2020

CHARTER SCHOOLS’ ACCOUNTABILITY: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE CHARTER OVERSIGHT UNIT OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Chaddrick L. Owes
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CHARTER SCHOOLS’ ACCOUNTABILITY: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE CHARTER OVERSIGHT UNIT OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

By

Chaddrick L. Owes

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2020
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CHARTER SCHOOLS’ ACCOUNTABILITY: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE
CHARTER OVERSIGHT UNIT OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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By

Chaddrick L. Owes
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the many individuals in my life who believed in me and supported my aspiration of attaining a doctorate degree. This dissertation is likewise dedicated to the many five-year olds entering the K-12 education system across this nation who are unfamiliar with the trials, tribulations, life lessons, and good fortune that is before them. This dissertation is more specifically dedicated to the woman who raised me and my siblings with the most unyielding effort to shape us into civilized and God-fearing beings: my mother, Catherine Franklin.
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My gratitude and acknowledgements go to my many friends, my siblings Charmaine Franklin, Cavonna Armstead, and Chico Owes. To my extended family and to colleagues (past and present). I additionally acknowledge the many mentors that I have had in my life who, over the years, pushed me to be a better student, better leader, and a better man. Mrs. Barbara Guerrucci, Mrs. Alex Chancellor-Lewis, Coach Clarence Isler, Mr. Raymond Reeves, Ms. Audrey Thorne, Mr. Chris Hines, Dr. Mary Kyser, Mrs. Erica Thomas, Dr. Edward Wilson, Dr. Maury Wills, and Mrs. Judie Hall, just to name a few. I likewise acknowledge the current mentors who continue to build on to the foundation that was cemented by the mentors of my childhood and early career. I further acknowledge the many members of my mother’s church, The Church of Christ. Those members were undoubtedly responsible for teaching me, instilling life lessons, and exposing me to experiences that helped to shape me into who I am today and who I aspire to be in the future. It is also important that I acknowledge Regina Lane, my Ed.D. cohort three accountability partner. I appreciate your candid feedback regarding my research and for the many study sessions that were filled with deep reflection. Finally, I acknowledge my dissertation chair, Dr. Brett Taylor along with the other esteemed members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Edward Wilson and Dr. Fred Estes.
CHARTER SCHOOLS’ ACCOUNTABILITY: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE CHARTER OVERSIGHT UNIT OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Abstract

By Chaddrick L. Owes
University of the Pacific
2020

This dissertation is a qualitative-based program evaluation that explored the existing charter school accountability measures, processes, and oversight systems of the California Department of Education (CDE) in relation to State Board of Education (SBE)-authorized charter schools. This dissertation further explored the potential program improvements that could be implemented to improve the charter school oversight functions of the SBE and CDE. After a charter school receives authorization and approval to operate, the degrees of accountably and oversight vary dependent upon the charter authorizer and the oversite entity. This dissertation study aimed to discover how charter schools authorized by the SBE are held accountable as the SBE delegates its oversight authority to the CDE. Data were collected from the CDE by way of interviews, artifact analysis, and participatory research. Furthermore, this dissertation study aimed to delineate how accountability and oversight systems subsequently impact both charter schools and authorizers, as these two entities are currently governed by the outdated Charter School Act of 1992. Finally, this dissertation study aimed to provide recommendations which may potentially be used as a guide to influence future legislation and or improve the CDE’s charter schools oversight processes. The findings of this study included six recommendations for future practice and three recommendations for future research.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, new education legislation, along with various education reform initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), has catapulted the American education system into the future. Atypical education reform initiatives such as Outcome-Based Education, Race to the Top, Montessori education, and school choice voucher programs made various avenues for alternative education systems possible. Charter schools are also known to be one of the alternative education systems. Grady (2012) asserted, "Over the last eighteen years, the number of charter schools in the United States has risen dramatically" (p. 514). Since Grady’s finding in 2012, charter schools have tripled across our nation. This increase has initiated the need for more accountability while holding charter schools accountable for student academic achievement. Grady additionally concluded the charter school concept was developed from the economic free-market theories of Milton Friedman. Friedman’s (1955) hypothesis was that the denationalization of the education system would widen the range of school choice options that were available to parents and students (p. 4). Improvement in the school system would result from providing parents with a wider variety of choice in school options. Grady (2012) believed the charter school movement and the system create an additional layer of structural change and also create a larger market for school choice that some may consider lacking in the public-school sector (p. 520).

Charter schools have become one of the more popular education alternatives in today's education system. Elizabeth Montaño contended that California legislators’ passing the California Charter School Act of 1992 was intended to allow parents the choice of sending their children to public charter schools. Charter schools were commonly known as places where
teachers would have more autonomy and where schools faced some exemptions from state education codes and from collective bargaining contracts (p. 1). Montaño continued by describing “One of the most distinguishing characteristics of charter schools is that they are part of the school choice movement. Charter schools were founded and envisioned as schools that provide a choice for parents in the community” (p. 94). Statewide in California, one out of every 10 students enrolled in a public school attends a charter school (Stokes, 2019).

As the charter school movement continues to flourish, each year more charter schools are authorized to operate. Ross (2019) described that charter schools are public schools that operate independently of school districts. School boards authorize them to operate and must provide some oversight. Shawgi Tell (2015) believes, “Charter schools are, by definition, contract schools. Charter means contract. However, few, if any, writers and commentators refer to charter schools as contract schools” (p. 315). Tell continued by describing the common understanding that “Charter schools are typically defined as tuition-free, publicly funded, performance-based, non-sectarian, public schools of choice open to all” (p. 318). Turnamian (2011) emphasized what many education practitioners and some parents have concluded that charter schools are some of the best public schools in operation today. In that same vein, some charter schools are on the opposite spectrum and are the worst schools operating today. “Yet, education and political leaders frequently criticize traditional public schools for not achieving standards, but are oddly silent when it comes to the plethora of failing charters and the possible implications this could have on their policy agenda” (Turnamian, 2011, p. 1). Christian Wilkens (2013) concluded, “The simplest and most common route to charter school closure has been financial or organizational mismanagement” (p. 235). The California Charter Schools Association (n.d.b) echoed similar sentiments when the organization published a statement
saying, “We cannot have an honest discussion about education reform and increasing accountability without acknowledging the fact that while a large number of charters are performing well, too many have demonstrated an inability to meet the challenge of excellence” (para. 3).

As charter schools work to meet the challenge of excellence, each state has its own unique set of charter laws and regulations that govern both traditional public schools and charter schools. Originally adopted by Minnesota in 1991, according to Wixom (2018), state laws establishing charter schools have swept across the country and now can be found in 44 states and the District of Columbia. Kentucky has the newest charter school laws, created in 2017. Pelz (2015) believes states may employ charter schools to challenge the traditional public-school infrastructure to improve the educational achievement of specific student groups or to ameliorate educational deficiencies in a particular part of the state.

While each state has its own set of laws that govern charter schools, in the state of California, where this project took place, charter schools are authorized to operate under the authority of a local school district board, also commonly known as the local educational agencies (LEA), a County Office of Education board (COE), or California State Board of Education (SBE). These authorizing entities are referred to as authorizers. Gustafson (2013) concluded, “Authorizers evaluate charter school applications, oversee charter schools once they are up and running, and decide, based on various performance measures, whether to renew or revoke the schools’ charters” (p. 33). Gustafson continued by asserting, “Strong authorizing can create and support high-quality charter schools, and weak authorizing can enable lousy charter schools to open or stay open” (p. 33).
Regardless of public/traditional or charter school status, all California schools are sanctioned to focus on the eight state priorities that have been designated by the SBE. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), the following is true: In 2013, California adopted the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). This new accountability system that is based on multiple measures. These measures are used to determine local educational agency (LEA) and school progress toward meeting the needs of their students. The measures are based on factors that contribute to quality education, including high school graduation rates, college/career readiness, student test scores, English learner (EL) progress, suspension rates, and parent engagement (California Department of Education, 2019g). Despite these accountability systems to which all schools must bring focus, throughout the education community, there has been a common public misconception that charter schools have lesser or no accountability and oversight as compared to traditional school district public schools. In reality, charter schools may have more accountability and oversight dependent upon which authorizer the charter school operates under.

**Problem Statement**

California charter authorizers take different approaches to the ways they hold charter schools accountable for addressing the 8 or 10 state priorities, adhering to their charter petition, the memorandum of understanding, and operation in compliance with the California Education Code. As described by Gustafson (2013), “Oftentimes many authorizers work in isolation, developing their own best practices, and are often just trying to keep their heads above water” (p. 33). For the purposes of this project, it was assumed that charter schools, regardless of the authorizing municipality, would benefit from having similar or more closely aligned accountability systems. As a result of the current charter accountability systems existing as they
are today, the systems are perceived to be disjointed based on the various authorizers throughout the state, and the stigma that charter schools have little or no accountability and oversight has continued to gain momentum causing charter schools to have a negative public perception. This perception may force charter authorizers and charter school leaders into unclear directions concerning accountably measures that charter schools must address during the authorization term. Charter leaders potentially dispense countless hours focused on accountability and compliance monitoring while simultaneously counteracting the negative public perception that charter schools have limited or no accountability, as the charter school leaders are inaccessible to the students and teachers they lead. Performance in the classroom may become stifled as the school leader spends an abundance of time and resources juggling various accountability measures, compliance reporting, and attending to authorizer requests.

Charter school leaders are in some cases left to concentrate their efforts cutting through systems of bureaucracy, red tape, and political seizure to operate efficiently while attempting to uphold accountability measures that are often unclear and are vastly different based on the authorizer. On the opposing side, authorizers struggle to provide support to charter schools while at the same time hold those charter schools accountable. Gustafson (2013) asserted, “Many school districts and state education departments do authorizing work via committee, whereby authorizing responsibilities are divided among various departments, whereas authorizing is added to the normal workload of staffers hired to do something else” (p. 34). This added/shared responsibility contributes to the level of inconsistencies faced by both charter authorizers and charter leaders, as both parties tread water to keep from drowning.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this program evaluation and dissertation study was to evaluate the program of practice and effectiveness of the Charter Oversight Unit of the California Department of Education and the related programs of practice associated with charter school accountability, charter school oversight, and charter authorizing, as these activities exist at the California State Board of Education level. This project further analyzed the current systems, processes, and procedures currently in practice as California Department of Education provides both oversight and accountability to charter schools authorized by the California State Board of Education.

Inquiry Questions

Q1: In what ways, if any, are the existing accountability measures, processes, and oversight systems of the California Department of Education perceived to achieve the outcomes, objectives, and goals necessary for the appropriate level of accountability and oversight of State Board of Education-authorized charter schools?

Q2: What program improvements, if any, can be implemented to improve the charter school oversight functions of the State Board of Education and California Department of Education staff?

Significance of Study

While previous studies have been conducted regarding the unique aspects of charter school programs, little research has been conducted concerning the various accountability systems and accountability challenges that charter schools and charter authorizers face. This charter oversight unit, qualitative-based program evaluation more narrowly focused on the oversight and accountability systems that exist at the California State Board of Education level.
Furthermore, this study investigated how the charter schools authorized by the State Board of Education work with its authorizer on a day-to-day basis.

This study may further demonstrate the program’s effectiveness or lack thereof, which may assist policymakers and the general public better comprehend the work that charter authorizers embark on to hold charter schools accountable for student achievement, successful operations, fiscal responsibility, CEC compliance, and program monitoring. This dissertation may further demystify the stigma that charter schools have no accountability and oversight. This dissertation may additionally aid in combatting the harmful anti-charter agendas that groups and or individuals push in attempts to derail the charter school movement due to misinformation or a lack of information concerning charter schools. This dissertation study may provide a foundation for additional scholarly research while adding to the existing body of literature related to charter schools. Finally, this study may provide recommendations that could potentially influence future legislation aimed at improving the charter school and education marketplace in California.

**Theoretical Framework**

This program evaluation and dissertation project used the systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) and complexity theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966) frameworks. These two theoretical frameworks relate to this research by evaluating the various systems associated with the interconnected relationships between charter authorizers and charter practitioners. Systems theory can be commonly defined as the interdisciplinary theory about the nature of complex systems in nature, society, and science and is a framework by which one can investigate and or describe any group of objects that work together to produce some result (Environment and Ecology, n.d.). Complexity theory derives as an extension from systems theory. Complexity
theory expands on the relationship between organizations and the development of complex adaptive systems and their relationships to the organizations in which they exist. Both systems and complexity theories apply to this study, as the researcher investigated the various oversight systems utilized by the California Department of Education to hold the charter schools accountable. Both of these theoretical frameworks are discussed further in Chapter 3. The next section underscores the methods of inquiry that were used throughout this project.

**Methods of Inquiry**

This dissertation study is a qualitative-based program evaluation. Therefore, this study was designed to gather data from interviews, artifacts analysis, and participatory research methods.

**Interviews**

The researcher conducted qualitative interviews with personnel who were employed or associated with the SBE and the CDE. Individuals employed by or associated with local educational agency (LEAs), county offices of education (COEs), and charter schools were also invited to participate in the study.

**Artifacts Analysis**

The researcher qualitatively reviewed and analyzed various existing data, documentation, artifacts, policies, bills, laws, legislation, and previous research.

**Participatory Research Methods**

The researcher qualitatively collected data derived from the participation in oral conversations, meetings, written, and fieldwork experiences.
Delimitations

This research study is restricted to the following delimitations in an effort to streamline the research process while providing practical qualitative data.

1. Data were mostly collected from representatives of the SBE-authorized charter schools and or the CDE.
2. Data collected from interviews were mostly limited to representatives of the SBE-authorized charter schools and or the CDE.
3. Data collected from artifact review were largely associated with the SBE-authorized charter schools and or the CDE.
4. The personnel and staff of the CDE possess delegated authority on behalf of the SBE. Therefore, interviews and data collection were arranged via the CDE personnel and staff to gather data concerning the SBE’s oversight and accountability systems.

Assumptions

Three assumptions were associated with this study.

1. The researcher assumed he would have access to documentation and or personnel that would assist the researcher with substantiating and collecting data that would lend itself to the completion of this program evaluation.
2. The CDE staff would cooperate with the researcher in a manner that would assist the researcher collect data in an orderly and informative process.
3. SBE-authorized charter schools supported this research with data, information, and artifacts that were useful to the study.

Definition of Terms

The following are key terms used throughout this dissertation. These terms may not be commonly identified by readers or non-practitioners.

*Assembly Bill (AB)*: A bill introduced in the state assembly to change, repeal, or add to existing state law.
California Charter Schools Association (CCSA): An advocacy organization that works to advance the charter school movement throughout the state of California (California Charter Schools Association, n.d.e).

California Department of Education (CDE): A governmental agency responsible for overseeing public education in the state of California. The CDE has the responsibility for the enforcement of education laws and programs that affect the education of 6.2 million children and young adults (CDE, n.d.b).

California Education Code (CEC): “Establishes the law of this state respecting the subjects to which it relates, and its provisions and all proceedings under it are to be liberally construed, with a view to effect its objects and to promote justice” (California Legislative Information, n.d., para. 3).

California State Board of Education (SBE): By statute, the SBE is the governing and policymaking body of the CDE. The Constitution and statute also assign the SBE a variety of other responsibilities (CDE, 2017).

Charter Authorizer: An entity or group that has either been approved by the state or been given statutory authority to oversee a portfolio of charter schools. Charter authorizers are responsible for issuing both new and renewal contracts to charter schools that desire to operate and serve pupils (Edstrom, Hodge, Merry, & Osborne, 2016).

Charter Petition: The central document to establishing a charter. The charter petition outlines the key information on the proposed educational program, student outcomes and assessments, operations, governance, policies, and how the school will meet legal requirements (California Charter Schools Association, n.d.a). The specific 16 California requirements for this document are outlined by California Education Code Section 47605.

County Office of Education (COE): County offices of education provide services to school districts statewide. County offices of education support school districts by performing tasks that can be done more efficiently and economically at the county level (CDE, 2017).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, and represents good news for our nation’s schools. This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation’s national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Local Educational Agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties as are recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. (Cornel Law School, n.d., para. 1)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Law in effect from 2002 to 2015. President George W. Bush signed NCLB into law in 2001. It was a version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. NCLB was the law that affected every public school in the United States. Its goal was to level the playing field for students who are disadvantaged (Lee, n.d.).

Oversight: Rules, regulations, and technical demands in the areas of school facilities, financial and governance responsibilities, curriculum, instruction, and accountability for student academic performance (Mayo, 2015).

Petitioner: Individuals or groups such as parents, teachers, or community members who initiate a charter petition in an attempt to convert, start-up, and open a charter school.

Renewal: At the end of a charter approval term, charter schools are required by law to renew the charter term by the entity that approved the charter petition for a period not to exceed five years (CDE, n.d.a).

Senate Bill (SB): A bill introduced in the state Senate to change, repeal, or add to existing state law.

Summary

As charter schools are a clear marker in today’s educational marketplace, these schools play a pivotal role in the lives of millions of students. The significance of this proposed research project is elevated in this chapter. This chapter additionally included information concerning the proposed research by highlighting the importance and future implications of this project. This section included research questions the researchers intended to answer, along with the theoretical foundations supporting this project. The next chapter includes a review of previous research and current literature to further support the prominence of this program evaluation.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Literature Review

Across the United States, the notion of inconsistent accountability and oversight variables related to charter schools poses problems for stakeholders, charter schools, and the charter authorizer. During a charter school authorization term, each charter school is purportedly held accountable to some degree to adhere to the charter petition approved by its charter authorizer (California Charter School Act of 1992). Supplementary accountability systems exist with the understanding that these accountability mechanisms will hold charter leaders/operators accountable for delivering on the promises presented during the petitioning process (California Charter School Act of 1992). California Education Code (CEC; 1999) § 47604.3 identifies the duties of a charter authorizing entity. Similarly, the accountability and oversight systems enacted by charter authorizers are intended to further prevent bad charter schools from operating. After charter schools receive authorization and approval to operate, the degree of accountability and oversight varies dependent upon the charter authorizer. As a result of inconsistent accountability and oversight systems as they exist amongst the charter authorizing community, the political landscape surrounding charter schools and the issues of accountability continue to widen. Enhanced friction is created through the educational marketplace at the local, state, and federal levels due to varying opinions with respect to how charter schools should be held accountable. This dissertation project and qualitative program evaluation examines the accountability practices and oversight systems as they currently exist for schools authorized by the California SBE. This program evaluation has the potential to influence future charter school legislation in the state of California. The findings and recommendations of this study may
additionally be used to improve the current practices of all charter authorizers in the state. Chapter 2 examines the existing literature related to the passage of legislation allowing charter schools to operate in the state of California. This chapter presents some historical context of the charter school movement in California and around the United States. This chapter introduces the roles and responsibilities of a charter school authorizer and further puts into perspective the oversight criteria, mechanisms, and accountably systems related to the operations and intended purpose of charter schools. This chapter examines the renewal and revocation criteria established in the current charter school laws, then discusses several current-day controversies related to charter schools in California. Finally, this chapter introduces and examines the theoretical framework related to this study.

**Background**

“Evaluation is a set of planned, information-gathering, and analytical activities that are undertaken to provide those responsible for the management of change with a satisfactory assessment of the effects and/or progress of the change effort” (Beckhard & Harris, 1977, p. 96). The purpose of this program evaluation was to examine the oversight and accountability systems in place at the SBE and CDE in relation to charter schools authorized by the SBE. Since the California Charter School Act of 1992 was signed into law, of the total 1,306 charter schools in the state, the SBE has authorized 109 charter schools and 11 statewide benefit charter schools. Currently, 48 of these schools remain in operation under SBE authorization. The remaining schools have since been re-authorized by either a local school board of education, a county board of education, or have voluntarily or involuntarily closed. In some cases, a school’s closure is the result of the charter being revoked, which means the school is forced to close. In relation to the presently SBE-authorized charter schools in operation, the SBE delegates its oversight authority
of these schools to CDE. CDE staff are responsible for carrying out the day-to-day duties and responsibilities related to charter appeals, renewals, revocation, oversight, and accountability. The program evaluation conducted for this dissertation study was limited and focused solely on the accountability and oversight systems as they exist at the SBE-authorization level. Local school district boards of education and county boards of education programs and oversight practices were not evaluated.

**History of the Charter School Movement**

In general, countless individuals lack the understanding of what a charter school is in comparison to a traditional or private school. Mehan and Chang (2010) explained, “Charter schools are elementary or secondary schools that receive public money but have been freed from some rules, regulations, and statutes in exchange for some type of accountability for producing certain results in student achievement” (p. 4). In California, according to the CDE website, it was and is the intent of the California Legislature that charter schools operate independently from the existing school district structure and with the goal of accomplishing the following:

- Improve pupil learning.
- Increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are identified as academically low achieving.
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.
- Provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system.
- Hold the schools established under this part accountable for meeting measurable pupil outcomes, and provide the schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance-based accountability systems.
- Provide vigorous competition within the public school system to stimulate continual improvements in all public schools. (CDE, n.d.a, para. 2)
To provide additional historical context to the topic of charter schools, in 1991, Minnesota was at the forefront of the nation in passing legislation to create the first legislated charter school (Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, 2020). According to the Minnesota legislature, the premise of charter schools was for groups of teachers or other educators to have the permission to open schools with a charter contract under the state board or a local school board. California was the second state in the U.S. following Minnesota to pass a set of charter school laws. Senate Bill 1448, known as the California Charter School Act of 1992, was signed into law, which would allow the authorization and operation of 100 charter schools. The law has since been amended to remove the charter school cap. Today, according to the CDE, as of the 2018-19 school year, there are more than 1,306 charter schools and seven all-charter districts that currently operate in California. The CDE also indicates that as of the 2017-18 school year, the number of students enrolled in charter schools in California was approximately 628,849, or approximately 10% of the public-school student population in California.
Figure 1. The yearly enrollment growth of students attending charter schools California.

Figure 2. Map of where students attend charter schools in California in school year 2017-18.
As the student enrollment in charter schools steadily grew, Lauen, Fuller, and Dauter (2015) found that charter schools have also become more differentiated in terms of various types of charter schools have also grown (p. 219). The types of charter schools that exist today in California encompass classroom-based charters, non-classroom-based charters, managed charters, conversion charters, and startup charters. Table 1 provides clarity regarding the types of charter schools that exist.

Table 1
*Types of Charter Schools in California*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charter School Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Based</td>
<td>A charter school that requires its pupils to be in attendance at the school site attending classroom instruction at least 80% of the minimum instructional time required pursuant to Education Code section 47612.5(a)(1). (Title 5 CCR § 11963)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-classroom Based</td>
<td>Encompasses home-schooling and various forms of independent study, including computer-based instruction using software modules and teacher-directed distance-learning (RAND Education, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Management Organization (CMO) managed charter</td>
<td>Nonprofit entities that manage two or more charter schools. CMOs often provide services such as back office functions, hiring, professional development, data analysis, public relations and advocacy (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Management Organization (EMO) managed charter</td>
<td>For-profit entities that manage charter schools and perform similar functions as CMOs but generally charge a management fee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charter School Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversion Charter</td>
<td>An existing district school that later becomes a charter (Los Angeles Unified School District, n.d.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start-up Charter</td>
<td>A charter school created &quot;from scratch&quot; by any member of the public – educators, parents, foundations and others (Los Angeles Unified School District, n.d.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data constructed from public information sources, reports, and statues concerning the diverse types of charter schools that exist in California.

Former State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) Tom Torlakson stated in a CDE news release dated August 13, 2018:

In the past few years, we have updated virtually our entire K–12 education system. Now it’s time to look at the key laws governing charter schools, which have not been significantly changed in 26 years, to see how they can be modernized to better meet the needs of all public-school students, including those who attend charter schools. (CDE, 2018, p. 1)

This statement led to a plethora of debates that, as of today, continue to be heavily argued across the education community. A portion of the controversial debates is discussed in later sections.

While Torlakson’s term as SSPI ended five months after this statement, newly elected and current SSPI Tony Thurmond presented a Charter Task Force Report of Recommendations to the California Governor, Gavin Newsom (CDE, 2019h). Newsom requested that Superintendent Thurmond convene a group of experts to closely examine the impact of charter school growth on district budgets and to provide a report with recommendations according to a CDE news release dated June 7, 2019 (CDE, 2019h). The report outlined several recommendations, and a portion related to the role of authorizers and the charter oversight processes discussed further in the next sections.
Charter Authorizer

A charter authorizer is described by Edstrom et al. (2016) as “An entity or group that has either been approved by the state or given statutory authority to oversee a portfolio of charter schools” (p. 5). Edstrom et al. continued by interpreting that “the role of a charter school authorizer is to provide oversight and create accountability tools that help to promote high quality schools” (p. 5). Additionally, these researchers concluded that charter authorizers are responsible for issuing both new and renewal contracts to charter schools who desire to operate and serve pupils. The researchers expounded on the conception that authorizers are charged with holding the schools they authorize accountable to the performance, as outlined in the charter contracts approved by the authorizing entity. Conversely, charter school authorizers are also responsible for closing a school or not renewing a charter contract when necessary. Charter school closure is discussed in a later section.

As previously mentioned, 1,306 charter schools are currently operating under the authority of an authorizer. Today in California, there are 294 local school district authorizers, 41 county offices of education authorizers, and the California SBE (Freedberg, 2019). Freedberg (2019) divulged that California’s largest authorizer is Los Angeles Unified School District with 277 charter schools followed by San Diego Unified School District who authorizes 48 and the SBE who authorizes 43 charter schools.

Oluwole (2019) asserted that due to diverse boards of education and state agencies possessing the authority and autonomy to authorize charter schools, the debate regarding authorization and control continues to become more complicated. To further complicate the charter authorizing landscape, Oluwole argued that states should consider retaining local control by preventing charter schools from invading minority communities that did not authorize them.
with school sites, resource centers, and satellite campuses. Oluwole supported his argument by highlighting the court case of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) where the United States Supreme Court concluded, local control over the educational process affords citizens an opportunity to participate in decision-making, permits the structuring of school programs to fit local needs, and encourages experimentation, innovation, and a healthy competition for educational excellence. Mayo’s (2015) research examined this problem from a different lens. Mayo asserted that previous scholars have attempted to examine the oversight policies and the regulatory relationships between charter schools and their authorizers. Yet, the previous research has “glossed over” the importance of proper oversight. As charter schools operate and implement innovative programs geared towards the pupil populations they serve, oversight over these schools and programs is necessary.

**Oversight**

Mayo (2015) communicated that the term “oversight” in the charter community is commonly defined as rules, regulations, and technical demands in the areas of school facilities, financial and governance responsibilities, curriculum, instruction, and accountability for student academic performance. Smith (2017) revealed that early charter school laws were all about how charter schools would operate while taking into account specifics concerning their internal structures. Those internal structures include, but are not limited to, the autonomy and decision-making authority regarding staffing, budget, and curriculum. Also, early charter laws were geared towards how charter schools would be approved for an initial charter contract term and how these schools would either be renewed or non-renewed at the end of their charter contract term. The laws also considered how charter school funding would be calculated along with requirements for the size and composition of their governing boards. Smith went on to reveal
that while the previously mentioned laws were geared towards charter schools, states failed to create any serious guidance for evaluating how well authorizers met the challenge of monitoring the aforesaid matters. Petrilli (2017) expressed similar concerns regarding the fierce arguments about the appropriate amount of oversight and accountability for charter schools, especially in states with a history of well-documented low performance and scandal. Mayo (2015) communicated similar sentiments that “the variable structure of charter oversight across the state has consequences both for applicant charters and for the legal cast of the process” (p. 690).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BILL</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB1448 (Hart) Ch. 781, Stats. of 1991-92.</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Established all school districts as potential authorizers. Gave very limited appeals power to the State Board of Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB3384 (Knox), Ch. 786, Stats. of 1995-96.</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Required charter schools participate in pupil assessment and meet statewide performance standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB544 (Lempert), Ch. 34, Stats. of 1997-98.</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Authorized the State Board of Education to grant and revoke charters. Established an appellate process, allowing a charter school denied a charter by a school district to appeal to a county office of education or the State Board of Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB434 (Johnston), Ch. 162, Stats. of 1999-2000.</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Required charter schools that offered independent study to comply with all laws and regulations regarding independent study. Required all schools to maintain written records of student attendance and release these records for audit and inspection. Required that charter schools certify their students participate in state testing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB675 (Poochigan), Ch. 344, Stats. of 2001-02.</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Required charter schools to submit their annual financial and compliance records to the California Department of Education in addition to their chartering agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB1994 (Reyes), Ch. 1058, Stats. of 2001-02.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Authorized the Superintendent of Public Instruction to conduct financial inquiries and audits of charter schools. Allowed the SPI to order a charter school closed on the recommendation of the State Board of Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB1137 (Reyes), Ch. 892, Stats. of 2003-04.</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Increased academic performance requirements for charter renewal. Required authorizers to visit the school annually. Increased charter school reporting requirements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Blanton (2012, p. 28)

*Note.* Data complied on key legislation that was passed in California related to charter school oversight from the California Research Bureau.
Once a charter school is authorized and begins operating, the charter school authorizers in California can claim an authorizing fee of up to 1% of the per-pupil funding allocated to a charter school, or up to 3% of per-pupil funding if the authorizer provides substantially rent-free facilities to the charter school (California Education Code [CEC], 1999, § 47613). This fee is commonly known as an oversight fee; oversight fees are charged by the authorizer so the authorizer can conduct the oversight processes. California law requires authorizers to perform the following tasks as these tasks pertain to oversight: (a) designate a contact person for the charter school, (b) visit the charter school once a year, (c) ensure compliance with all required reports, (d) monitor the fiscal condition of the charter school, and (e) inform the state of new charters, renewal decisions, and closures (CEC, 1999, § 47604.3).

Hill et al. (2001) concluded that while most charter school leaders know they must meet performance goals set by the municipality that authorizes them, it is equally important to maintain a relationship of trust and confidence with those municipalities. However, many authorizers have not clarified their expectations and oversight processes that are in place for those schools they authorize and oversee. These authors and researchers furthermore determined through their research that:

A vast majority of authorizers fit into one of four categories: (1) Ambivalent about approving charters, and conduct only minimal oversight (2) Reluctant to approve charters, yet conduct aggressive compliance-based oversight and compliance (3) Wiling to approve charters, and conduct balanced performance oriented oversight or (4) Enthusiastic about approving charters, yet conduct minimal oversight. (Hill et al., 2001, p. 53)

After this program evaluation is completed, it may be revealed which of the aforementioned categories the CDE might align with as related to the approval and amount of oversight conducted.
Renewal Criteria and Academic Achievement

Groshoff (2010) affirmed that research shows that in contrast to traditional public schools, some charter schools can be successful. How successful these schools prove to be is taken into consideration when the charter term has expired, and it is time for renewal. Bulkley (2001) made the distinction that charter renewal accountability refers to two accountability measures, one being accountable to stakeholders such as parents and students. The other is the correlation of performance-based accountability as a result of contracts between the charter school and its authorizer. The authorizer holds the charter school accountable for the educational outcomes of students (p. 3).

California law requires that upon renewal of a charter, the authority that granted the charter shall consider increases in pupil academic achievement for all groups of pupils served by the charter school as the most important factor in determining whether to grant a charter renewal (CEC, 1999, § 47607 (a) (3) (A)). The education code further clarifies in § 47607 (4) (A) the entity that granted the charter determines that the academic performance of the charter school is at least equal to the academic performance of the public schools the charter school pupils would otherwise have been required to attend, as well as the academic performance of the schools in the school district in which the charter school is located, taking into account the composition of the pupil population served at the charter school.

Often the general public questions whether charters prove to be as valuable as they claim. This value is often determined during the renewal period described in the previous section. Berends, Waddington, and Schoenig (2019; as cited in Betts and Tang, 2014) indicated in their research that charter schools are producing higher achievement gains in math when compared to traditional public schools in elementary and middle schools. However, these gains are not
evident in high school. For reading, achievement in charter schools on average are producing higher gains in middle schools but not in elementary or high schools. For elementary schools, the average effect of charter schools is not statistically significant for reading but is positive and significant for math. For middle schools, the researchers found positive and significant effects of charter schools for both reading and math achievement. For high school studies, neither effect is statistically significant (para. 2).

Other researchers such as Sass, Zimmer, Gill, and Booker (2016) found that while many see importance in test scores, these assessments and subsequent scores do not provide the full scope of the impact that charter schools may have on students who attend. Long-term attainment and earnings prove to have a greater influence. Factors such as high school graduation, college enrollment, and earnings are of greater consequence than simply relying on test scores to measure success. Polikoff et al. (2014) conducted a study by polling voters regarding public education in California. Based on the data presented in Figure 3, voters from each respondent group had a common perception and believed charter school students performed better on standardized tests than students who attended traditional public schools. The beliefs and perceptions shared by this sample of voters, provide further insight regarding how the public view charter schools.
Revocation and School Closures

Although charter schools have the potential of being closed as a result of not being renewed by its authorizer, a charter can be revoked during the charter contract authorization term. Grady (2012) disclosed there are four common reasons why a charter is revoked, which subsequently means the school closes. The most common reasons to revoke a charter are “(1) a violation of the terms and conditions established in the charter petition that was approved by a respective authorizer, (2) a violation of applicable laws or statues (3) fiscal mismanagement or failure to meet financial obligations, (4) failure to make progress in pupils academic achievement” (p. 531). Many previous researchers and scholars indicate that good charter revocation statutes have the ability to hold charter schools more accountable and promote efficiency in the marketplace.
In California, the CEC (1999) describes the following as permissible reasons that a charter authorizer can revoke a charter:

1. Committed a material violation of any of the conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter.
2. Failed to meet or pursue any of the pupil outcomes identified in the charter.
3. Failed to meet generally accepted accounting principles or engaged in fiscal mismanagement.
4. Violated any provision of law.

Upon notification of closure whether voluntary or involuntary, charter schools must commence the school closure procedures outlined in the charter petition and or outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding.

Paino, Boylan, and Renzulli (2016) suggested, “A significant number of closures would suggest that accountability processes are working, with underperforming schools being removed from the population” (p. 4). As with “bad” or underperforming traditional public schools, there are a handful of “bad” charter schools. However, a number of circumstances prevent the school from being closed. Stokes (2019) concurred, “Critics say this leaves local school districts with very little ability to say ‘no’ to a petition or renewal application — even in circumstances where saying ‘no’ might be the best option for everyone” (para. 22). According to Perser and Marino (as cited in Wechtenhiser, Wade, & Lin, 2011), the four most common reasons that bad charter schools remain open are: (a) “The absence of clear or meaningful performance data” (Chapter 1, p. 4). The performance criteria set by the authorizer may be vague or ambiguous. This becomes problematic during renewal time, as authorizers may not be able to determine if satisfactory progress has been made. (b) “The absence of a strong body of evidence gathered over the charter term” (Wechtenhiser et al., 2011, Chapter 1, p. 4). Lack of evidence to support a solid case or argument when it is time to renew a charter school may be a result of poor monitoring or inadequate supervision. (c) “The absence of better alternatives in the surrounding
neighborhood” (Wechtenhiser et al., 2011, Chapter 1, p. 4). Closing a low-performing charter school will force the students to attend equally or worse performing schools. And (d) “Community and political support for the failing school” (Wechtenhiser et al., 2011, Chapter 1, p. 4). Community and political members along with devoted parents, teachers, and students may heavily advocate for the school to remain open creating a wealth of political pressure.

Rossi (as cited in Wechtenhiser et al., 2011) believes authorizers should approach closure through a lens of planning, clear goals, comprehensive policies and procedures, appropriate allocations of resources, overall transparency, and the ability to make decisions even if tough or politically unpopular (Chapter 1, p. 22). “Closing a school demands care and communication and community input” (Noonan, 2016, para. 13). Clark (2019) cited economics Professor Douglas Harris who believes charter school closures work only when you send a student to a higher-performing school. The next section discusses inconsistent authorizer practices.

**Inconsistent Authorizer Practices**

Blanton (2012) disclosed, “Authorizers have been in existence for 20 years and have developed many different methods for charter school oversight” (p. 47). The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA; 2016) echoed that California laws and statutes provide little guidance to authorizers. “Many authorizers simply focus on basic compliance, doing what the law directly requires but losing sight of the larger intent: to foster a high-quality charter sector” (p. 8). The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond submitted a Charter Task Force report to Governor Gavin Newsom on June 6, 2019. Attorneys of the law office of Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud, and Romo (2019) detailed that the report revealed the task force members “unanimously agreed that there is a need for clear, reasonable, and rigorous standards for oversight to ensure fair evaluations statewide” (para. 6).
The attorneys concluded that the members of the task force included a recommendation for the establishment of a statewide entity that would develop a set of clear standards to guide charter authorizers across the state. This state agency would also train charter authorizers on the standards. The report went on to reflect the need for rubrics or handbooks for use by authorizers and by charter applicants in developing and evaluating charter petitions and that authorizers currently evaluate charter petition elements in varying levels of detail. Therefore, clear guidelines would be aimed at standardizing the process of charter petition evaluations.

NACSA (2016) reverberated its original 2014 conclusion that “nationwide, 20 states have already adopted national industry standards for quality charter authorizing, in most cases based directly on NACSA’s Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing. California should do likewise—and require authorizers to meet them” (p. 12). NACSA asserted California has a weak state-level oversight of authorizers citing, “California provides little state-level oversight of charter authorizers themselves. It provides no state authority that can address grievances about authorizer performance beyond appeals of petition, revocations, or renewal decisions” (p. 9). The NACSA (2016) report finally revealed the following four main points of contention that have resounded for the past several years:

1. There is no objective way to distinguish conscientious authorizers from those that are hostile, overbearing, negligent, or otherwise performing poorly. 2. There are no transparency mechanisms to ensure that an authorizer is annually verifying and appropriately measuring the academic, financial, and organizational performance of the charter schools it oversees. 3. There are no mechanisms to review and evaluate, either periodically or selectively, the quality and performance of authorizers based on the performance of their schools or standards of quality authorizing. 4. The State has no authority to prevent or sanction authorizers who abuse for financial gain the charter law’s limited exemption to in-district chartering—a situation that has prompted litigation among districts and led to serious questions of conflict. (p. 9)
Additional inconsistencies exist around the topic of supervisory oversight fees paid by charter schools to their authorizer. Blanton (2012) and the California Research Bureau surveyed 72 charter authorizers to determine the usage of the oversight fees that were collected from charter schools pursuant to CEC § 47613 (a) (b) according to, “a chartering authority may charge for the actual costs of supervisorial oversight of a charter school not to exceed 1 percent of the revenue of the charter school.” “A chartering authority may charge a charter school not to exceed 3 percent of the revenue of the charter school if the charter school is able to obtain substantially rent-free facilities from the chartering authority” (para. 1-2). Inconsistencies between authorizers and the services provided to the schools they oversee were noted in Blanton’s study. Blanton cited, “The State Auditor reports that charter school authorizers are not accounting for their costs however, the authorizer continue to charge both schools and the state maximum allowable amounts for oversight” (p. 96).
Table 3  
*Authorizer Uses of Oversight Funds Collected*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charter Authorizer Activities and Use of §47613 Funds for Mandated Oversight Activities</th>
<th>Entirely Paid with §47613</th>
<th>Partially Paid with Oversight Funds</th>
<th>Provided/Performed but Not Paid for with §47613 Funds</th>
<th>Provided/Performed, Don’t Know if Paid with §47613 Funds</th>
<th>Not Provided/Performed by This Authorizer</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site Visits</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notify CDE of Charter Changes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring School Finance</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance with Reporting Requirements</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Blanton (2012, p. 92)

*Note.* Survey Data From 72 Charter Authorizers Related to the Uses of Oversight Fund Collected.
Table 4
*Additional Services Provided to Charter Schools from Authorizers*

| Charter Authorizer Activities and Use of §47613 Funds for Optional Oversight Activities |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Entirely Paid with §47613 Oversight Funds | Partially Paid with §47613 Oversight Funds | Provided/Performed But Not Paid for with §47613 Funds | Provided/Performed, Don’t Know if Paid with §47613 Funds | Not Provided/Performed by This Authorizer | Missing |
| Office Support | 5 | 8 | 15 | 4 | 30 | 6 |
| Pre-opening Procedures | 8 | 9 | 17 | 11 | 18 | 4 |
| Fiscal Services | 8 | 14 | 25 | 8 | 11 | 2 |
| Legal Services | 3 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 34 | 6 |
| Providing Information and Notices to Charter Schools | 18 | 11 | 19 | 13 | 6 | 3 |
| Human Resources | 5 | 8 | 25 | 11 | 16 | 4 |
| Reporting to Authorizer Board | 21 | 8 | 24 | 12 | 2 | 2 |
| Food Services | 0 | 3 | 23 | 5 | 35 | 3 |
| Facilities | 5 | 8 | 17 | 9 | 27 | 4 |
| Develop District Policies | 14 | 13 | 22 | 9 | 8 | 3 |

Source: Blanton (2012, p. 93)

*Note.* Additional Services Provided to Charter Schools from Authorizers. Survey Data From 72 Charter Authorizers.

**Current Day Controversies**

Blad (2019) makes light that the charter school debate has become more intense since President Donald Trump took office and Betsy DeVos was selected Secretary of Education. DeVos appears to be a highly visible and divisive supporter of school choice (p. 22). Meanwhile “California lawmakers stirred up a fierce debate about funding, accountability and school choice
by considering legislation that would put new limits on the state’s charter schools and give districts broader discretion to deny their applications” (Blad, 2019, p. 22). Lake, Cobb, Sharma, and Opalika (2018) found through interviews with various parties on both sides of the issue, local school districts in California often cite that charter schools are the result of the financial strain that some districts may be facing today. As a result of this alleged financial strain, these districts go to great length to undermine charter school expansion by blocking access to facilities, making compliance regulations more difficult, by bringing lawsuits against charter schools, or by recruiting teachers that may be employed by charter schools (p. 10). Lake, Jochim, Hill, and Tuchman (2019) corroborated the current debate about how charter schools affect school district finances due to enrollment and funding losses that occur when students leave district schools for charter schools. These researchers highlighted data from the California Department of Finance (2019) report, which predicts a statewide enrollment decline of 250,000 between the 2017-2018 and 2027-2028 school years. The enrollment decline will potentially further impact both school districts and charter schools. Concurrently, these researchers advocate, “The growth of charter schools cannot account for all of the enrollment loss experienced by urban school districts” (p. 2). And “charter school enrollment is not currently a major factor in continued district enrollment decline” (p. 2).

Beam (2019) narrated that recent controversies have arisen in California as the Charter School Act of 1992 is currently being reviewed and potentially updated. Multisided arguments have dominated the conversation regarding what entities should have the right to approve charter schools to operate along with the politically motivated discussions regarding the SBE’s role in authorizing and CDE’s role in overseeing state board-approved charter schools. Similar to Beam, Mahnken (2019) determined that it is challenging for an authorizer such as the SBE to
provide effective oversight remotely. Beam predicted that Assembly Bill 1505 would include language that would remove the SBE as an authorizer of new charter schools. Beam’s predication was correct. As of July 1, 2020, the SBE will no longer serve as an authorizer for new charter schools. Instead, only local school districts and county offices of education would retain this autonomy. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) (n.d.a), the current California charter laws do not require the legislature or the governor to regularly review the performance of the SBE as an authorizer. The legislature and the governor can review the SBE’s performance at any time. In addition, the ability of the SBE to continue authorizing charter schools can be removed by the California legislature and governor, which is what is being proposed, as previously mentioned. The new proposed legislation would also ban new virtual charter schools for a period of two years. This proposed legislation is intended to resolve several problems. Subsequently, this legislation may also introduce related problems. Charter schools may view this legislation as a defeat due to the fact that these schools would only have two chances to be approved instead of the traditional three chances as developed in the existing appeals process. School districts may view this legislation as an advantageous win, as this proposed legislation would give districts greater autonomy to deny a charter school that petitions to open within the district’s boundaries. Todd Ziebarth (2019) of NAPCS similarly found some potential areas for improvement in California’s charter school law. Some recommendations include strengthening authorizer accountability, beefing up requirements for performance-based charter contracts, and ensuring transparency regarding educational service providers (p. 18).

Another current-day controversy often highlighted amongst charter school stakeholders and lawmakers is the renewal criteria. As discussed in a previous section, for a school to be
considered for renewal, that school must demonstrate academic progress for their students served. Similar research from NASCA (2016) found that California’s charter schools’ renewal standard can be inappropriately applied and overly subjective. Consequently, the renewal standards as they currently exist can be undermined by a loophole giving authorizers discretion to renew schools that fail to meet the minimum performance standards designated by CEC 47605 and 52052. “Any authorizer seeking to avoid confrontation with a disappointed operator, or avoid the painful process of closure, can often find an escape route” (NASCA, 2016, p. 10) by finding other justifications for the renewing of the charter. Similarly, NASCA determined:

There are two technical problems with current renewal policy, first, when the state’s API was suspended, the legislature did not provide an explicit replacement for the API-based renewal thresholds, leaving a large hole in the basic design of the renewal process. Second, California’s law continues to reflect outdated federal guidance by requiring that a chartering entity consider increases in pupil academic achievement for all groups of pupils served as the most important factor in determining whether to grant a charter renewal. (p. 10)

Comparable to NASCA, NAPCS (n.d.b) reported that charter schools that fail to improve student outcomes for three or more student subgroups (English Learners, Special Education, Socioeconomic Status, Racial or Ethnic Identification, or other school-assigned classifications) in three out of four consecutive years may receive technical assistance and intervention from its authorizer or other agencies such as the newly established California Collaborative for Educational Excellence.

The final current-day controversy surrounding charter schools in California is transparency. As previously highlighted, charter schools retain various levels of accountability requirements. Previous researchers similar to Green, Baker, and Oluwole (2018) determine that “charter school autonomy comes in the form of deregulation, which frequently involves exemption from state laws that govern budgets and financial transparency” (p. 1123). These
researchers went on to emphasize that as charter schools are to some extent exempted from certain laws governing budgets and financial transparency, it is the responsibility of the “gatekeepers,” which include auditors, governing boards, authorizers, state education agencies, and the U.S. Department of Education to regulate financial practices of these schools.

As charter schools in California and around the country struggle with transparency and accountability, Garnett (2018) determined that accountability regulations must arm parents with the information they need to make wise choices for their kids, which means that information about school quality must be transparent and readily available, easy to interpret, and matched, to the greatest extent possible. Garnett went on to unpack the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) transparency requirements that attempt to address concerns regarding traditional public, private, and charter schools’ transparency. ESSA promises to increase the accessibility of school quality information for charter schools (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Although Garnett found that ESSA and the U.S. Department of Education regulations implementing it allow states to choose their own research-based indicators of academic success, ESSA further requires states to issue an annual report card on every public school, including charter schools. ESSA, however, requires that states use the same assessment criteria for both public and charter schools and mandates transparent reporting of the results of school assessments. Edwards (2017) cited Cathy McBride, Legislative Advocate for the Association for California School Administrators (ACSA). McBride determined that charter school transparency and accountability to the parents and communities these schools serve is necessary. To address charter school transparency in California, according to attorneys Ahluwalia, Harden, and Young (2019), “On March 5, 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Senate Bill 126, requiring charter schools to comply with the same public records, open meeting, and conflict of interest laws as school districts and county
offices of education” (para. 1). The passage of SB 126 added §47604.1 to the CEC. Ahluwalia et al. further clarified that on December 26, 2018, the California Office of the Attorney General issued a non-binding opinion that concluded that charter schools and their governing bodies are subject to the Ralph M. Brown Act, the California Public Records Act, Government Code section 1090, and the Political Reform Act of 1974. By abiding by these codes and regulations, more transparency should be evident. Many of the aforementioned issues regarding transparency continue to divide stakeholders. Other issues not highlighted add to the transparency strain. In the next section, the theoretical framework associated with this study provides further insight regarding the broader concepts of systems and complexity theory.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical bases for this dissertation study and program evaluation are the systems theory and complexity theory frameworks. Systems theory relates to this research by providing further exploration associated with how various systems are related to the interconnected relationships between the work in which charter authorizers engage and how this complex nature of work impacts the operations of charter schools. Systems theory can be commonly defined as the interdisciplinary theory about the nature of complex systems in nature, society, and science, and is a framework by which one can investigate and or describe any group of objects that work together to produce some result (Environment and Ecology, n.d.). Ludwig von Bertalanffy is generally acknowledged as the founder of the systems theory. von Bertalanffy (1968) demonstrated the theory of which dynamic interactions tend to manifest different behaviors that may work in isolation of one another. Yet, the isolated behaviors contribute to a larger configuration that relies on smaller behavioral interactions that meaningfully impact the larger ecosystem. Hammond (2003) further clarified von Bertalanffy’s research by providing a
summation of the general systems approach, clarifying that the approach should be thought of as a comprehensive worldview in contrast to that of classical mechanistic science. von Bertalanffy emphasized the importance of studying interactive relationships and how different systems work together to contribute to an output or final product (p. 103). Although von Bertalanffy’s theory was rooted in a scientific and mathematical context, the theory encapsulated several major aims of general system theory. von Bertalanffy’s research made the unique distinction that general system laws appear to apply to any system, regardless of the individual properties of that system and the elements involved. Senge (1994) viewed systems theory through a lens of associating the long-term results by enacting short-term interventions gained through insights from feedback loops. The short-term interventions produced long-range results, thus ultimately impacting the entire organization system. Mockler (1968) viewed systems theory as a catalyst for making change within an organization by citing Boulding’s (1956) General System Theory–The Skeleton of Science, highlighting the idea that companies should engage their business in a manner that would reflect how they envisioned themselves five years into the future.

The systems theory framework pertains to this study, as the researcher investigated the various oversight systems commonly utilized by authorizers in an effort to hold the charter school accountable. The researcher intended to investigate and provide meaning behind how the varied and yet complex systems of accountability impact both the SBE and CDE as authorizers and the authorizer practices, which impact charter schools under this agency’s oversight. Furthermore, as indicated in this research, subsequent to a charter school’s approval and authorization to open and operate, various systems of accountability are jolted into gear, giving the authorizer the autonomy to "oversee" the school (California Charter Schools Association, n.d.d).
As declared in Chapter 1, each of the 336 authorizers in California provides oversight differently. Financial and fiscal oversight is no different. The financial and fiscal accountability systems charter authorizers embody are often a result of the guidance and direction from the CDE. The California Charter Schools Association (n.d.c) concluded, “Authorizers review financial reports, Accountability Plans, and they have the authority to conduct audits to determine if the charter school should be renewed at the end of the charter school's term” (para. 12). California Charter Schools Association additionally illustrated that charter schools are sanctioned to pay an oversight fee to their authorizer. The oversight fee provides for the cost of the authorizer to conduct school visits, fiscal and academic monitoring, renewal evaluation and other required forms of oversight. CEC § 47613 provides that a chartering authority may charge for the actual costs of supervisorial oversight of a charter school not to exceed 1% of the revenue of the charter school. This project additionally evaluated the aforementioned fiscal and financial oversight practices and systems through systems theory and complexity theory lens, further exploring how these systems impact both the charter school and charter authorizer. Not only do the systems of oversight impact the charter school and the authorizer, these systems in most cases impact stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, and the larger education ecosystem (California Charter Schools Association, n.d.b).

Complexity theory derives as an extension from systems theory and the work of von Bertalanffy (1968) along with the work of Katz and Kahn (1966). Recent researchers such as Grobman (2005) introduced the concept that “complexity theory provides a framework for theorizing about how there got to be an organization and environment in the first place so that general systems theory could be applied” (p. 353). Morrison (2006) synthesized that complexity theory reemphasizes the notion that systems created by organizations further develop educational
systems, institutions, and practices. These practices exhibit many features of complex adaptive systems. By being dynamic and emergent, sometimes unpredictable non-linear organizations operate in unpredictable and forever changing external environments. Fidan and Balci (2017) comparably delineated the relationship of complexity theory, as it does not only refer to a number of moving components; on the contrary, it represents a system of components which interact mutually to the extent that it influences prospective events. Cheney and Terry (2018) explained that viewing challenges and potential solutions through a systems thinking lens provides opportunities to investigate the potential of local innovations to affect change at a systemic level given the complexity of challenges faced.

This research study examined the daily organizational activities of the charter oversight unit of the CDE through a lens of complexity theory, an extension of system theory, by examining the complexity levels of monitoring, work products, and the delineation of various information that ultimately impact the relationship between charter schools and the charter authorizer. The aforementioned oversight and accountability systems can be evaluated through the lens of system theory while further exploring how complexity associated systems impact both the charter school and the charter authorizer. Not only do the systems of oversight impact the charter school and the authorizer; these systems and complexity relationships in most cases can potentially impact stakeholders and the larger education ecosystem. Frye and Hemmer (2012) found that educational programs are complex, with multiple interactions among participants and the environment. Therefore, system theory and complexity theory are suited for informing this program evaluation and dissertation study.
Chapter Summary

In conclusion, while there are still furious debates surrounding the appropriate level of oversight for charter schools, there are still no clear criteria in the state of California regarding what effective oversight means. The debate remains an issue to be resolved. The results of this literature review chapter and dissertation study may be used by future researchers to strengthen the body of existing research, influence future legislation and possibly influence better authorizer practices across the state.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview

As discussed in Chapter 1, when comparing accountability systems between charter authorizers, each authorizer develops varying accountability mechanisms. Throughout California, the systems for oversight amongst the 336 charter authorizers are disjointed. These inconsistent accountability and oversight systems impact California charter schools in both positive and negative ways. This program evaluation examined the CDE’s Charter Oversight Unit and its work as a charter authorizer. Findings from this program evaluation and study are aimed at providing program of practice improvements that may better support coherent charter accountability and oversight systems.

The qualitative-based research questions were designed to gather data that allow the researcher to further explore and gain insights into the participants’ experiences related to the topic of charter school accountability (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam, 2014).

Q1: In what ways, if any, are the existing accountability measures, processes, and oversight systems of the California Department of Education perceived to achieve the outcomes, objectives, and goals that are necessary for the appropriate level accountability and oversight of State Board of Education-authorized charter schools?

Q2: What program improvements, if any, can be implemented to improve the charter school oversight functions of the State Board of Education and California Department of Education staff?
Inquiry Approach

Mertens and Wilson (2019) defined program evaluation as evaluative research focusing on a systematic process in a context of related activities aimed at collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and communicating information about the inner workings and effectiveness of a program or process. Likewise, this program evaluation was used to ascertain information regarding charter accountability and oversight while adding to the body of previously existing research concerning the relationship between charter authorizers and charter schools. The findings of this research study may provide a base for future research concerning this topic. This study will more closely analyze the CDE’s charter authorizer duties and responsibilities, as CDE provides oversight, compliance monitoring, technical assistance, and support, which is intended to hold charter schools accountable, but also promote growth. As there is currently a wide range of perceptions that exist around the topic of charter schools, this study will leverage the available information by making connections with the key stakeholders who are a part of the charter school consortium in California, as these stakeholders may have access to reliable information that may benefit this study and findings.

Logic Model

Frye and Hemmer (2012) constructed meaning by supporting the notion that a logic model can offer practitioners and educators an evaluation structure that incorporates system theory applications when evaluating and analyzing educational programs. Moreover, the logic model approach is most often grounded in the assumption that the relationships that exist between the program’s educational methods and the desired outcomes are clearly understood when evaluation takes place in a logic model construct.
Methodology

A qualitative-based program evaluation presents the most usable amount of data that will answer the aforementioned research questions. The researcher predetermined that by having the opportunity to interact with various stakeholders throughout the research and data collection...
process, these interactions will lead to a naturalistic assemblage of evidence regarding the topic of charter school oversight and accountably. This qualitative study made discoveries concerning charter school accountability using information gathered from participants utilizing a naturalistic approach. As illustrated by Newton and Llosa (2010), program evaluation allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship that exists between program implementation and program outcomes. Frye and Hemmer (2012) likewise indicated that information necessary for program evaluation is typically gathered through processes of measurements. Specific measurement tools, strategies, or assessments for program evaluation processes are guided by many factors, including the specific evaluation questions that define the desired understanding of the program’s success or shortcomings. Therefore, as aligned with Cook (2010), educational program evaluation uses information to make a decision about the value or worth of an educational program.

The data for this research were collected from the CDE and from charter schools authorized by the SBE. This inquiry will optimistically benefit both charter authorizers and charter schools in multiple facets that will expectantly allow each entity to function in a manner that will ultimately benefit pupils being served. Furthermore, this dissertation study may be used by other practitioners to support or advance their program of practice and provide a foundation for further research. Moreover, this dissertation study may be used to influence legislation or laws related to charter schools in the State of California and other states.

**Evaluation Framework**

The program evaluation framework used during this project was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 1999). The CDC noted that effective program evaluation is a systematic way to improve and account for actions by involving
procedures that are useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate. Therefore, the framework for program evaluation in public health offers foundational steps and standards allowing for a deeper understanding of each of the program’s components that ultimately improved how the program evaluation is conducted. The CDC illustrates the following steps in the evaluation process:

**Engage stakeholders:** those individuals involved in or affected by the program and primary users of the evaluation. **Describe the program** by exploring the needs, expected effects, activities, resources, stage, context, and logic model. **Focus the evaluation design** to evaluate the purpose, users, uses, questions, methods, and agreements. **Gather credible evidence** by reviewing the indicators, sources, quality, quantity, and logistics. **Justify conclusions** by communicating the standards, analysis/synthesis, interpretation, judgment, and the final recommendations. **Ensure use and share lessons learned** by analyzing the design, preparation, feedback, follow-up, and dissemination of information.
Methods

During the research and data collection phase of this dissertation, interviews, artifact analysis, and participatory research were used to ascertain the information required to complete this study. The aforementioned methods of data collection are discussed in greater detail in the next section.
The researcher used the scripted set of interview questions used as a foundation to begin the interview. However, the researcher was ready with additional follow-up questions should they be rendered based on the participant responses, though no follow-up questions were needed.

Artifacts were examined, analyzed, and interpreted in a manner that would not be altered to misrepresent the facts as presented. Artifacts and documentation included, but were not limited to, data sources such as documents, contracts, reports, policies, bills, laws, legislation, previous research, etc. When analyzing artifacts and documents related to this research topic, the researcher did not in any way use his position to alternately influence the relationship between the authorizer and the charter school, stakeholders, SBE, or CDE.

Participatory research is inevitable due to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and his professional duties and responsibilities in the workplace at the California Department of Education. Participatory research may include the researcher’s participation in board meetings, council meetings, commission meetings, or other related meetings, work-related tasks, or authorizer and authorizer interactions. None of the information from participatory research were altered to misrepresent any facts or findings. The researcher did not in any way use his position to alternately influence or alter the relationship between the authorizer and the charter school, stakeholders, SBE, or CDE. The protocols for the previously mentioned data collection methods are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

**Data Collection/Instruments/Measures**

This dissertation study and program evaluation were designed to gather data from various data sources such as interviews, artifacts, and participatory research. Appendix A provides evidence of the CDE’s approval to conduct the related research activities.
Interviews. The researcher conducted individual or group qualitative interviews with personnel or other stakeholders affiliated with Local Educational Agencies, Charter schools, the CDE, and the SBE. Interviews are often employed as a qualitative method to learn about individuals’ opinions, perceptions, and experiences. An interview protocol was developed by the researcher as a mechanism to guide the interviews and data collection procedures associated with each interview. Interviewees were informed by email or in person of the study and its purpose. Interviewees were invited to participate in a 30-60-minute interview which was conducted in-person, over the phone, or through an alternate communication method such as Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, Facetime, or the like thereof. The interview questions were provided to the participants prior to the interview so the participant could review the questions asked and have an opportunity to prepare the most coherent responses. By providing the interview questions ahead of time, the participant had the opportunity to identify questions that they may not be willing to answer or provide responses for (see Appendix C for interview questions). Before the interview, the participant also received a copy of the participant consent form (see Appendix D), which outlined all the participant rights and protection affirmations. Interviews were conducted in a manner that would not cause harm to the participants, subjects, research respondents, schools, organizations, the SBE, or the CDE that individuals interviewed represented. Interviews were structured in a manner that allowed for optimal privacy; therefore, the interviewee had the opportunity to be as open and honest as possible concerning the topic. The researcher and any participant acknowledged and adhered to all COVID-19 safety precautions.

Artifact analysis. The researcher reviewed various data sources such as documents, contracts, reports, etc. obtained from the SBE and CDE. Other local artifacts included policies, bills, laws, legislation, and previous research. Artifact analysis provided data to answer the
outlined research questions associated with this program evaluation. Artifact analysis also informed the researcher of how the charter school addressed authorizer concerns or questions related to the implementation of the charter school operations and program as described in the charter schools petition, memorandum of understanding, and current CEC. Artifacts were gathered as supplemental documentation requested from participants. Artifacts were obtained from public sources such as charter schools, school districts, county offices, the CDE and the SBE websites, and/or other public sources. Some artifacts were obtained through Public Records Act requests pursuant to the California Government Code, Chapter 3.5 of Division 7 of Title 1. Lastly, a portion of artifacts were available to the primary researcher due to his working and close relationship with the work of charter authorizing and due to the researchers position as an Education Administrator at the CDE.

**Participatory research.** As the researcher is an Education Administrator at CDE, the researcher collected data by immersing himself into the work and culture of charter authorizing while interacting with participants, respondents, and subjects. The researcher had the autonomy of working alongside several charter school operators and charter municipalities while concurrently working with the staff of the CDE and the SBE. Other forms of participatory research were incorporated by analyzing artifacts, analyzing existing documentation, conducting interviews, observing various meetings, and participating in meetings or other work-related tasks with participants, subjects, and respondents. This level of participatory interaction will provide this study with a more informed compilation of useable data. Participatory research was conducted in a manner that would not cause harm to participants, subjects, research respondents, schools, organizations, the SBE, or the CDE. Participatory research was between one hour and 50 hours per week. Participatory research took place via in-person, teleconferencing or other
virtual formats such as WebEx or Zoom. The researcher went the extra step to adhere to all COVID-19 safety precautions. In-person participatory research did not occur because COVID-19 restrictions were not lifted.

Description of Participants/Respondents/Subjects

Creswell (2015) described that convenience sampling often allows the researcher to select participants who are both willing and available to participate in the research study (p. 145). The selected participants provided useful information related to the research questions of this program evaluation. In the data collection and research phase of this study, some of the participants in the study included:

- One or more charter school administrators or leaders who lead or work within a charter school that is SBE authorized.
- One or more employees who represent the SBE.
- One or more employees who represent the CDE.

The formerly mentioned sampling of participants, respondents, and subjects were selected by the primary researcher based on their expertise, knowledge, and or experience working with charter schools in the state of California. These individuals had first-hand experience and or the extended capacity regarding charter accountability and oversight. The demographics of the participants vary by gender, ethnicity, years of experience in the field of education, and as practitioners in their designated field of expertise. The researcher illuminated for the participants that confidentiality is a priority and the researcher would do everything within his power to maintain and conceal the identities of participants. Fictitious names and descriptions are used to protect the identity of the participants, schools, districts, and
organizations. Once the research study concluded, all information and data collected will be destroyed after the retention period and in a manner that aligns with university policy.

**Data Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain information concerning the programs of practice related to the charter oversight unit of the CDE. In this study, Creswell’s (2015) six-step process for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data was used as a framework to guide the data analysis process. The evidence gathered from interviews were transcribed by hand and with the assistance of a computer program. The data were then further analyzed and coded into themes and categories. The significantly identified emergent themes and categories were further analyzed and validated. By grouping the data into themes and categories, the researcher was able to identify similarities and differences amongst the participants’ responses to the guiding interview questions identified in Appendix C. Emerging themes that developed during the data analysis process are highlighted in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The data collected were analyzed in a manner that allowed the researcher to narrow the findings and interpret the necessary information. Some information was further sorted into narratives, summaries, visuals, or infographics. A description of the participants is reported in Chapter 4. The findings were then interpreted by comparing and contrast the findings in the literature, the findings in this study, and introducing information concerning future research. Finally, a set of validation procedures were implemented in an effort to check, triangulate, and further validate the findings for accuracy.

**Trustworthiness**

The primary researcher for this dissertation study strove to ensure that the data collected would positively benefit this study along with work that may stem from other researchers’
utilization of this body of work to aid their research or work purposes. The researcher attempted to protect the rights and interests of all participants so harm was not caused to the individual, the school, or the organization with which the participant was affiliated. Since this research is closely related to K-12 education, the researcher protected the identities of students while ensuring that all FERPA laws and CEC regulations were followed. The researcher additionally complied with any and all procedures, rules, or regulations of the University of the Pacific, schools, school districts, agencies, or organizations that agreed to participate in this study.

The data collected and the findings presented were structured in a way that would not intentionally cause harm to any of the research subjects, participants, schools, school districts, agencies, or organizations. The data collected during the research process were not altered, screwed, or manipulated to benefit the researcher or the research outcomes. The reliability of the data collected was not contingent upon the research subjects’ and participants’ knowledge and ability to yield information and or data that would be of benefit to this research project and body of research.

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations, as related to positive or negative public perception, have the ability to hinder the validity and reliably of the data collection mechanisms used throughout this study. The findings may be limited and reflect only the information authorizers and practitioners were willing to share concerning charter schools or authorizers with which they may be closely affiliated. Conversely, many charter schools are overly protective of their public reputation. Consequently, this public reputation may have the ability to impact the school or programs offered by the school. Thus, some charter schools may not be as honest or forthcoming concerning challenges the school may face related to interactions with its authorizer. As the
researcher has some professional affiliations to some of the charter schools or authorizers used in this research, there was the potential that some of the charter school participants may have limited or masked some of the data the researcher may request. In other cases, due to the aforementioned affiliations, some of the charter schools or charter authorizers may have been extremely transparent and forthcoming during the data collections process. These biases may or may not have minor implications on the research findings. The researcher went above and beyond to ensure that the previously mentioned possible implications do not misrepresent the data, facts, findings, or recommendations related to this study.

Before data collection began, informed consent guidelines were provided to each participant or organization participating in this research study. Informed consent guidelines provided the participants or organizations with information concerning the nature and purpose of the research study along with the goals and anticipated participant outcomes. Although there were no known potential risks associated with this research study, the primary researcher informed all participants of any potential risk or harm that may have arisen. Research participants may have, at any time, withdrawn their consent and participation during this study or data collection proceedings.

**Limitations**

While there is an abundance of charter schools and charter authorizers across the United State of America, this dissertation study was limited to charter authorizers and charter schools in the state of California. More specifically, this research mainly focuses on the SBE and the CDE as an authorizer. Therefore, the primary research data collected were extracted from the SBE’s and CDE’s Charter Oversight Unit along with charter schools under the authorization of the
SBE. Other limitations considered were the availability of knowledgeable staff willing to participate in this study while providing useable or valid data.

**Researcher Positionality and Personal Disclaimer**

As a result of the researcher’s current professional career, the researcher has a close relationship with this research topic along with the work of charter school authorizing and oversight. Over the past 15 years, the researcher has had the pleasure of working in both traditional district and charter schools in various capacities. The researcher started his education career as a classroom and after-school teacher, later transitioning into a discipline administrator role where the researcher was responsible for schoolwide culture and behavior management. The researcher then led curriculum, instruction, assessment, and staff development as a charter school Assistant Principal. The researcher also had the pleasure of being a charter elementary and middle school International Baccalaureate (IB) Coordinator. Early in the researcher’s education career, the researcher also held other positions such as Director of Student Services and Director of Technology. The researcher is employed by the CDE and was responsible for directly overseeing, monitoring, and providing technical assistance and support to several SBE-authorized charter schools. Many of the recently published news articles and publicly released reports indicate that three CDE staff members are responsible for the oversight of the 48 SBE-authorized charter schools. The researcher identified as being one of the three CDE staff members. However, additional staff members in CDE’s Charter Schools Division aid in the complex work of charter oversight, appeals, renewals, federal grant stewardship, and financial/fiscal monitoring. Presently, the researcher is an Education Administrator serving as the CDE/SBE Liaison responsible for and existing as the conduit between the two agencies.
Due to the researcher’s level of insider knowledge concerning this topic, there are both added advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages include readily available access to research subjects, participants, and artifacts. This level of access allowed the researcher to gather relevant information that strengthened this research study. The core disadvantage noted would rely on the extra exertion of discipline necessary from the researcher. Based on the researcher’s similar professional background, charter leadership experiences, and close proximity to the work of charter school authorizing and oversight, the researcher could potentially have an inherent researcher bias. In an effort to eliminate this bias, the research findings only include the factual findings and perceptions collected from participants or artifact and documentation analysis. The primary researcher was committed to going the extra mile to ensure that his own biases regarding this topic were not inserted into the research, data, facts, findings, or recommendations related to this study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the research methodology used in the study and why program evaluation and qualitative methods are appropriate for this study. This chapter contains a description of the data collection methods used throughout this study. Descriptions of the sample population were illustrated along with why the sample population would be selected for this study. Finally, this chapter addressed the data analysis procedures implemented during the data collection and data analysis process. The next chapter presents the facts and findings of this dissertation study.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this program evaluation and dissertation study was to evaluate the program of practice and effectiveness of the Charter Oversight Unit of the California Department of Education and the related programs of practice associated with charter school accountability, charter school oversight, and charter authorizing, as these activities exist at the California SBE level. This project further analyzed the current systems, processes, and procedures in practice as CDE provides both oversight and accountability to charter schools authorized by the California SBE. This study explored the following research questions:

Q1: In what ways, if any, are the existing accountability measures, processes, and oversight systems of the California Department of Education perceived to achieve the outcomes, objectives, and goals that are necessary for the appropriate level of accountability and oversight of State Board of Education-authorized charter schools?

Q2: What program improvements, if any, can be implemented to improve the charter school oversight functions of the State Board of Education and California Department of Education staff?

This chapter summarizes the findings that emerged as a result of the program evaluation and the data collection procedures. This chapter additionally summarizes the responses from the participants and respondents that agreed to contribute to the study. The synthesized data presented in this chapter articulate a summary of triangulated data that supports each of the research questions dedicated to this study along with the emergent themes that reinforce the
recommendations for future practice and recommendations for future research outlined in the next chapter.

**Data Collection and Analysis Discussion**

The results of this study were derived from interview transcripts and participant responses from seven participants. Each one-on-one interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. Each participant was given latitude to reflect and share their individual perspectives guided by the interview questions identified in Appendix C. Interviews were transcribed and further analyzed during the data analysis proceedings using Creswell’s (2015) six-step process for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data coding method. By visually color-coding the interview transcription data, this common data analysis method cultivated an alternative technique of extrapolating large amounts of information into smaller subsections targeted towards answering the research designated to this study. Visually color-coding data included tagging words, phrases, or sentences that reflect particular themes and categories that required further analysis. From the interview data analysis, five categories emerged, and each was further explored in the documentation analysis phase of this study. The five categories that emerged are as follows:

- Accountability Methods Used During Oversight
- Communication
- Problems Encountered During Oversight
- Improvement and Recommendations for the Future

Each of the categories is further discussed in the next sections of this chapter.
Description of Participants

Data were collected from the staff of the CDE and the staff of the SBE authorized charter schools. Other individuals who had official relationships with charter authorizing or charter schools were also limitedly included in this study. At the time of the study, all participants possessed at least 10 years of professional experience in the education sector, charter schools, charter authorizing, or other K-12 education-related affiliations. Data collections excluded the use of students, minors, or individuals who did not have official affiliations with charter schools, charter authorizing, or charter oversight. Informed consent was obtained from all participants who participated in the study. Appendix D provides a copy of the informed consent document used during this study. Randomized pseudonym identities or alias names were used on transcripts and other printed materials as an avenue to increase confidentiality and to further shield the identities of the participants and respondents. Table 5 provides a profile of the participants. Each participant was randomly given a random pseudonym identifier to protect their true identity. The participants comprised three males and four females.
Table 5
Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years of Total Experience</th>
<th>District School Site Experience</th>
<th>Charter School Site Experience</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Administration Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loxley</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data in this table were constructed from information informally collected from study participants.

Results

Appendix A provides a copy of the interview questions that were used to inform the results of the inquiry questions dedicated to this study.

Inquiry Question One

In what ways, if any, are the existing accountability measures, processes, and oversight systems of the California Department of Education perceived to achieve the outcomes, objectives, and goals necessary for the appropriate level of accountability and oversight of State Board of Education-authorized charter schools?

The staff designated to the CDE’s Charter Schools Division expressed a common perception that the outcomes of the work performed by the unit do achieve the goals and outcomes relative to quality charter school oversight. The CDE staff in the charter oversight unit
and the charter division as a whole appear to be invested in the delegated authority that is bestowed by the SBE. The CDE Charter Schools Division has a total of 15 staff members: one is the Division Director, one is an Administrator, one is a Manager, two are dedicated to charter schools oversight, one is dedicated to charter appeals, one is dedicated to the implementation of new charter legislation, one is dedicated to fiscal and financial oversight, four are division support staff, two are dedicated to the administration of the U.S. Department of Education’s Public Charter School Grant, one is dedicated to special projects, and there are currently four staff vacancies, as indicated in Figure 6. Figure 6 provides an adapted snapshot of the organizational structure of the CDE’s Charter Schools Division.

Source: California Department of Education (2020b)

Figure 6. Adapted organizational chart of CDE’s Charter Schools Division.
Table 6
Functions of the Charter Schools Division Office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Objectives &amp; Functions</th>
<th>Staffing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charter School Division Director’s Office</strong></td>
<td>• Provides oversight to all of the Charter Schools Division offices and staff</td>
<td>1 Current Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides managerial direction to the division's support staff, consultants, managers, and education administrators</td>
<td>0 Current Vacancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Represents the State Superintendent of Public Instruction on the statewide Advisory Commission on Charter Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Represents the State Superintendent of Public Instruction on charter relative issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charter Support Services Office</strong></td>
<td>• Provides direction and administrative functions relative to charter numbering, renewals, closures, and the annual information update</td>
<td>5 Current Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Travel coordination, claims, and reimbursements</td>
<td>0 Current Vacancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Division budget management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personnel transactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• General support to the field and public regarding charter schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public Record Act Requests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support to the Division Director and other division staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Charter School Grant Program Office</strong></td>
<td>• Responsible for the administration of the federal Public Charter School Grant Program</td>
<td>2 Current Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Funds the planning and implementation of replication, expansion, and dissemination grants</td>
<td>1 Current Vacancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides grants of up to $575,000.00 to plan and implement new charter schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide startup and initial operating capital to assist schools in establishing high-quality, high-performing charter school operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Board of Education Oversight &amp; Technical Assistance Office</strong></td>
<td>• Provides general direction to charter schools submitting charter appeals to the SBE</td>
<td>7 Current Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Charter appeal reviews</td>
<td>3 Current Vacancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conducts fiscal analysis of charter appeals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conducts ongoing fiscal analysis and monitoring of SBE-authorized charter schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SBE-charter schools oversight and accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides Technical Assistance &amp; Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data in this table provides a summary of the functions relative to each office in the Charter Schools Division of the CDE.

Over the years since the SBE authorized its first charter school, the charter oversight unit has grown and developed countless mechanisms that allow for what is perceived as quality
appeals reviews, authorizing, and subsequent oversight. The charter oversight unit of the CDE has enacted innovative ways to circumvent the challenges of not being in close proximity to the schools the unit oversees. However, distance and proximity continue to be a challenge because the CDE headquarters is located in Sacramento, California and the schools the unit oversees are spread out in various cities and towns across the state. One participant explained, “Given that CDE is located in Sacramento, site visits need to be planned and scheduled. The ability to conduct impromptu site visits is challenging.” Despite this challenge, the staff of the unit has the ability to visit each school site at a minimum of once per year. The staff of the unit retains the ability to visit schools more often if necessary. However, visits to schools are costly and can sometimes be disruptive. Table 7 displays direct cascading quotes extracted from interviews concerning the challenges relative to the location of the CDE and the SBE-authorized charter schools.
Table 7
*Interview Quotes Concerning Visitation Challenges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davis, CDE Staff</td>
<td>We need to go to our schools more often, even if it’s for one day versus the two-day visit, it would be beneficial to check-in. Being at the school site is more effective than being on the phone on conference calls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly, CDE Staff</td>
<td>One of the biggest challenges that we face is proximity, we sit at CDE in our building and we can’t get in our cars and go over to the school site if we need to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica, CDE Staff</td>
<td>Knowledge of the local area where the charter school is located is important. SBE-authorized charter schools are located across the state and it is impossible for consultants to be well-versed and knowledgeable about the local climate, community/district/county needs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan, CDE Staff</td>
<td>I think it’s important to connect with the school leaders, there is so much that is happening right now and a lot of them have questions so I think it would absolutely improve the functions of oversight if we could get out to schools more often.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The unit is perceived to have cultivated healthy working relationships with the leaders of the respective SBE-authorized charter schools. The unit has developed several communication protocols that allow for coherent messaging to the charter schools. Several of the participants indicated that the in-depth level of oversight provided to SBE-authorized charter schools do exceed the level of oversight and accountability provided by other authorizers relative to the schools they oversee. The CDE charter oversight unit has developed various compliance systems for monitoring the operational, financial and fiscal conditions, academic, and governance of each SBE-authorized charter school. The participants revealed that the CDE is inherently sought after for guidance relative to quality-authorizing practices, although authorizer
training does not fall within the purview of the CDE. Additionally, the CDE’s Charter Schools Division does not retain staff dedicated to authorizer training and technical assistance. Table 6 provides a more comprehensive breakdown of the above-referenced results derived from interviews, documentation analysis, and participatory interactions.

**Inquiry Question Two**

What program improvements, if any, can be implemented to improve the charter school oversight functions of the State Board of Education and California Department of Education staff?

The results from interviews indicate the staff of the CDE charter oversight unit perceived six recommendations that would assist in improving the charter oversight unit’s functions and outcomes. These recommendations are further summarized in Chapter 5. First, professional growth/development for the SBE/CDE and other charter schools and authorizers would be beneficial to the alignment of statewide charter authorizer practices. Assembly Bill 1505 redefines the submission process for new charter schools that wish to submit petitions to local school district authorizers, county office of education authorizers, and the SBE. The charter renewal standards are also changed to include the results of the California School Dashboard. According to the CDE (2020a), the California School Dashboard contains reports that display the performance of LEAs, schools, and student groups based on a set of state and local measures aimed to assist in the identification of strengths, challenges, and areas in need of improvement. AB 1505 additionally changes the standards under which the SBE reviews most types of charter appeals. As a result of these significant changes, statewide authorizer training is imperative as reflected in the research findings. Table 8 displays direct cascading quotes extracted from interviews concerning the implementation of new charter legislation, AB 1505.
Table 8

*Interview Quotes Regarding Implementation of AB 1505*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryan, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>Following the implementation of AB 1505, the role of the CDE will change given that the CDE will no longer serve as an authorizer. I am interested to see what role the CDE will play in terms of supporting charter schools, districts, and counties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loxley, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>Post-AB 1505, hopefully, what the CDE develops in its new regulations would be pertaining to accountability measures. What results from AB 1505 should speak to more effective measures than it has been treated in the past. Much of this I imagine will change and we can only hope accountability becomes more effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>I believe that there is still an important role for the CDE to play after AB 1505, we need an authorizer consulting unit just like we have the charter schools consulting unit. Especially for smaller school districts that end up with a charter school and the district staff is not familiar with what to do. Helping and assisting school districts with their oversight to build stronger oversight procedures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, the CDE staff of the charter oversight unit perceives that additional webinars for SBE-authorized charter schools will assist with the coherence of communication and expectations relative to oversight and accountability. These webinars will also provide the added opportunity for SBE-authorized charter schools to collaborate and to ask questions. Currently, the CDE charter oversight unit hosts approximately two webinars per school year. The current webinars are used as an avenue to communicate to SBE-authorized schools what the accountability, compliance, and financial reporting requirements entail. The staff of the CDE Charter Schools Division more specifically summarized the mandatory attendance, teacher credentialing, educational program, operational, student academic, and fiscal reporting
requirements. Table 9 displays direct cascading quotes extracted from interviews concerning CDE webinars for schools and authorizers.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>We should beef up the technical assistance webinars. The webinars could also be offered to authorizers relative to compliance expectations and other mechanisms such as the new Senate Bill 126 requirements, conflicts of interests, and other required website postings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>I would love for us to do more webinars providing technical assistance and support. It would also be nice if we could have school leaders and some staff come to CDE and we engage in some types of professional development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, additional more in-depth technical assistance and support should be offered to schools that experience academic declines or financial/fiscal challenges. The increased technical assistance and support would play multiple roles: improve the charter school, increase school/authorizer communication, and increase the oversight unit’s effectiveness. However, due to the lack of staff within the division, the current staff is stretched thin with the present duties, responsibilities, and traveling. Therefore, the level of technical assistance and support offered to cure academic or fiscal challenges is limited and relies heavily on the charter school to address the challenges after a letter of concern or notice of violation is issued. Table 10 displays direct cascading quotes extracted from interviews concerning technical assistance, support, and training that should be offered to charter schools and authorizers.
### Table 10
*Interview Quotes Regarding Technical Assistance, Support, and Training*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loxley, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>As we provide very direct support to SBE-authorized charter schools, I think we can also provide better support to other authorizers who oversee schools, especially after we go into this new era of AB 1505 legislation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>I have directly seen my technical assistance and consulting services lead to better outcomes for the school’s academics, enrollment, professional development for teachers – so I feel like we are making an impact on the school and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>By providing more technical assistance, we overcome many of the barriers by providing a statewide understanding of what authorizers need to do in their oversight processes. I’m not sure exactly what the boundaries and limitations of telling school districts what to do, but some type of an outline of what is expected could be helpful across the board.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fourth, it is perceived the CDE staff would benefit from improved salaries. The present salaries bestow alternative consequences such as high turnover and a lack of a voluminous high-quality candidate pool for vacant positions due to the low salary in conjunction with the level of education and experience necessary to qualify for CDE positions. Therefore, many qualified candidates opt to seek employment at local school districts or county offices of education as a result of the increased salaries offered at the district or county. Additionally, one participant ascertained that positions at the CDE are “fluid.” CDE staff have mobility, which allows for reassignments to alternative positions within the CDE. As a result of staff transitioning into other positions within CDE, the relationships between CDE and the charter school must be reestablished, which causes delays in oversight and accountability related activities.
Fifth, additional site visits and supplementary physical interactions with the school sites would benefit not only the schools but also provide for additional oversight and accountability as each of the SBE-authorized charter schools is poised to progress towards the goal of being renewed and authorized by a local district board of education. Additional site visits by CDE staff would further cultivate the outcomes and goals relative to school operations, academics, fiscal, and compliance mechanisms as identified in Figure 4. Charter Oversight Unit Program Evaluation Logic Model. Currently, the practice is to conduct at least one site visit to each school each year. Site visits are guided by CDE’s charter schools Monitoring Instrument. The monitoring instrument is a checklist inclusive of all the components of the schools that must be reviewed to ensure compliance with the school's charter petition, memorandum of understanding, and select charter school relevant ED Codes and regulations. Site visits last two school days allowing for the CDE staff person to visit the school and embark on the following activities:

- Review and verify the implementation of the educational program
- Visit classrooms to observe teaching and learning
- Conduct interviews with teachers, parents, school administrators, and other school support staff
- Verify that there are adequate services for students of special populations (English Learners, Special Education, Gifted & Talented)
- Meet with the Governing Board members to discuss many aspects of the school and the governance responsibilities of the board
- Review student records, special population files, attendance records, and school safety plans
- Check the campus for adequate safety and security
- Verify that the proper meal and food services are intact
• Observe the safety and traffic flow around the school during the arrival and departure of students

• Participate in a State of the School presentation presented by the school’s leadership and administration

Sixth, the establishment of a southern California field office would diminish several of the aforementioned challenges and subsequent recommendations due to the possibility of additional staffing, less travel, closer relationships with the schools, less burnout, and enhanced oversight and accountability. One of the participants specifically revealed that the SBE authorize and oversee several charter schools in the Los Angeles, San Diego, and Santa Barbara regions of the state. Therefore, the need for a southern California field office would be ideal not only for the charter oversight unit, but other CDE units, offices, and divisions. Table 11 displays direct cascading quotes extracted from interviews concerning the establishment of a Southern California CDE field office.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erica, CDE Staff Person</td>
<td>If the CDE continues to monitor charter schools, establishing a Southern CA field office would help with covering the geographic limitations of working from Sacramento only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 provides a more comprehensive breakdown of the above-mentioned recommendations and emergent themes. Furthermore, Table 12 provides a summary of the research results along with the themes extracted from interviews and document analysis. The viewpoints and opinions reflected in this table provide insights regarding mechanisms related to SBE charter school oversight and accountability. To minimize the distraction of the specific
content, the participant insights are classified into three subcategories and were further analyzed and disseminated through the following lenses:

- **Shared Oversight Variable**: both the CDE and the SBE-authorized charter schools hold shared responsibility for these variables

- **Internal CDE-Controlled Variable**: a mechanism primarily driven by the CDE and the CDE staff

- **Compliance Variable**: driven by laws, regulations, or rules. These variables are primarily enforced by the CDE staff. In some instances, both the CDE and the charter school hold shared responsibility for the related outcomes

Table 12
Research Themes Derived from Interviews and Documentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountability Methods Used During Oversight</th>
<th>Communication Interview Questions 2, 10</th>
<th>Problems Encountered by CDE’s Charter Oversight Unit Interview Question 8</th>
<th>Positive Outcomes Interview Question 9</th>
<th>CDE Staff Recommended Improvements Interview Question 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Oversight Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Shared Oversight Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Shared Oversight Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Shared Oversight Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Shared Oversight Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Site Visits</td>
<td>Monthly Calls</td>
<td>Communication Barriers with Some Schools</td>
<td>Positive Relationships with Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unannounced Visits</td>
<td>Response to CDE’s Letter of Concern</td>
<td>Late/No Payment of Oversight Fee</td>
<td>Local Renewal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Calls</td>
<td>Response to Notice of Violation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars</td>
<td>Intent to Cure Violation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing Feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Technical Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal CDE-Controlled Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal CDE-Controlled Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal CDE-Controlled Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal CDE-Controlled Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Charter Meetings with SBE Staff</td>
<td>Legal Advice Requests</td>
<td>Location &amp; Proximity to Schools</td>
<td>Increased Staff Coherence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Memo to SBE</td>
<td>Technical Assistance Communication with SBE Staff</td>
<td>Lack of Staffing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Memo to SBE</td>
<td>Communication with SBE</td>
<td>Staff Turnover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of SBE</td>
<td>Informal Contact with the School</td>
<td>Budget Constraints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned to Charter Division as Liaison</td>
<td>Issuance of Letter of Concern</td>
<td>Organizational Bureaucracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDE Monitoring Instrument</td>
<td>Issuance of Notice of Intent to Cure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Issuance of Notice of Violation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountability Methods Used During Oversight</th>
<th>Communication Interview Questions</th>
<th>Problems Encountered by CDE’s Charter Oversight Unit Interview Questions 8</th>
<th>Positive Outcomes Interview Question 9</th>
<th>CDE Staff Recommended Improvements Interview Question 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compliance Variable</td>
<td>Compliance Variable</td>
<td>Compliance Variable</td>
<td>Compliance Variable</td>
<td>Compliance Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Instrument</td>
<td>Letter of Concern</td>
<td>CA Dashboard Results</td>
<td>Academic Accountability</td>
<td>Student Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Enrollment &amp; Attendance Reports</td>
<td>Notice of Violation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Teacher Credential Records</td>
<td>Revocation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Budget and Fiscal Analyses of Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Local Control Accountability Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Petition Adherence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data constructed from interviews, participatory research, and review of documentation.

Table 13 identifies eight themes that reoccurred throughout participant interviews.

Stemler (2012) identified that one of the most common notions in qualitative research is the use of content analysis. Content analysis more specifically distinguishes the use of conducting word-frequency counts. The themes identified in Table 13 derived from interview transcripts and were reanalyzed with greater clarity to identify how frequently the word, phrase, idea, or theme reoccurred and to which category the theme correlated to as categorized in Table 12: Research Themes Derived from Interviews and Documentation.
Table 13
Reoccurring Themes Derived from Interview Transcripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data Analysis Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implications and the necessity for site visits to SBE-authorized charter schools</td>
<td>Accountability Method Used During Oversight</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location or proximity of CDE staff to schools</td>
<td>Problem Encountered by CDE Oversight Unit</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication between CDE and SBE-authorized charter schools</td>
<td>Problem Encountered by CDE Oversight Unit or Positive Outcomes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDE staffing assignments or CDE staffing challenges</td>
<td>Problem Encountered by CDE Oversight Unit</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorizer and charter school relationships</td>
<td>Positive Outcomes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorizer training and development/training regarding new legislative changes affecting charter schools</td>
<td>Recommended Improvement</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering or receivership of technical assistance, support, training, or professional development from CDE to SBE authorized charter schools</td>
<td>Recommended Improvement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget or funding mentions related to CDE staffing, oversight capacity, or fiscal oversight</td>
<td>Problem Encountered by CDE Oversight Unit</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data in this table were constructed from words or phrases identified as frequent reoccurrences during the interview proceedings.

Theme One: Implications and the Necessity for Site Visits to SBE-Authorized Charter Schools

The site visit conducted by the CDE is to assess the school’s progress in governance and organizational leadership, educational performance, fiscal operations and internal controls, and adherence to the charter. The site visit includes a review of the facility; a review of the school’s records; and interviews with the school’s administration, staff, parents, advisory councils, and governing board. Additionally, the site visits include classroom observations. The annual site visit to SBE-authorized charter schools are guided by professional integrity and grounded in evidence, not opinion. The length of a site visit varies but will average one and a half days to
two days. In recent years, the oversight unit has begun the practice of conducting unannounced visits to SBE-authorized charter schools, aimed at providing an alternative lens of support to the schools. During the regularly scheduled annual site visit, school leaders and staff are prepared to engage with CDE staff. However, due to the level of planning activated before the visit, it is sometimes difficult to authentically view the school as it would be seen during a normal school day when visitors are not present. Figure 7 provides a snapshot of CDE’s charter school site visit protocols and procedures.

Following a site visit to SBE-authorized charter schools, if the CDE staff person notes areas that require improvement or correction, a letter of concern is remitted to the school’s governing board and school leadership. The governing board and school leadership typically have 30 days to respond to CDE’s letter of concern by providing an action plan to address and remedy the concerns noted. The CDE will then respond to the action plan to signify if the action plan and response are deemed sufficient. One participant indicated that in recent months and years “the charter divisions have increased efficiency and streamlined the process of issuing letters. Letters are drafted, edited, and approved and go out to the schools sooner which enables more effective and timely corrective action.” Upon renewal, the SBE is apprised of any and all letters of concern that were issued to SBE-authorized charter schools over the previous five-year period. The CDE staff will indicate if the letters of concern were sufficiently remedied or if outstanding concerns remain. The board has the ability to take these aforementioned letters under consideration when taking action regarding the charter schools. Figure 13 describes written reports and letters, along with additional relevant site visit information previously mentioned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRE-VISIT</th>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The CDE oversight consultant contacts school to schedules the on-site visit.</td>
<td>8 weeks prior to visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CDE oversight consultant provides school leadership with an orientation to the process.</td>
<td>4 weeks prior to visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School uploads documents requested by the CDE to the File Transfer System</td>
<td>8 weeks prior to visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Oversight consultant reviews documents submitted by the school and record their initial questions about the school’s performance according to protocol standards.</td>
<td>4–3 weeks prior to visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The oversight consultant creates a draft schedule of interviews and classroom visits, finalizes the schedule with the school’s input, and sends a copy of the schedule to the school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ON-SITE</th>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The oversight consultant spends a minimum of one and a half days on site conducting classroom visits, interviews with school administration, faculty, and students. The site visit will include a review of cumulative record folders and confidential special education files during the on-site visit.</td>
<td>At least 1 ½–2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The oversight consultant will communicate regularly with school leadership to keep the school informed of the consultant’s progress and to seek the school’s input on that progress.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The oversight consultant’s primary objective is to evaluate the degree to which the school is meeting expectations specified in the school’s charter. Collected evidence is discussed throughout the site visit with the site administration.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The oversight consultant presents an oral report of key concerns to school leadership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOLLOWING THE VISIT</th>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After the site visit, the oversight consultant develops a written report/letter that formalizes the concerns discussed on site. This report/letter will be sent to the charter school administrator and Governing Board Chair or President. This report/letter will be used by the oversight consultant to monitor the school’s progress toward addressing identified concerns.</td>
<td>1–2 weeks after the visit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CDE (2019a, p. 2)

*Figure 7. CDE’s SBE-authorized charter schools site visit protocols and procedures.*
Figures 8 and 9 provide a sample copy of the site review schedule embarked upon by CDE staff when site visits take place at SBE-authorized charter schools.

Source: CDE (2019f, p. 1)

*Figure 8.* Sample day 1 schedule followed by CDE when conducting a site visit to an SBE-authorized charter school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Arrive at Charter School</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Office</td>
<td>• Campus Safety and Security Check</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:30</td>
<td>Conduct Classroom Visits (escorted or non-escorted)</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 – 11:30</td>
<td>Principal/Site Leadership Presentation</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss Academic Performance</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Goals and focus for the year (LCAP)</td>
<td>School Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional Development</td>
<td>Other Key Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher and staff evaluations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School safety plan; emergency preparedness, mandated reporting, emergency drill schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Key initiatives and school priorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Overview of Finances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Charter Renewal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 – 12:30</td>
<td>Lunch (off site)</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 – 1:00</td>
<td>Front Office and File Review</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Office</td>
<td>• Independent Study Records</td>
<td>School Staff Responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDE</td>
<td>• Review of enrollment process, outreach activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workspace</td>
<td>• Review of attendance procedures to include</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attendance records maintenance and verification, absence and tardy procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of student files (cumulative and IEPs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personnel files</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher credentialing records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 – 1:45</td>
<td>Meeting with Parents</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Room</td>
<td>• Members of the School Site Council &amp; ELAC</td>
<td>Parents &amp; Guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents (not members of SSC &amp; ELAC)</td>
<td><em>No Admin or Staff</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involvement and Reflection on LCAP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School Safety Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student Academics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Issues/Concerns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45 – 2:45</td>
<td>Conduct Classroom Visits (escorted or non-escorted)</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45 – 3:00</td>
<td>Observe dismissal procedures</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Check for staffing levels to ensure student safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Observe Traffic Flow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 – 4:00</td>
<td>Exit Meeting with School Leadership Team &amp; Board Members (board members attendance is optional)</td>
<td>CDE Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of notes from visit</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review any action items</td>
<td>School Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Commendations, Recommendations, Areas of Concern</td>
<td>Board Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide Timeline of official Visit Email Summary and CDE Visit Letter</td>
<td>(attendance is optional but encouraged)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CDE (2019f, p. 2)

Figure 9. Sample day 2 schedule followed by CDE when conducting a site visit to an SBE authorized charter school.
Theme Two: Location or Proximity of CDE Staff to Schools

As previously indicated, the CDE headquarters is located in Sacramento, California. The SBE-authorized charter schools the CDE staff oversee are scattered throughout the state. Therefore, there is added difficulty when providing oversight and accountability to these schools. Figure 10 provides a visual representation of where SBE-authorized charter schools are located in relation to the CDE headquarters. This figure also provides additional clarity as to the importance of the establishment of a southern California field office, previously discussed in alternate sections.

Source: CDE (2019e)

Figure 10. Geographical locations of SBE-authorized charter schools
Theme Three: Offering or Receivership of Technical Assistance, Support, Training, or Professional Development from CDE to SBE Authorized Charter Schools

One of the main components of accountability and oversight is the CDE’s ability to interact with schools, districts, and county offices in a meaningful manner. Technical assistance, support, and training allow for schools to have current information regarding authorizer expectations and standards for practice. Schools are generally receptive to technical assistance offered as continuous improvement is paramount. The charter oversight unit would like to have additional opportunities to provide the above-mentioned municipalities with additional technical assistance, support, and trainings. However, due to the limited staff and a significant amount of time spent traveling, the current staff is unable to provide enormous amounts of additional trainings.

Most recently the CDE’s Charter Schools Division in conjunction with the CDE’s Analysis, Measurement, Accountability Reporting Division provided technical assistance and support to the field by holding a webinar to discuss the implications of several of the new charter school laws and legislation that went into effect July 1, 2020. As previously indicated, many of the participants requested there be opportunities to provide supplementary technical assistance and support to the field and SBE-authorized charter schools. It is believed that in the future, to improve the efficiency of the charter oversight units work, there will be more webinars hosted by the CDE and the Charter Schools Division.

Theme Four: Communication Between CDE and SBE-Authorized Charter Schools

One participant indicated, “The biggest problem that I have had to encountered but have overcome was trust and open communication.” When a new CDE staff begins working with a school, the charter oversight unit will generally send out emails to the school leaders to introduce
the new CDE staff person. This engagement allows for the opening of ongoing open
communication. Email plays a huge role in relation to communication. The CDE sends various
email communications to schools to allow the charter schools to easily access and respond to
authorizer requests. Monthly conference calls with the leadership teams of each school and the
charter oversight unit allow for regular communication regarding expectations, upcoming dates
and deadlines, an avenue to solve issues or problems, and allows the charter schools to ask any
clarifying questions they may have. Participants additionally considered the monthly conference
calls and informal technical assistance and support. Moreover, webinars are often used to
provide an avenue to communicate and disseminate information in a larger format to many
schools and school leaders at one given time. Webinars are traditionally held at the beginning
and halfway point of each school year. Other webinars are held when there are oversight
changes or requirements that must be communicated to multiple stakeholders.

The CDE Charters Schools Division also produces two-yearly memorandums that are
rendered to the State Board of Education: a fiscal memo and academic memo. CDE (2019b)
explains the following:

The fiscal memo provides a summary and analysis of the financial condition of each SBE-authorized charter school and all-charter district. In the course of oversight monitoring, if the CDE finds that a charter school failed to meet generally accepted accounting principles or engaged in fiscal mismanagement, it must provide recommendations to the SBE to take appropriate action, as deemed necessary, including issuing a notice of violation or revocation. (p. 1)

The academic memo provides a summary of the academic progress of each SBE-authorized charter schools and all charter districts. The CDE (2019b) reviews the following:

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics academic test results. The CDE additionally reviews the California Accountability Model and School Dashboard data prior to the issuance of the academic memo. If the CDE finds that a charter school did not
make satisfactory academic progress, the CDE may provide recommendations to the SBE to take appropriate action, as deemed necessary, including issuing a notice of violation or revocation. (p. 1)

The above-mentioned memorandums serve as a method of communication not only between the CDE and SBE but also serve as a method of communication between the CDE and the charter school.

**Theme Five: CDE Staffing Assignments or CDE Staffing Challenges**

As a result of the CDE being such a large organization with some 1,500 employees at headquarters, the staff has the opportunity to transition to alternate positions throughout the CDE fairly easy. When these transitions occur, it is necessary for the remaining staff or new staff in the charter oversight unit to re-establish relationships with the charter schools the CDE overseas. Reestablishing these relationships can be somewhat abrupt and untimely. When CDE staff transitions occur, the charter school leaders often feel some levels of anxiety due to the requirement of having the build new relationships with the new CDE staff persons. This may also cause a delay in oversight, accountability, and support during the time of the transition.

Currently, there are four staff vacancies in the charter oversight unit as previously indicated in Figure 6. Often vacancies take a significant amount of time to fill due to the organizational bureaucracy; time that it takes to process paperwork, along with other human resources requirements; and the time required to conduct candidate screenings. While many educators have experience in the larger education community, a significant number of educators do not have experience in the unique charter school arena. Due to many educators possessing a lack of familiarity with the charter schools, there is an added complexity when initially reviewing candidates to fill vacant positions in the Charter Schools Division. One participant
indicated, “Given the amount of work that the Charter Schools Division produces, the division would benefit from additional staff persons to help with the workload that is encumbered.”

**Theme Six: Authorizer and Charter School Relationships**

The relationship between the authorizer and the charter school is a significant pillar that relies heavily on effective ongoing communication. The relationship between the two entities can have both detrimental and positive implications. Many of the participants explain that the work of the Charter Oversight Unit relies on attempts to have positive relationships with schools and school leaders. One participant explained that in the instances where the relationships lie on rocky foundations, it is mostly due to the charter schools being unresponsive or combative with the CDE staff. Another participant stressed the importance of developing a more personal relationship with the leaders of the schools so the CDE staff could not only buy into the mission of the schools but also support the success of the charter school. As previously indicated, it is vitally important that CDE staff have the opportunity to be on site more often at the charter school sites. This physical interaction creates a better relationship between the charter school and the authorizer.

During the authorization term and relationship, if schools are found to have fiscal, academic, or operational concerns, the CDE Fiscal Letters of Concern, Letters of Academic Concern, or Letters of Concern are issued to the Governing Board of the charter with a request for corrective action. In most cases, the schools must also provide additional documentation including, but not limited to, the process by which the board of the charter school will review Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) goals and analyze pupil data, including how the board will consult with stakeholders. The board is required to specifically articulate actions the board will take to address the concerns noted by CDE.
Finally, during the renewal phase, the relationships between charter schools and its authorizer are detrimentally important as both sides must make their case as to why the charter schools should remain open or be shut down at the end of the term. If the charter authorizer and the charter school have had a tumultuous relationship, it is commonly understood that this relationship is taken into consideration when the authorizer makes its recommendation to the respective board as the fate of the school is determined. For SBE-authorized schools specifically, the SBE relies heavily on this type of information presented by the CDE staff.

**Theme Seven: Authorizer Training and Development**

In an effort to create statewide coherence in the charter schools arena, many of the participants explained the importance of authorizer training that could be potentially spearheaded by the CDE and CDE staff. Much of the disjointed authorizer practices that exist today are due to the lack of standardized authorizer practices and training. Many authorizers are left to hire staff and figure it out on their own. Other authorizers attend workshops and professional development delivered by independent organizations or consultants. One participant indicated, “The CDE should set the tone for how authorizers will be held accountable and for the charter schools that they approve, renew, and ultimately authorize.” Another participant indicated, the “CDE could develop oversight authorizing practices so that CDE can be viewed as a model for district and county authorizers throughout the state as CDE’s role has changed as a result of some of the newly passed legislation.” As indicated in the inquiry question two section, in 2025, the SBE and the CDE will no longer serve as an authorizer. Therefore, the Charter Oversight Unit could shift is responsibilities to supporting charter schools, districts, and county offices of education. Significant support, professional development, and CDE-initiated training could be dedicated to developing the remaining district and county authorizers.
Theme Eight: Budget or Funding Mentions Related to CDE Staffing, Oversight Capacity, or Fiscal Oversight

During the process of oversight monitoring in addition to the previously mentioned fiscal memorandum, the CDE reviews financial reports, budgetary updates, and pertinent budget assumptions provided by each SBE-authorized charter school in its overall assessment of a charter school’s current and projected financial condition, fiscal sustainability, and appropriateness of fiscal management practices. Specifically, the CDE Charter Oversight Unit reviews each charter school’s budgets to identify, manage, and focus on signs of fiscal decline and possible fiscal mismanagement. As a guide the CDE (2019h) uses the following:

The general themes of the state’s budget reporting and monitoring system used for school districts; that process requires school districts to self-certify their financial condition as positive, qualified, or negative related to current and projected financial conditions. Other factors that monitored include, measuring the adequacy of managing cash; evaluating debt levels; reviewing the sustainability of budget operations; reviewing trends in enrollment and attendance; determining the reasonableness of revenue and expenditure projections; assessing the multi-year projected financial position of each SBE-authorized charter school. (p. 2)

As indicated in Chapter 2, fiscal and financial management is one of the most vital factors that determine the livelihood and longevity of a charter school's existence. Therefore, the CDE’s Charter Oversight Unit does significant work in this area to ensure that schools are fiscally and financially viable throughout the five-year charter term and during renewal. Figure 11 provides a snapshot of CDE’s required fiscal, financial, and attendance reporting dates relative to SBE-authorized charter schools.
### SBE authorized Charter Schools

#### Revenue and Expenditure Reporting Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Due</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1</td>
<td>Preliminary Budget</td>
<td>For current fiscal year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 15</td>
<td>Final Unaudited Report</td>
<td>For prior fiscal year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 15</td>
<td>First Interim Report</td>
<td>For changes to the approved preliminary budget through October 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 15</td>
<td>Annual Independent Financial Audit Report</td>
<td>For prior fiscal year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15</td>
<td>Second Interim Report</td>
<td>For changes to the approved preliminary budget through January 31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Student Attendance Accounting Reporting Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Due</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 31</td>
<td>Pupil Estimates for New or Significantly Expanding Charters (PENSEC) Report</td>
<td>First special advance apportionment for newly operational or significantly expanding charters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No later than 15 days after the first 20 school days</td>
<td>20-day Attendance Report</td>
<td>Second special advance apportionment for newly operational or significantly expanding charters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 5</td>
<td>First Principal Apportionment (P-1)</td>
<td>Attendance for all full school months between July 1 and December 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 21</td>
<td>Second Principal Apportionment (P-2)</td>
<td>Attendance for all full school months between July 1 and April 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 30</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Attendance for the entire school year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Other Reporting Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Due</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>Annual Audit Information</td>
<td>For annual audit due on December 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1</td>
<td>Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and LCAP Annual Update review</td>
<td>For current fiscal year and two years after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After First and Second Interim Report</td>
<td>Balance Sheet and Accounts Payable Aging Report</td>
<td>For current fiscal year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CDE (2019d)

*Figure 11. CDE’s SBE-authorized charter schools fiscal, financial, and attendance reporting information.*
Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the results garnered from interviews, participatory research, and documentation analysis. The eight reoccurring themes were discussed in this chapter to provide clarity and further understanding of the topic. Cascading quotes provided direct quotes from participants who partook in the study and provided insights into the participants’ perceptions related to the topic. Chapter 5 further discusses the recommendations and implications of this study.
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Overview

This chapter summarizes the purpose of this research, provides a summary of how this research is connected to previous research, discusses the implications of this study, and provides recommendations for future practice and future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this program evaluation and study was to determine the effectiveness and barriers of the Charter Oversight Unit of the California Department of Education. In the history of the CDE and the Charter Schools Division, this is the first study of this kind that was conducted as a program evaluation aimed at examining the current practices and the outcomes of quality charter authorizing, accountability, and oversight. Not only does this study retain the potential to impact the programs of practice of SBE and CDE as an authorizer along with the SBE-authorized charter schools, likewise, this study also has the potential to impact numerous district authorizers, county authorizers, and other charter schools across the state and nation. Through the use of a qualitative-based program evaluation, the following inquiry questions were posed:

Q1: In what ways, if any, are the existing accountability measures, processes, and oversight systems of the California Department of Education perceived to achieve the outcomes, objectives, and goals that are necessary for the appropriate level of accountability and oversight of State Board of Education authorized charter schools?
Q2: What program improvements, if any, can be implemented to improve the charter school oversight functions of the State Board of Education and California Department of Education staff?

The perceptions of education leaders and practitioners in the charter authorizing and oversight arena were explored during this study. The authorizer duties of the SBE related to charter school operations, academic accountability, financial/fiscal controls, and compliance-related oversight practices were examined. Data were collected via multiple sources including interviews, participatory research, and a review of documentation and artifacts. Interviews allowed the participants to reflect on previous practices, current practices, and potential future promising practices related to charter school oversight and accountability. During the data analysis proceedings, several categories and reoccurring themes emerged from the interview responses that are correlated to the program components illustrated in Figure 4: Charter Oversight Unit Program Evaluation Logic Model, also Figure 11. The aforesaid themes and program components were further investigated via participatory research and examined through artifact and documentation analysis.
Figure 12. Charter Oversight Unit program evaluation logic model.
Eight reoccurring themes derived from interviews with participants were further analyzed with the intent of investigating the supporting six recommendations for future practice along with the three recommendations for future research. Figure 13 provides an infographic summarization of the significant themes that emerged as meaningful from interviews conducted with participants.

Figure 13. Infographic to further illustrate reoccurring themes.

Created by Chaddrick Owes (2020)
Six recommendations for improving the Charter Oversight Unit’s functions and outcomes were extrapolated based on the perceptions of participants. These six recommendations are discussed later in this chapter.

**Linkage to Previous Research**

As indicated in Chapter 2, Edstrom et al. (2016) found that the role of a charter school authorizer is to provide oversight and create accountability tools that help to promote high-quality schools (p. 5). Through the documentation review, it was found that many of the documents and guidance the CDE provides to SBE-authorized charter schools endorse the essential goal and five-year plan of the oversight unit as it relates to stimulating charter schools that achieve the objective of being considered a high-quality school as purposed by the Charter School Act of 1992. Hill et al. (2001) found many authorizers have not clarified their expectations and oversight processes in place for those schools they authorize and oversee. Dissimilarly, the CDE’s Charter Oversight Unit and the SBE were found to be expressively clear with expectations, goals, monitoring, and with notable yearly benchmarks for the charter schools the CDE and the SBE oversee. The CDE and the SBE were found to be willing to approve charters and conduct balanced performance-oriented oversight as Hill et al. cited in their research.

The NACSA (2016) found that many authorizers simply focus on basic compliance by minimally meeting basic requirements outlined in the law related to authorizer duties. However, through this program evaluation, it was revealed that the CDE staff perceives the work of the CDE Charter Oversight Unit to be meaningful while meeting the larger intent of the Charter School Act of 1992, which describes the purpose of fostering high-quality charter schools. The work of Todd Ziebath (2019) found that some potential areas for improvement in California’s
charter school law would be to strengthen authorizer accountability by beefing up requirements for performance-based charter contracts and ensuring transparency regarding educational service providers. The CDE staff that participated in this study shared similar sentiments regarding the necessity of statewide coherence related to authorizer support, technical assistance, and the need for aligned authorizer training and ongoing professional development.

**Discussion of Implications**

This study was solely focused on the SBE and the CDE as charter authorizers. A plethora of opportunities exist to study and explore other local districts and county offices of education authorizers. This study sheds light on a small sector of the larger challenges faced concerning charter authorizing and oversight at the state level. Conversely, this study also does not exhaustively resound the positive qualities that correlate to charter authorizing, oversight, and the charter school movement in general. Additional research in this arena is encouraged and should be embraced.

This study has the potential to inform local school district authorizers and the county office of education authorizers. Portions of the relative information presented can influence how these authorizers interact with the schools they oversee. Authorizing and effective oversight requires adjusting and the refinement of practice to ensure that authorizers and schools remain current with trends in the educational marketplace. As the outdated charter laws of 1992 have most recently come under heavy scrutiny, this study provides some context to the issues and serves as an outline for further research in this area. Not only does this study retain the potential to impact the programs of practice of the SBE, the CDE, and SBE-authorized charter schools. This study also has the potential to impact numerous district authorizers, county authorizers, and other charter schools across the state and nation. While California is grappling with this
uncharted territory, other states also retain the ability to replicate this study and explore the charter laws and regulations that are relative to that individual state. This study opens the door for states around the nation to learn lessons from one another on how to navigate this important but difficult work.

Another implication that should be considered is how the CDE will shift its practices based on the findings and recommendations elevated as a result of the department's participation in this study. The Charter Oversight Unit has the ability to review and redefine several of the processes associated with charter school oversight and the support of local authorizers. Moreover, based on new California charter legislation that goes into effect in July 2020, the CDE will continue to oversee charter schools until 2025. This period grants the CDE the opportunity to reevaluate its role in the charter school arena after the CDE will no longer have direct oversight of SBE-authorized charter schools.

The final implication to consider is CDE staff’s ability to thoroughly conduct site visits along with each of the site visit activities, responsibilities, and related components for which one CDE staff person is currently responsible when visiting charter school sites. While none of the participants highlighted the complexities of singularly completing all the aforementioned tasks outlined in Chapter 4, there is a benefit to having multiple CDE staff persons to jointly visit charter school sites in an effort to thoroughly examine each of the distinctive components of the school while fulfilling the oversight responsibilities the site visit is intended to examine.

**Recommendations for Practice**

1. It is recommended the California legislature mandate the creation and rollout of statewide authorizer training aligned to a single set of charter authorizer oversight standards. This analogous assemblage of training would provide coherence to the already complex nature
of charter reviews, appeals, approvals, and oversight. The CDE has the opportunity to be the entity responsible for the creation and delivery of the above-mentioned statewide authorizer training.

2. It is recommended there be the establishment of an entity or body that would be tasked with the responsibility of providing monitoring and oversight of authorizers to ensure authorizers adhere to currently established authorizer duties described in CEC § 47604.3 along with any newly established duties, responsibilities, and legislative mandates. The CDE has the opportunity to be identified as the entity responsible for providing oversight and guidance to authorizers across the state, as there is perceived authorizer misalignment due to the large number of authorizers that exist in California.

3. It is recommended that funding be made available for the creation of an authorizer oversight unit similar to the already existing CDE Charter Oversight Unit. The staff of the CDE’s Charter Schools Division would be responsible for providing technical assistance, monitoring, and training to all local school districts and county offices of education charter authorizers in California. As the enrollment of students attending charter schools is significant, proper oversight of authorizers must be prevalent so that students and teachers are not unjustly impacted.

4. It is recommended that funding be made available for the establishment and staffing of a southern California field office. The southern California field office would not only house staff of the Charter Oversight Unit, but other CDE units, offices, and divisions that serve essential functions in the southern California region.

5. It is recommended that all CEC sections relative to charter schools be analyzed and updated to align with current-day charter school standards. In California, 10% of the 6.2
million public school students attend public charter schools. The necessity for updated legislation relative to this school choice option would mitigate many of the existing challenges faced in the charter schools marketplace.

6. It is recommended that charter school administrators, leaders, and petitioners develop the means of creating and maintaining constructive relationships with their authorizer. By adhering to authorizer requests, maintaining open communication, abiding by charter laws, mandates, memorandums of understandings, and the charter petition; charter operators are better positioned for future success. This success would potentially include an enhanced likelihood of being renewed for additional charter terms.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. There are currently limited research and studies exploring individual authorizers. Further exploration of individual authorizers would create an assemblage of real-world research that can be used to inform the California legislature and the general public. This future research has the opportunity to coincide with present day legislative reform initiatives. There is importance in legislative reform being guided by current practices and current challenges.

2. There are currently limited research and studies exploring the implications that result from the relationship that charter schools have with their respective authorizer. Additional research would provide insights that would inform practitioners, the educational community at-large, the California legislature, and the general public.

3. As indicated in Chapter 2, charter schools can be conceived by parents, community members, individuals, or other petitioners. However, there is currently limited research exploring the success rate of charter schools birthed by seasoned educators,
administrators, or practitioners. Additional research comparing the success rate of charter schools started by individuals or groups with limited experience in the educational arena against the success rate of charter schools started and operated by seasoned educators would be enlightening.

**Conclusion**

This study provides a glimpse into the untold truths and realities that exist in relation to the SBE and the CDE as charter authorizers and overseers. The results of this study are consistent with the literature. Although various closely related literature exists, there remains many misinterpretations about charter schools that require further exploration. This study highlights the value of quality charter school oversight and accountability. The participants reported the importance of seeking new opportunities for growth and continued development regarding the topic of quality charter school authorizing, oversight, and accountability. The CDE staff participants similarly welcomed the improvement and growth of their practices. Given the difficulties and complexities herein, it is urged that practitioners and policymakers strongly consider the currently emerging trends while exploring solution-oriented innovations. Solutions should not be driven by uninformed public opinions; rather the solutions should be informed by practitioners, traditional public schools stakeholders, administrators, and the public charter school operators that are closest to the heart of the issues.
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California Education Code, Title 2 Elementary and Secondary Education (1992)


doi:10.1177/0731121416674948


July 15, 2019

Institutional Review Board, University of the Pacific
University of the Pacific
3601 Pacific Avenue
Stockton, California 95211

Dear IRB Board Members:

Subject: Permission Granted for Chaddrick Owes to Conduct Research

Dear Members of the IRB Committee:

On behalf of Charter Schools Division (CSD) of the California Department of Education (CDE), I am writing to formally indicate my awareness of the research proposed by Chaddrick Owes, a doctoral student at University of the Pacific. I am aware that Mr. Owes intends to conduct research related to his dissertation by administering interviews with staff members of the CSD and by reviewing CDE data related to charter school oversight.

Therefore, I grant Mr. Owes permission to conduct his doctoral research within the department.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact me by phone at [Redacted] or by email at [Redacted].

Sincerely,

Lisa F. Constancio, Director
Charter Schools Division

LFC.co

cc: Carrie Lopes, Education Administrator I, California Department of Education

Sent via First Class Mail and Email to:
IRB@pacific.edu
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Project:** Charter Schools Accountability: A Program Evaluation of the Charter Oversight Unit of the California Department of Education

| Date of Interview: | 
| Time of Interview: | 
| Interviewer: | 
| Interviewee: | 
| Position/Title of Interviewee: | 

**Instructions and description of the project:** Your consent is being requested to voluntarily participate in a dissertation research study concerning charter school authorizing and oversight. The purpose of the research is to determine the effectiveness of the California Department of Education’s Charter Oversight Unit. You are being asked to participate in a 30-minute to 1-hour interview. During the interview, audio or video recordings will be used to assist the researcher gather and document information. Due to COVID-19 and in an effort to adhere to health and safety precautions, the researcher may ask the participants in the interview via teleconferencing or other virtual formats such as Webex or Zoom. Information collected during the interview will be used solely by the researcher to complete this dissertation and research project. If you prefer to not be audio or video recorded, handwritten notes will be taken by the researcher as an alternate data collection and archival method.

**Consent:**

| Have you read and signed the consent form? | Interviewee Indicated Yes or No |

*Start the audio or video recording*

**Questions:**

Ask interviewee questions 1 – 15 identified in Appendix C

*Stop the audio or video recording*

Thank the individual for their participation in the interview. Reassure the participant that confidentiality will be maintained. Invite the participant to email any additional information that they may like to share.
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you represent a charter school, local educational agency (school district), county office of education, or the state board of education (California Department of Education)?

2. In relation to the agency that you represent; what accountably methods are used during “oversight?”

3. In relation to the agency that you represent; what steps occur if a charter school does not adhere to the charter petition, memorandum of understanding, or abide by Education Code?

4. How are oversight fees that are collected from charter schools used to support the work of the authorizer (if applicable)?

5. Does the authorizer track, account for, or record expenditures and actual cost for oversight or administrative services (if applicable)?

6. How often do revocations occur for charter schools under your oversight (if applicable)?

7. Do you perceive the CDE’s charter oversight unit and its programs to be sustainable? Why or why not?

8. What problems have been encountered with providing charter schools with proper oversight and accountability (if applicable)?

9. What are some of the positive outcomes of the work of the CDE’s charter oversight unit?

10. How effective do you perceive the work and outcomes of the CDE’s charter oversight unit to be?

11. How efficient do you perceive the work and outcomes of the CDE’s charter oversight unit to be?

12. What program improvements or recommendations can be implemented in the future to improve the CDE’s charter school oversight functions?

13. What types of State-level guidance do you perceive should be offered to other charter authorizers?

14. Do the existing accountability measures, processes, and oversight systems of the CDE staff achieve the outcomes, objectives, and goals that are necessary for the appropriate level accountability and oversight of State Board of Education authorized charter schools?

15. Do you have any additional feedback or information that you would like to offer that we have not discussed?
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Participant Consent Form

Research Title: Charter Schools Accountability: A Program Evaluation of the Charter Oversight Unit of the California Department of Education

Lead Researcher: Chad Owes

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brett Taylor

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION: Your consent is being requested to voluntarily participate in a dissertation research study concerning charter school authorizing and oversight. The purpose of the research is to determine the effectiveness of the California Department of Education’s Charter Oversight Unit. You will be invited to participate in an interview or observation. During the interview or observation proceedings, audio or video recordings will be used to assist the researcher gather and document information. Information collected during the interview or observation will be used solely by the researcher to complete this dissertation and research project. If you prefer not to be audio or video recorded, handwritten notes will be taken by the researcher during the interview or observation.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no known risks associated with this study. However, due to COVID-19 and in an effort to minimize the known health risk, some interviews and participatory interactions may take place via teleconferencing or other virtual formats. The researcher and any participant must acknowledge and adhere to all COVID-19 safety precautions. There are no known benefits to be expected as a result or your participation in this study. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not impact your employment or professional reputation.

COMPENSATION: You will receive no compensation or payment for your participation.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this research project, you understand that your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings, conferences, or published in scientific journals. It is possible that we may decide that your participation in this research is not appropriate. If that happens, you will be dismissed from the study. In any event, we appreciate your willingness to participate in this research. If you believe that you may have a conflict of interest, you may also terminate your participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your identity will not be disclosed. Your identity will not be made known in written materials resulting from the study. Artificial or factitious names and identities may be used to describe participants to attempt to maintain confidentiality.
CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Lead Researcher, Chad Owes at (404) 414-0706 or by email at c_owes@u.pacific.edu or the Faculty Research Advisor, Dr. Brett Taylor at btylor@pacific.edu.

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact Office of Research and Sponsored Programs to speak to someone independent of the research team at (209)-946-3903 or IRB@pacific.edu.

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that your participation is completely voluntary, that you understand that you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

SIGNATURE _____________________________ DATE _________________________

Research Study Participant (Print Name): _______________________________________