FACTORS SHAPING CHARTER SCHOOL LEADERS' STUDENT RECRUITMENT PRACTICES IN SOUTHERN NEVADA

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Abstract:

Charter schools have witnessed significant growth in the United States, accompanied by increased diversity among student populations. However, Southern Nevada charter schools diverge from national trends, enrolling a less racially and socioeconomically diverse student population. This study examined factors that shape charter school leaders' student recruitment practices in Southern Nevada. In addition to addressing the lack of literature coverage on Southern Nevada charter schools' demographics, this study also introduced new research regarding the predicament of charter school demographics in Southern Nevada. Using a case study approach, data from 16 charter school leaders and staff members across four identified charter schools were gathered, alongside website analysis and enrollment data review. Three main themes emerged: challenges related to complex public funding, difficulties in community outreach and informing about admission processes, and constraints imposed by charter school enrollment caps and application procedures. Based on these findings, the recommendations were provided for both policymakers and charter school leaders. This study lays the groundwork for discussions aimed at enhancing charter school recruitment practices and addressing public funding complexities, fostering greater inclusivity in Southern Nevada's educational landscape.

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Dedication

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I dedicate this dissertation to you all with the deepest gratitude and love.

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Chapter One Introduction

Introduction

Public charter schools are unique schools that generally have the freedom to choose their own academic programs and governing body (Bogrek, 2017; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Bulkly & Fisler, 2002; Cheng et al., 2017; David et al., 2017; Witte et al., 2007). Despite this autonomy, charter schools are still accountable for advancing student achievement (Bogrek, 2017; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Bulkly & Fisler, 2002; Cheng et al., 2017; David et al., 2017). Over the past two decades, studies have shown that charter school enrollment has grown, increasing from 339,678 to 3,143,269 students from 2000 to 2018 (USAFacts, n.d.). According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' (NAPCS) 2020 annual report, there are 3.3 million students attending charter schools nationwide across 7,500 charter schools and campuses, which is three times as many students as the 2005-2006 school year (National Alliance, 2021).

According to 2018 data, students in charter schools across the United States are 31% White, 25% Black, 34% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 4% two or more races (NCES, 2021). Over the years, student diversity at charter schools nationwide has increased significantly; per NAPCS's 2020 annual report, Black or Hispanic students account for nearly 70% of all charter schools' students (National Alliance, 2021). The same report indicates that 59% of all charter schools' students are qualified for the Free and Reduced-priced Lunch (FRL) program (National Alliance, 2021). Although most states, like California and Texas, reflect similar demographics to the national average, there are other states that do not, such as Nevada and Arizona (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). State Public Charter Schools Authority (SPCSA) authorized charter schools located in Clark County, Nevada, have fewer minority students compared to the district schools in the same county (SPCSA, 2020). While this may be the case,

charter schools in Southern Nevada are not enrolling as racially and socioeconomically diverse students as other school districts nationwide. These differences in each state might be due to their state policy support or their type of authorizers. For example, charter schools in California can be authorized by a local school district, county office of education, or the State Board of Education, whereas in Nevada, they are authorized by the state agency of SPCSA (EdData, 2020; Nevada State Public Charter School Authority, 2019).

Charter schools in Southern Nevada do not reflect the demographics of traditional district schools within the same neighborhoods. Charter schools authorized by the SPCSA have 11.9% Black and 34.9% Hispanic students, whereas Clark County School District (CCSD) has 15.3% Black and 47.2% Hispanic students, and the state has 11.8% Black and 43.5% Hispanic students (SPCSA, 2020). Similarly, SPCSA charter schools have 39.4% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) eligible students, whereas CCSD schools have 85.6% FRL eligible students, and the state has 72.5% (SPCSA, 2020). According to the SPCSA's report, charter schools located in Clark County have 39.2% FRL-eligible students, while CCSD schools have 85.6%. Most charter schools are located in the outer suburbs rather than the inner city of Las Vegas. In short, many of Southern Nevada's most disadvantaged students are not being served by charter schools (SPCSA, 2020).

As publicly funded school systems, charter schools must ensure equal access to all students. Charter schools can be considered a school of choice for many families who are unhappy with the academic quality of their zoned public school and who cannot afford to send their kids to private schools. Racially and socioeconomically diverse families' children must also have access to the high-quality seats that quality charter schools offer. Despite this, Nevada charter schools have an equity and diversity issue; as Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson, former

chairman of the Assembly Education Committee, states, “the higher-performing charter schools have very little students of color in them, that is a problem” (Pak-Harvey, 2019).

Problem Identification

Charter schools nationwide are increasingly more diverse when compared to traditional district schools (National Alliance, 2021). However, this is not the same for Southern Nevada charter schools. Southern Nevada charter schools have a smaller percentage of Black and Hispanic students and a smaller percentage of students from low-income families compared to local traditional district (CCSD) schools (SPCSA, 2020).

Charter schools are new choices of schooling for families who are displeased with their zoned traditional district schools and cannot afford the tuition of private schools; however, not all families have equal access to these school choices. Various factors contribute to unequal access to charter schools for families, including disparities in information availability regarding the school’s quality, offered programs, enrollment procedures, language barriers, socioeconomic status, and parents’ capacity to arrange transportation (Frankenberg et al., 2011).

The growth of charter schools nationwide initiated a competition between charter schools and traditional district schools to attract students to their schools. The competitive environment prompted charter school principals to take on the responsibility of promoting their schools to both attract and retain students (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016; Jabbar & Wilson, 2018). Gawlik & Bickmore (2017) stated, “Successful charter school principals must possess an uncommon set of skills, including both strong instructional leadership and solid business and management skills” (p. 5). As a result, recruitment and enrollment of students became one of the primary responsibilities of charter school principals (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Portin et al., 2003). Charter school principals have the task of strategically developing methods that can potentially increase

student enrollment and demographics and influence where schools are located. (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Villavicencio, 2016; Riel, 2020; Riel, 2021). Typically, the school principal does ground-level recruitment by going door to door, visiting youth associations and churches, and reaching out to the targeted populations (Eckes & Trotter, 2007).

Charter schools are generally permitted to recruit across traditional school boundaries; in the case of Nevada, they are allowed to recruit throughout the municipal county (Charter schools commonly asked questions, n.d.). However, data has indicated that the majority of charter schools in Southern Nevada are predominantly White and serve the children of affluent families (SPCSA, 2021). Charter school principals play a tremendous role in their schools' recruitment and marketing efforts. Yet, minimal, if any, research is available that examines the factors that could possibly shape the recruitment practice of charter principals in Southern Nevada. As such, it is Imperative to examine what factors influence their student recruitment ini'iatives.

Purpose of Study

This study will investigate Southern Nevada charter schools to determine some potential reasons why they do not reflect the neighboring zoned traditional district schools and the national trend. This study will also explore the student recruitment practices of Southern Nevada charter school administrators.

In addition to addressing the lack of literature coverage on Southern Nevada charter schools' demographics, this study will also introduce new research regarding the predicament of charter school demographics in Southern Nevada. Additionally, it will aim to explore student demographic recruitment efforts from charter school principals that can potentially diversify their student body.

The following research question guided this study:

Research Question: What factors shape charter school leaders' student recruitment practices in Southern Nevada?

Summary

Charter schools are public schools that have the autonomy to choose their own academic programs and governing bodies. Being operated by taxpayers' funds, charter schools are accountable for their finances and academics. The number of charter schools, as well as the number of students attending them, is increasing significantly each year across the United States. Along with the increase in the number of charter schools, diversity at charter schools nationwide has also increased significantly; per NAPCS's 2020 annual report, Black and Hispanic students account for nearly 70% of all charter schools' students (National Alliance, 2021). The same report indicated that 59% of all charter schools' students are qualified for the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) program (National Alliance, 2021). However, charter schools in Southern Nevada have more White students than minority students, and they are not enrolling racially and socioeconomically diverse students similar to the national averages.

Charter schools in Nevada do not reflect the demographics of traditional district schools within the same neighborhoods. Charter schools authorized by the SPCSA have 11.9% Black, 34.9% Hispanic, and 39.4% FRL-eligible students, whereas CCSD has 15.3% Black, 47.2% Hispanic, and 85.6% FRL-eligible students (SPCSA, 2020). In short, many of Southern Nevada's most disadvantaged students are not being served by charter schools. These racially and socioeconomically diverse students might not have equal opportunities to get into Southern Nevada charter schools. Children of economically disadvantaged and racially diverse families should also have access to the high-quality seats that are offered by quality charter schools. Racially and socioeconomically diverse families face numerous barriers in accessing charter

schools in their neighborhoods, such as a lack of access to information about the quality of the charter school, programs offered by the charter school, and enrollment procedures about the charter school, as well as language barriers and transportation.

Key Terms and Definitions

Charter School: Autonomously managed public schools with the liberty to tailor classrooms according to their students' requirements.

Lottery: When charter schools face an excess of student applicants relative to their available seats, they should employ a lottery system to allocate enrollment and built the waitlist.

Weighted Lottery: Giving additional weight (giving two or more chances to win the lottery) to the students identified as part of a specified group of students, like students who are qualified for FRL or students who are English learners (EL).

Zoned Public School: For traditional public schools, a school's attendance zone is an outline of where students will attend within that traditional district school system or school district.

Economically disadvantaged: A student who has been determined eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) meals as determined under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), or who is in a household receiving supplemental nutrition assistance program, or who is homeless, migrant, or in foster care, as reported to the school.

Authorizer: A state, school district, or higher education entity with the chartering authority to review charter school applications, decide to approve or deny the charter applications, enter into charter contracts with the charter applicants, oversee the charter schools, and decide whether to authorize, renew, deny renewal of or revoke the charter contracts.

Diverse Students: Students of all abilities from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

English Language Learner (ELL) or English Learner (EL): Students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English.

Waitlist: When charter schools have more student applicants than they have available seats, they use a lottery system to determine their enrollment. After filling the open seats with the lottery, the remaining applications build the waitlist for the charter schools. They continue to enroll students from the waitlist as additional openings become available throughout the school year. Charter school waitlists do not roll over from year to year.

Charter Management Organization (CMO): A non-profit educational back-office organization that supports the charter school(s) by offering specialized services such as financial management, payroll processing, and facility management.

Educational Management Organization (EMO): A for-profit educational back-office organization that supports the charter school(s) by offering specialized services such as financial management, payroll processing, and facility management.

Chapter Two Literature Review

This chapter includes a review of literature leading to the demographic challenges that charter schools are facing. The literature review starts with the historical background of the charter school movement, both nationwide and within the state of Nevada. Since the customers of charter schools are parents who are displeased with the academic quality of their zoned traditional district schools (Moss, 2018), the academic achievement of charter schools nationwide and within the state of Nevada will be discussed next. Student demographics at charter schools and segregation, which is the backbone of this study, will be reviewed next. The review will continue with charter schools' student recruitment and their community engagement, as both aspects significantly influence the student demographics of the charter schools. Literature regarding principalships within charter schools will also be provided. Finally, the possible barriers for low-income families to enroll their children in charter schools, including application processes, lottery, parental involvement, and transportation, will be reviewed.

History of Charter Schools

Public charter schools are a school of choice and are allowed the freedom of their curriculum and program while still being academically and financially accountable (Almond, 2012; Bogrek, 2017; Bulkly & Fisley, 2002; Cheng et al., 2017; David et al., 2017; Witte et al., 2007). The charter school movement was initiated as an educational reform to improve the public education system by experimenting with different models (Bogrek, 2017; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Gleason, 2016; Hoxby, 2003; Winters, 2012). The first charter school law was passed in Minnesota in late 1991, and the first charter school opened its doors in Minnesota in 1992 (Bogrek, 2017; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; David et al., 2017; Witte et al., 2007). At present, 45 states, along with the District of Columbia, have established charter school laws;

West Virginia, which enacted its charter school law in 2019, is the most recent addition (Rafa et al., 2021).

Over the decades, charter schools have played an important role in improving public education by creating choice in the curriculum, accountability for educational outcomes and student progress, and creating autonomy for teachers, parents, and administrators (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). According to Renzulli (2006), "charter schools are one of the fastest-growing educational innovations" (p. 619). Certain critics of charter schools argue that these publicly funded institutions do not notably enhance students' academic performance or growth and fail to generate noticeable competition among school choices (Villanueva, 2019). Charter schools were envisioned to expand teachers' autonomy in curriculum and instruction, and they have expanded over the last 25 years as publicly funded alternatives to traditional district schools operating under private governance (Villanueva, 2019).

Charter schools do not charge tuition, and they operate with public funds (Almond, 2012; Bu & Mendenhall, 2022; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Cheng et al., 2017; Nevada Department of Education, n.d.; Witte et al., 2007). Charter schools also receive the same amount of local revenue as district schools. However, in some states, like New York and Massachusetts, charter schools receive less funding compared to traditional district schools (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Hoxby, 2003; Ladd & Singleton, 2018; Winters, 2012; Witte et al., 2007). Charter schools in Nevada also get their funding from the state, although not at the same average per-pupil rate as the school district in which the student is zoned. District schools in Nevada receive additional capital funding to maintain school buildings, which is more than $1200 per student each year; however, Nevada charter schools do not receive this additional capital funding (Hickey & Reese, 2019). Public funds follow the student, and if the student chooses a charter school for his/her

education, then the money goes to the charter school instead of the local school district (Ladd & Singleton, 2018).

Nevada Charter Schools

Charter school law was passed in the 1997 legislative session in Nevada. Senator Ernie Adler, D-Carson City, Senator John Porter, R-Boulder City, Senator Valerie Wiener, D-Las Vegas, and Senator Maurice Washington, R-Sparks, were the coauthors of this charter school bill, Senate Bill 220 (Hinds, 1997). This law gave charter school sponsorship to the school districts in Nevada. Nevada's first charter school, I Can Do Anything Charter High School (ICDA), was authorized by Washoe County School District (WCSD) and started its operations in September 1998 (Nevada Legislature, 2002). Odyssey Charter School and Keystone Academy were the first charter schools that were authorized by CCSD and started their operation in the Las Vegas Valley in 1999 (Nevada Legislature, 2002). Gateways to Success Public Charter School was authorized by Churchill County School District and started its operations in Fallon, NV, in 1999 (Nevada Legislature, 2002). In the 2001-2002 school year, there were a total of 10 charter schools operating in Nevada (Nevada Legislature, 2002). Rainbow Dreams Academy was the last charter school that was authorized by CCSD in 2007 (Rainbow Dreams Academy, n.d.). CCSD has had a moratorium on sponsoring new charters since 2007 (Opportunity180, 2017), and currently, all Nevada school districts have a moratorium on sponsoring new charters; instead, they continue to sponsor their existing charter schools (CSAN, 2019) (Guinn Center, 2018). The Nevada Board of Education continued to authorize new charter school applicants until the establishment of SPCSA in 2011 (Nevada Legislature, 2011). In 2011, the SPCSA was created as a governmental agency of the State of Nevada and a statewide charter sponsor (Nevada State Public Charter School Authority, 2019). Currently, the SPCSA and colleges or

universities within the Nevada System of Higher Education can sponsor new charter schools (Nevada Legislature, 2011). There are no charter schools sponsored by a college or university within the Nevada System of Higher Education, and SPCSA is the only sponsor in Nevada accepting applications to open new charter schools (Nevada Department of Education, n.d.). As of 2021, there is a total of 53 charter schools with 87 campuses around the state of Nevada, which are sponsored by SPCSA, CCSD, or WCSD (Nevada State Public Charter School Authority, 2020; Charter schools located in Clark County, Nevada., 2019, September 17; Washoe County School District, n.d.). SPCSA sponsors a total of 40 charter schools with 71 campuses across the state, and 27 of them, with 58 campuses, are located in Southern Nevada (Nevada State Public Charter School Authority, 2020). CCSD sponsors six charter schools (Charter schools located in Clark County, Nevada., 2019, September 17), and WCSD sponsors seven charter schools with a total of 10 campuses (Washoe County School District, n.d.). The number of students attending SPCSA-sponsored charter schools more than doubled in five years from the 2015-2016 to 2020-2021 school years, increasing from 25,748 to 53,223 (State of Nevada Department of Education, 2021). The number of students attending charter schools in Nevada increased from 56,999 to 58,855 just from the 2019-2020 school year to 2020-2021, which is a 3.3% increase; meanwhile, Nevada district schools lost their enrollment by 3.6% (Veney & Jacobs, 2021).

Charter School Principalship

A school leader's quality and efficiency play a big role in the success of the school. These leadership skills play an even more important role in charter schools' success. The traditional role of school principals has been to keep the maintenance of the building and ensure the safety of the school community; however, this role has changed since schools need more than

a mere manager (Dressler, 2001). As a novel educational initiative, charter schools aim to be more receptive and accountable to parents and the community, necessitating charter school leadership that extends beyond mere management (Dressler, 2001). The administration and management of charter schools with multiple and unique responsibilities require experienced and highly qualified principals (Luekens, 2004).

The principals of the stand-alone charter schools that are not part of a charter management organization (CMO) or an educational management organization (EMO) are responsible not only for the academic success of the school but also for the finances, safety, and any other operations of the organization. Most of these stand-alone charter schools do not have a district office like traditional district schools do. Charter school principals encounter challenges similar to those encountered by traditional district schools in order to realize the objectives of their charter schools (Dressler, 2001). However, charter school principals must undertake additional tasks, like budgeting and hiring, which are typically handled by the district offices at traditional district schools (Luekens, 2004). According to the findings of a study, charter school principals work more hours per week than traditional school principals (Williams-Allen, 2004). Charter school principals deal with unique challenges that can consume most of their time during the day and detract their focus from the most important aspects of principalship, like being an instructional leader (Goff et al., 2012). Findings from another past study indicate that increased focus on schools' marketing and branding has the potential to draw school principals' attention away from instruction and students' learning and toward more managerial work (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016). Charter schools that are affiliated with CMOs or EMOs can assign their managerial duties to them and have more time for the duties that are directly related to student learning (Goff et al., 2012). So, they can utilize this time to observe classes, conduct

walkthroughs, and engage in professional learning communities to enhance teaching quality and student learning.

Charter school principals have a great deal of autonomy and flexibility when compared to traditional principals (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017). Charter school principals take advantage of autonomy by engaging directly with human resource management to recruit the best teachers and set high expectations for teacher engagement in schools (Gawlik & Bickmore, 2017). Recruitment and enrollment of students are also two of the main responsibilities of charter school principals (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Portin et al., 2003).

Charter school principals can use strategies to create more of a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body at their schools by making decisions about both where to locate their school and where to advertise or recruit (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Villavicencio, 2016). Charter school principals use strategic recruitment to attract racially and socioeconomically diverse student applicants to their schools. They engage in active recruitment of Black or Hispanic students from specific neighborhoods through word of mouth and participation in community meetings (Eckes & Trotter, 2007).

Charter Schools and Student Achievement

Historically, the academic achievement gaps between White and racially diverse students have been prevalent, persistent, and consistently growing (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Kerstetter, 2016; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2015; Renzulli, 2006). Past researchers show that highly segregated school districts have the largest achievement gaps between Black and White students and similarly between Hispanic and White students (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2015). Wells et al. stated that racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are more successful in producing strong academic achievement results for students (2019, February 9). To address this

achievement gap, educational reform policies in the United States have introduced new avenues for restructuring schooling by authorizing the establishment of public charter schools (Almond, 2012; Kerstetter, 2016). Kerstetter (2016) stated, "Public charter schools are given significant freedom in how they operate in exchange for the requirement that they meet academic goals such as the reduction of achievement gaps between lower-income and higher-income students" (p. 512). Charter schools boasting diverse student demographics, both racially and socioeconomically, are ranked among the top performers in English and mathematics when compared to traditional district schools (Wohlstetter et al., 2016). Research also shows that some charter schools are effective at raising the academic performance of students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. (David et al., 2017; Gleason, 2016; Sowell, 2020). Another research done by Cheng et al. (2017) indicated that attending an urban charter school with a "no-excuse" model for 4 to 5 years could eliminate the math and literacy achievement gap between Black and White students.

According to research by Angrist et al. (2013), Massachusetts' urban charter schools are effective for poor and minority students, and they generate impressive achievement gains, while non-urban charters are largely ineffective and appear to reduce achievement for some. The findings from the same research indicate that policies promoting charter expansion, particularly those supporting operators and pedagogical approaches with proven effectiveness, enhance the prospects of charter schools narrowing achievement gaps (Angrist et al., 2013). Washington, DC charter schools with racially and socioeconomically diverse student bodies increased academic achievement significantly, and the DC Public Schools (DCPS) district started a partnership with one of the DC charter schools to implement the best practices at their district school (Buckley & Schneider, 2009). Minority students are more successful in charter schools compared to the

traditional district schools in states like California, Massachusetts, and New York; however, in states like North Carolina, this is not the case (Almond, 2012; Bifulco & Ladd, 2006).

However, recent studies suggest that despite two decades of existence, not all charter schools have achieved academic success (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Gleason, 2016; Gleason et al., 2010; Sowell, 2020). According to Gleason (2016) and Buckley & Schneider (2009), one of the initial aspirations for charter schools was to function as an educational experimentation ground.

Without having school district regulations, bureaucracy, and requirements, charter schools have the freedom to test new ideas and educational techniques. However, not all charter schools succeed; some of them fail while experimenting with these new techniques. The schools that did not provide extra school hours, additional after-school programs, free tutoring, home visits, or parental involvement activities did not have any additional success or even failed. Gleason et al. (2010) evaluated 36 charter middle schools in 15 states for their study and found that, on average, charter middle schools are neither more nor less successful than traditional district schools in improving student achievement. According to the research conducted by Gleason et al. (2010), findings show that charter schools serving advantaged students (students whose parents have higher incomes and with prior achievements) had significant negative effects on math test scores (p. xvii). Sowell (2020) examines the academic performance of students from both traditional district schools and charter schools by comparing their test scores on the New York State Education Department's yearly assessments in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Sowell's (2020) findings show that in the English Language Arts examination, a significant proportion of students attending charter schools, predominantly comprising Black or Hispanic individuals, achieved proficiency or exceeded expectations. Their success margin was

close to 5 to 1. Regarding the Mathematics assessment, approximately 68% of the 161 grade levels in charter schools witnessed a majority of students achieving proficiency. In contrast, among the 177 grade levels in traditional public schools, only 10% managed to have a majority of students testing proficient. Sowell (2020) notes that while some charter schools succeed, not all of them do. Charter schools that underperform risk losing their charters, leading to the termination of public funding. This presents in sharp distinction for underperforming and tainted traditional district schools, which often continue to receive public funding. Successful charter schools pose a significant challenge to traditional unionized public schools (Sowell, 2020).

Generally, there are some high-performing charter schools and some low-performing charter schools. Some charter schools are effective at raising the performance of students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. This may be because charter schools are given more flexibility from federal, state, and local policy to innovate and address the needs of students. Past research studies state that some charter schools are successful in boosting student achievement while others are not. Their findings show that high-dosage tutoring, frequent feedback to the parents, coaching for teachers, increased instruction time, extended school day/year, and policies promoting data-driven instruction practices are associated with charter schools' achievement (Angrist et al., 2013; Cheng et al., 2017; Gleason, 2016).

Successful charter schools that demonstrated significant improvement in students' academic achievements had shown that when their best practices were tested at low-performing traditional district schools, evidence indicated a significant increase in their students' academic achievement. (Fryer, 2014; Hoxby, 2003). Fryer (2014) tested the best practices of high-performing charter schools at Houston area traditional schools, and the results showed evidence suggesting that these high-performing charter schools' best practices can be used in previously

low-performing traditional district schools to significantly increase their students' academic achievement (p. 1405).

In Nevada, SPCSA-authorized charter schools are academically more successful than traditional district schools. The Nevada Department of Education uses the Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) to label the academic performance of public schools in Nevada. NSPF uses a star rating system for the academic performance of the schools on a scale from 1-Star to 5-Stars; 1 Star =Not Meeting Expectations and 5-Stars =Superior (State of Nevada Department of Education, (n.d.). For example, 46% of the SPCSA charter schools received the highest rating of 5-Stars in 2019, whereas only 17% of Nevada state public schools received a 5-Star rating. Similarly, only 3% of SPCSA charter schools received the lowest performance rating of 1-Star, whereas 13% of all Nevada public schools received a 1-Star rating (SPCSA Strategic Plan, n.d.).

In Nevada, charter schools share similarities with what Brown and Makris (2018) define as "prestige charter schools." This term refers to charter schools that possess attributes resembling those of elite private schools and cater primarily to advantaged families, resulting in a student demographic distinct from local public district schools. Prestige charter schools typically emerge from grassroots initiatives led by affluent community parents, exhibit strong parental leadership, boast high levels of parental involvement, maintain waitlists, rely on word-of-mouth reputation and social networks, and demonstrate high student test scores. Unlike traditional district schools in their locality, these schools' demographics often consist of unique subgroups, such as Asian, White, and non-FRL students. Brown and Makris (2018) advocate for policy reviews at these prestige charter schools to safeguard against advocacy by an advantaged

parentocracy seeking policies like unfair lottery systems, excessive parent fundraisers, or costly after-school enrichment activities, all of which may marginalize more at-risk students.

Charter School Community Engagement

Community engagement is vital when starting up a new charter school in any neighborhood. Even after being founded, these schools should continue engaging with their families and community in order to sustain their success at operating a charter school. Ruiz (2011) summarized the importance of family and community engagement for charter schools in his study. In his words, "When administrators, teachers, and parents asked why they thought Hispanic parents choose their particular charter school, they all agreed that personal interactions were the key; they all pointed out that their school had a feeling of family" (p.113). Some charter schools host cultural activities to attract minority families to their schools in order to make their school enrollment more racially and socioeconomically diverse. Their teaching staff are also available at these events to interact with the families, answer their potential questions about the school and its programs, and provide information on the school's application. Huhman et al. (2008) found that engaging in grassroots initiatives and participating in festivals within densely populated Hispanic communities prove effective in directly connecting with Hispanic audiences through one-on-one interactions. Community partnerships also play an important role in improving communication and parental involvement at the school. This parental involvement is positively associated with students' academic achievement (Erol & Turhan, 2018). Parental engagement produces positive outcomes for both school climate and individual student achievement by helping students achieve higher test scores and improve their attitudes and behaviors (McGinn & Ben-Porath, 2014).

Charter Schools and Student Demographics

While researchers, teacher unions, and the public debate the academic effects of charter schools, some researchers have begun to explore their influence specifically on racial diversity (Ritter et al., 2016). For example, in Little Rock, Arkansas, charter schools' demographics tend to be Whiter than in the surrounding traditional public schools; there are also fewer Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) eligible students in charter schools than in the surrounding district schools (Ritter et al., 2016). Charter school proponents point to the high number of enrollments of minority and economically disadvantaged students in charter schools and contend that charter schools are integrative. On the other hand, opponents of charter schools explain these minority and economically disadvantaged enrollment levels by noting the high minority and poverty concentrations in urban areas where most of the charter schools are centered (Miron et al., 2010). According to the findings of Miron et al. (2010), both White flight and minority flight are evidenced in charter schools. Charter schools managed by educational management organizations (EMOs) often exhibit pronounced racial segregation, both for minority and majority students, in contrast to the demographic makeup of the traditional district schools from which they draw students (Miron et al., 2010). Charter schools operated by educational management organizations (EMOs) demonstrate a higher degree of segregation among economically disadvantaged students compared to their corresponding local districts (Miron et al., 2010). Garcia's (2008) research also had similar findings, stating that "students leave district schools with more exposure between White students and minority students to attend charter schools with less exposure between White and minority students" (p. 598). Garcia's (2010) study also discovered that parents chose to enroll their children "in charter schools that were more racially segregated than the district schools from which students exited" (p. 608). There is always

a fear that charter schools will exacerbate racial segregation; however, that is not the case for all charter schools or all states. For example, according to the data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2002), there were 1,993 charter schools in the 2000-2001 school year in 37 states and the District of Columbia. These charter schools served less than 1% of the public elementary and secondary students across the nation. According to this study, 47% of these students were in Arizona, California, and Michigan, and more than half of them were located in urban areas. They enrolled a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students and a lower percentage of White students compared to the traditional district schools. A higher percentage of these charter schools have more than 75% minority students and more than 75% of students FRL-eligible. In another related research, Rapp & Eckes (2007) reported that across the nation, the proportion of Black students attending charter schools surpasses that in traditional district schools by 20%, while the percentage of Hispanic students attending charter schools exceeds that in traditional district schools by 13%.

Regarding the state policy support, Nevada Revised Statute (n.d) (NRS) 388A.453 states that "the charter school shall, if practicable, ensure that the racial composition of pupils enrolled in the charter school does not differ by more than 10% from the racial composition of pupils who attend public schools in the zone in which the charter school is located." During the 2019 legislative session, there was a heated discussion about charter schools at both the Senate and Assembly. One of the proposed bills, AB 462, was proposing to institute a moratorium on the new charter school openings until 2021. This bill was sponsored by the Education Subcommittee Chair, Assemblyman Tyler Thompson (Pak-Harvey, 2019). According to Pak-Harvey, the Nevada State Education Association (NSEA) President, Ruben Murillo stated, "We're just concerned about the quality, the transparency, the lack of accountability when it comes to charter

schools" (para. 13). There was considerable resistance by the Nevada charter school community. A large number of charter school students, parents, and staff presented their opposition to the proposed AB 462 bill before the hearings. The sponsor of the bill, Chair Assemblyman Tyler Thomson, amended the bill by removing the "moratorium" and adding a new task for the biggest Nevada charter school authorizer, SPCSA. According to the newly amended bill, SPCSA has been tasked with creating a growth management plan for new and expanding charter schools in Nevada (Pak-Harvey, 2019). This AB 462 bill was approved by both the Assembly and Senate, signed by the Governor and became part of amended NRS 388A (Nevada Revised Statues, n.d.). NRS 388A required authorizers to work with the new charter school applicants and existing charter schools to expand in areas of greatest need. This bill allowed the opportunity to add more successful public school options where they are needed most. AB 462 guided and inspired SPCSA to adopt the Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment Plan for the strategic and informed growth of public charter schools in 2019 (2021 Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment, 2021, January 22). SPCSA board and staff believe that this plan will help them to their obligations as an authorizer of charter schools, ensuring they remain responsive to the diverse needs of students and families across Nevada. Likewise, the primary factor contributing to the prevalence of California's racially and socioeconomically diverse charter schools could be attributed to its charter school legislation, mandating that schools mirror the demographic composition of the broader community within the school district's territorial jurisdiction to which the charter application is submitted (Potter & Quick, 2018).

Segregation

Goyette & Lareau (2014) stated that "as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, race remains a powerful social category that shapes patterns of residence and

educational opportunity in the United States" (p. 64). Still, racial segregation remains high in most large cities, and because of school zoning, this residential segregation also creates racial inequality in public schools (Goyette & Lareau, 2014). Charter schools, in contrast, typically have a higher proportion of Black or Hispanic students compared to traditional district schools (Almond, 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Paino et al., 2017; Villavicencio, 2016). Due to their concentration in urban areas and their focus on minority populations, charter schools enroll a disproportionately high percentage of Black students compared to traditional district schools nationwide (Villavicencio, 2016). In 2012, 15.8% of all students in the United States were Black, while in charter schools, 28.7% of the student body consisted of Black students (Paino et al., 2017). Another previous study suggested that charter schools are prone to creating racially segregated learning environments for students of color, with some instances resulting in schools characterized by white segregation in certain communities (Frankenberg et al., 2011).

Charter schools generally exist in urban areas, most often in the inner cities. Yet, in Nevada, fewer charter schools exist in urban areas, and the majority of them are located at the perimeter of the city (Opportunity180, nd). Parents choose charter schools because of the smaller classroom sizes, more parental involvement opportunities, instructional programs offered, rigorous curriculum, quality of teachers, flexibility, accessibility of staff, and safety (Caldwell et al., 2005). In addition, charter schools have the flexibility of setting a maximum number of students in a class; when they reach the maximum, they start building a waitlist by using a lottery system. On the other hand, traditional district schools cannot turn down any student who applies within the zoned area. They have to place every student who comes to school to enroll. This parental choice has resulted in heightened racial and economic segregation among students

attending charter schools nationwide, according to Jacobs (2011). Renzulli (2006) stated, “The charter school concept was not created to specifically remedy racial disparities in education or to serve minorities, but charter schools do have consequences for educating racial and ethnic minorities” (p. 619). Similarly, Dee and Fu (2004) suggested in their research that charter schools in Arizona skim White, non-Hispanic students from traditional public schools, which led to resource reductions for those schools.

Charter School Recruitment

Charter schools are funded by the number of pupils attending, which is why student recruitment plays an important role in charter schools’ funding. Charter schools are not limited to recruiting students from a certain area like the traditional public schools’ district boundary lines or zones. For example, in the State of Nevada, charter schools can recruit their students from anywhere within the county limits that they are authorized to operate. A charter school that is chartered to operate in Clark County, Nevada, can draw students from all cities that are part of Clark County. This presents an opportunity for charter schools to enhance the diversity of their student body by attracting students from beyond the boundaries of the district school's zone (Eckes & Trotter, 2007). However, some charter schools limit this opportunity by giving a preference to the children of neighborhood families. Riel’s (2020) research explained this situation with an example of a new charter school opened in a predominantly White neighborhood in North Carolina. Although the school expanded access to families outside of the community, it failed to diversify the student body. This is due to the charter school’s selection procedures, which give preference to students whose families currently live within the neighborhood boundaries. Student recruitment and marketing play a critical role in shaping the demographics of the charter school (Jabbar & Wilson, 2018; Riel, 2020; Riel, 2021).

Charter schools can shape their recruitment and demographics by the programs they offer or the requirements they establish. Mommandi and Welner (2021) explained that charter schools exercise control over access at every stage of the enrollment process. For instance, if a charter school requires its parents to volunteer or even implies the importance of volunteering at their kids' school, it potentially shapes the school's enrollment (Mommandi & Welner, 2021). Research has indicated that both parents and schools play a role in choosing the school or students (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Buckley & Schneider, 2009). As Eckes and Trotter (2007) stated, "Indeed, one could reasonably assume that the charter school leaders who organize schools for reasons of equity and social justice may have the inclination to create a more diverse group of students" (p. 67). Eckes and Trotter (2007) discovered that it is the school principal who conducts targeted recruitment efforts, organizing community outreach events to connect with these racially and demographically diverse populations. These events specifically aim to engage parents facing challenges in participating in their children's education due to various barriers, including time constraints, language barriers, or limited understanding of enrollment procedures. Charter school principals typically have a specific population or demographic in mind when establishing their schools, demonstrating deliberate intent in selecting their charter school's location (Eckes & Trotter, 2007). A charter school's leadership, board, and principal can shape the demographics of the school as they want it to be by choosing the location of the school and by allowing priorities or preferences in their lotteries (Riel, 2021).

Possible Enrollment Barriers

As National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standard three explains, district and charter school organization superintendents should promote equity and equal opportunity for all students, including children of minority and low-income families (NPBEA, 2008). Similarly,

charter schools in Southern Nevada must put more effort into determining why racially and socioeconomically diverse students are not applying to or enrolling in charter schools, and then they need to work on attracting minority and low-income parents so their children can receive the benefits of the great programs offered by these schools. They should explore ways to have more racially and socioeconomically diverse student populations. Access to quality education is possible for all students if some of these barriers can be removed. According to Logan and Burdick-Will (2015), getting accepted and enrolling in any charter school entails an active application process that demands more time and effort compared to simply enrolling in the designated zoned district school. Families of students from racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods frequently encounter challenges when navigating through the application and enrollment procedures of charter schools (Hammel & Fischer, 2014). This obstacle is often encountered by low-income families who may lack the time and resources to navigate the enrollment process of charter schools, making it more convenient for them to opt for their zoned traditional public school.

Lottery and Weighted Lottery. Charter schools use the lottery system to select their students if they do not have the capacity to accept all interested students. Although the lottery process is fair and transparent, it still may act as a barrier for minority and low-income families. Most racially and socioeconomically diverse parents do not have information about the school options available, and they do not have information on how to access these schools, such as through the lottery (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006). Research finds that the lottery system is a barrier for minority families and those in need because they cannot change schools easily if there is an opening at the charter school in the middle of the school year (Weiler & Vogel, 2015). Most charter schools hold their lottery for the following school year in early spring and start building a

long waitlist. However, most minority and low-income families do not look for school options for their children early in the year. Additionally, when they start looking for options in mid or late summer, they generally hear from the charter schools that their child would not be able to attend their school due to the lack of room and the extensively long waitlist. The findings of this study may suggest that state officials and SPCSA should have one common lottery time for all charters and advertise the application window for these charter schools by using all means of communication, including local TV and radio in both English and Spanish and posters at libraries and a variety of cultural and community centers.

Introducing the weighted lottery system would be a solution to this equal access problem. Weighted lotteries that favor disadvantaged students could help include more under-represented student populations in charter schools. Charter schools might implement a weighted lottery system in their student selection process, offering increased opportunities for racially and socioeconomically diverse students (Eckes & Trotter, 2007). Disadvantaged students encompass those from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, individuals experiencing homelessness, or English language learners (Ash, 2014). In the weighted lottery, the lottery software system gives more chances to the students of low-income and minority families. School Administrators can define their priorities for the weighted lottery system, which could include race, income, or distance of home from the school. This would give underrepresented families' children more chances to get into charter schools.

Parental Involvement. In the past, it was believed that parents should be kept away from schools. This has changed over the years, however, and it is now believed that parents' involvement in their children's school activities plays an important role in their children's academic progress (Epstein, 2011, p.39). Epstein (2011) presents a model of parent involvement

centered on the collaboration between school, family, and community. Her framework posits that students benefit from parental engagement in school affairs and offers a model of family-school-community partnerships built on the premise of interconnected influences from home, school, and community that impact children's learning. As schools of choice, charter schools could be accessible to students from a larger area rather than limiting enrollment based on what zone a child's family could afford to live in, just like many traditional district schools do (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2015). However, according to the Nevada report card (2021) published by the Nevada Department of Education, low-income families in Nevada are not enrolling their children in charter schools as much as wealthier families are. One of the reasons for this may be the mandatory participation of parents required by charter schools. Research supports that parental involvement is positively associated with students' academic achievement (Erol & Turhan, 2018). McGinn & Ben-Porath state that parental engagement produces positive outcomes for both school climate and individual student achievement (2014). Parental participation helps students achieve higher test scores and improve their attitudes and behaviors. Smith et al. (2011) stated that parent engagement practices in urban charter schools typically manifest through participation in school events, engagement in home-based learning activities, involvement in decision-making processes, and collaboration with community entities. These schools promote parental involvement by providing incentives for attending school events. However, many low-income families cannot participate in these mandatory parent activities since many of them are single parents or have to work multiple jobs, so they cannot take time off from work during the school day (Aldridge et al., 2015). Rotberg (2014) asserted that certain charter schools bar children from low-income families due to their parents' inability to fulfill rigorous parent involvement obligations.

Transportation. Transportation is another barrier for low-income families. Marshall (2017) stated in his research that the lack of access to transportation makes it difficult for socioeconomically diverse families to send their children to charter schools. Lake et al. (2015) explained that after the closure of traditional district schools due to the economic crisis, charter schools were a new hope for the parents in Detroit; yet, about one-third of these parents claimed that finding transportation made choosing a charter school more difficult. Rotberg (2014) argued that charter schools, even when employing a lottery system, indirectly select students, thereby heightening the likelihood of segregation. They limit the access of low-income students by not providing transportation. For instance, most charter schools in San Antonio, Texas, do not provide transportation and force families to arrange it themselves. Researchers in this study reported transportation as a major barrier for families who want to enroll their children in charter schools (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The Diverse-by-Design Charter Schools framework from Potter and Quick (2018) was used for this study. This framework focuses on both the racial and socioeconomic diversity of charter schools. Potter and Quick (2018) also gathered qualitative data from the school leaders and reviewed documents and enrollment data from charter school websites.

Potter and Quick's (2018) distinctive analysis identifies 125 charter schools intentionally fostering diversity through an examination utilizing three criteria: (1) the racial and socioeconomic makeup of schools, (2) survey responses from school leaders, and (3) an evaluation of charter schools' websites. The Diverse-by-Design Charter Schools framework addresses the integration of schools within the broader public education system, with a particular

focus on charter schools. Besides summarizing the characteristics of these identified charter schools, this report also highlights the significance of diversity within charter school models.

Potter and Quick (2018) investigated the significance of the diversity of the student body in the school's mission statements across the charter schools on a broader scale. To pinpoint Diverse-by-Design charter schools, Potter and Quick (2018) accessed enrollment data from the US Department of Education's 2014-2015 school year Common Core of Data, encompassing 7,299 charter schools nationwide. They scrutinized the websites of these charter schools and conducted surveys among select schools. Utilizing these resources, the authors initially assessed the dedication to diversity and diversity in enrollment among these charter schools. Subsequently, they identified 125 intentionally diverse charter schools by combining those meeting both criteria of commitment to diversity and diversity in enrollment.

Commitment to Diversity

Potter and Quick (2018) used charter schools' websites to measure the schools' commitment to diversity. They analyzed these schools' mission statements and any other mention of diversity on their websites. They reviewed the search results and coded them according to four distinct types of commitment:

Diversity in the Mission. The school's mission statement or website clearly states that diversifying the school's student body is fundamental to the school's mission or objectives.

Strategies for Diverse Enrollment. The school's mission statement or website indicates the use of recruitment or admissions strategies targeting the attraction and enrollment of a diverse student body.

Benefits of Diversity. The school's mission statement or website outlines the advantages of the school's diversity for students and the school's community.

Valuing Diversity. The school's mission statement or website demonstrates an acknowledgment of diversity within the charter school's community. Following an examination of approximately 6,281 charter schools' websites, Potter and Quick (2018) distributed a subsequent survey to 971 charter schools regarding their diversity objectives and methodologies. Additionally, they assessed the charter schools' affiliation with the Diverse Charter Schools Coalition (DCSC) as an indicator of their dedication to diversity. Using these assessments and data, Potter and Quick (2018) categorized each school's dedication to diversity into one of three ratings: strong, visible, or not evident.

Strong. Clear signs from the website of the charter school, membership in the DCSC coalition, and or the survey results illustrate the integration of diversity into the charter school's mission or framework.

Visible. Several indications suggest that diversity is taken into account in the charter school's mission or structure.

Not Evident. Limited or no evidence suggests that diversity is considered in the charter school's mission or design.

Diversity in Enrollment

Potter and Quick (2018) analyzed the charter schools' demographics to assess the extent of diversity in the school's enrollment. They specifically considered racial and socioeconomic diversity, as these factors are closely associated with school segregation. Racial diversity was determined by ensuring that the highest racial percentage in the charter school represented no more than 70% of the school's student body, while socioeconomic diversity was defined as having 30% to 70% of students eligible for the FRL program. Federal enrollment data and information from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools were utilized to compare

charter schools' demographics with those of the traditional district schools. Charter schools were considered reflective of district demographics if the percentage of students eligible for FRL fell within 15% above or below the traditional district's representation. Based on these criteria, each school was assigned a rating of high, medium, or low for diversity in enrollment.

High. A charter school received a high rating for student enrollment diversity if it demonstrated balanced representation in socioeconomic status (with 30%-70% of students classified as FRL-qualified) and race (with the highest racial percentage in the charter school represented no more than 70%). Additionally, the charter school mirrored the socioeconomic and racial demographics of the neighboring zoned traditional district school.

Medium. A charter school was categorized as having a moderate level of diversity in student enrollment if it did not meet the criteria for high diversity but fulfilled one of the following conditions:

- The charter school's enrollment demonstrated diversity in both socioeconomic status and race, but it failed to meet one or both thresholds for comparison with traditional school district demographics (or data on the traditional school district's demographics was unavailable).
- The charter school's enrollment showed diversity in either socioeconomic status or race, and it passed both socioeconomic and racial comparisons with traditional district school's demographics. Additionally, the highest racial percentage in the charter school did not surpass 90%, and low-income students comprised 10%–90% of the charter school's enrollment.

Low. A charter school was classified as having a low level of diversity in enrollment if it did not meet the criteria for either high or medium diversity.

Combining Commitment and Enrollment

Potter and Quick (2018) identified a charter school as intentionally diverse when it fulfilled both commitment to diversity and diversity in enrollment criteria. Specifically, a charter school was categorized as intentionally diverse if it demonstrated a robust commitment to diversity alongside either a high level of enrollment diversity, a medium level of diversity, or a visible commitment paired with a high level of enrollment diversity. Among the 5,692 charter schools examined, 125 met the criteria for intentional diversity.

Characteristics of Intentionally Diverse Schools

Potter and Quick (2018) condensed the traits of these 125 intentionally diverse schools into five distinct categories: (1) dedication to diversity, (2) expansion, (3) geographical location, (4) enrollment and demographic composition, and (5) educational approaches.

Commitment to Diversity. Certain intentionally diverse charter schools integrate diversity into their mission statements and outline the strategies they employ to cultivate a diverse student population. For instance, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, a Rhode Island charter school serving students from kindergarten to twelfth grade, explicitly articulates its commitment to intentional diversity in its mission statement. It traditionally draws students from both higher and lower-income communities to foster a diverse student body (Potter & Quick, 2018). Similarly, High Tech High, a San Diego charter school spanning kindergarten through twelfth grade, underscores its deliberate dedication to diversity in its mission statement. The school implements a weighted lottery system to facilitate diversity, selecting students based on zip codes to reflect the demographics of their surrounding neighborhoods. Teachers at High Tech High embrace diverse classrooms and employ inclusive teaching methodologies, eschewing

academic tracking. Moreover, the institution places a strong emphasis on preparing all students for college and ensuring their success.

Growth. Potter and Quick's (2018) study highlighted the expansion of diverse charter schools over time. In 2000, intentionally diverse charter schools accounted for less than 1% of the total charter school population. However, by 2014, this figure had risen to 1.8%. Notably, charter schools like New Orleans' Morris Jeff Community School were initially established as diverse-by-design institutions, while others like Massachusetts' Boston Collegiate Charter School made deliberate strides in diversifying their student enrollment after their inception.

Geography. Potter and Quick (2018) identified diverse-by-design schools across 27 states, with a concentration in four key states accounting for half of these institutions. California leads with 38 out of the 125 identified schools, followed by New York with 19, Colorado with 12, and Rhode Island with seven. Notably, each of these states hosts one or more intentionally diverse charter schools, like California's High Tech High network, comprising 11 deliberately diverse charter schools. Interestingly, Nevada did not feature any charter schools on this diverse-by-design list.

The majority of these intentionally diverse charter schools are situated in urban or suburban areas, with 69% located in cities, primarily in large urban centers, and 21% in suburbs. These areas typically boast diverse populations and robust transportation infrastructure, facilitating the integration of students from various backgrounds. Additionally, 10% of these intentionally diverse charter schools are situated in towns or rural areas, showcasing the viability of diverse-by-design charter school models even in rural charter school settings.

Enrollment and Demographics. These 125 intentionally diverse charter schools collectively enrolled nearly 45,000 students, with enrollment figures ranging from 39 to 1,362 students per school. Compared to traditional district schools, these diverse-by-design charter schools tended to be smaller, with an average size of 359 students, in contrast to traditional district elementary schools, with an average of 482 students, and traditional district secondary schools, with 698 students on average. The range of low-income enrollment across these 125 intentionally diverse charter schools varied widely, spanning between 31% and 89% of students qualified for the FRL program. Only two of these schools reported a single racial or ethnic group constituting over 70% of these schools' student enrollment, while half of them had no racial or ethnic majority. Hispanic students comprised the highest percentage of racial groups in 56 of the 125 intentionally diverse charter schools. However, it is noteworthy that intentionally diverse charter schools more frequently had White students as the highest percentage of racial groups compared to the neighboring zoned traditional district schools.

Educational Models. Potter and Quick (2018) identified Diverse-by-Design charter schools employing various educational models, including traditional STEM, test preparation, dual language, thematic, project-based, expeditionary learning, Montessori, and Waldorf-inspired approaches. Notably, STEM emerged as the predominant educational model among these charter schools, although others were also represented. For instance, The Albuquerque Sign Language Academy in New Mexico, one of the schools listed, served a diverse student population consisting of deaf, hearing-impaired, and hearing students.

The study's findings reveal that approximately 60% of the analyzed charter schools showed no clear commitment to diversity and had limited diversity among their student populations. However, 20% of the charter schools assessed exhibited visible or strong

commitments to diversity, while 25% met the criteria for medium or high diversity in enrollment. These findings suggest that charter schools falling short in their diversity efforts have opportunities to enhance their commitment to diversity and adopt strategies to promote greater diversity within their student populations.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature leading to the demographic challenges that charter schools face and proposed solutions for their principals for these challenges. The literature review included the historical background of charter schools both nationwide and in the state of Nevada, the academic achievement of charter schools nationwide and within the state of Nevada, student demographics at charter schools and segregation, charter schools' student recruitment and their community engagement, charter school principalship, and the barriers for low-income families to enroll their children in charter schools, including application processes, the lottery system, parental involvement, and transportation. However, there are few current studies that examine the student demographics of Nevada charter schools.

Chapter Three Methodology

Despite the national trend of charter schools serving racially and socioeconomically diverse student populations, Southern Nevada charter schools do not serve more children of racially and socioeconomically diverse families compared to traditional district schools (National Alliance, 2021; SPCSA, 2020). The challenge of why the charter schools in Southern Nevada do not reflect the neighboring zoned traditional district schools and the national trend was explored in this study.

The methodology employed for this research was a case study approach that explored the factors that might shape charter school leaders' recruitment practices in Southern Nevada. Case study research is a qualitative method where the researcher examines a contemporary, real-life system or multiple systems within defined boundaries through extensive data gathering (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Charter schools authorized by SPCSA and located in Southern Nevada would be considered a bounded system in this study.

The following research question guided the qualitative multi-site case study:

> **Research Question:** What factors shape charter school leaders' student recruitment practices in Southern Nevada?

Participants

There are 61 charter school campuses authorized by SPCSA and located in Clark County, Southern Nevada. Thus, purposeful sampling requires key informants in the field who can help identify the best informative cases in qualitative research (Suri, 2011). If the study requires a decision to choose the participants, a specific sampling strategy, or the size of the sample, then a purposeful sampling approach in qualitative research needs to be utilized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These 61 charter school campuses are all located in different areas of Southern Nevada

and have different demographics. Purposeful sampling was used to identify four charter schools, two socioeconomically and racially diverse and two lacking diversity in race and socioeconomic student demographics.

In this study, charter school campuses that fall below the criteria of having less than 20% FRL students, less than 5% Black students, and less than 22% Hispanic students based on the NDE's October 1st, 2021 enrolment data (SPCSA, 2021) were indicated as non-diverse charter schools. Diverse charter schools had the following inclusionary criteria: having more than 95% FRL students, more than 10% Black students, and more than 60% Hispanic students based on the same data. Charter School A and Charter School B were the two charter school campuses identified with racially and socioeconomically non-diverse student populations. Charter School C and Charter School D were the two charter school campuses identified with racially and socioeconomically diverse student populations. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and schools. These identified diverse and non-diverse schools were labeled as Charter School A, Charter School B, Charter School C, and Charter School D. Since the study was focused mainly on charter school leaders, emails were sent to the principals, assistant principals, and other administrative staff members responsible for recruiting these four identified charter school campuses to participate in this study (see Appendix A).

Research Procedures

Data Collection

Once these invited administrators agreed, they were asked to sign the consent and facility authorization forms before conducting the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals, assistant principals, and other administrative staff members responsible for recruiting these four identified charter schools (see Appendix B). Semi-structured

interviews can allow the participants to explore issues they feel are essential regarding the research (Longhurst, 2003). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes and occurred at the principals' and administrators' offices at the identified charter school campuses. Interview questions stemmed from Potter and Quick's (2018) Diverse by Design Charter School framework.

In addition to conducting interviews, materials and documents were collected from the participating charter schools' websites. Collecting documents is one of the main components of the data collection approaches in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additional collected documents included, but were not limited to, student demographic data, lottery applications, and enrollment forms. These documents helped the study examine and triangulate the schools' recruitment strategies to diversify student demographic enrollment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To mirror Potter and Quick's (2018) framework, the participating charter schools' websites, including mission and vision statements, were reviewed and analyzed.

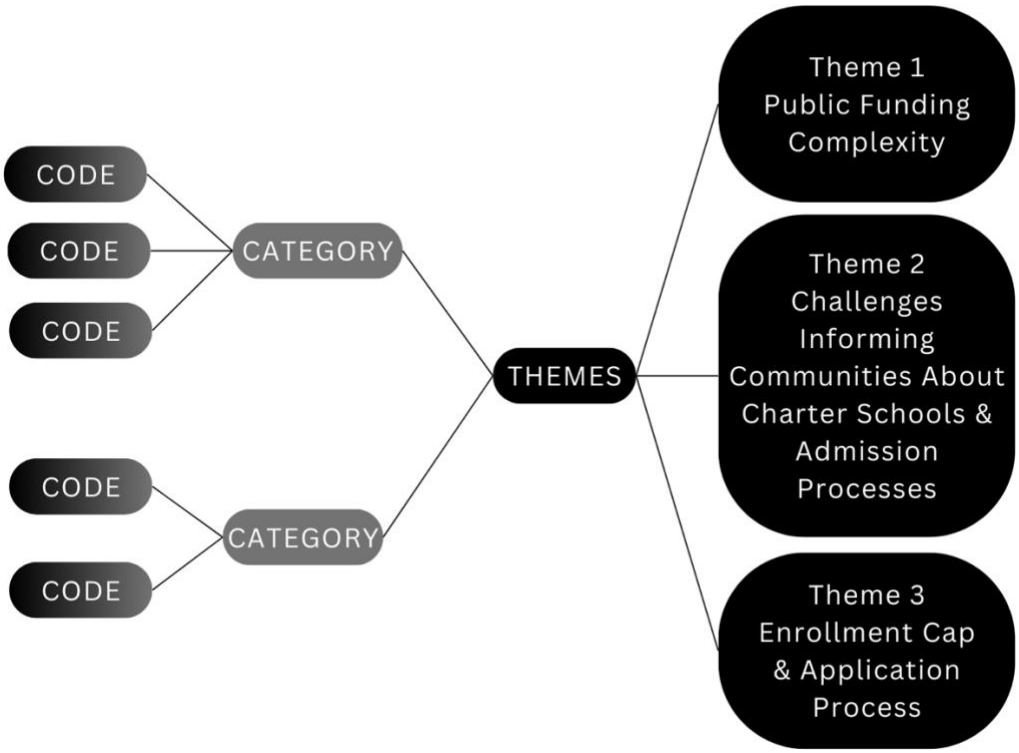
Data Analysis

The data analysis process includes arranging the data, coding and categorizing themes, presenting the data, and interpreting the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The raw recording data of the principal and administrative staff interviews were analyzed after organizing them. These recordings were transcribed using a Word document and Google Meet Transcript. The transcription of each recording was coded with the three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Atlas.ti software was used for coding. As outlined by Saldaña (2013), a code within qualitative research is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). While analyzing the data, various codes were identified, and they

were assigned to specific segments of the data from interviews. As Saldaña (2013) explained, coding is a technique used by researchers to categorize and organize data with similar attributes into distinct groups. After completing the coding of all transcriptions of the recordings, it was found that several codes were repeated and used for many of the phrases.

Figure 1

Code to theory model for qualitative inquiry (Saldaña, 2013)



For example, the code of *lack of information* collapsed into a theme of *challenges informing the community about the charter school admission process:*

Participant C's Response: " I think, the bigger obstacle is them having the opportunity to hear about a school when it's opening….."

Participant M's Response: "…..some (families) don't even know about charter schools and what they offer…."

Participant H's Response: "….the enrollment process. Being familiar with that, not getting, not understanding the process of the lottery and enrollment or how they apply."

These codes were then grouped into coherent categories; by identifying relationships among codes, meaningful clusters were formed that laid the foundation for the subsequent identification of overarching themes.

Potter and Quick (2018) gathered documents and enrollment data from charter school websites to explore their commitment to diversifying their enrollment. Similarly, in this study, application and enrollment documents, as well as the mission and vision statements of the participant schools, were collected and reviewed. A report showing the historical growth of enrollment and demographics of some of the Southern Nevada charter schools, including all four participant schools, was also collected and reviewed.

A member check was conducted with eight of the sixteen charter school staff interviewed to validate the findings of the study. This member check involved sharing the key findings and interpretations derived from the interviews with the participating staff members and inviting them to provide feedback or corrections. Participants were able to determine if their stories were accurately reported (Koelsch, 2013). The purpose of this member check was to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data collected and analyzed for the study. The feedback obtained from the staff during this process contributed to enhancing the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings (Busetto et al., 2020; Stahl & King, 2020).

Researcher's Reflexivity and Positionality

The researcher, a charter school administrator and former charter school parent in Nevada, brings valuable firsthand experience to the study. This background likely facilitated a sense of trust and openness among the study participants, encouraging them to share their lived experiences regarding student recruitment practices. However, it's important to acknowledge that the researcher's professional background could influence his interpretation of the data. The researcher recognizes that his positionality could impact this research to some extent. However, it is worth noting that the charter school at which the researcher has worked and that his children have attended is not included as one of the participant charter schools in collecting the data for this study.

Chapter Four Findings

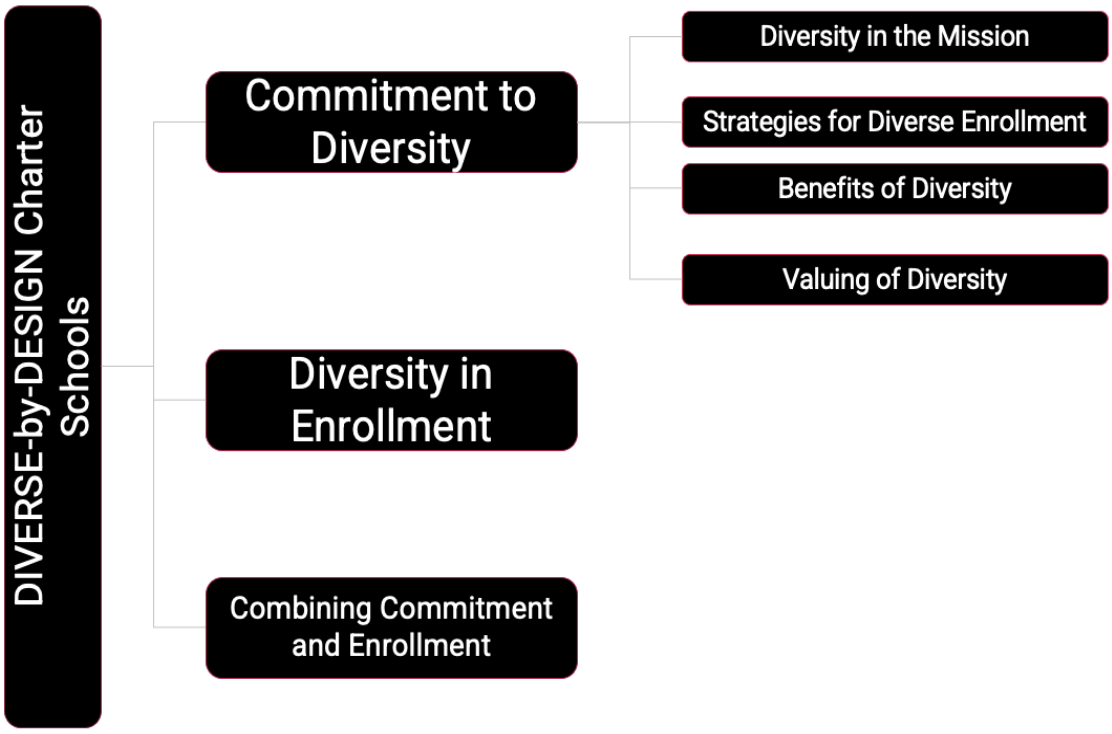
Charter schools are playing a vital role in shaping the educational landscape for Nevada students. Student enrollment in charter schools across the state has witnessed significant growth in recent years. As reported by Adams (2024), since 2018, student enrollment in charter schools in Nevada has increased from 42,333 to 61,889. Notably, these figures exclude students enrolled in charter schools authorized by local school districts. Overall, the charter schools authorized by SPCSA enroll 12.7% of Nevada's K-12 public school students (Girnus, 2023). However, as previously noted, the diversity in charter schools is not growing at the same pace as enrollment in traditional district schools (SPCSA, 2020).

Many of Southern Nevada's most disadvantaged students are not being served by charter schools, potentially denying them equal opportunities for enrollment in charter schools. Thus, this study explores factors influencing charter school recruitment and enrollment.

The Diverse-by-Design Charter Schools (Potter & Quick, 2018) framework was utilized to guide this study (Figure 2). This framework focuses on both the racial and socioeconomic diversity of charter schools nationwide. Potter and Quick (2018) collected qualitative data from school leaders, reviewed documents, and analyzed enrollment data from charter school websites to identify Intentionally Diverse Charter Schools.

Figure 2

Diverse-by-Design Charter Schools Framework (Potter & Quick, 2018)



Potter and Quick (2018) delved into charter schools' dedication to diversity by scrutinizing their mission statements, strategies for fostering diversity, and commitment to valuing diversity within their schools. They accessed enrollment data from the US Department of Education's 2014-2015 Common Core of Data to assess the demographic diversity of charter school students. Potter and Quick (2018) classified charter schools that demonstrated both a commitment to diversity and diversity in enrollment as Intentionally Diverse Charter Schools. Administrators responsible for student recruitment at these schools participated in interviews structured around Potter and Quick's (2018) Diverse by Design Charter School Framework. In addition to qualitative interview data, a comprehensive array of documents, including lottery

application and enrollment materials, demographic data, student recruitment materials such as flyers and fact sheets, and mission and vision statements from the identified charter schools, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), and the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA), was collected to provide a thorough understanding of the research context.

After further data analysis, three significant themes emerged as factors that influence charter school recruitment and enrollment: (1) complex public funding for charter schools, (2) challenges informing the community about the charter schools and their admission processes, and (3) charter school enrollment cap and application process.

Theme 1: Complex Public Funding for Charter Schools

As previously noted in Chapter Two, charter schools in Nevada have historically not been receiving the same funding as the school districts (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Hickey & Reese, 2019; Hoxby, 2003; Ladd & Singleton, 2018; Winters, 2012; Witte et al., 2007). They receive the same basic funding per pupil; however, charter schools do not receive any funding for facilities like traditional school districts (Hickey & Reese, 2019). This funding complexity appears to directly affect charter schools' governing boards' decisions to identify the location of charter schools. Participants of this study commonly stated that since they do not receive funding for campus facilities, they look for opportunities where they can afford the cost of the land or facilities.

Participants of the study noted that many of these charter school operators found home developers who were building new homes on the outskirts of the Las Vegas Valley so they could give a piece of land to a school. Although it was not for free, participants from the study also revealed it was a much lower price than its market value. For example, Participant C explained, "A masterplan developer did make it clear that they wanted the school there, set aside a good

piece of property for the school, and encouraged the city through the school zoning process to ensure the school came to be." Although not at market value, charter schools were required to cover the costs of acquiring land, specifically for the infrastructure expenses necessary for development, such as sewer and power lines and roads. Similarly, Participant C recounted a comparable scenario:

> The developer who wanted quality schools in their new housing community approached us about putting a school on a piece of land dedicated to a school, and they gifted it. Now, it wasn't a completely free gift because there was some work to do, and they told us that we'd have to incur all the costs of that additional work to do. And the cost of that work was hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Not all charter schools in Southern Nevada were able to secure an affordable school site in specific targeted areas, such as the inner city or East Las Vegas. Participant B understood why a significant number of charter schools located their campuses in the suburbs of the Las Vegas Valley. This participant noted that finding property "tends to be the outskirts" of Las Vegas, where demographics are "very white and very affluent." In addition, Participant B explained that "it is not easy to find land in the inner part of Las Vegas…you build the campus where you can find property."

Two of the four charter schools included in this study succeeded in establishing their campuses in diverse neighborhoods. One administrator, Participant H, elucidated on her school's inception in such a neighborhood. She revealed that the founders actively sought locations for the new school, specifically targeting "this (Hispanic and low-income) demographic within the population." Two of the other four charter schools were not fortunate or successful in securing an affordable school site in socioeconomically low neighborhoods due to the complex public

funding. Participant C highlighted the increasing difficulty of finding affordable land in racially and demographically diverse areas, stating, "We want our charter school to serve at-risk students, but we aren't given facility funding. So, we can't just choose a property wherever we want."

Participant B expressed her concerns about the charter authorizer, SPCSA, requesting a newly approved charter school to bus children from other neighborhoods to their campus. She explained that this new school was in an affluent area because “they could only afford land in these new developments.” She did not think this was a permanent solution to make these schools more diverse; instead, “it would be an extra burden on the children, parents, and the school.” Participant B noted that either the authorizer should not approve a charter school to go into "a white, affluent neighborhood, which also isn't fair" or they just have to approve more schools to go into "diverse neighborhoods, and maybe you have to help charter schools find the property." Participant B concludes her concern by suggesting helping charter schools find "affordable property in the racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods.” She expressed, “You can't just turn it over to a real estate company to go out and try to find it. They don't do that for the school district, right? They find property for them."

Funding for transportation emerged as a pivotal element connected to facilities funding, influencing not only the accessibility of charter schools but also shaping leaders' approaches to reaching prospective students. Participant P clarified that charter schools do not provide transportation. Similarly, Participant L stated that most low-income families do not prefer charter schools for their children due to the lack of transportation and that “it might be easier for them to stay in their neighborhood district school because they might not have the transportation to go to the charter schools located in affluent areas. They just don't have the means.” Participants in the

study acknowledged that having campuses in low-income areas of the city would help diversify the student population in charter schools. Participant A explained:

> Definitely, transportation and the location of our campus are major barriers for low-income families. Having our campus up in that targeted area where the majority of low-income families live would eliminate these barriers. We would have been right there in the neighborhood, and people can walk to us, and that transportation won't be as major of an issue as it is for our current location.

Participants who could not secure a building in racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods admitted that their location is a barrier for low-income families to access their schools. For instance, Participant H was concerned about her campus's location: "We are kind of nuzzled; it is far; just getting in from the nearest freeway is a 15-minute drive." The participants of the study, whose campuses are located in the suburbs of Las Vegas, commonly admitted that it's hard for some of the families who live downtown or in other parts of the Valley to have transportation, pay for gas, and get their kids to their schools if they face economic hardship. Participant A affirmed, "There's no public transportation, no bus routes out here. We don't have school buses out here. So, families have to be able to drive to us. The most significant barrier would be our location." Participant H revealed that they could not provide transportation to their students and that they "don't have funding for transportation" in Nevada. Likewise, Participant O also acknowledged that his campus is not in a low socioeconomic area " and…We don't have the funding to pay for transportation, so it's not economically feasible to provide transportation with what we get from the state in funding right now."

Many participants of the study revealed that they offered bus passes to assist low-income families in accessing their charter schools. Despite these efforts, many families in the community

perceived it as inconvenient. Participant O noted that many families saw the free bus passes as burdensome because “you're on a bus, it can take a long time, especially if they [students] have to transfer between multiple buses.” Participant J also stated that although her charter school did not provide transportation, they provided free bus passes to those who “can’t afford transportation.” Similarly, Participant F acknowledged that “if you (low-income students) cannot walk to our school and you don't have transportation, then that would be a problem.” Participant D disclosed that transportation posed a significant obstacle for many families in reaching their charter school, situated in an affluent neighborhood distant from low-income communities. Participant D added, “If you do not live in the neighborhood and do not have the transportation, then you are on your own.” Participant G admitted that “transportation is the biggest barrier or the hardest struggle with our families.” She mentioned that when families lack transportation to their school, “here and back and forth, we support them with bus passes.” Participant A expressed concerns about transportation being a significant issue for those families, saying that they were “just trying to make ends meet.” He added that it would continue to be a hurdle “until we can get some transportation money. In my opinion, these families are struggling to make ends meet, and expecting them to drive them down here to our school is not a doable thing for them.”

Theme 2: Challenges Informing the Community About Charter Schools and Their Admission Processes

A Review of the Nevada Department of Education's school report cards revealed that two of the four identified charter schools for this study had student populations consisting of more than 95% FRL students, over 5.5% Black students, and more than 83% Hispanic students. Conversely, the other two schools had student populations with less than 18% FRL students, fewer than 5.5% Black students, and less than 25% Hispanic students.

Regarding mirroring the demographics of neighboring traditional school districts, Participant J, for her school, noted, "All very similar. High Hispanic. Very similar in all the (district) schools around here." Similarly, Participant P also believed that their demographics were fairly similar "since most of our families are coming from the same area." Both Participant J and Participant P were administrators at charter schools located in racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods.

The research findings shed light on the challenges faced by low-income and diverse families in accessing information about charter schools, particularly concerning the admission process. Economically disadvantaged and racially diverse families face numerous barriers to accessing charter schools in their neighborhoods, such as a lack of access to information about the programs offered by the charter schools and enrollment procedures (Frankenberg et al., 2011). Participants of the study observed that the community, in general, is unaware of the existence of charter schools and lacks knowledge that they can enroll their children in such schools. Participant B believed that charter school leaders and staff need to improve the way they educate families about the charter school admission process:

> I think you have to really go after them. I think it has to be targeted. When I say targeted, I think you really have to go and educate those families about what charter schools are and what opportunities we provide, such as smaller class sizes, that we do have special education.

Similarly, participants of this study believed that economically disadvantaged families have to work multiple jobs and do not have enough time to research and make decisions for their children's education. Participant A affirmed that most of these families are "just trying to make ends meet." He stated they don't know what they are not getting from their zoned district schools

until “they take the time to find out what charter schools are offering…the more we can get out there and educate them, the more they will learn about the programs our charter school is offering.”

Participant B reiterated that both the charter school authority, SPCSA, and all existing charter schools have to do “a better job of educating the communities” about what the charter schools are. She emphasized that low-income communities need to be informed that charter schools are funded by the state, are tuition-free, and are just like their neighborhood district schools without any difference. She insisted that such communities need to be informed that the charter schools built in the brand new housing communities are not just for the big brand new house owners. She mentioned that even when they build their school in the inner city, “We see it here, so many of the families would say, well, they can't go there, and they have to go to their zoned district school because they can't afford our school. And I'm like, it's free. Come on.”

Besides not knowing charter schools as an option, participants noted that many communities were unaware of the timelines of the application process for charter schools. Participant D stated that most families start thinking in the summer about where their kids are going to go in the fall; however, “you must be proactive if you want your student to attend our charter school at the latest, March 1st, before the lottery takes place.” She reiterated that families “don’t know enough about the application process details, and so by the time they do, it’s too late.” Similarly, Participant E admitted that most low-income families “miss that open application window because they don't pay attention.”

According to Participant I, lack of awareness about charter schools is a significant and widespread barrier for low-income families because “If the families are unaware of your school’s existence, they cannot consider it as an option for their children; many perceive charter schools

as private schools with tuition.” Similarly, Participant M highlighted that low-income families are often unaware of the application window and that “Most of the time, they assume they can submit their application over the summer, right before school starts, similar to the school district. However, for charter schools, it's a little late, and already there are hundreds of waitlisted students.”

All four participating charter schools' websites offered comprehensive information about charter schools and their admission processes. To assist families who may not speak English, each of these participant schools provided translations of their website content into 30 different languages, including Spanish. However, they offered a translation of the enrollment procedures only in Spanish.

Participants shared their efforts to reach out to racially and socio-economically diverse families as part of their commitment to diverse recruitment. For example, when their school opened, Participant J expressed their commitment to engaging with targeted families. They distributed flyers in both English and Spanish and visited families "door-to-door in all the houses around here." Additionally, they set up information booths at local grocery stores, particularly targeting Hispanic grocery stores.

However, the mission statements of these four charter schools did not include enrolling a diverse student body as a stated goal. Moreover, their websites did not indicate the use of recruitment or admissions strategies aimed at attracting and enrolling a diverse student population. Furthermore, the potential advantages of fostering diversity within the learning environment were not highlighted in either the mission statements or the websites.

Theme 3: Charter School Enrollment Cap and Application Process

Charter schools are subject to regulations imposed by their authorizers regarding their academic programs and operations (Bogrek, 2017; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Bulkly & Fisler, 2002; Cheng et al., 2017; David et al., 2017; Witte et al., 2007). Participant A explained that, unlike traditional district schools, charter schools operate under a cap on student enrollment, which their authorizer, SPCSA, regulates. This enrollment cap restricts them from admitting students beyond their specified cap number. If a charter school aims to increase its enrollment cap, it must formally request an amendment to its charter contract from the authorizer (Nevada Revised Statute, n.d.).

Due to these enrollment caps, participants explained that charter schools are required to conduct lotteries to ensure equitable access for all interested families. Participant E explains that just like all other charter schools, they have an open application window: "From January 8th through February 28th, we run the lottery on March 1st."

Participant A pointed out that the enrollment cap is a barrier to diversifying charter schools in Nevada, stating, “Not to blame our charter authorizer; however, they cap how big we can be, right? And we're trying to bring in more kids, and they're holding us to that cap.” As Participant A highlighted, traditional district schools can admit any new applicants, impacting their demographics. In contrast, charter schools cannot accept additional applicants if they are already at full capacity due to the enrollment cap. Participant C expressed his concerns, saying that limited openings of the charter schools are often filled with existing students' siblings, slowing down the pace of demographic change compared to neighboring traditional district schools. Participant A believed that without an enrollment cap, the outcomes would be significantly different:

> But if you can add more students, if there is no cap, then you can have the opportunity to get more Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students than your existing rates, then that cap is a barrier actually. Putting a cap on the growth, then it's slowing down the improvement of the FRL, the diverse student body.

Participant C also believed that "the only way you can change a charter school's demographics is to open more seats because the existing seats are going to fill with siblings." He suggested, "Unless you're opening up significant numbers of new seats, it's very hard to reflect a growing community. Growth creates diversity." Similarly, Participant A thought that "our charter authority is a barrier for diversifying by limiting our capacity, whereas a district school does not have that cap." Furthermore, this enrollment cap requires charter schools to conduct lotteries, a distinctive feature of charter schools. Participant H explained that they must conduct a lottery whenever there is more demand than their school's cap number. She expressed her concern that following the lotteries, the schools start building waitlists after accepting the lottery winners. She emphasized how it makes it difficult for new parents to get into the charter schools due to their long waitlists, stating that "it might take longer to get the student into one of our campuses." She admitted that "lotteries and waitlists would be another barrier that comes to mind." Participants of the study commonly agreed that the cap of the charters, lottery, and long waitlist affect the overall composition of their student body. Similarly, Participant I said that her school has a cap of 1004 and has thousands of kids on her waiting list, which makes it difficult for children from new families to get in.

Participant J mentioned that some charter schools adopted a weighted lottery to give more chances to racially and socioeconomically diverse children, explaining that "it was for those families that make under a certain amount of money." Participant H admitted that the

weighted lottery works for her charter school, stating, “I think with the help of our weighted lottery, we are bringing in more diversified students to our school.” Even though a weighted lottery helps some charter schools get more diverse in some capacity, participants noted it is not enough to help most of them.

Participant N observed an increase in Hispanic and African American families in the neighborhood where his school is located, suggesting that a weighted lottery would help “younger grades like the kindergarten” students from racially and socioeconomically diverse communities get into the school and that “it’s a very likely chance that your child with one in four chances (weighted lottery) could be accepted.” Participant O explained that they have explored the option of a weighted lottery to diversify their campus. However, right before they began considering that more seriously at their school, their authorizer, the SPCSA, told them that a weighted lottery helps at some point; however, it doesn’t have an immediate impact. He concluded, “They really want you to go with the lottery priority to see a bigger impact.” SPCSA told them that “the weighted lottery takes so many years before you’re really going to start to see a change with schools that are full and already have a waitlist.”

Chapter Five Discussion And Conclusion

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the factors that shape the student recruitment practices of Southern Nevada charter school administrators. Qualitative data was gathered from 16 leaders and staff members of these four identified charter schools, and documents from their websites and their enrollment data were reviewed. The Diverse-by-Design Charter Schools (Potter & Quick, 2018) framework was utilized to guide this study. Three significant themes emerged: (1) complex public funding for charter schools, (2) challenges informing the community about the charter schools and their admission process, and (3) charter school enrollment cap and application process.

As previously mentioned, charter schools in Nevada historically have not received equitable funding compared to traditional school districts (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Hickey & Reese, 2019; Hoxby, 2003; Ladd & Singleton, 2018; Winters, 2012; Witte et al., 2007). Unlike traditional district schools in Nevada, which receive additional capital funding of over $1200 per student annually for maintaining their existing school buildings, which are in good condition and have the ability to issue bonds backed by taxpayers with affordable rates when they need to construct new facilities, charter schools do not benefit from this supplementary capital funding, and they lack access to bonds backed by counties' property taxes (Hickey & Reese, 2019). It's worth noting that this $1200 discrepancy between district schools and charter schools was observed in 2019, and the gap may have widened further by 2024. Hickey and Reese (2019) emphasized that charter schools have to finance and maintain their facilities on their own without getting any additional facility funding or support from county property taxes.

This funding disparity has significantly impacted charter schools' recruitment strategies. Participants frequently cited their inability to afford sites in urban areas due to the lack of funding for campus facilities. Consequently, they sought opportunities where they could afford the cost of land or facilities, exacerbating the challenge of recruiting students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. To underscore their commitment, two of these charter schools succeeded in establishing their campuses in racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods. Their founders actively sought locations for these new schools, specifically targeting racially and socioeconomically diverse populations. However, two of the other four charter schools were unable to secure affordable school sites in socioeconomically low neighborhoods due to the complex public funding. Participants were concerned with the increasing difficulty of finding affordable land in at-risk areas and not getting the facility funding even though they wanted to serve at-risk students.

The literature has indicated that many racially and socioeconomically diverse families do not know about the school options available, such as charter schools, and these families' access to charter schools is unequally constrained by several factors, including access to information about the charter schools, programs offered, language barriers, lack of time, or lack of knowledge regarding the enrollment processes including the lottery system (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Eckes and Trotter, 2007; Frankenberg et al., 2011). Participants of the study observed that the community, in general, was unaware of the existence of charter schools and lacked knowledge that they could enroll their children in such schools. Participants admitted that charter school leaders and staff need to improve the way they educate families about charter schools in general and about their admission processes. They stated that charter school leaders should make significant efforts to reach out and better educate families about charter schools. Participants

mentioned that many families in urban areas work multiple jobs, which makes it challenging to be involved in learning about other school options. Potter and Quick (2018) utilized charter schools' websites to assess the schools' commitment to diversity. They examined the schools' mission statements and any other references to diversity on their websites. Similarly, for this study, upon reviewing the websites of all participating charter schools, it was found that they offered comprehensive information about charter schools, their offered programs, and admission processes. To assist non-English speaking families, each of these schools provided translations of their website content into 30 different languages, including Spanish. However, upon further examination, it was noted that none of these four charter schools' mission statements mentioned enrolling a diverse student body as part of their mission or goal. Additionally, their websites did not mention using recruitment or admissions practices to attract and enroll a diverse student body. The potential benefits of a diverse learning environment for students and the community were not addressed in any of the mission statements or websites. However, participants shared their commitments, such as distributing bilingual flyers to families by knocking on the doors of all the houses around their school and setting up information booths at local grocery stores to reach out to racially and socioeconomically diverse families and inform them about what charter schools are, charter schools' application procedures, and application timelines. Potter and Quick (2018) utilized demographic data to assess the level of diversity in school enrollments. Similarly, this study analyzed the racial and socioeconomic demographics of 61 Southern Nevada charter school campuses authorized by SPCSA. A review of the Nevada Department of Education's school report cards revealed that those two charter schools located within racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods had student populations consisting of more than 95% FRL students, over 5.5% Black students, and more than 83% Hispanic students. Conversely, the

other two charter schools located in racially and socioeconomically non-diverse neighborhoods had student populations with less than 18% FRL students, fewer than 5.5% Black students, and less than 25% Hispanic students.

The lottery system employed by charter schools to manage student selection, while transparent and equitable, can inadvertently create obstacles to diversification efforts in Southern Nevada's charter schools, particularly for minority and low-income families (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006). Additionally, legislative initiatives such as the 2019 proposal by Assemblyman Tyler Thompson for a moratorium on new charter school openings until 2021, essentially capping charter school growth, significantly impact charter school recruitment and enrollment dynamics (Pak-Harvey, 2019). These barriers, including both the lottery system and the proposed moratorium, underscore the intricate challenges the participants in this study encountered as they attempted to diversify charter schools and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students in the region. Potter & Quick (2018) suggested solutions like weighted lotteries, as proposed by participant school networks, to mitigate the adverse effects of the lottery on diversity. Similarly, participants in the study expressed their commitment to diversifying their existing schools by introducing weighted lottery and priority enrollment at their campuses. They aimed to accelerate diversity by admitting new students from targeted demographics; however, enrollment caps posed a significant barrier to their efforts. As participants in this study stated, the only way to change a charter school's demographics significantly in a short amount of time is to open more seats since the existing seats are going to be filled up with the existing students' siblings due to the given priority. They thought that the charter authority's cap on the number of students is a barrier to diversifying their charter schools, whereas a district school does not have that cap. They believed that growth creates diversity.

Implications

As aforementioned, charter schools play a pivotal role in shaping Nevada's educational landscape, with a significant surge in student enrollment witnessed in recent years. Despite this growth, challenges persist in ensuring equitable access to charter schools, particularly for disadvantaged students. The themes that emerged from this study have shaped Southern Nevada charter school administrators' student recruitment practices.

The complex public funding landscape presents a significant hurdle for charter schools, particularly regarding facilities. Without dedicated funding for facilities, charter schools face challenges in identifying suitable locations, often resorting to partnerships with developers or locating in affluent areas where land is more accessible but may not serve the most disadvantaged students. As participants disclosed, new housing developers are actively encouraging high-quality charter schools to establish a presence within their new development to attract prospective homebuyers. Essentially, the housing developers are offering discounted land prices to charter operators for their own marketing benefit, which is not a common practice in traditional school districts' marketing. Transportation funding emerges as another critical aspect connected to facilities, influencing accessibility and enrollment. Lack of transportation options disproportionately affects low-income families, limiting their ability to access charter schools located in affluent areas.

It is imperative for state legislators to recognize charter schools as integral components of the public education system and provide them with equitable funding, including support for facilities and transportation. This support would enable charter school leaders to establish campuses in racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods and ensure equal access for all families.

Additionally, challenges in informing the community about the charter school admission process further exacerbate disparities in enrollment. Racially and socioeconomically diverse families often lack access to information about charter schools, impeding their ability to consider these options for their children. Efforts to educate families about charter schools' offerings and admission procedures are crucial to ensuring equitable access. Participants underscored the importance of proactively engaging with racially and socioeconomically diverse communities to inform them about charter school options, emphasizing that these schools are tuition-free, akin to traditional district schools. However, charter school leaders must undertake more grassroots efforts to educate families who may lack awareness of their educational choices, thereby fostering greater inclusivity and equitable access to quality education.

Furthermore, charter school enrollment caps and application processes pose significant barriers to diversifying student populations. Enrollment caps, regulated by authorizers, restrict charter schools from admitting students beyond specified numbers, leading to lotteries and long waitlists. These processes disproportionately impact racially and socioeconomically diverse communities, hindering efforts to promote diversity within charter schools.

Recommendations

Transportation for charter schools has been a major challenge in diversifying their student populations. However, in the 2023 legislation session, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo allocated $14 million in transportation funding for charter schools in his biennium state budget, to be dispersed at $7 million each school year (Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, 2023). This funding was incorporated into Assembly Bill 400, a component of the Education Achievement, Opportunity, and Accountability Act. While this funding is limited, it represents significant advancement and will assist some charter schools in financing student transportation. Although it

marks a notable progression toward addressing transportation challenges, it is not sufficient to cover transportation expenses for all Nevada charter school students. Thus, it is recommended that policymakers revisit the school funding mechanisms to support charter schools' facilities and transportation, which will significantly enhance accessibility for racially and socioeconomically diverse students. It is also recommended that policymakers establish a timeline for traditional school districts to utilize the lands allocated for constructing new schools. If these districts are unable to develop the designated lands within the specified timeframe, consideration should be given to offering the lands to interested charter schools. Additionally, Nevada policymakers could explore the adoption of laws similar to California's trigger law, which permits the conversion of academically underperforming traditional district schools into charter schools (Ahluwalia & Harden, 2020). This could facilitate charter schools' access to facilities in racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods. To help expedite and bring attention to policymakers, charter school leaders must better organize and advocate for such funding allocation.

Charter school leaders should develop strategies such as targeted community outreach and improved communication to inform the public about charter schools in general and their admission procedures. Charter school leaders should actively research and pursue solutions to eliminate barriers preventing racially and socioeconomically diverse families from accessing charter schools. For this purpose, it is recommended that the charter school authorizer, SPCSA, have one common lottery time for all charters and advertise the application window for these charter schools by using all means of communication, including local TV and radio in both English and Spanish and posters at libraries and a variety of cultural and community centers. Moreover, charter school leaders should implement measures such as a weighted lottery to give

more chances for children from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds to get admitted to charter schools. They should also consider more assertive strategies, like enrollment priority to get into the charter schools, for students from racially and socioeconomically diverse families, which could further promote inclusivity and equitable access.

There is a lack of research available on the complex funding of charter schools in Nevada and the demographic disparities between charter schools and district schools in Southern Nevada. Therefore, further research on charter school funding is recommended to inform future policy and practice in the charter school sector. Similarly, more research on charter school leaders' recruitment strategies is recommended to shed light on the challenges faced by Southern Nevada charter schools in their racially and socioeconomically diverse student recruitment practices. Southern Nevada has also struggled with student transiency, as indicated by the most recent data from the Nevada Department of Education. In the 2022-2023 school year, the state's transiency rate stood at 24.7%, while the Clark County School District, which serves the vast majority of Southern Nevada students and approximately 70% of the state's total student population, reported a rate of 27% (Nevada Department of Education, 2023). The transiency could also have an impact on student enrollment in charter schools. Thus, it is recommended to have future research on the impact of student transiency on schools' diversities, both for charter schools compared to traditional district schools.

Limitations

This study has three limitations. The first limitation is the size of the study sample. Only four of 61 SPCSA-authorized Southern Nevada charter school campuses were included in the study. The findings based on these four charter school campuses might not be the same as those of the other 61 charter school campuses. The second limitation is that the findings of this study

were only focused on Southern Nevada charter schools and are not replicable in different contexts or states. The third limitation is that the researcher's role as a charter school administrator may introduce biases or perceptions that could impact the interpretation of data or findings and transparency in the research process.

Conclusion

The factors shaping charter school leaders' student recruitment practices in Southern Nevada were addressed in this study by using Potter and Quick's (2018) Diverse-by-Design Charter Schools framework. The findings underscore the significant impact of complex public funding, lack of community awareness about charter schools and their admission process, and the charter school enrollment cap limitations on these schools' efforts to diversify their student populations.

While charter schools offer valuable educational opportunities, it is imperative to address systemic barriers to ensure equitable access for all students. The lack of equitable funding, particularly for facilities and transportation, presents a substantial obstacle for charter schools, hindering their ability to establish campuses in racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods and provide equal access to all families. By tackling funding complexities, improving community outreach, and reevaluating enrollment practices, charter schools can better serve the diverse needs of Southern Nevada's student population. It is crucial that children from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds have access to the high-quality educational opportunities provided by public charter schools, which are funded by Nevada's taxpayers.

This study serves as a starting point for discussions aimed at making necessary adjustments to charter school leaders' recruitment practices and addressing the complexities of charter schools' public funding.

Appendix A

Participant List

Charter School A

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Participant Role	Gender	Race
Participant A	Principal	Male	White
Participant H	Assistant Principal	Female	White
Participant N	Assistant Principal	Male	White
Participant C*	Administrator	Male	White

Charter School B

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Participant Role	Gender	Race
Participant D	Assistant Principal	Female	White
Participant I	Principal	Female	White
Participant O	Executive Director	Male	White
Participant C*	Administrator	Male	White

Charter School C

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Participant Role	Gender	Race
Participant B	Principal	Female	White
Participant G	Assistant Principal	Female	White
Participant K	Assistant Principal	Male	White
Participant M	Assistant Principal	Female	White
Participant P	Registrar	Female	Hispanic
Participant C*	Administrator	Male	White

Charter School D

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Participant Role	Gender	Race
Participant E	Registrar	Female	Hispanic
Participant F	Assistant Principal	Female	White
Participant J	Principal	Female	White
Participant L	Assistant Principal	Female	Black
Participant C*	Administrator	Male	White

*Participant C provides educational services to all four participant charter schools.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Project: Factors Shaping Charter School Leaders' Student Recruitment Practices in Southern Nevada

Interviewer: _____ Interviewee: _____

Position/Title of the Interviewee: _____ Location of the Interview: _____

Date of the Interview: _____ Time of the Interview: _____

To make my study as accurate and efficient as possible I will audio record the interview. Please feel free to ask me turn off the recorder at any time during the interview.

Interview Questions:

1- Can you tell me about your professional background and your experience in the education field especially as a school administrator or leader?

2- Can you tell me about your school's demographics in general in terms of racial and socio-economical (FRL)?

3- Who was/were the decision maker(s) for the location of this school/campus to open?

   a. What was the main rationale to start this school/campus at this location?

4- In what ways does your school recruit racially, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse students to enroll?

   a. Does your school face any barriers when recruiting diverse students to enroll?

5- In what ways has your school demonstrated a commitment to diversify student enrollment?

6- To what extent have you received diversity and/or inclusion training?

a. How did the training impact the recruitment practices?

7- How is the demographics of the zoned, neighborhood District/CCSD school in the area your school is located at? How is your school's demographics compared to that school's demographics?

a. If your school demographics do not reflect the zoned neighborhood CCSD school's demographics, what might be the reasons for that?

b. Data indicates that most Southern Nevada charter schools do not reflect the zoned neighborhood CCSD school's demographics. What factors do you see play a role in such a predicament?

8- What might be the reasons that low income (FRL qualified) families are not enrolled/attending your school as much as affluent families?

9- What might be the reasons that Hispanic and Black families are not enrolled/attending in your school as much as White and Asian families?

10- What barriers/reasons do you think those racially and socioeconomically diverse families struggle with when they try to get their kids to your charter school?

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