel, 2001.

Appendix D

Letter of Introduction

<Date>

<Title><First Name><Last Name>
<Position>
<School District>
<Address>

Dear <Title><First Name><Last Name>,

Thank you for participating in my research study. I look forward to meeting with you on <date><time> to gather your perceptions and insights into the charter school movement.

I have allotted one hour to conduct the interview. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped to ensure your responses are transcribed accurately.

Enclosed are the interview questions to allow time for reflection before our interview. I have also enclosed the Letter of Informed Consent Form for your review and signature. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Confidentiality is assured. If you have questions, please call or send an e-mail (417-546-XXXX or pjg829@lionmail.lindenwood.edu).

Sincerely,

Phillip J. Guy
Doctoral Candidate
Lindenwood University

Appendix E

Lindenwood University

School of Education

209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Missouri Charter Schools and Educational Reform

Principal Investigator: Phillip J. Guy
Telephone: 417-546-XXXX E-mail: pjg829@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

Participant _____Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Phillip J. Guy (researcher) and Dr. Sherry DeVore (advisor). The purpose of this study is to analyze the academic strides of the Missouri charter schools.

2. Your participation will involve a face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped to assure your responses are transcribed accurately.
   *I give my permission to audiotape the interview (Participant's initials: ___).

3. The amount of time involved in your participation will be 1 hour or less. Approximately three subjects will be interviewed for this research.

4. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

5. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about Missouri charter schools and provide stakeholders and legislators information to make informed decisions.

6. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

7. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study, and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.

8. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, if problems arise, or you would like the results of the findings, you may call the Investigator, Phillip Guy, 417-546-XXXX, or his Faculty Advisor, Dr. Sherry DeVore, 417-881-0009.

9. You may also ask questions, or state concerns, regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) by contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

Appendix F

Tables D1-D5 provides examples of the demographic data that was used to pair a similar non-charter school grade level with a non-charter school grade level. These tables do not include every school comparison used in the study and are provided only so the readers can view the examples of the comparisons that were used.

Table D1

2008 3rd Grade MAP Communication Arts Index Score Comparison within the Kansas City District

Charter school code	F/R%	Non-white %	Grade level pop.	MPI score	Non-charter school code	F/R%	Non-white %	Grade level pop.	MPI score
CS1	90.8	99.0	265	684.5	S17	96.6	100	43	725.6
CS3	83.2	99.2	111	673.0	S2	85.6	99.4	69	671.0
CS4	79.4	99.8	37	627.0	S23	67.2	58.4	41	690.2
CS5	81.0	94.7	74	668.9	S3	79.3	100	41	661.0
CS6	98.6	98.0	39	648.7	S1	85.1	94.9	42	709.5
CS8	98.6	78.2	55	650.9	S15	91.1	98.8	48	712.5
CS9	65.5	60.5	98	709.2	S20	91.9	98.8	30	670.0

Note. Anonymous school codes have been assigned to all schools. F/R = Free and Reduced Price Meal. MPI = MAP Index Score.

Table D2

2009 High School Algebra I EOC Index Score Comparison within the Kansas City District

Charter school code	F/R%	Non-white %	Grade level pop.	MPI score	Non-charter school code	F/R%	Non-white %	Grade level pop.	MPI score
CS12	85.7	97.8	36	686.1	S34	77.8	98.7	45	664.4
CS14	74.4	79.1	27	681.5	S48	73.4	88.7	31	745.2
CS17	80.4	97.0	15	620.0	S45	82.6	97.6	20	655.0
CS20	76.7	99.3	13	746.2	S67	69.4	91.3	8	600.0
CS21	91.8	95.3	124	634.7	S71	74.5	84.4	118	686.4
CS23	75.2	100	84	642.9	S59	63.8	94.8	70	692.9
CS25	78.6	95.8	52	740.4	S65	78.0	90.3	66	698.5
CS26	84.5	99.0	34	635.3	S73	62.3	97.00	47	674.5

Note. Anonymous school codes have been assigned to all schools. F/R = Free and Reduced Price Meal. MPI = MAP Index Score.

Table D3

2009 8th Grade Math MAP Index Score Comparison between Charter and Non-Charter Schools in the St. Louis District

Charter school code	F/R%	Non-white%	Grade level pop.	MPI score	Non-charter school code	F/R%	Non-white%	Grade level pop.	MPI score
CS1	96.9	97.8	118	691.5	S16	84.6	99.7	99	650.5
CS3	81.7	99.8	66	650.0	S4	73.4	100	93	631.2
CS4	84.9	99.8	47	655.3	S22	77.8	100	72	675.0
CS5	84.5	98.7	96	655.2	S26	79.6	99.3	106	644.3
CS6	87.8	98.2	122	648.4	S30	83.2	100	93	639.8
CS7	96.1	95.4	84	721.4	S18	78.8	94.8	98	649.0
CS8	94.8	84.5	73	641.1	S6	79.0	86.1	78	707.7
CS9	66.9	57.6	96	737.5	S7	66.7	60.2	91	685.7

Note. Anonymous school codes have been assigned to all schools. F/R = Free and Reduced Price Meal. MPI = MAP Index Score.

Table D4

2009 Dropout Comparison between Charter and Non-Charter School in the St. Louis District

Charter school code	F/R %	Non-white %	High school pop.	Non-charter school code	F/R %	Non-white %	High school pop.
CS2	82.7	96.7	58	S19	64.2	94.8	175
CS3	81.7	99.8	73	S28	73.3	99.7	138
CS6	87.8	98.2	267	S31	56.9	99.4	74

Note. Anonymous school codes have been assigned to all schools. F/R = Free and Reduced Price Meal.

Table D5

2009 Graduation Rate Comparison between Charter and Non-Charter School in the Kansas City District

Charter school code	F/R %	Non-white %	High school pop.	Non-charter school code	F/R %	Non-white %	High school pop.
CS12	85.7	97.8	36	S73	62.3	97.0	47
CS17	80.4	97.0	15	S44	78.2	99.1	187
CS20	76.7	99.3	13	S58	70.2	90.1	200
CS25	78.6	95.8	52	S59	63.8	94.8	70

Note. Anonymous school codes have been assigned to all schools. F/R = Free and Reduced Price Meal.

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Vita

Phillip J. Guy was born in Garden City, Kansas, on October 1, 1976. He attended a private Catholic school in Wichita, Kansas, through the third grade. His family moved to Forsyth, Missouri, located in the Ozark Mountains of southern Missouri, in 1985. He completed his elementary and high school years at Forsyth Public School and graduated in 1995. Phillip continued his education at Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, Missouri, earning an Associate's of Arts Degree in 1998. He then moved to Springfield, Missouri, were he completed a Bachelor's of Science in Education from Missouri State University in 2000. He then pursued a Master's of Science in Educational Administration from Southwest Baptist University earning his degree in 2005. In addition to these degrees, Phillip has earned almost 20 graduate hours in the sciences

Phillip has spent the past 10 years teaching high school science at Forsyth Public School. He teaches Physics, Chemistry, and Physical Science. Phillip partnered with Missouri State University and added a duel credit Chemistry class to the Forsyth Science Department. He has held the position of the Forsyth Science Department Head for the past eight years and chaired the Science curriculum committee for two years. He taught Adult Education and Literacy classes through Ozark Technical Community College from 2003 to 2006.

In addition to these academic achievements, Phillip is also an active member of two small business partnerships which focus on home construction, remodeling, and rental properties. Despite his busy lifestyle, Phillip enjoys spending time with his wife, Julia, and their two young boys, Nathaniel and Nickolas.