Where
Charter School Policy
Fails

The Problems of
Accountability and Equity

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**TEACHERS
COLLEGE
PRESS**

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CHAPTER 5

Public Schools, Private Resources

The Role of Social Networks in California Charter School Reform

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In Chapter 4, Slayton demonstrated that charter schools receive various levels of public funding from their districts due to several factors, including the ambiguity of California's charter school legislation and the knowledge and expertise of the charter school principals. Whatever level the charter school's public funding may be, it is generally insufficient to completely support this reform, especially within new, "start-up" charter schools. Thus, in this chapter, we look at charter schools' need to supplement their public funding with private resources. Specifically, we discuss the strategies employed by start-up charter schools—those that are newly created, as opposed to converted public schools—to accumulate and sustain private resources. Using these strategies as lenses, we see that charter schools in different social contexts are unable to accumulate the same levels of private support despite their common need to do so. In other words, there appears to be a strong relationship between the geographic, political, economic, racial, and educational environments within and around these start-up charter schools and their ability to raise the private resources they need.

We argue that this relationship exists because the processes charter schools use to garner private resources are circumscribed by the social status and the social networks of their local school communities. In fact, we contend that the high-status networks—personal and professional connections to people

with money and political power—are even more critical to private-resource accumulation than the particular strategies used to acquire resources. Thus, understanding the social context of the schools is critical to understanding why the same processes or strategies of private-resource accumulation net such disparate results for different charter schools. More specifically, we see vast, disturbing inequities emerging within and across charter school reform—inequities that mirror the wealth and poverty of the communities that house these schools. We conclude that policy makers should attend to these inequities by targeting start-up funds and technical assistance to charter schools in low-income communities. In the absence of such government efforts to further support charter schools in poor neighborhoods, we argue that some (perhaps many) charter schools in low-income communities will be forced to partner with private, for-profit or non-profit educational management organizations (EMOs) because of the financial support these groups offer. More will be said about this in the conclusion of this chapter.

The following three questions framed the inquiry for this chapter:

1. By what processes do start-up charter schools secure private resources?
2. Which schools are most successful in generating private support and why?
3. What are the implications of the varying levels of private support for educational inequality?

In an effort to answer these questions, we examined data from the larger UCLA Charter School Study and found that several strategies were used across these sites. We then used these strategies in analyzing data from six start-up charter schools located in four urban and one suburban school district in California. As we will discuss in greater detail, these strategies include having aggressive school administrators; selecting high-status, wealthy, and influential school governance council members; forming partnerships with corporations, universities, or law firms; grant writing and fund raising from various private sources; and drawing from various in-kind resources, such as parent volunteers.

We focus on these strategies to demonstrate that private resources are not limited to monetary sums, but also can include more subtle forms of support that are difficult to quantify. Furthermore, these strategies are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are sometimes complementary and overlapping. Nor are they unique to charter schools; many non-profit organizations also employ them. What is noteworthy, however, is how the very same strategies taken on with similar determination, energy, and commitment in the context of public charter schools can yield such divergent results.

STARTING A NEW CHARTER SCHOOL

As other chapters in this book point out, charter schools are allowed to operate as fiscally "independent" entities or remain more "dependent" on their district for administrative resources or services. Start-up charter schools, which are often fiscally independent, rarely receive facilities or capital expenses from their districts. These independent start-up charter schools in California and elsewhere generally pay for their rent or mortgage out of their daily operating budgets.

So-called conversion charter schools, or those that convert from existing public schools, generally remain more dependent on their sponsoring districts and thus face fewer resource-related difficulties. We know, for example, that conversion charter schools usually continue to operate in the same buildings for little or no rent, maintain most of the same staff, and utilize district services such as food, transportation, and payroll (UCLA Charter School Study, 1998).

Thus, one of the most formidable challenges to starting and maintaining a new, start-up charter school is securing adequate resources (Corwin & Flaherty, 1995; RPP International, 2000). Given these fiscal challenges to starting charters, it becomes important to understand how start-up charter schools manage to surmount them. In this chapter we focus on *how* the schools secure private resources and *why* different schools have access to different resources. In order to do this, we examine charter schools in their social, economic, and political contexts. We argue that these contexts circumscribe the networks available to charter schools, and the forms of capital—economic, social, or political—upon which they can draw in their efforts to make their schools successful.

NETWORKS: THE TIES THAT BIND

As we examined the strategies start-up charter schools used to acquire resources and tried to make sense of why the same processes led to such widely different results across schools, we turned to social network theorists. In contrast to those who see individual actions removed from social relations, network theorists examine the more dynamic ways in which people both shape and are shaped by their social networks. For example, Granovetter (1985) writes:

> Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations. (p. 487)

This understanding of actors enables us to examine the ways in which charter school educators' actions are embedded in social relations, including the wealth or poverty of their local communities.

To acquire and sustain the private resources they need to survive, many charter school communities draw from social networks. To understand how people network, Granovetter (1973) discussed the concept of "strong" and "weak" social ties. Strong ties are those that an individual has to family and close friends. Weak ties are more distant connections to co-workers, business associates, or other peers from school. Granovetter (1983) suggests people use weak ties as bridges between strongly tied social groups. Weak ties, then, can connect groups made up of strong ties, further strengthening individual access to information, relationships, and other resources. Individuals who rely only on strong ties may be more isolated socially, disconnected from opportunities for mobility or expanding their experience. This reliance solely on strong ties is particularly problematic for poor and politically disempowered people whose family and friends are also mostly poor and disempowered. On the other hand, Granovetter (1983) notes that weak ties tend to be particularly important to the social mobility of poor people. He writes: "Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle; but strong ties have greater motivation to be of more assistance and are typically more available" (p. 209). Thus, the potential impact of weak ties on poor people's lives and opportunities for mobility is quite large.

We found in our examination of start-up charters that the social location of such schools determines the types of ties that envelop them. For example, schools located in high-status communities have strong and weak ties to many resources, and are therefore able to tap easily into financial, social, and economic capital in their community, as we will demonstrate later. Yet the strong ties, or social networks, of schools located in poorer areas and serving poorer students, fail to link such schools with similar resources, in part because they are not available in the immediate community. Therefore, we find these schools must expend comparatively more effort using what weak ties, or more distant connections, they have, to obtain the resources they require. For instance, we found that generally charter schools in poor neighborhoods either were supported by wealthy, private individuals or organizations from outside the nearby community or simply got by with less.

As noted, one of the most important functions of social networks is the way in which they connect individuals or institutions to resources. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), two of the most important types of such resources are economic capital (financial resources) and cultural capital (high-status knowledge). Possession of these two types of capital, Bourdieu argues, enables individuals, families, or groups to maintain or increase their power in society

(Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu maintains, however, that these forms of capital are not merely to be held, but are strategically used and "cashed in" by individuals or groups seeking to improve their social standing (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Lareau, 1989).

In relation to Granovetter's theory of social networks, it is useful to consider the differences between high- and low-status communities in the possession of cultural and economic capital, and the ways in which strong or weak social ties grant access to these types of capital. A consideration of these disparities in access to cultural and economic capital across communities is particularly important in the United States where a long history of segregation and discrimination in both housing and education resulted in significantly greater degrees of economic capital (wealth) and cultural capital (educational attainment) for White families than for families of color (Oliver & Shapiro, 1997). These disparities in capital, furthermore, have multiplied over time, as economic and cultural capital provide access to one another (Bourdieu, 1977).

Charter school reform has been laid down upon this highly unequal economic and social landscape; as such, differences in charter founders' and operators' social networks, which grant access to important resources, must be considered when analyzing start-up charter schools' resource needs and strategies for garnering these resources. As we will show, founders and operators of start-up charter schools located in high-status communities generally have many close connections (or strong ties) to individuals in those communities who possess a tremendous amount of resources that they may grant to the charter school. However, founders and operators of charter schools located in economically impoverished communities rarely possess these strong ties to well-resourced individuals or institutions; rather, they must use their weak ties (i.e., distant acquaintances) or in fact forge ties (i.e., by approaching businesspeople or foundations) in order to tap into resources far outside their communities to individuals or organizations that may have drastically different educational or organizational visions for the schools.

Educational policy makers and researchers rarely mention these disparities across charter schools. Yet, we believe it is important to illuminate ways in which pre-existing inequalities across communities, and unequal access to resource-rich social networks within these communities, have been magnified by charter school reform.

OUR SAMPLE OF START-UP CHARTER SCHOOLS

In this chapter, we analyze data from six of the nine start-up charter schools in the UCLA Charter School Study. The three start-up schools from the larger sample that were excluded from the analysis were combinations of home-

schooling and independent study programs. None of these required a large building with classrooms and seats for all their students, full-time teachers to staff each class, or the furniture and supplies of a regular school. The resource needs of the other six start-up charter schools were clearly much greater—particularly in the area of capital expenses. Examining these six start-up charter schools, therefore, allows us to document the ways in which such schools meet their tremendous resource needs.

Despite their similarities, the six schools were different from each other in many regards—in particular, their social locations and the students they served. For instance, these six schools were located in communities that ranged from affluent to very poor. The schools also differed in the length of time they had been in operation. All were within their first 5 years of operation, but some had been open for several years while others were relatively new. We recognize that newer schools may have different resource issues and concerns than schools that have been able to work through them over time. We are confident, however, that the open-ended, semistructured interviews utilized in this study allowed the respondents to reflect upon their experiences and that temporal differences emerged from the data. Wherever possible, we have drawn from interviews of stakeholders with comparable roles at their respective schools, namely, principals, founders, governing board members, donors, and volunteers.

The following brief descriptions of each of the six start-up charter schools in our sample provide a sense of the local contexts in which these schools were founded and the social networks that envelope them. One of these schools was introduced in Chapter 3, and three of them were discussed in Chapter 4.

Foundation Elementary Charter School. As described in Chapter 3, this start-up, independent school served a low-income and working-class population within the large, diverse, and urban Mission Unified School District. The charter school's partnership with a private educational management organization (EMO) played a large role in shaping its curricular and instructional philosophy while also providing administrative support and resources, including locating and renovating the building in which the school was housed. The staff described the school as having attentive teachers, small class sizes, and challenging curriculum.

Academic Charter School. As introduced in Chapter 4, Academic was a charter elementary school in an impoverished neighborhood in a large urban school district—Madrona Unified—serving mostly low-income students of color. Academic Charter also managed to attract substantial corporate and foundation support, including the donation of an industrial building complex in the community, for which it paid basically no rent. In addition, Academic

raised more than a million dollars in direct financial donations, mostly from corporations and wealthy individuals. The school's leaders also forged partnerships with local universities and a national school reform movement, through which they received in-kind support for their school.

Community Charter School. Also a focus of Chapter 4, Community Charter School was located in a poor, urban school district—Edgewood Unified School District—that served mostly students of color. The founders of this middle school envisioned serving students who supposedly got lost in the district's large middle schools, schools they described as being violent and impersonal. The charter school had a rocky start in its first 4 years, facing facilities challenges, high staff turnover, and lack of resources. Community basically consisted of bungalows—or portable classrooms—in an empty lot in an industrial park, surrounded by anonymous warehouses.

Directions High School. Described in Chapter 4, this urban charter school served an ethnically diverse student body, although it had more White students than most schools in the Vista Unified School District. Still, there was not a clear majority of any one racial group among the students. Directions boasted an impressive array of supporters, from district officials to major corporations, as well as the benefits of several private partnerships. This support enabled the school to secure a building location in a private university. They expended little for capital costs, with the exception of the $25,000 annual rent for use of the building.

Shoreline Charter School. This elementary charter school was located in a wealthy suburban community and, like most other schools in the suburban Shoreline district, served mostly White middle- and upper-middle-class students. The school was started with the involvement and support of leaders from the school district, and it was one of the first charter schools in the state, approved and opened when no start-up funding was available. Yet, as we will describe later, the school has received substantial financial and in-kind support from the professional connections of its parents and corporations in the surrounding community.

Heritage Charter School. This was a very small school, serving approximately 60 students, with two full-time teachers. Heritage enrolled students of color from a different racial/ethnic group than those in Community, although, like Community, this middle school—also in the Edgewood Unified School District—arose out of some community members' concerns about a perceived lack of responsiveness by the district toward their children. There had been significant financial difficulties at the school, even though it enjoyed

the support of a community group. Still, the building the school rented was in poor condition, needing repairs, particularly heating and plumbing, which failed from time to time. According to the lease on this building, Heritage was responsible for all maintenance. Thus, when plumbing or heating problems occurred, the educators at the school had to try to fix them or pay for someone else to. Given this responsibility, the rent they paid for the space seemed exorbitant.

EXAMINING STRATEGIES FOR ACQUIRING RESOURCES: THE USE OF NETWORKS

In the course of the UCLA Charter School Study, we learned that starting and operating a charter school demands a substantial amount of economic, social, and political resources. Consistent with the framework discussed in the first part of the chapter, we also learned that the nature and amount of resources were correlated with the social location of the charter school. In other words, charter schools in high-status and wealthy communities had an easier time garnering the resources they needed. Yet, the charter schools' success in getting these resources was also dependent on the status and wealth of their "acquaintances and networks," which were generally related to their social location but, as we will see, were not completely predetermined by it. In other words, our analysis shows that even in relatively low-income communities, charter schools can be well connected—that is, some of them have wealthy donors and are partnered with affluent and high-status institutions. But what is also apparent from our analysis is that these low-income schools are so much more dependent for their survival on people and institutions with whom they have very weak ties. And in instances where those ties do not exist, the poor schools are even poorer.

Despite the differences in status, location, and wealth of the charter schools, we found that all six of them used remarkably similar strategies in their efforts to acquire resources. We now turn to a detailed discussion of these strategies, using examples from schools where particular strategies were most salient. It is also important to remember that these strategies were not mutually exclusive, and the charter schools often employed all or combinations of them at any given time.

School Leadership

In a finding that overlaps with the issues discussed in Chapter 4, we learned that in three of the six start-up charter schools discussed in this chapter, the principals used their personal and professional connections to garner private

financial and in-kind resources for their schools. These leaders generally wrote the charter proposals, hired the staff, and rounded up the resources required for the charter's opening, while garnering the help of key educators, community members, and donors to ensure the charter's continued success. These leaders invested a tremendous amount of time and effort into networking for their schools, while often expressing frustration that the time spent on fund raising could be better spent at the school site itself, working on curriculum, instruction, or meeting with constituents.

While no one involved in school reform could doubt the enormous degree of creativity, persistence, and determination involved in starting a charter school, the acquisition of resources—one of the most difficult tasks in starting a charter school—requires more than these personality traits. Rather, a leader's ability to garner critical financial support is often dependent on his or her connections to individuals who have resources or who know where to find them.

In two of the start-up charter schools discussed in this chapter—Heritage and Community—we found that this type of leadership was conspicuously absent; these were the same start-up charter schools that experienced serious problems in leadership turnover, both losing two principals in the first several years of operations. Not surprisingly, these two charter schools—both serving low-income communities—had some of the most serious troubles in garnering resources. In one start-up charter school, Foundation, the leadership issue was less significant, because the school had partnered with an EMO, and thus the charter's financial survival was less dependent on the networks of the school's leader. In this section, we discuss the leadership at Directions, Academic, and Shoreline charter schools.

Ken Morris, the founder of Directions High School, who was introduced in Chapter 4, was from an affluent and influential background and was a lawyer by training. He was forthright about the relationship between his personal background and his ability to get his school off the ground: "I mean, I'm able to bring certain connections to the table, I come from a relatively privileged background, and the whole legal, and the whole business connection has enabled us just to take the time to get the whole community connection." Yet even this relatively privileged educator recognized the limitations under which many start-up charter schools operate. He said, "I need to be spending time talking to families and teachers and parents, not raising money. And to me it's short-sighted to expect schools to be high quality if you don't give them the resources to plan." In addition, like many urban school districts, officials in his sponsoring district expressed concern about charter schools serving all students, particularly poor and minority students who had been the least well-served. With some irony, Morris noted that this caveat placed restrictions on the number of charter schools starting up that would be able to do so.

> The district—their approach is good because it makes sure that any charter schools that you start in the city are committed to the students who need it most. But the downside is, it's very hard to do so, and if I had been less privileged, I'm not sure I would have been able to do so. It took every ounce of energy . . . every ounce of energy that I have, and connections, and everything else. And maybe you don't need to do all the things we're doing, and all the partnerships and everything, but we think it's worth it, and I think it's tough.

In contrast to charter schools that struggle on a daily basis to meet basic educational expenses such as teacher salaries, instructional materials, and rent, Morris noted of his charter school, Directions: "In some ways it's almost . . . we have so many . . . so many resources. It's hard to know what to do. . . . And so we make sure that we don't do too many projects."

As discussed in Chapter 4, Academic Charter School had two co-directors, Scott Kent and Whitney Jefferson, who together founded the school, wrote the charter, and located the funding required to get the school running. In the beginning, neither of these former elementary school teachers had any personal networks with foundations or corporations. Instead, they canvased the low-income neighborhood in which they were hoping to start the school for resources. Through these initial efforts they secured the donation of a community center to house the school.

In addition to the acquisition of this temporary facility, Academic's co-directors also needed $200,000 in start-up funds to prove to the school district that they could get the charter off the ground. Initially, the directors successfully secured a large grant from a national corporation. As Jefferson observed, the initial grant evolved into an ongoing commitment from the bank to the school, enabling the school to secure both monetary resources and financial expertise from the corporation's executive ranks.

> We actually have one of their vice presidents serving on our board of trustees. Another way in which a traditional school won't be able to pull in people, these power-hitters . . . to serve on their board of governors to help direct fiscally and legally their organization. So we get to draw on all these private resources from a local school-type basis.

While both co-directors taught at the school initially, as the school grew they transitioned to strictly administrative roles, making the school very administrator-heavy, with a far higher administrator/teacher ratio (2:6) than most small schools have. However, Jefferson noted that he spent at least half his time fund raising and promoting the school, rather than performing more tra-

ditional principal roles. Jefferson's constant efforts at fund raising were crucial to the school's survival. As he noted, "We've been real fortunate to be able to have found the money thus far. But you know, this is a finite opportunity . . . we're not gonna always be able to find the money."

Shoreline Charter School was unusual because it was started by a business-savvy superintendent, Stuart Damon, and members of his school board. Damon brought the charter idea to his district, arguing that it would provide a vehicle to draw in students—and their funds—from outside the district, as well as provide a site where innovative instructional practices could develop. Thus, Damon was central in writing the charter, getting it approved, and securing funding for the charter through grants from local foundations. He already had powerful social networks in his local community, with legislators in Sacramento, as well as within the educational profession. Over time, however, this leader became less central in ensuring the financial success of the charter, as wealthy parents and community members took over the school's fund raising and resource gathering once the school was in operation.

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, savvy and well-connected leaders are critical to the ability of charter schools to obtain the public funds they need. It appears this same finding is true with private resources as well.

Governing Board Membership: Selection and Composition

Every charter school is required to set forth in its chartering application the structure of its governance (see Chapter 3). We found that regardless of social location or stated intentions, most charter schools selected individuals for their governing boards because of the connections, expertise, or resources these people could bring to the school. In this section we describe the process by which Directions, Heritage, Community, and Shoreline charter schools created their governing boards.

At Directions High School, the school's founder and principal, Ken Morris, selected the governing board members prior to the approval of the charter by the school district. On the board were leaders from the business, legal, political, and educational communities, many of whom were his former legal colleagues or other acquaintances. He commented on the value of his board member choices: "Basically, whenever we have an issue that relates to their area, we call them and get them involved. We will have quarterly meetings . . . it's really more whatever issues each of them represent, we use them for their expertise."

The board was responsible for school policies, school budget, resource solicitation from potential donors, and monitoring school personnel. For instance, members of the governing board with business backgrounds assisted with the school's application for non-profit corporation status. This applica-

tion process can be quite lengthy and involved. In this respect, Directions Charter School was fortunate to have legal experts on its board.

Shoreline Charter School employed a rather unique process to select its original board members from a larger group of the school's founders. Because there were a limited number of slots on the governing board and many members of the founders' group were interested, all who wanted to be on the board sat in a circle and deliberated until enough people volunteered to step down. According to founders' group members we interviewed, this process of selection ensured that the people with the most to offer in terms of expertise, resources, and connections were put on the board, because those less valued were not encouraged to stay in the circle.

In the end, Shoreline Charter School's governing board members included a physician, a successful entrepreneur, and the spouse of a school district board member. One governing board member described the school's motivation for weeding through prospective board members.

> We want people who have some education background. We want people who have some business background in terms of knowing how to run an organization that has a budget. People with some political skills. . . . So we want people who can represent various constituencies but who can represent them and bring some special skills or relationships or background.

In fact, we heard from several people connected to Shoreline Charter School about the benefits of choosing the board members based on their connections. For instance, one parent talked about the characteristics of the board members in this way:

> And there are people who were, who were recruited, who were commandeered, really, people wanted them. There was a doctor, a medical researcher, a Ph.D. scientist. There's some consultant to Fortune 500 companies who's a parent, who's still got a child in the charter, who's on there. That's what's amazing is how the quality of a group like that attracts other quality people and there's a natural evolution and a transfer of power.

The connections that the governing board members brought to the school helped the school secure not only management expertise but also ties to the businesses in which the board members worked.

At Community Charter School, governing board members were selected in similar ways, yet the selection process did not result in a board that was as well connected. The board comprised parents, members from community-

based organizations, teachers, and the principal. There were significant struggles over what exactly the functions of the governing board would be. In fact, it was not clear during the time that we studied the school what the board actually did. For example, the governing board was supposed to select and evaluate the principal each year, but according to one teacher who was on the board, "I'm not sure if they are going to set up another committee to evaluate the principal, I'm not really clear on that. We've never had to do that, so, it will be an experience." She noted that due to high staff turnover at the school, only two staff members remained who had been at the school since the beginning. "So a lot of committees do change, in terms of governance, because the board changes. And because teachers also leave, then that changes."

Thus, Community's governance structure was still emerging, and we spoke with at least one parent who thought that there was a lack of parental participation in policy matters. The principal, Darla Henderson, acknowledged the lack of clarity about the governing board's function and scope. She said, "The charter document was kind of vague in terms of the governance structure and so forth. There are different perceptions about who's making what decisions and about what the priorities of the school are or should be."

Yet, as Community struggled to garner more resources, the staff began to think about a more strategic selection process for governing board members. As one teacher noted:

> We're learning better to pull in community people as board members and advisors to help us with those other [areas of] expertise that you can't expect in any one key [person], even. So I feel we have matured. And this is our fourth year, and we're looking outward to pull in that kind of help. I think, we seem to all of us, [to be using] our connections in a way to pull in people who can contribute to the school, to be a resource to the school, to the educational area or provide in-kind contributions, hopefully in the fund-raising area.

Although the charter proposal for the Heritage Charter School stated that its governing board would be elected, the board was a selected group. Many came from the community the school served, but none at the time we visited were parents with students in the charter school. Furthermore, it was not clear to what extent parents were involved in the school at all. According to the principal, Henry Losoya, the board's task was to establish school policy while he administered the day-to-day operations. He explained the lack of parental participation on the board, noting:

> For the most part the everyday parent knows what's good for the child but . . . they don't understand a certain procedure or manner or how

to run a school. You can't run a school haphazardly; it can't be done. So that could be one of the problems if parents don't have an educational background nor the experience in school.

Yet we know that parents wanted to be more involved in the school. For instance, one parent we interviewed said she was disturbed by the composition of the board. She said the board often met at times when most parents could not attend and that many of the parents felt left out of the decisions made by the teachers and the board members. She lamented, "We were all parents with full-time jobs, none of us could have become a board member in the fashion that they were and do as much work. We just wanted to be included." She told us that at one point, tensions became so serious that she asked a mediator to come in to help negotiate between the parents and the board. After attending one session, however, no board members came to any follow-up meetings. She explained that the entire board, which "sort of seated themselves," was made up of people from the community who were educated, but, "my personal feeling is, I don't think you should have a board with just educators because, you know, then you get a perspective that's very slanted and not diverse."

Furthermore, despite the attempt by those who founded the Heritage Charter School to select a governing board composed of the best educated members of their community—a strategy that other charter schools in high-status communities employed—this did not enable Heritage to become a fiscally secure school with ample resources. In other words, the school's strong community ties did not connect it to other groups that could provide support.

At least one district official we spoke with doubted whether the school would survive without the assistance of wealthy individuals. Principal Losoya said he was aware of the school's precarious position, yet he believed that the school would produce private resources from within the community and become self-sufficient. He commented, "There may be some who don't have that access or the contacts or the people . . . someday, maybe, we can have our own basic foundation for ourselves."

Academic Charter School had several governing committees and a board of trustees. The role of the board of trustees was to ensure that the school was managed well, especially from fiscal and legal perspectives. The board of trustees also assisted with fund-raising efforts. While there were parents and teachers on other committees, only one parent and one teacher served on the board of trustees. In fact, most of the board members were high-level executives in corporations or other high-status institutions.

One of Academic's co-directors, Jefferson, said that the ability to govern the school without district interference was liberating. He observed that traditional schools would have trouble establishing a board of directors to whom

they could turn over business matters if they were connected to a school district. Yet with a charter school, he said, he was able to bring in "these power-hitters. . . . So we get to draw on all these private resources from a local school-type basis. . . . We make a decision . . . it's implemented that next day."

Foundation Elementary Charter School had a governing board with no teachers or administrators and only one parent. The governing board, which was the main policy-making body at the school, comprised mostly representatives from the educational management organization and other high-status institutions. Board members were appointed by leaders of either the EMO or the church that housed the school. Foundation's principal, Shane Damian, noted that the head of the EMO was the governing board member in charge of community and business partnerships. A governing board member, who was the representative from a nearby college, was in charge of the educational arena, that is, the curriculum, according to Damian, to "really keep us in line, academically, you know." Thus, although the school appeared to have strong community support, with parents expressing their satisfaction, there was little school community presence on the board.

Partnerships

In some cases, charter schools sought out partnerships with universities, corporations, educational management organizations, or other institutions. Often various members of these school communities utilized both strong and weak ties, as well as their own social capital, to make these connections. In other cases, particularly when the schools lacked high-status ties, the partnering organizations sought out the charter schools. Thus, we learned that all six of the charter schools formed formal and informal partnerships with foundations or other organizations. While some of these schools formed durable partnerships that proved fruitful in terms of resource acquisition, other schools flailed about, searching desperately for a connection that would stabilize the school.

As we noted, Morris, the lawyer and principal and founder of Directions High School, established a partnership with a nearby university, through which the school received its very well-equipped facility. Morris noted that the school received certain resources by being located in the university. For instance, he noted, "It's like you have student services, you have facilities that have natural collaborations . . . that enable you to do things districts never do. Aside from the fact [that] we're in a beautiful building."

The legal counsel for the school, a firm to which the founder is connected personally, also handled negotiations with the school district, fighting for what they argued was a fair revenue limit for the school (see Chapter 4). The founder planned to use this resource to appeal to the school board for additional monies.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the charter proposal for Foundation Elementary Charter School actually was written by the non-profit educational management organization, which sought out this particular community as a place to start a new charter school. This EMO brought support to the school on all levels: it paid for renovations to the building, it hired and evaluated staff, and it supplemented state funding for various educational expenses. Thus, although there appeared to be little participation in school governance on the part of teachers, administrators, or parents, it was unlikely that this school could even exist without the partnership with the EMO because the community served by the school had limited resources. The trade-off appeared to be community control for existence.

In part, the partnerships Academic Charter School formed were also the result of the school being selected by wealthy patrons, corporate sponsors, and a university. While the school's founders and co-directors initially sought support and partnerships, over time their initial connections led to additional partnerships. For instance, through its early partnerships, the school received curriculum support, its large campus, and substantial media attention. This media attention, in turn, fostered the interest of donors, further assisting the school in resource accumulation. In addition, the school was part of a national reform movement, which brought curriculum support to the school.

Jefferson said that part of the reason Academic attracted so much attention and support from wealthy patrons was the novelty of charter school reform. For example, he explained, "I have seen more people that are interested from other organizations and from institutes of higher education . . . in my first year of charter than in the 4 years that I was at my traditional school. Charter schools are given a lot more attention." As the only start-up charter school in a district where most of the other, so-called "converted" charter schools were located in wealthy communities, Academic Charter School became even more of a novelty.

The school was selected by a group of well-connected, wealthy individuals who decided they wanted to offer support to an inner-city school engaged in reform. The businessperson who donated the building to the school said his desire to improve public education emanated from his frustration with what he saw as the large, unresponsive public school system and the proliferation of private schools in this country. He sparked a collaboration among a group of powerful associates, and they decided to support the charter school.

This collaborative, made up of members of prestigious institutions, several corporate sponsors, as well as members of the entertainment industry, donated huge amounts of resources to the school. As indicated in Chapter 4, during the 1997–98 school year, 40% of Academic Charter School's total revenue came from private donations. Several members from the collaboration currently serve on the board of trustees as well.

As a result, the school received a new building, valued at several million dollars, for free. And, according to the businessperson who donated the building, more resources were to follow. He explained, "The seed gift amounted to $10 million . . . and we need about $50 million because we've got 200,000 square feet of buildings there." He planned to help the school convert some of the space into a gymnasium and expand to become a K–12 school.

The donor's collaborative established a non-profit foundation housed at a local university, to which the building was donated. As was pointed out in Chapter 4, the charter paid the foundation a nominal rent per year for it. Therefore, the school did not own the building, which meant it avoided some of the maintenance and liability costs associated with ownership. Gifts to the school also were filtered through this foundation.

Meanwhile, parents of Academic students were required to donate 3 hours of volunteer work a month to the school, but the parents did not provide the school with the types of monetary or material resources that the schools partners provided.

While most schools in our sample had some degree of parental participation, this participation yielded different results. Parental volunteerism on the part of high-status parents, such as those at Shoreline, connected the school even more to resources in the business community. Working-class and poor parents, however, did not have access to these communities and thus contributed more hands-on work—for example, cleaning and maintenance or classroom assistance—to Academic, Heritage, and Community charter schools. It was these schools that were much more reliant on partnerships with larger institutions and outside donors for survival. In the next section, we examine the use of fund raisers and grant writing.

Grant Writing and Fund Raising

Efforts were made by several schools to generate funds through grants or fund raising. We found that while some schools received substantial supplementary funds through these efforts, others were less well-endowed. In particular, we learned a great deal about these activities at Directions, Foundation, Shoreline, Heritage, and Academic charter schools.

At Directions, the charter school's partnership with a private university brought it many of the resources it needed. As noted, the main benefit of the partnership was the school's facility. In addition, a new building was being renovated for the school to use. While most charter schools would have to cover these capital costs themselves, Directions' principal noted, "It's also nice that we don't really have to fund raise to do it. The [university] is doing it."

Similarly, Foundation Elementary Charter School benefited from the resources it received from its partnership with an EMO, especially in the area

of capital improvements. Thus, leadership at this school did not yet feel the need to write grant proposals. For instance, the principal said, "We don't have the private grants and things we want yet. [The EMO] is funding the initial start-up for us right now."

Shoreline Charter School, on the other hand, utilized parents—most of whom were highly educated and possessed a great deal of social capital—for important tasks such as grant writing. These grant-writing parents were quite successful. In fact, the grants the school secured provided everything from business services to technology. For example, a governing board member was employed by a prestigious computer corporation that made computer hardware available to schools through a competitive grant process. This particular governing board member evaluated the grant proposals for this program. In fact, he noted that he actually "put together" the team of people at the company who reviewed the proposals. And while he removed himself from the evaluation of the charter school's application, his insider status certainly did not hurt the charter school's chances. Not surprisingly, Shoreline Charter School did receive one of these grants, which paid for many of the school's computers.

Indeed, Shoreline Charter School's impressive array of computer hardware, software, and technical support was testimony to this governing board member's facilitation. According to a district administrator, the charter school had more resources than traditional schools in the district, perhaps more than they needed. She commented, "They definitely have a lot more equipment than our regular schools do . . . computers, they're networked. It's gotten to the point now that the donations are not helpful at all. Their equipment is so new, and most of the donated things can't even be used."

In addition to the strong ties that the Shoreline Charter School parents possessed, the school was intimately connected with the district, which also helped in the area of grant writing and fund raising. Several people who were involved in the school were also well connected to—and sometimes married to—people in the district administration or the school board. The Shoreline superintendent and a district school board member collaborated to write the charter proposal. They also secured grants in excess of $100,000 to help start the school. Interestingly enough, a school board member observed that the charter school improved the overall image of the district to potential donors. She said that the charter school was the reason "we got the attention of the business community." She added that some district-wide grants had come in "because the charter was . . . a trusted commodity by grantors." She said that the district as a whole was seen as a "quality district," and the charter had become further evidence of that to the outside community.

Meanwhile, impoverished Heritage Charter School was in desperate need of the resources grants and fund raisers could bring. Yet the school had lim-

ited success in this area. This charter school was started by a founders' group, some of whom were connected via a community-based organization. Indeed, several individuals from this founders' group were actively involved in the school. One, in particular, took a leave from her job for several months to serve as the school's principal when it needed one unexpectedly.

The founders' group, which was funded in part through support from the community-based organization, in turn helped to launch the charter. One founder noted, "In one way we were more fortunate than other groups trying to start charter schools. We had resources in the beginning . . . a $25,000 start-up . . . [to] buy our copier, buy our fax . . . coffee maker."

Although the school was indeed fortunate to receive the start-up money, by its second year of operation it faced severe financial difficulty. Due to an error in record keeping, it was found to owe the district close to $70,000 mistakenly received when the school overestimated its student enrollment. The school, however, did not have anyone with either the time or the business acumen needed to handle financial affairs. It contracted out with a private financial manager, but one district official argued that this contractor overcharged the charter school for the services.

Despite these hardships, Losoya, Heritage's principal, was optimistic about the possibilities.

> But with charter schools we can . . . get grants and we can go to private foundations and businesses and we can solicit for money. We can get entrepreneurship. You know, to increase the level of funding . . . , for example, if . . . [the school] was getting, let's say, $3,500 per child from the district. If that's all we had, we could do education at a bare minimum. . . . Just the basics. The bare bones. . . . But if you go beyond that, we can get grants, donations, foundations, etc. . . . And once we get that in we can determine what the students need in order to achieve their potential.

Yet even as he was optimistic, he remained cognizant of the school community's lack of available networks. He noted: "You've gotta have people. You've gotta have a goal. You've gotta have a mission. You have to have community and state support. You have to have all of that. . . . People. Resources. Things we don't have right now."

In fact, his role as school principal was multifaceted by necessity. During one of our visits, he had to climb through the heating ducts in an effort to repair a broken heater. (When he was unable to fix the heater, he and other governing board members sat bundled in overcoats, shivering during their meeting that night.)

Losoya described his duties as follows:

> Due to short-handedness, I suppose, and that we are a new school, I'm doing a lot. . . . I mean I'm a secretary, I'm a [receptionist], I'm a cook, I'm a janitor, so believe me there's a difference. I try to do . . . the computer. I'm doing everything. I'm writing grants. I go out and do PR.

Meanwhile, a teacher at Heritage reflected on all the problems associated with the poverty of the school.

> Our biggest challenge right now is finding a site. This is not a good area. It isn't. We need to find a site that's safer for our students, plus we need our own gym. We need to meet those needs for the students as well as, we need to work on a lot of things. Our problem now is . . . we are so limited with money, and people are literally betting on us closing. It's kind of hard, but we're hoping that some rich, wealthy person will say, Hey, I'll give you a couple of million dollars. And then at least some of our challenges will be met and settled, and somehow, it doesn't look like it.

What this Heritage teacher did not know was that this is what happened to Academic Charter School. Indeed, as we noted, while Academic also served poor students of color, it was in far better financial shape than Heritage or Community because it had received numerous private donations. In addition to the support that Academic received from wealthy donors and corporations, foundations were also interested in supporting this "inner-city" charter school. Potential donors were given tours of the school, after which they often volunteered to fulfill a need. Describing the touring, a parent remarked:

> Now this is a big tour and they see all of this and then the potentials in it. And most times, they do give us something. We've had, we've gotten money from, [donors] who gave us $25,000 to put carpet on the floors . . . To as much as, anonymous donors who have given us a million dollars over 4 years.

The connections the original contributors had to other potential donors helped to keep the school financially supported through significant donations.

At Community Charter School, there was no time or staff to pursue grants and fund raising. Some teachers and former directors were successful at attracting small grants from corporations and foundations. But, overall, Community Charter School, like Heritage, was greatly in need of resources. One teacher

discussed the importance of attracting people to the charter school who could use personal connections to get desperately needed resources. She said:

> You really need people who are very familiar with fund raising and looking for that money. And sometimes you just—who has the time to do that. You have to hire people who are actually proposal grant writers who are familiar with the system, so that means you have to have money for that particular grant writer . . . there have been donations here and there but not to that great extent.

Thus, in some instances, the charter schools did not need to exert much effort on fund-raising and grant-writing tasks because of the connections they had to those who had the money. In other schools, the staff and community were desperate for resources, but due to heavy workloads and social locations, they did not have the time, expertise, or connections to raise the amounts of money they needed.

Parental and In-Kind Support

We found that many of the start-up charter schools in our study benefited greatly from high levels of parent involvement. In most of the schools we visited, parents donated significant amounts of time and effort to the schools and provided both classroom and administrative assistance. In fact, four of the six charter schools discussed in this chapter had mandatory parent contracts that required parents to spend a minimum number of hours volunteering at the school. Yet we also found that the types of resources and support parents were able to provide varied dramatically across communities. Generally, charter schools in high-status communities were able to draw on the abilities and expertise of professional parents who were highly skilled in grant writing or teaching courses. Meanwhile, charter schools in low-status communities had parents whose involvement in the school more often consisted of performing unskilled tasks related to grounds keeping and maintenance. If these poorer parents were involved in fund-raising activities at all, they tended to seek small donations from local businesses. In this section, we look at parental support in Shoreline, Heritage, Community, and Academic charter schools because of the contrasts within this group of schools.

Shoreline Charter School required a high level of involvement from its parents. The parental-involvement contract, which parents had to sign before their children enrolled in the school, specified that parents must volunteer 80 hours per school year for one child and 120 hours per school year for more than one child. As noted, this school served mostly children of professional parents—doctors, lawyers, university professors, computer scientists, and so forth—and these parents frequently fulfilled their contract requirements by

teaching, for example, courses in genetics, math, music, or foreign languages. One teacher described the parent-involvement program, noting that it provided pro bono expertise that most public schools could not afford.

> I have a couple parents who have just been godsent. One is an amateur astronomer. She has her degree in physics and she does computers now. . . . She did our Mars webpage. . . . One of the founding parents . . . has a microbiology background. . . . She brought in all her lab equipment. [Another parent] taught . . . an advanced math class for 3 years. I didn't have to deal [with it] at all. He and I met, and he taught me a ton. A lot of what I do now and how I approach my mathematics curriculum is because of [that parent's] influence.

Not only did many of these parents use their expertise to help the school, but as high-level professionals, many of them had more control over their schedules, allowing them to donate time during school hours. One parent, who was also a member of the governing board, noted:

> We are fortunate enough that . . . most of our community is affluent enough that there are parents who either are working but are in a high enough position where they have flexibility or parents who don't have to work full time or who have flexible hours because they are self-employed who can make themselves more available than would happen in a district where the people were not so affluent.

Shoreline's parents also served as liaisons between the school and various local corporations (often where they were employed) or donated other kinds of services such as catering or construction services. And, as mentioned earlier, many parents helped write or evaluate grants.

At Heritage Charter School, where there were no parent contracts or volunteer requirements, parents donated time and expertise to the degree they could. However, they were not able to satisfy their school's tremendous resource needs. Parents who had the time to donate did so most often as classroom volunteers, acting as tutors and classroom aides. Yet, as one parent noted:

> Our families aren't in that economic bracket where one parent can work and the other one doesn't have to. We do have a few parents that are here during the day, . . . and those parents are not necessarily from wealthy families, some of them have very low incomes but they're able to come volunteer and still secure their income. But I just feel like, we don't have the time to really become part of the school because we have to work during the day.

Thus, while parents and their contributions were valued at Heritage, there were cultural and socioeconomic barriers that prevented meaningful involvement. In addition, some parents felt intimidated by the prospect of being involved. One parent commented on this phenomenon.

> We need to make parents aware that they have that option and then more aware of how important it is to take that option. . . . I don't think we have a group of parents that are used to thinking of themselves as making a difference in the school if they're there. We are primarily a working-class economic bracket where you don't even think of yourself as a potential educator or tutor. We don't think of ourselves that way, so we don't think that we'd be valuable in the classroom.

Meanwhile, Heritage's teachers attempted to satisfy the school's tremendous resource needs by donating their own resources; one teacher mentioned that the teachers often bought food to feed students who came to school hungry. According to Principal Losoya: "For the most part we clean our own rooms and that type of stuff. We don't have a cook. We don't even have a lunch program. So, at first we were taking out of our own pockets to go and buy food to make sandwiches for the kids." Some parents, the principal noted, had written small food service grants for the school in recent years and had gotten some food donated to the school.

Community Charter School, located in the same impoverished school district as Heritage, faced many of the same problems in terms of obtaining the kind of parent volunteerism and donations that Shoreline had. Parents at Community Charter School were required to volunteer at the school 4 hours per month, and the parents had donated a great deal of time to the school in terms of cleaning and maintaining the physical plant, installing sidewalks, and performing janitorial tasks. Yet there was a clear need at this school for more large-scale fund raising that charter schools like Shoreline do through their parents' networks and support.

Community Charter School took advantage of some of the cultural resources in its community and had volunteers come in and teach a variety of courses, including art, history, and literature. Generally, however, this charter school had been struggling financially since it first opened. This strain, as Principal Henderson described it, prevented teachers from utilizing parent time in a more effective way.

> One of the problems that we have had here is that we are a start-up school, and you know, we have had very little support. We have really [gone] from crises to crises, and a lot of our time has been spent

putting out fires rather than moving ahead. And one of the ways that we haven't been able to really reach out is to reach out to parents as much as we would like to.

At Academic Charter, in-kind donations were a large component of the charter's operation. However, as described earlier, most of these donations were from corporations, and not the local community, which was fairly poor. Like many other charter schools, parents at Academic were required to volunteer at the school a minimum of 3 hours per month, and like at Community, at Academic this involvement often took the form of grounds keeping and janitorial services, such as cleaning. Some parents, however, helped the school solicit local organizations and businesses for funds, and several led tours around the campus for prospective funders. But the parents at Academic Charter School clearly lack the connections to major corporations and donors that Shoreline parents have.

Parents at Academic Charter School, like at Heritage and Community, found it difficult to volunteer often, because they had less flexibility in their work schedules to come and help out at the school during the day. Yet, as one Academic parent described, some parents found ways to volunteer despite this difficulty.

> You know, there is a certain group who come in the morning who work with breakfast and the clean-up after breakfast and those are the ones I feel who have time in that early morning to do that. We have one parent who finds time to go and buy the things that we need for the after-school children. . . . We have parents who will come and just help. Like, for example, my wife . . . she will come once a week and she usually goes down to the primary office, and helps straighten up things there, orders supplies that they need for their supply room.

These disparities in access to private resources also exist in non-charter schools, as the amount of resources any school receives is often dependent on the type of community—poor or affluent—it serves. However, we found that such disparities in resources are magnified in start-up charter schools, which are, as other researchers have documented, particularly resource-needy (see Chapter 4, this volume; RPP International, 1997).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we observed the spectrum of activities in which charter school communities engaged in order to gain the private resources they needed to thrive,

we saw vast inequities emerging across schools. While inequality is not unique to charter school reform, what is unusual is the exclusivity and isolation developing across many charter school communities located in wealthy and poor neighborhoods, even as these schools are joined under the same umbrella of charter school reform. The networks in these communities—and the types of social or economic capital these networks provide for schools—enable some schools to maintain or create their privilege, while other schools fall even further behind.

Furthermore, charter school reform is unique in that it leaves partially "publicly funded" schools starved for resources to pay for fundamental things, such as buildings and equipment. At every start-up school we visited, respondents called for more start-up funding from the federal and state governments and individual schools districts. All start-up charter schools need a tremendous amount of resources.

Thus, charter schools exist within a policy framework that leaves them no choice but to scramble for private resources. We have witnessed the tremendous disparity in the resources gathered between charter schools that begin in low-status communities versus charter schools that are started by more privileged and powerful individuals and serve more diverse communities. We worry that many well-intentioned educational reformers have embraced the potential of charter school reform while forgetting the resource inequities that the reform fails to address (Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999). Due to decades of public neglect, many California schools are racially, politically, economically, and socially isolated, literally cut off from networking opportunities. Charter school reform in such communities means either starting a school that lacks many fundamental resources or partnering with an outside organization that may or may not allow low-income parents and students to have a great deal of voice in how the school is run.

We suggest that if policy makers, school district officials, educational practitioners, and researchers want to redress the inequalities we saw emerging from charter school reform as it currently is constructed, they consider our recommendations. First, we suggest that start-up funds be targeted to charter schools in high-poverty communities—for example, schools in which most students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and/or Title I funding. Furthermore, these start-up funds should come in grants, not loans. At the same time, community-based, as opposed to EMO-founded and run, charter schools should be given priority in receiving these grants. In other words, this money should be used to fund truly grassroots charter schools as opposed to those run by either for-profit corporations or other non-profit educational service providers.

Second, district officials should ensure that charter schools in poor communities are made aware of the public and private resources for which they

may qualify. Technical assistance should be offered to these communities, which may not have the connections or expertise needed to apply for such resources.

Finally, policy makers, practitioners, and researchers must wrestle with the implications that the blurring of private and public spheres might have for the future of public education. Further research could shed light on how one of the central arguments for charter schools—creating innovative learning environments that also empower communities—is circumscribed by schools' access to resources, both public and private. Start-up charter schools, due to their smaller size and other constraints, are unable to subsist on public monies alone. Facing this reality means accepting that charter school reform is part of the trend toward privatization in public education (Wells & Scott, 1999).

Related to this issue, researchers and policy makers should consider the relationship between resource inequity and the proliferation of educational management organizations in charter school reform. There are myriad implications of the growing involvement of EMOs in public school management. Thus far, the research on EMOs by outside evaluators is still emerging (see Richards, Shore, & Sawicky, 1996), but it has raised serious questions about accountability, effectiveness, access, and equity (Miron, 2000; Toch, 1998; Winerip, 1998).

Clearly, the successful implementation of charter school reform requires heavy reliance on private resources and the private sector. While we have provided an initial look at one aspect of this trend, further research is needed to document the various forms privatization can take, and what the effects will be on *all* school environments.

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