

LOCALLY ELECTED SCHOOL BOARDS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS:
NAVIGATING SUSTAINABILITY OF THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

JOHANNA P. HANLEY

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth DeBray)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the Los Angeles Unified School District and the intersection of its school board, charter schools, and threats to district fiscal and political sustainability. The purpose of this study is to provide greater insight into the complex nuances of charter school proliferation in LAUSD, effects on the school board, and the increasing influence of intermediary organizations in educational policy and politics. This research builds upon decades of scholarship on LAUSD, its locally elected school board, institutional change, external actors, and local political dynamics. This study aims to begin to fill the gap of research on district sustainability, particularly in relation to the relatively newer role of charters in educating students.

Using a qualitative case study approach, collected data included from interviews, observations, and documents. Qualitative coding methodology was employed for analysis. Findings provide greater insight into challenges felt by LAUSD school board members, district officials, and external actors. The perspectives of district and local leaders on the fiscal and political sustainability of LAUSD are central to the findings, and provide evidence that charter

schools have challenged the fiscal and political sustainability of LAUSD, but other factors, such as ballooning pension and healthcare benefits and declining student enrollment, present more dire fiscal threats. Finally, this study develops an emerging framework including three key principles for fiscal and political sustainability in LAUSD: 1) long-term solutions; 2) leadership stability; and 3) transparency. Implications of more contested factors of sustainability are also explored. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How has the California Charter School Act of 1992 changed over time through the legislative amendment process?
2. Which amendments to the California Charter School Act from 1992 through 2019 affect the sustainability of traditional public schools (specifically the Los Angeles Unified School District)? How does the California charter law relate to district sustainability from the perspective of LAUSD school board members? From the perspective of intermediary organizations and their backers involved with the board?
3. How can data from this study contribute to the development of an emerging active sustainability framework for traditional public school districts and their decision makers?

INDEX WORDS: Los Angeles Unified School District, fiscal and political sustainability, charter schools, intermediary organizations, educational policy, politics of education

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JOHANNA P. HANLEY

BA, Union College, 2010

MEd, University of Virginia, 2015

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JOHANNA P. HANLEY

Major Professor:	Elizabeth DeBray
Committee:	John Dayton
	Amy Stich
	Brian Williams

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2023

DEDICATION

To my husband, Henry. Thank you for your unwavering love and belief in me. I am grateful every moment to be on this adventure together with you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Locally elected school boards (LESBs) have governed traditional public school districts in the United States for over a century, yet until more recently, they have existed as what Danzberger, et al. (1987) called “the forgotten players on the education team.” School board elections have traditionally been held off-cycle from federal elections, have low voter turnout and campaign spending (Kirst & Wirt, 2009); however, campaign spending and outsider involvement has risen dramatically in certain cases over the past two decades (primarily in large urban school districts) (Henig, Jacobsen, & Reckhow, 2019). This intensified attention to school boards has prompted questions of what their role should be and whether they are failing or not (Alsbury, 2018; Kogan, 2022; White, Stitzlein, Abowitz, Gottlieb, & Schneider, 2023). White, et al. (2023) point out that although school are in need of reform, that “flaws aren’t failure.” Schneider and Berkshire (2020) expand on the shortcomings but importance of school boards:

Consider elected school boards: imperfect though they are, the democratic process allows voters to hold them accountable for the success of the local schools. Such governance structures inhibit the freedom and autonomy of individuals to do as they wish, but they do so in service of the common good, as defined and enacted by ordinary citizens. (pp.6-7)

Charter schools, publicly-funded schools that are given greater autonomy and independence than traditional public schools, have only been part of the education landscape for thirty years, but have proven a sticky addition to public education, particularly in urban school districts. Consequently, those districts have had to evolve as

the charter sector has—with state charter laws playing a role in shaping requirements for school boards and a factor in the involvement of intermediary organizations (IOs) in education. Studies on the effectiveness of charter schools for student achievement compared with traditional public schools have been mixed and depend on location. The most recent National Charter School Study report from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University provided evidence of overall growth in math and reading for students in charters compared with their peers in traditional public schools (TPS). Of 31 states included in the study (including New York City and Washington, DC), only 3 states showed weaker growth in math compared with TPS students, and one state for reading (Raymond, Woodworth, Lee, & Bachofer, 2023, June 19). In California, Raymond, Mumma, and West (2018, September) found that urban area charters do better in terms of academic growth for “traditionally lower performing student groups,” (i.e., students from economically disadvantaged homes, and especially Black and Latino students) but less insight was found in regards to the effects of charter growth on TPS.

The LAUSD school board serves as the primary policy and decision-making body for a large portfolio of school choice options, including their traditional public schools, magnet schools, and charter schools (and more). LAUSD has the unique distinction of having the largest percentage of district students attending charter schools—approximately 20 percent. In addition to school funding, this also has a substantial effect on the district’s political dynamics and ecology (Scott, DeBray, Lubienski, Hanley, Castillo, & Hedges, 2019; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Navigating these dynamics has proved incredibly challenging.

Many school boards and their districts have had to learn how to coexist with charters while simultaneously authorizing and overseeing them. This complex relationship is affected by various factors including the state charter law, local political dynamics, and the involvement of IOs. This is acutely the case of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest U.S. public school district. The intermediary organization (IO) sector in L.A. is a highly complex network with differing agendas, funding sources, and connections. Examples include the UTLA, an accumulation of local and national think tanks, nonprofits, charter management organizations (CMOs), and philanthropic foundations—organizations operating outside of government (e.g. outside LAUSD and California state government for the purpose of this study) with increasing power to influence the production and dissemination of research evidence, and shape the political and policy environment (Brand, 2015, September 27; Lubienski, Scott, & DeBray, 2011; DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar, 2014; Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Tseng, 2012). An extremely charged political environment permeates every action particularly between charter- and traditional public school (TPS)-supporters (Scott, DeBray, Lubienski, Hanley, Hedges, & Castillo, 2018). Countless market-based reforms over time have contributed to this system of increasingly diverse actors who influence and shape policy in LAUSD (Marsh, 2016). All of these factors contribute to a vast and complex policy network—making it difficult to distinguish who sets the education agenda, who implements policy, who exerts the most power and influence over it, and how this affects LAUSD students (Scott, et al., 2018). The California state education politics, California charter law, and ongoing local fiscal issues in LAUSD also play a role.

For decades, LAUSD has projected impending budget deficits and fiscal collapse. Rising healthcare benefits and pension costs, declining student enrollment, charter school expansion, failures to adapt district fixed and variable costs to changes, unfulfilled state funding, and inefficient uses of funding (e.g., facilities usage) have all been proclaimed as contributing factors to this deficit (Lafer, 2017; Marsh, 2016; MGT, 2016). The district's sluggishness to respond to changes and challenges is not necessarily a surprise—it is well known for its vast and unwieldy bureaucracy, despite decades of efforts to decentralize and create and maintain institutional change (Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger, & Clayton, 2008; Marsh, 2016; Reckhow, 2013). The persistent decline in student enrollment is partially attributed to charter school expansion and resulting student mobility, and mobility to private schools or different districts altogether (Marsh, 2016; MGT, 2016).

An argument could also be made that charter school proliferation is one of the only “successful” educational reforms to challenge the behemoth bureaucracy of LAUSD to make some positive changes toward sustainability. This has been one factor to push the Board to consider its role differently, and has put district spending under a closer microscope by attracting greater IO involvement in education and Board elections. LAUSD has long provided examples of how political rhetoric can obfuscate the real issues. The rhetoric between the charter organizations and UTLA has been especially acrimonious. Charter schools have been used as a point of argument used by the UTLA to challenge and question the Board's commitment to district sustainability. Both the district and UTLA leaders have appeared to be arguing and bargaining for greater long-term

sustainability of the district, but their approaches differ, which harkens back to the fundamental disagreements over problems and therefore solutions.

Background of the Study

School Choice Context and Policy Change in Los Angeles, 1990s-Present

Choice in education has been part of the reform conversation in Los Angeles since at least 1967, when it was included as a key part of a reform strategy (along with decentralization, standards, and grassroots participation) (Kerchner et al., 2008). In the 1967 strategy report, variety and choice in education meant opportunity to “experiment with different types of construction, building plans, room size and equipment ... new approaches to scheduling and curriculum, new teaching methods and experience” (Hamerman, 1967, p. 251; as quoted in Kerchner et al., 2008, p. 238). Model schools, magnet schools, and other options have been part of LAUSD’s choice offerings for decades, and the different offerings continue to expand. In 1976, a California Supreme Court issued desegregation order led to the creation of Permits with Transportation (PWT), a voluntary integration program of magnet schools and intradistrict transfers, which has since been a significant piece of LAUSD’s choice offerings (Kerchner et al., 2008; LAUSD, 2018a).

On September 22, 1992, California Governor Pete Wilson sign SB 1448, the Charter School Act of 1992—the second charter school law passed in the U.S. In 1993, the Charter Schools Division of LAUSD was created to monitor compliance in operations of the district’s charter schools; their primary responsibilities include petition evaluation, oversight, and renewal of charter schools in LAUSD (Kerchner et al., 2008). Also, in 1993, the Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now (LEARN) initiative

was launched to “empower local actors and increase school autonomy” (Marsh, 2016, p. 14) and advance decentralization efforts (Kerchner et al., 2008). The Annenberg Challenge started the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP), with over \$103 million donated by Annenberg and local matching funds to foster similar efforts as LEARN. It is important to note both LEARN and LAAMP lived a “mostly separate existence from the charter school movement,” however, the timing of their operation with the beginnings of the charter school movement and other factors proved a foundation for the future mass charter school expansion the district would experience over the following two decades (Kerchner, et al., 2008). It was no secret that choice was endorsed by LEARN programs and officials.

In 1998, the charter law was amended to allowed for unlimited charter expansion, which led to an increase in large charter management organizations (CMOs) opening multiple school networks in L.A. (Clough, 2016). By the end of the 1990s/early 2000s, both LEARN and LAAMP had faded out. Kerchner et al. (2008) asserted that those studying Los Angeles education can view LEARN, LAAMP, and other reforms of the 1990s either as failed projects, or “part of a still-incomplete process of institutional change” (p. 17). School choice more broadly can also be viewed this way—it hasn’t (yet) proven the great panacea of equity and improvement of student achievement its supporters may claim; however, it is generally agreed upon that it has fundamentally changed the school district and is likely not just another cycle of education reform. Today, LAUSD functions as “both a traditional school system and a choice-based system, which means ANY and EVERY student can attend their neighborhood school OR apply to schools of choice that offer specialized programs within the district” (LAUSD, 2018c).

L.A. Unified and Sustainability Challenges (2015-2019)

The fiscal and political sustainability situation for LAUSD is a multifaceted challenge. This study revealed that while charter schools often dominate much of the public conversation over education in Los Angeles, they play only a minor role in the district's fiscal situation. There are fundamental disagreements across union, district, and charter leaders over what challenges LAUSD faces and the most promising solutions. The resulting political dynamics and infighting present one of the greatest threats to the district's long-term existence, and detract from policymakers' abilities to put students at the center of the decision-making process. This case study of LAUSD contributed to the broader debates over the purpose of public education and the role of choice in the U.S. education system.

As several interview participants described, the LAUSD budget process is not always clear to the public: "School districts are really good at not being totally transparent with what the budget dollars are" (Personal communication, August 29, 2018). There are three measurable examples of drains on LAUSD's fiscal health (as mentioned by most interview participants): (1) special education funding; (2) employee healthcare; and (3) retirement benefits. A former LAUSD official and current Education Program Officer for a foundation, spoke to the implications of these three fiscal issues:

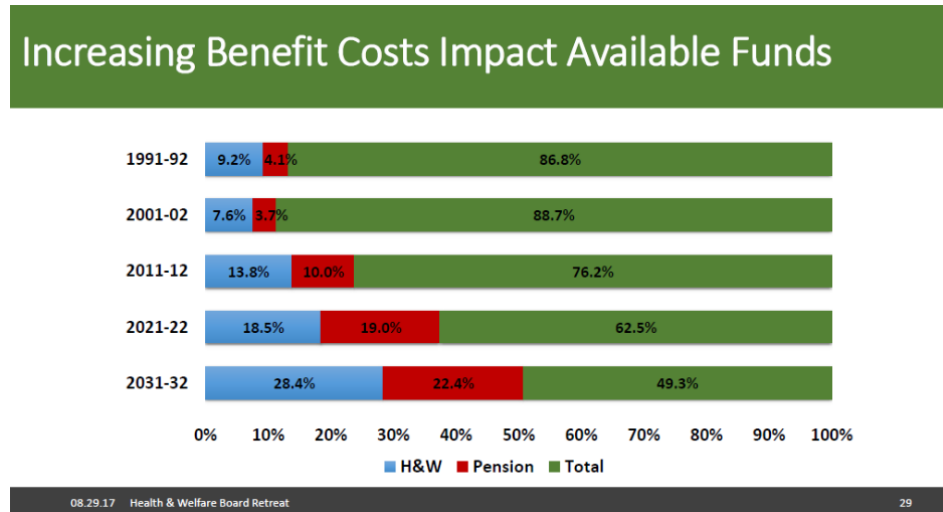
Special ed is a huge cost to the district. It's not covered by the federal funds that the state receives. And while the charter schools are serving a growing special ed population, they're not serving the higher cost incidences. So, the district is serving those populations. The cost keeps coming up and as your enrollment changes and your enrollment declines, it starts to eat much more of your general fund costs. And then the second factor, I feel continues to be the healthcare piece. We don't pay anything for healthcare and the district employees don't pay anything. Everybody knows the cost of healthcare is escalating and the premiums go up. There's no negotiation on that. And then the third one continues to be the

retirement piece. We were a district of 800,000 students, 15 years ago, [and] it was a larger employee population. Today we're a district of about 500,000 students. So, your revenue base has shrunk, but you're obligated to pay for a retirement base that at one time was 800,000 students. Even if you're cutting people and you're shrinking your functioning and your numbers, you're still obligated for people that were on your payrolls years ago. So that's a dynamic that is also factoring into all of this. And those are structural issues. My belief is that at some point the state is going to have to come in and correct some of this stuff and it's not just this L.A. Unified problem. This is a statewide problem. (Personal communication, August 29, 2018)

Charter school expansion is not solely to blame for why these three factors are persistent issues for the LAUSD budget, but it does play a role. Chad Aldeman, an expert on teacher pensions and benefits, described the future outlook for LAUSD's benefits situation "alarming" (Aldeman, 2017, August 31; Favot, 2017, December 20). The figure below shows the projected portion of LAUSD's budget that will go to teacher benefits and pensions. It was part of a slide deck presented to the board by the LAUSD Chief Financial Officer at the August 2017 board meeting (but this deck can no longer be found on the LAUSD website). H&W stands for health and welfare. This slide shows us that the CFO was projecting that approximately half of LAUSD's annual budget would be allocated to pension and health benefits by 2031-2032.

Figure 1.

LAUSD projected benefit costs and impact to available funds



Source: <https://www.teACHERPENSIONS.org/blog/los-angeles-benefit-costs-are-eating-school-districts-budget>

Student population decline is also a critical challenge for the district, and is exacerbated by charter expansion when students move from an LAUSD TPS to a charter within the district. One board member affirmed that declining student enrollment is one major sustainability problem facing the district:

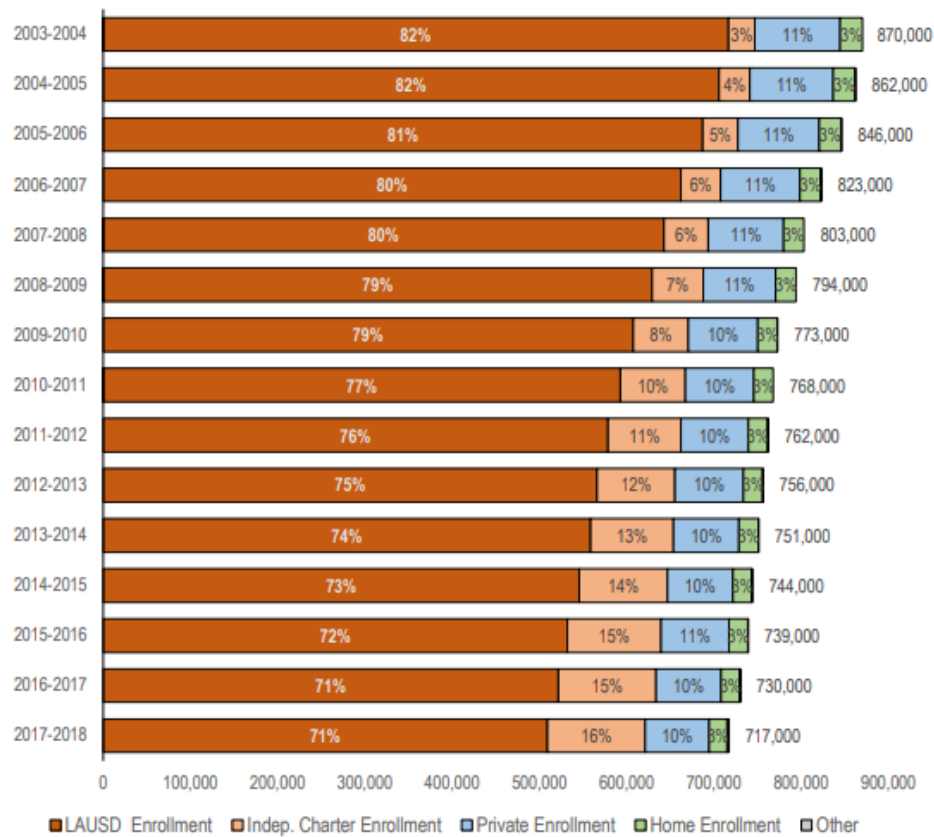
And [enrollment] has steadily gone down across the district, but it has slightly gone up in charter schools. And so, the impetus for charters was to [incubate] great ideas. And if there are things that are successful in terms of recruitment retention, marketing, whatever it is, family relationships or obligations potentially, some of that should be lessons that we're taking on or at least considering. We haven't yet had a team really dedicated to addressing the historical declining enrollment in the district. All of it plays into our physical instability. (Personal communication, December 22, 2021)

In 2019, the LAUSD Independent Analysis Unit (IAU) put out a comprehensive report on student enrollment decline. From the report, Figure 2 shows the student enrollment change within the LAUSD district boundary between 2003 and 2018 and delineates by the percentage share by school provider (e.g., LAUSD traditional public schools,

independent charter schools, private, and home). The share of students attending the traditional public schools steadily decreases from 82 percent to 71 percent, while the share of independent charter enrollment increases from three percent to sixteen percent (Thomas & Ganon, 2019).

Figure 2.

Student enrollment in LAUSD boundary (2003-2018), total and percentage enrollment share by school provider



Sources: LAUSD District-operated and charter enrollment from California Department of Education 2018, Data Reporting Office, Enrollment by School data files; private school enrollment from California Department of Education 2018, Private School Directory 2017-2018; home school enrollment estimates from National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts: Homeschooling

One observation the IAU report noted was that student enrollment losses within LAUSD traditional public schools were always greater than the charter school enrollment growth.

Therefore, students leaving district-operated schools were both switching to charter schools and left the district altogether (Thomas & Ganon, 2019).

Charter school expansion has also had an effect on the role of the LAUSD board by adding the charge of charter authorizer to their already immense responsibilities. This has been exemplified by recent board elections and how campaign fundraising and the portrayal of candidates is demarcated by union-backed and charter-backed (Blume, 2020, November 4; Burke, 2020, February 26; Kuznia, 2017, June 8). And that reputation follows the winning candidate to the board—dividing the board itself. There is evidence that IOs behave differently and shift strategies depending upon the ratio of charter-backed and union-backed (or charter skeptical) members. For example, one L.A.-based reporter described a case when the board stood at a 4-3 majority and charter IOs “essentially creat[ed] a crisis that did not necessarily have to exist,” related to charter reauthorizations; instead of using backchannels to work through the issue, they aimed to make a larger, more public point. This reporter didn’t believe the charter IOs would have done that if the board majority had been flipped (Personal communication, November 16, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Charter schools have been an increasing part of the U.S. public educational system for over 30 years now. Studies have been conducted on the outcomes of students attending charter schools compared with those attending TPS, however, there is less research on the long-term effects of charters on TPS districts, and more specifically, the role charter laws can play in TPS district sustainability. In LAUSD, there have been fiscal challenges for decades and charter expansion appears to play a role in exacerbating this,

but there are other sustainability factors for the district that likely threaten its long-term health more. How the district spends, variations with changes in leadership, and political trends must be better understood to ensure stability and minimize negative effects on students.

Coinciding with charter expansion in LAUSD, school board elections have increasingly attracted much greater attention and spending. After years of trying to work with the LAUSD board, IOs decided to either work around the board (through charters and other tactics) or spend millions of dollars to get “their” candidate elected to the board (Kerchner, et al., 2008). As a result, questions arise as to how beholden board members are to their backers and how this affects their decision-making. There were numerous controversies in the 2015 board election which ousted one union-backed incumbent in favor of a charter-backed challenger (Ref Rodriguez), re-elected George McKenna (union-backed), and Scott Schmerelson ousted Tamar Galatzan to take another union-backed board seat (Ballotpedia, 2015). In the 2017 board election, approximately \$15 million was spent, with most funding coming from outside influencers backing pro-charter school candidates—an unprecedented amount for any locally elected school board (LESB) election in U.S. history (Blume & Poston, 2017). Additionally, this election marked a swing in the board to a majority of members considered pro-charter and not backed by the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), the strong local teachers union. Prior to the election, the Board had displayed a toughening stance on charter schools regarding accountability and authorization (Lafer, 2017). The board elections in 2019 and 2020 followed a similar playbook and charter politics were clearly at the forefront again (Ballotpedia, 2019; Ballotpedia 2020; Burke, 2020, February 26).

It is not enough for policymakers to consider only whether something can last—they must also consider policies and initiatives that “can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000, p. 32). Local and state-level IOs must consider long-term outcomes of funding and advocacy choices and demands that may hinder the ability of the board and district officials to promote the institutionalization of effective reforms. As Cuban (1990) advises, “Reforms do return again, again, and again. Not exactly as before or under the same conditions, but they persist” (p. 11). We must do better to understand why so as not to repeat past mistakes—to ensure that changes that lead to improvement, instead of defeating it, will endure (Hargreaves, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

Contemporary elected school boards face many competing dynamics and challenges beyond running a school district. In LAUSD, the expansion of charter schools and increasing involvement of IOs in education have in ways further complicated the board’s responsibilities. The purpose of this study was to investigate how this large urban elected school board considers its own sustainability and works to ensure it. This study focuses on 2014-2019: from a point of peak political tensions between charters and traditional public schools in Los Angeles to the Fall 2019 signing of the latest CA state charter amendments into law.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. How has the California Charter School Act of 1992 changed over time through the legislative amendment process?

2. Which amendments to the California Charter School Act from 1992 through 2019 affect the sustainability of traditional public schools (specifically the Los Angeles Unified School District)? How does the California charter law relate to district sustainability from the perspective of LAUSD school board members? From the perspective of intermediary organizations and their backers involved with the board?
3. How can data from this study contribute to the development of an emerging active sustainability framework for traditional public school districts and their decision makers?

Methodological Approach

A qualitative case study approach was used for this dissertation research design. Two cycles of coding analysis, In Vivo and Pattern Coding, were employed to investigate the data carefully through the words and concepts contributed by the interview participants and develop categories and emergent themes. Analytic memo writing was integral to the research design and throughout the study, in addition to concept mapping in building the initial sustainability framework and interpreting the findings into the emerging active sustainability framework described in Chapter 5.

Significance of the Study

Claims made by various IOs, policymakers, and others predict a positive correlation among the increasing charter market share and increases in the LAUSD fiscal deficit over time. This study attempts to better understand how this may threaten the longevity of LAUSD to exist independently from the state of California and how sustainability is considered by policymakers in relation to this. The concept of

sustainability in terms of policy and a district itself is contested and defined differently depending upon the source. This study aims to theoretically link charter school-related policy with the sustainability of a large, urban public school district. It works to shed light on practice through study of how board members' and IOs' positions and actions have bolstered or worked against sustainability. Subsequently, I hypothesize that there are both structural and ideological barriers to sustainability at the state and local levels that are exacerbated by this ongoing charter versus TPS battle. Additional preliminary hypotheses for existing barriers to sustainability for LAUSD are leadership turnover and lack of transparency from the board and other district leadership.

This study contributes to the improvement of policy development and implementation with greater attention to fiscal and political sustainability for the governance of large urban school districts. Through in-depth study of the intersection of LESBs, the politics of education, and market-based reforms, it explores the sustainability considerations and actions of LAUSD board members and the influence of IOs on board politics and governance. It also provides insight into how these issues intersect at the state of California level with amending a 30-year-old charter law, this study contributes to the development of conceptual frameworks related to policy sustainability through exploration of how policymakers and IO representatives may consider and debate sustainability in a more student-centered and politically viable way. The public and private narrative regarding politics in education can differ substantially—this study aims to better understand what is driving these disparate narratives and use this knowledge to drive more productive debate and execution in the policymaking process. Finally, it provides a more in-depth understanding of the fiscal and political effects of the expansion

of market-based school reforms, particularly charter schools, on a large urban school district.

This study also strives to contribute a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between IOs and leadership in a large urban school district and the influence of IOs on policy and fiscal sustainability. This necessitates better understanding of the intersection of locally elected school board governance, the politics of education, and the growing prominence of market-based reforms in service of creating greater stability and opportunity for students in large urban school districts.

Ultimately, AB 1505 included greater power for charter authorizers (including the LAUSD board) to consider the community and fiscal impact for neighborhood schools where charters want to open. It is too soon to know if this provides school board authorizers enough capacity to make effective decisions focused on district sustainability, but it appears to provide an opportunity for greater insight into learning more about how charter laws can positively influence those decisions. This study provides a foundation for continuing this research.

William T. Grant Foundation Acknowledgement

I also wish to note that this dissertation research is an offshoot from a grant study I have worked on for over two years funded by the William T. Grant Foundation and lead by co-principal investigators Janelle Scott, Elizabeth DeBray, and Christopher Lubienski. This study is investigating how political contexts and IOs in New York City and Los Angeles inform research utilization and influence incentivist education policies, such as charter schools and teacher merit pay. This dissertation draws from data collected (by this researcher and others on the team) in Los Angeles from 2016-2018. This data is primarily

used for this dissertation to inform the political context of L.A. and California more broadly, and information regarding the role of IOs within the political context and specifically in relation to the LAUSD board of education.

Definition of Key Terms

Intermediary Organizations

Intermediary organizations (IOs) are organizations operating outside of government with increasing power to influence the production and dissemination of research evidence, and politically influence policymaking (Brand, 2015, September 27; Lubienski, Scott, & DeBray, 2011; DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar, 2014; Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Tseng, 2012). Examples include: teacher unions, local and national think tanks and other research organizations, advocacy organizations, nonprofits, charter management organizations (CMOs), civil rights organizations, school reform organizations, and philanthropic foundations. The typology of IOs for the purposes of this dissertation expands upon existing definitions of IOs to incorporate literature on traditional interest groups as part of the overall ecology of IOs and their increasing influence over educational policy and locally elected school board politics and governance.

Locally Elected School Boards (LESBs)

A school board in which each member is elected by its constituents. They are given their authority by voters and the state and must develop and maintain policy in accordance with federal and state education laws. Their responsibilities include establishing “fiscal, personnel, instructional, and student-related policies” (Brewer &

Hall, 2014, p. 637). In the case of LAUSD, the school board is responsible for appointing the Superintendent.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools that are independently operated and allocated funding differently from traditional public schools. The first charter school law passed in Minnesota in 1991, and California became the second state to pass a charter law in 1992. Their accountability, financing, and operations are dependent upon each state's charter school law and designated authorizers. Charter schools can be authorized by local school districts or another legally designated authorizer, such as the state or an independent commission/organization. Authorizers are also in charge charter reauthorization and monitoring.

Sustainability

Drawing from literature on the concept of sustainability in environmental studies, economics, and education, this study defines sustainability broadly as the longevity and integration of policy and reforms into the school system without compromising the progress of others. At its foundation, sustainability in this dissertation requires fiscal sustainability of a district, but the framework includes factors beyond that—such as student outcomes, leadership transparency, and stakeholder engagement. The 1987 Brundtland Report, one of the most influential pieces of research for developing this definition, defines sustainable development as: "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 41). This is the broader vision for the policy sustainability framework—that policymakers and school district decision-makers take long-term

stability and development into account while simultaneously considering the effects of their decisions on other sectors and long-term stability for the students. The following chapter includes a list of potential sustainability indicators and a concept map for the framework.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 is an extensive literature review of locally elected school boards (LESBs) and sustainability to provide a foundation for the developing framework. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology. The findings are divided across Chapters 4 and 5; Chapter 4 describes findings for Research Questions 1 and 2, and Chapter 5 explains the further development of the active sustainability framework based on the findings for Research Question 3. Chapter 6 serves as the study's final chapter through discussion of the findings and implications.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The locally elected school board in the United States public school system is simultaneously a revered American institution and in danger of extinction (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Over the past several decades, locally elected school boards (hereafter referred to as LESBs) have experienced an erosion of their authority over the system they are elected to govern. Multiple factors have contributed to this evolution, however the growing prominence of school choice policies and new actors in the education policy landscape have played a significant part in the changing roles of LESBs in educational governance (Au & Ferrare, 2014; Reckhow, 2013; Welsh & Hall, 2018). The rise of intermediary organizations (IOs) and creation of a new policy network have fundamentally changed the educational policymaking process through funding of research evidence production, promotion, and dissemination, advocacy, reform agendas, and LESB election campaigns (DeBray, Hanley, Scott, & Lubienski, 2018; Reckhow, Henig, Jacobsen, & Litt, 2017).

Since the late 18th century, LESBs have held primary authority and decision-making power for school districts in the U.S. Brewer and Hall (2014) explained that “many scholars have described school boards as the essence of representative governance in a democracy” (p. 637), and “states delegate powers to local school boards to act on their behalf in the provision of education” (Björk, 2005, p. 4). LESB responsibilities include establishing “fiscal, personnel, instructional, and student-related policies” (Brewer & Hall, 2014, p. 637). The National School Boards Association (NSBA)

describes their responsibilities as: “employing the superintendent; developing and adopting policies, curriculum, and the budget; overseeing facilities issues; and adopting collective bargaining agreements” (NSBA, 2018a). Despite this centuries-long tradition of power and influence over school districts, LESBs’ authority has gradually weakened since the mid-twentieth century as educational governance at the state and federal levels has evolved, and as external groups, or intermediary organizations (IOs), have gradually acquired greater power and influence (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Ongoing heated debates have endured for decades over the efficacy and purpose of LESBs in light of these governance shifts. Criticisms of school boards have included: “petty politics, micromanagement, amateurishness, lack of imagination, kowtowing to the teacher unions, corruption, and waste” (Henig, 2013, p. 68).

The rising influence of IOs and market-based reforms have contributed to these consequences. Market-based reform advocates have argued that politics are the primary problem in traditional school districts and that a system of privatization and autonomy provide the solution and finally free education from politics (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Jabbar, 2015). Common refrains have been to “take education out of politics” (Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p. 10) and to maintain local control of schools. However, the rationale behind these rallying cries doesn’t always match up with needs and realities. Notably, “by their nature, IOs make ideology, and not evidence, the over-riding consideration” (Lubienski, Scott, & DeBray, 2011, p. 2). Jabbar (2015) demonstrated that even appointed school boards, such as the Recovery School District in New Orleans, are not immune to political tensions and divisions. Mayoral or gubernatorial control of school districts comes with its own set of difficulties (Henig, 2013).

For numerous reasons, there is no absolute formula when it comes to assessing the fiscal sustainability of a public school district. School districts in the U.S. come in all different shapes and sizes and are made up of a community of diverse people and demographics with different beliefs and values about education. Definitions and perceptions of sustainability vary as much as the school districts, however, whether or not it continues to independently function and exist is fundamental. Nevertheless, *why* it should endure must be agreed upon by all stakeholders—otherwise, its purpose is unclear and existence in its current form perhaps questioned. The expansion of market-based reforms and policies in education and their effects on traditional public schools (TPS) has certainly complicated the existence of the broader American public educational system. But why research the sustainability of a school district in the first place?

In educational policy today, it has become normalized for policies to frequently not withstand the test of time, whether that is due to leadership and political party changes or other factors. Reports, such as by Lafer (2017) on failures in policy planning for California charter school funding policy for example, found that “funding is almost completely disconnected from educational policy objectives, and the results are, in turn scattershot and haphazard” (p. 3). In the case of school choice, these education reforms have also led to concerns of the sustainability of school districts themselves. With significant changes occurring in many school districts across the country, self-sustainability of TPS districts has been a fiery topic. What do these changes mean for the long-term operation, functioning, and existence of TPS districts?

Fiscal sustainability is the foundation of what ultimately enables a district to endure; this research seeks to provide further insight into the role of politics in that

sustainability—particularly in relation to the rise of charter schools. It questions what is worth sustaining, who is fit to determine this, and consideration of differing perspectives from across stakeholders. A sustainable district is a safeguard for students and ensures that each day they are present within a school, they are learning in a safe, functional environment.

The purpose of this review is to explore the literature on LESBs and sustainability of policy and TPS districts. Both areas are integral to this research, and the sustainability literature provided a foundation for the research design, interview protocol, and the nascent development of an active sustainability framework for investigating the pressures on a LESB in conjunction with charter school expansion. Also, critical is that the concept of sustainability itself—in education and particularly the charter sector—is a contested space. Across constituencies, sustainability has different meanings, related factors, and outcomes. This chapter reviews literature on the intersection of the role of urban locally elected school boards (LESBs), the politics of education, the growing prominence of market-based reforms, and how they have changed over time. It begins to explore how LESB roles have evolved as the education landscape has changed with the appearance and significant expansion of charter schools, and how LESBs adapt (or don't).

This review of school board research is an important contribution to the literature particularly because of its focus on better understanding how LESBs are approaching and understanding how the expansion of market-based education reforms may be affecting their governance roles—particularly charter schools. In certain states with a charter law, LESBs serve as charter authorizers in charge of approving charters and renewing or rejecting charter renewals. This review also contributes by compiling and analyzing

research that has been done on how national political influences have affected the composition of LESBs; for example, politics at the national level have affected LESB school board elections—for example, campaign funding and rhetoric have played a role in the public perception of certain candidates (DeBray, Hanley, Scott, & Lubienski, 2019). Finally, this review identifies key gaps in the literature for future research; for example, research on how LESB have confronted issues brought on by the expansion of charter schools, such as threats to financial sustainability of a district, and what kinds of policy actions they have taken. This review of LESB literature in relation to the effects of charter schools on their roles as the primary governing body of public school districts was conducted through a systematic review process. The following section describes the literature search and identification process in detail.

The databases used for this literature search include: Google Scholar, and the countless search options through the University of Georgia library including: GIL-Find, WorldCat, GALILEO, and Multisearch. These search tools were instrumental in this literature search—in particular, books and edited volumes on school board research, journal articles, and dissertations. Each source was added to a Google Sheets spreadsheet, including the citation, summary, methods, findings, and key concepts and quotations. Search terms included: locally elected school boards; school board literature review; school boards charter schools; local governance; local democracy; localism; small-scale democracy; policy sustainability; reform sustainability; education sustainability. Speaking with several LESB experts clarified that there is no central language for this research and the literature can be found through several different sectors, including political science, education, and public administration.

When searching these terms, the identification process for relevant sources consisted of specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Galvan, 2014). First, the source must have been published between 1991 and 2019; the first U.S. charter school law was written and passed in 1991 in Minnesota, and thus began the entrance of charter schools into the public school system and when LESB members began to interact with charters. The only exception to this timeframe was for sources providing historical background on LESBs as context for the overall review. Second, sources could be qualitative or quantitative. Third, all resources had to be specific to the U.S., as that is the geographic location of focus for this review and research. Fourth, all resources must be relevant to the topic. The source had to cover research specifically on LESBs and charter expansion; IOs and their influences on LESB elections, composition, and decision-making; and/or how the role of LESBs has changed during this timeframe. Fifth, any journal articles must be peer-reviewed. Finally, all resources must contain data and information that was obtained lawfully and reported accurately.

This chapter compiled this literature in an effort to generate a strong foundational base for the research and active sustainability framework findings. This chapter covers the following sections: historical background of LESBs; an overview of LESBs today; defining IOs for the purposes of this research; challenges to LESB governance during the 1992-2019 timeline; and emerging patterns in LESB elections. The second major section on sustainability begins by defining sustainability through an extensive review of literature and conceptually from environmental studies to build upon what has been developed for education specifically. The purpose of delving deeply into the

sustainability literature is to emphasize a need for understanding multiple stakeholders' perspectives on the issue and learning from other sectors.

Locally Elected School Boards and the Rise of Charter Schools

Evolution of Locally Elected School Boards in Educational Governance

Locally elected school boards (LESBs) serve as the governing heads for most school districts across the U.S., regardless of size, demographics, or geographic location. School boards have governed districts since the late 1700s, and large city-wide elections began as a method for reducing corruption (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). In certain areas of the U.S., their role has changed in the contemporary educational governance and political landscape. Today, according to a National School Boards Association (NSBA) survey, 44 percent of LESB members were female, and in large school districts, 21.8 percent of members were African-American, and six percent were Latino (National School Boards Association, 2018). During the 2010-2011 school year, there were 13,588 public school districts in the U.S., and most of these districts are governed by a LESB (NCES, 2011). As a result of a national trend toward centralization, the number of districts has decreased dramatically from its peak of 117,108 districts in 1939-1940 (Iannaccone, 1975). Approximately 40 percent of LESB members in large districts receive a salary; LAUSD board members recently received a 174% raise—their salary is \$125,000 per year for members not employed elsewhere and \$50,000 for those with outside employment (Blume, 2017).

This section describes the evolution of LESBs in educational governance through first exploring their history and original purpose. It traces the evolution of their role in educational governance leading up to the present. This chapter addresses LESBs on a

broader level and more specifically on large urban district LESB literature due to this study's focus on LAUSD. The role of LESBs has changed across the U.S. particularly amidst the growing prominence of school choice policies and new actors in the education policy landscape. The growing influence of IOs on educational governance and politics is also explored.

Historical Background

LESBs developed as a natural process of the growth of school districts in the U.S. during the 17th and 18th centuries. As schools and districts were established, their maintenance and operation were dependent upon local officials; as the number of students and schools grew, specific committees of local governments were given these tasks, and eventually school boards and elected school boards became their own separate entities from local civic government (Callahan, 1975; National School Boards Association, 2018b). Today, most school board members are elected, although some are appointed and many perform their duties on a volunteer basis.

Callahan (1975) described the evolution of school boards from 1789-1960, due to this being the period of time during which LESBs held the most power and control over public school districts. Several important events shaped LESBs throughout this time into what exists today. During this time period, several changes occurred that shifted school board power dynamics—typically occurring in one school district and gradually trending across more districts. One such shift was the creation of the position and office of superintendent of schools in Boston in the 1840s; local school committee officials and school boards thus turned over some of their responsibilities, and therefore power, to superintendents (Callahan, 1975; Tyack, 1974). From the 1850s to the turn of the

twentieth century, major efforts were undertaken to “professionalize, homogenize, and organize common schooling [which] threatened highly prized local control” (Kaestle, 1983, p. 158; as cited by Howell, 2005, p. 3).

Nationally, during the 1890s, another shift occurred in which there were increasing calls for school boards to turn power over to educational experts and the superintendent office—essentially to either eliminate school boards altogether or at least diminish their power further in the operation of public schools (Callahan, 1975; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Tyack, 1974). Details varied by city and district, but the implications of such pressures certainly affected the reputations and authority of school boards despite not altogether eradicating them.

More than half a century later, Callahan (1975) argued that 1960 marked the “beginning of a new era in the history of boards of education in this country” (p. 20). He attributed this mainly to an increasing prevalence of teacher strikes throughout the 1960s and resulting successes leading to collective bargaining rights with school boards and the distinct powers of teacher unions—a trend Callahan (1975) predicted would be ongoing nationwide (Henig, 2013). Collective bargaining still experienced educator opposition and reluctance, but by 2004, there were 37 states with collective bargaining statutes to cover teachers (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Also, during the 1960s, community groups, or local IOs, began challenging school boards’ authority and power: “I see this development, however, as simply a resurgence of the democratic impulse which led to the establishment of locally elected boards in the first place” (Callahan, 1975, p. 20).

Iannaccone (1975) described diversity and the increasing diversity across the U.S. as “a key motor concept to explain the growing stress and heightened political conflicts

faced by school boards today” (p. 257). Although written in 1975, this was prescient to issues faced by contemporary LESBs. Large urban school districts such as LAUSD face numerous issues as the city’s population changes, including provision of language supports for English Language Learner (ELL) students, integrating and encouraging engagement of immigrant families into schools, and ensuring the safety of undocumented students and students with undocumented family members in this current climate of fear propagated from the federal level. Most changing districts have struggled to adapt to these needs. Iannaccone (1975) outlined four tensions through which to speculate on the issue of who education should be governed by: “(1) The tension between and among the family of governments in the pattern of separate educational government; (2) The tension between lay and professional power; (3) The tension between administrator and teacher power within the professional power spheres; (4) The tension between the general society’s universal interests in education and the interests of the particular child, the child’s parents, and their immediate reference groups” (p. 260).

The evolution of governance in the case of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) school board provides an exemplary case of challenges to LESBs. Kerchner et al. (2008) found that by the 1960s, the LAUSD board and “the institution’s legitimacy began to be discredited” (p. 5). Desegregation lawsuits, racial politics, student activism, collective bargaining, and other factors “challenged the Progressive Era norms of unquestioned professional dominance and local control” and “diminished its capacity to function” (p. 5). Amidst LAUSD’s imminent paralysis, due to its inability to afford any of its reform plans, labor settlements, and more, the district had no other choice but to take action and seek external support (p. 6). In 2000, serious efforts were undertaken to

take over the LAUSD school board amidst their choosing of Roy Romer, the former Governor of Colorado and a non-educator, to become the district's new superintendent. Kerchner et al. (2008) summarized the evolution of considerations of education and the board in Los Angeles over the past several decades:

Over the last forty years, schooling in Los Angeles underwent a radical transformation in how it operated and in how people thought about schooling. School board members used to be civic elites, elected city-wide. The school board had the independent ability to raise taxes in order to pay for operations. The board did not meddle too much in how the schools operated. The superintendent was a largely unquestioned leader who commanded loyalty from administrators and obedience from the teachers. Fledgling teacher unions spoke meekly and officially did not bargain. Over four decades, LAUSD had changed in ways that challenge virtually every traditional assumption about how to govern and organize public education. (pp. 19-20)

As a result of expanding choice options offered within LAUSD, the board now navigates the governing of hundreds of schools that are not subject to their traditional authority and accountability (Kerchner et al., 2008). In the instance of charter school expansion, advocates “fear that local school boards view charter schools as competitors for their students and funds and act both to impede their creation and limit their growth” (Teske, Schneider, & Cassese, 2005, p. 130).

School Boards, 1990s to Present

Kirst & Wirt (2009) opened their 4th edition of *The Political Dynamics of American Public Education* with a description of a 2002 survey in which most respondents believed that local school boards hold the majority of power in improving U.S. public schools:

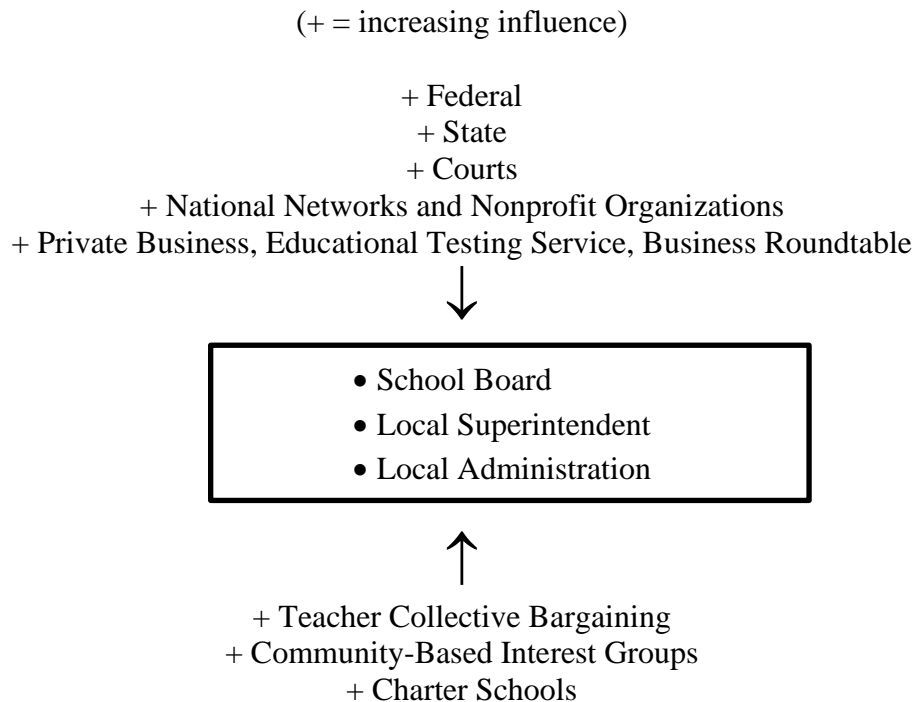
The public has been told repeatedly, after all, how much the nation reveres local school control, told it even by those who have been taking away much of that control. Thus, Americans are largely unaware that local boards as well as local superintendents and individual schools have been losing influence over education

programs for some time to state and federal officials and other interests. Indeed, some analysts even view local school boards as an endangered species. (p. 3)

This points out a dichotomy between what the public is told, listens to, and what it actually believes. Local control holds various interpretations in different regions throughout the U.S.; our general reverence for it stems from colonial times when education and our nation were very different from what they are today (Callahan, 1975; Danzberger, 1994). Figure 3 (below) illustrates these trends in education governance of local school boards losing influence over education policy between 1960 and 2004. Different forces have gradually “squeezed the authority of local school boards and superintendents into a smaller and smaller place” (Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p. 25). From above, state and federal government and the courts have increasingly gained power, as have what have more recently been described as intermediary organizations (IOs). From below, teacher unions and collective bargaining, grassroots IOs, and charter school networks have also worn away that local power.

Figure 3.

Trends in education governance, 1960-2004 (adapted from Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p. 25)



Kirst and Wirt (2009) also described school-based management (SBM) as having reduced the authority of local school boards and superintendents. “Indeed, the basic assumption of SBM, which has evolved into today’s charter school movement, is that schools would do better if only they were not under the thumbs of boards, superintendents, and central offices, if power were decentralized to the local school level” (p. 17). This suggests that the expansion of charter schools has reduced the authority of district leadership, despite their continued authority over independent charter schools. Simultaneous state and federal mandates for testing, standards, and curriculum are more centralizing controls (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Today, Alsbury (2008) describes one prevalent distinction between the roles of the board and superintendent is the board works as policy developer and the superintendent as policy implementer.

Kowalski (2005) concluded that “the future of local district governance can be decided in two ways; exclusively by political elites or collectively by political elites and education professionals” (p. xi). This debate over who governs American education has endured for more than two centuries. There is no doubt that political elites and IOs from outside education have gained increasing influence and LAUSD has some of the blurriest lines between the district and outside influences; there also isn’t substantial evidence that political elites and education professionals can govern both collectively and amicably with a common student-centered agenda.

Growing Prominence of School Choice and New Actors in the Landscape

Intermediary organizations. The definition of IOs used for this research evolved primarily from the scholarly works of Drs. Elizabeth DeBray, Christopher Lubienski, and Janelle Scott and their studies funded by the William T. Grant Foundation. They define IOs as: organizations operating outside of government with increasing power to influence the production and dissemination of research evidence, and politically influence policymaking (Brand, 2015, September 27; Lubienski, Scott, & DeBray, 2011; DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar, 2014; Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Tseng, 2012). This definition of IOs was used because of its deeply-rooted connection with charter school research and understanding the dynamics between IOs and governmental entities such as LESBs.

The role of LESBs in education governance has changed over time for numerous reasons, as described above. The growing prominence of school choice policies and new actors in the education policy landscape have led to momentous and potentially irreversible shifts in the role of LESBs. School choice, particularly in large urban districts, has fundamentally transformed certain public school systems and further blurred

lines of governance. Charter schools, for example, are inherently given greater autonomy to operate than traditional public schools (TPS) and most LESB interactions with charters only revolve around authorization. It is difficult to isolate how school choice growth and the rise of IOs have individually changed the role of LESBs in educational governance—each has fueled the other’s growing influence on educational policymaking. The emergence and increasing influence of IOs such as charter or education management organizations (CMOs and EMOs) on education policy has further eroded power from school boards (Henig, 2013). LESBs may have been one of the last strongholds against the privatization of public education and the sustainability of school districts, but the simultaneous increasing of IO influence on board members and erosion of LESBs authority and public trust have called this into question. It could be argued that teacher unions now possess this role.

The funding, production, promotion, and dissemination of research evidence has also been influenced by IOs with implications for policy and decision making by LESBs. Lubienski et al. (2011) described this relationship between IOs, research, and policymakers, and their increasing influence on education policymaking:

Issues around the effectiveness of educational interventions in particular highlight the institutionalization of extra-governmental political forces in the policymaking process. Indeed, we are seeing new institutional forms emerging that are re-shaping the political economy—that is, the institutional relationships—of research production and use in education. Specifically, new intermediary organizations are increasingly determining the body of research made available for the policymaking process by ‘brokering’ evidence. Here we discuss these new ‘intermediaries,’ and note their power in the area of ‘incentivist’ educational policies. Their emerging power raises questions about the future of traditional forms of research production. (p. 1)

Incentivist policies refer to those rooted in market-based reforms, such as school choice and charter schools. Lubienski et al. (2011) and other scholars have found that this leads to several outcomes including diminished quality control mechanisms for research used by policymakers. There are many publications and several conceptual frameworks the study has drawn from in defining IOs. Works by Ball (2007), Ball and Junemann (2012), deMarrais (2006), and Ferris, Hentschke, and Harmssen (2008) are examples of influential sources in understanding this new political landscape in education. The work of Ball and Junemann (2012) highlighted the role played in public policymaking by new/nongovernmental actors. Au and Ferrare (2014) demonstrated how IO coalitions in Washington State can successfully work to advance consistent messages to policymakers at the state level. Hess (2005), Reckhow (2010; 2013), and McGuinn (2012) have also been valuable sources in understanding how policies at each level of government have been influenced and even at times directly formed by philanthropies. deMarrais (2006) raised clear concerns over the cost for democratic processes and equity that this influence foundations possess over policymaking may have. DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar (2014) described these philosophical and empirical concerns further:

The emergence of these new intermediaries represents a significant theoretical and empirical issue. As these organizations seek to assume a larger role in influencing research use, they might have a consequent impact on research production as well. Such an impact might change not just the political economy of how knowledge is produced, but what types of knowledge get promoted by powerful intermediaries to influence policymakers around specific agendas. Thus, how those intermediaries act along or within coalitions is a crucial consideration in understanding their impact. (p. 176)

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999) has also been used conceptually, as it “highlights the role of non-governmental groups and

postulates that organizations work together across levels of government to achieve common policy goals (Scott et al., 2017a, p. 18). Finally, literature on urban regimes by political scientists has advanced understanding of coalition building in urban school reform and how these IOs interact with each other and governmental actors (i.e., Bulkley & Henig, 2015; Henig, 2010; Shipps, 2003; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001; Wohlstetter & Houston, 2015).

The new education research environment is no longer composed solely of universities and other highly-regarded and traditional institutions—research now flows from multitudinous types of organizations and institutions. Policymakers, particularly regarding “incentivist” policies such as charter schools, teacher merit-pay, and vouchers (Henig, 2013; Hout & Elliot, 2011; Moe, 2008; Stern, 2008), are increasingly reliant on numerous sources and varying types of institutions for information, which “has created a producer-to-consumer relationship that is less of a pipeline and more of a quasi-market of vendors trying to promote goods and consumers having to sort through options of varying reliability” (DeBray, et al., 2014, p. 177). These new IOs are also more well-equipped, both financially and staff-wise, and skillful with marketing and promoting their message in order to advance their agenda to policymakers. Many incentivist policies and reforms have been pursued regardless of evidence of their effectiveness (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010).

Scott and Jabbar (2014) studied the advocacy coalition of IOs and the role of philanthropies in this coalition using their hub and spoke conceptual framework. Specifically studying IOs involved with incentivist reforms, they found that foundations and philanthropies are the central actor positioned at the “hub,” or center, as a primary

funder of IOs, and of the IO political landscape and activity. Simultaneously, foundations are also “a ‘spoke’ in the wheel that helps to mobilize and, in many ways, direct the activities of the IOs” (p. 1). The other spokes include charter management organizations, advocacy groups, think tanks and research institutes, media, and school reform organizations (see Appendix A).

Scott and Jabbar (2014) also described an underlying “imperative to dramatically and directly alter schooling systems [that] has created at least two political dynamics. First, it has contributed to the rise of research production, promotion, and utilization around incentivist reforms to provide evidence of their effectiveness to policymakers and the public (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010). Second, it has contributed to the creation and funding of new educational IOs” (p. 3). This imperative is driving the actions of many foundations and IOs, but also IOs in opposition. Scott and Jabbar (2014) summarized four key findings for philanthropies and research utilization: “philanthropic organizations occupy a central position in the overall landscape of IOs, helping them to (1) become established and stay fiscally sound; (2) connect them to one another to help concentrate their influence; (3) gather, package, and disseminate data and research; and (4) fund political campaigns through the support of 501(c)(4) organizations (p. 4).

Further insight into the effectiveness and failures of IOs demonstrates a tendency for research to be discarded or disregarded when its findings don’t fit the agenda. Harris (2011) described how researchers outside of colleges of education, such as economists, are often overlooked or ignored when findings fail to support a market-based reform agenda. “This raises questions about why policymakers tend to admonish education research, which may instead simply be an excuse to ignore research if the findings run

counter to ideological commitments. Claims about the need for ‘research evidence’ may have less to do with the research, and more to do with the need to get the ‘right’ evidence to policymakers” (DeBray et al., 2014, p. 179). This success of IOs in such a climate is indeed striking in education (Qi & Levin, 2013)—they possess substantial power to sell evidence claiming the efficacy of incentivist reforms, which “points to a new political economy of knowledge productions and use in educational coalitions” (DeBray et al., 2014, p. 179). Lubienski, Scott, and DeBray (2011) warned from the beginning that:

IOs make ideology, and not evidence, the over-riding consideration. Usually dependent on private funding, these organizations are based on specific agendas, which they must advance in order to secure funds. Moreover, the advantage of IOs in terms of responsiveness comes at the price of established quality control mechanisms associated with university research (p. 2).

Limitations of IOs are thus typically agenda- and rigor of research-based, as they often subscribe to a singular objective (i.e., market-based reforms or opposition to those reforms), and aim to capture policymakers’ attentions using the most effective and efficient means—a dexterity researchers and scholars cannot always compete with.

Scott et al. (2017a) advanced a typology of IOs (see Appendix B) that also explores the function of advocacy networks and interest groups. They emphasized more in-depth study of the political landscape and context as “critical for developing a useful theoretical understanding of how these networks are formed, structured, and operate, and how evidence on educational policies is produced, promoted, and utilized within and across networks” (p. 16). The authors also introduced intermediary organization networks (IONs) as coalitions of IOs, which they described as differing from the traditional conceptualization of interest groups. IONs seem to adapt to their local policy landscape, regardless of being local or “outsiders.” Scott et al. (2017a) conclude that:

Researchers need to incorporate IOs and IONs into the systematic theorizing and study of policymaking models in the future, insofar as federal, state, and local policymakers are granting them both authority and financial resources to carry out policy agendas (p. 26).

Market-based reform growth and challenges to governance. Advocates of market-based reforms see “local school boards as a nuisance and an obstacle rather than as the public’s representatives in shaping education policy” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 27). Philanthropist Eli Broad had been vocal in his advocacy for changes in school governance structures from LESBs to mayoral, gubernatorial, or state control (Henig, 2013). In an address to a gathering of governors, Broad expressed this view: “I don’t mind telling you that I believe in mayoral control of school boards or having no school board at all. You should craft legislation that enables school board members to be appointed by the mayor. You should ... limit the authority of school boards” (Broad, 2003; as cited by Henig, 2013, p. 154). Broad is not alone in this view and his foundation’s funding choices have reflected this. What remains more ambiguous is whether Broad and other philanthropic organizations are in favor of eliminating school boards because they stand in the way of their agendas to massively expand charter schools choice, and privatize education, or because they believe it would truly eradicate massive inefficiencies in the education bureaucracy.

Reckhow (2013) found that districts under state takeover or mayoral control were the strongest predictors for greater foundation allocations compared with districts under LESBs control. The implications of this include districts in need not receiving external funding and the fueling of choice-related reforms; in this climate of constant school-funding shortfalls, it would be difficult for most school districts to refuse massive

influxes of funds even when attached to a specific program or initiative. The result however is further weakening of LESB authority. Henig (2013) described:

This alignment between philanthropic support and the erosion of school-specific areas for governance [is] not coincidental. Partly out of frustration with what they have considered to be the recalcitrance or ineptitude of elected boards, some foundations have very self-consciously sought out districts where the governance arrangements and political dynamics are more favorable to the core values and premises and policy instruments that they are seeking to promote (p. 154).

In these cases, they work around dealing with LESBs and purposefully seek governance structures and climates perceived as more amenable to their agenda.

Emerging Trends in School Board Election Financing

Local school board elections have traditionally existed as provincial, low-profile, *local* affairs (Feuerstein, 2002; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; McDermott, 1999). More recently though, several studies have begun to uncover and explore a number of emerging trends and patterns in the financing of elections for LESB members. LESB election and campaign contribution research is sparse, but has been garnering more interest. These trends include a growing influence of IOs on elections—monetarily through campaign contributions and public endorsements (regardless of IO location, i.e., local, state, or national); LESB elections being thrust into the national spotlight; the projection of federal-level politics and tensions onto candidates and elections; and the biggest donations typically funding candidates portrayed as or running on a platform of education reform and charter school support. This section explores prior studies that have examined these trends and the relationship between campaign contributions, school finance, and the sustainability of market-based reforms.

Low budgets, dominating teacher unions, and low voter turnout have also characterized LESB elections in the past. Many LESB elections are held off-cycle, so they don't attract the same attention of voters as gubernatorial, presidential, or other more large-scale elections (Anzia, 2011; Henig, 2013; Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Despite a broader trend toward centralization in education to the state and federal government, local districts have not become obsolete—if anything, their role in the implementation of policies from the state and federal levels is critical (Bulkley, Henig, & Levin, 2010; Henig, 2009). “Recognizing this, national actors may have a growing interest in participating in the shaping of local political regimes (Marsh & Wohlstetter, 2013). Campaign contributions are one key lever for local political involvement” (Reckhow et al., 2017, p. 787). In the case of New Orleans, Jabbar (2015) described implications of IO and philanthropic influence on elections, finding that:

Given the politicized nature of school-board elections . . . , and the influence of private philanthropy (Cunningham-Cook, 2012; Maxwell, 2013), the traditional school board system is certainly not an ideal democratic system. Foundations and reform advocates are able to buy influence in the elections and directly fund new schools. But democratic forms of oversight can potentially provide a structured and institutionalized avenue for change. (p. 767)

Jabbar (2015) demonstrated that even appointed school boards, such as the Recovery School District in New Orleans, are not immune to political tensions—what she called “the politics of no politics” (p. 766). Market-based reform advocates argue that politics are the primary problem in traditional school districts; that a system of privatization and autonomy provide the solution and finally free education from politics (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Jabbar, 2015).

Similar to findings by Reckhow (2013) and Henig (2013) of alignment and patterns between reforms philanthropies and IOs choose to fund, Reckhow et al. (2017) also found alignment and “shared affiliations through education organizations” that were “significantly associated with school board campaign contributions” (p. 783). IO and foundation involvement in LESB elections trend toward support of pro-reform candidates (DeBray et al., 2018; Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow et al., 2017; Scott, 2009; Welsh & Hall, 2018). There is also substantial IO involvement in opposition to these candidates, in addition to teacher unions, but charter and market-based reform supporting IOs appear to be outspending these groups (DeBray et al., 2018; Reckhow et al., 2017). Among large national donors, these shared affiliations are predominantly in support of pro-reform board candidates, and candidates backed by teacher unions or affiliated IOs received little to no monetary support from these large national donors (Reckhow et al., 2017). Overall, this alignment of large national donors behind pro-reform candidates is directly tied to the sustainability of market-based reforms in those districts. IOs with market-based reform agendas make these contributions to ensure candidates with similar agendas are in positions of power and influence over policymaking.

Welsh and Hall (2018) studied the relationship between LESB elections, IOs, and the sustainability of post-Katrina New Orleans’ portfolio management model (PMM), a market-based reform strategy for improving school districts which incorporates choice and charter schools (Bulkley et al., 2010; Hill & Campbell, 2011). The authors found a number of important findings and implications for the emerging trends in LESB elections, and the relationship between campaign contributions and the sustainability of market-based reforms. One finding was that “unprecedented levels of campaign

contributions ... suggest that state and local school board elections may be one of the primary mechanisms through which interest groups influenced post-Katrina educational governance” (Welsh & Hall, 2018, p. 10).

Welsh and Hall (2018) also found an expansion of non-local actors and campaign contributions primarily supported pro-market-based reforms, in accordance with findings from other studies described above. At least in the case of New Orleans and Louisiana, it was more challenging to influence school board composition at the local level than at the state level (Welsh & Hall, 2018). Critical to sustaining PMM reforms, and market-based reforms more broadly, is support from the national level: “The New Orleans case suggests that reforms may originate locally but are sustained nationally” and that “engaging national networks and allies plays an important role” (p. 12). Finally, Welsh and Hall’s (2018) findings supported those of Reckhow’s (2013) regarding civic capacity for the sustainment of education reforms—“Civic capacity, or the ability to attract outside supporters, played a significant role in sustaining the PMM, and these intermediary organizations played a crucial role in fostering this civic capacity” (p. 11; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001).

It is important to note that since Reckhow et al. (2017) published, Los Angeles experienced the most expensive school board race in U.S. history later in 2017. Approximately \$16 million was spent on three board seats—\$9.7 million spent by charter supporters, and the results shifted the board to a pro-reform majority (Blume & Poston, 2017; DeBray et al., 2018; Scott, DeBray, Lubienski, Hanley, Castillo, & Hedges, 2017). This board election was fully characterized as pro-reform/pro-charter candidates versus pro-union/anti-charter candidates, partially due to the candidates’ backgrounds, but also

due to a projection of political and policy debates over school choice at the federal level occurring simultaneously with the nomination and confirmation of Betsy DeVos as the new U.S. Secretary of Education. The heated nature of this LAUSD election, the unprecedented amount of campaign contributions, and these national-level projections led to the race becoming nationally high-profile. National public figures, such as former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Senator Bernie Sanders, endorsed the pro-reform and pro-union candidates, respectively (Ballotpedia, 2017). Post-election, a critical question for future research must be how beholden these pro-reform candidates are to their backers once they are elected and how this compares across other locally elected school boards.

Sustainability

The difficult concept of sustainability spans multiple fields of study and holds distinctive meanings for different scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. The modern day understanding of the term remains somewhat opaque and intertwined with environmental issues; the concept continues to be morphed by politics and ideology, obscuring the definition of the word *sustainable* itself. Diesendorf (1999) and Jacobs (1991) called the concept contestable, juxtaposing it with ancient concepts such as democracy, truth, and justice and the practice of debate over their definitions have become “essential parts of the practical process of working towards sustainability” (p. 3). What is generally agreed upon are three dimensions of sustainability: (1) economic; (2) environmental (or ecological); and (3) social, but the inseparability of these dimensions is debated (Diesendorf, 1999; Harris, 2003). Important to this paper is the pillars’ inclusion of equity into the sustainability debate.

In the case of education, changes in political and district leadership and political parties can also have an effect on whether or not policies are sustained, regardless of effectiveness (Copland, 2003; Kingdon, 2011; Spillane, 2003). For these factors and more, there is a longstanding “conceptual problem of defining sustainability”—a problem that may likely never be resolved, however it can continue to be more clearly defined in terms of practicability and use in policymaking (Hussen, 2013, p. 289). Also central to this section on sustainability is the reality that the entire concept of sustainability in education is a contested space; in relation to charters, this is especially apparent and stakeholders throughout even the same site heatedly debate what sustainability is, how best to bolster it, and even what should or should not be sustained.

Redclift’s (1991) apt summation of the concept of sustainability was that “its very strength is its vagueness” (p. 36). The difficulty in defining sustainability is it has a literal meaning, but is also applied across various fields and its meaning has morphed as its use and application has grown. The adjective sustainability is defined by Merriam-Webster (2017) as “of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged” and its first known use was in 1924. It has simultaneously become a popular buzzword and a serious academic field of science (Mebratu, 1998). In the case of education, the concept of sustainability must go back to its roots—particularly to the idea of longevity and every factor that entails. Regardless of field of study, a guiding definition of sustainability for the purposes of this paper is meeting the “needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987, p. 41).

Key to the sustainability of TPS districts is policy designed in line with indicators of sustainability. In terms of educational policy today, it has become common for policies, initiatives, and programs to not withstand the test of time, whether that is due to leadership and political party changes, changes in trends, or other factors. This can provide opportunities to fix or remove “bad” policy, however good and bad policy is relative depending on who its target is and each individuals’ view of it. If the issue is systemic, changes become much more complicated. Policy should be developed to benefit the largest amount of people possible, but there will always be individuals or groups it does not reach effectively and those who view it unfavorably. It seems like common sense that a policymaker would desire their policy to endure, but what does that truly mean for governance and who does it affect? What, if anything, is put into place to support a policy or reform’s sustainability? How is it determined what must be sustained and why? These are only some questions that must be considered in greater depth.

As McLaughlin (2006) warns, “concerns about sustainability pose different questions about relevant outcomes” (p. 219). This is the case in general in addition to variations between constituencies and multiple stakeholders’ perspectives on sustainability. At the core of a debate over policy sustainability must be several questions including: (1) what constitutes “good” and “bad” policy?; (2) how can sustainability be measured?; and (3) can policy be created with an upfront intention of sustainability? Inevitable events such as leadership change can be enough to derail sustainability, but this doesn’t always need to be the case. Additional obstacles include state laws in place that prevent sustainable practices from being considered.

Above all, understanding sustainability is about carefully taking into consideration how stakeholders perceive the concept regarding different issues and outcomes. One particular group of stakeholders may believe improved test scores or graduation rates are good evidence for sustainability; however, advocates for special education, desegregation, or homeless students may have differing perspectives. In those cases, reducing student mobility, equitable charter school locations and lotteries, or schools providing certain social services may be vital indicators. No perspective is “incorrect” in this regard, but political rhetoric and action can present a different story. These are some challenges of sustainability.

Sustainability Application Across Research Fields

Environmental. Prior to the 1980s, sustainability primarily maintained the interest of academics, but this began to change as it became a critical policy issue for action on the global stage (Diesendorf, 1999; Hussen, 2013). The Brundtland Report, formally called *Our Common Future*, was released in October 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). Also called the Brundtland Commission, this agency was established by the United Nations General Assembly in response to these growing concerns over the environment and natural resources across the globe; the commission was intended to join countries together in working toward sustainable development (Hussen, 2013; Redclift, 1991; WCED, 1987). Gro Harlem Brundtland ran the commission; she was the first female Prime Minister of Norway and served three terms—in 1981 and from 1986-1996, and later the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) (World Health Organization [WHO], 21 July 1998).

Drawing from environmental studies for the purposes of this literature review was important for building the conceptual definition of sustainability for this dissertation research. For these reasons, the inclusion into the report of these broader factors as relating to sustainability is important in working through sustainability factors for education as well. Poverty, population growth and development, economic health, and other factors each play a role in certain stakeholders' perspectives of what sustainability is and the Brundtland Report and other studies described in this section illustrate the importance of taking numerous factors into account when assessing sustainability.

The Brundtland Report is known for drawing attention to sustainability as more than an environmental issue and the need for an “interdisciplinary, integrated approach to global concerns and our common future”—the report was “a global agenda for change” (WCED, 1987, p. 5-7). Poverty, population growth and development, survival, and the economic crisis of slow world economy growth are listed as global symptoms and causes threatening our future (Hussen, 2013; WCED, 1987). Hussen (2013) described the report as being “about goals and aspirations that global society needed to use as a guide in order to pursue sustainable and equitable economic development projects” (p. 291). The report is well known for helping to define the term sustainable development (Hussen, 2013), marked “the concept’s political coming of age, and established the content and structure of the present debate” (Kirkby, O’Keef, & Timberlake, 1995; Mebratu, 1998, p. 501). Still germane today, the report (WCED, 1987) defined sustainable development as:

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: (1) the concept of ‘needs,’ in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and (2) the idea of

limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. (p. 41)

Redclift (1991) asserted that the Brundtland Commission regarded “sustainable development as a policy objective, rather than a methodology” (p. 37). Brundtland argued in her foreword: “But the ‘environment’ is where we all live; and ‘development’ is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable” (p. 7). Part of the report’s definition included that perceived needs are different based on social and cultural determinations, and sustainability requires living within means (WCED, 1987). The commission and other scholars may argue that social and ethical values are inherently intertwined within these considerations. In comparison with sustainability of a public school district, environment and development, or progress, are also considerable factors.

Sustainability issues cannot be viewed or addressed in isolation—there is great need to approach solutions in an interdisciplinary manner because issues are inextricably tied politically, economically, and socially. “Brundtland mapped a very political agenda, arguing that”:

Sustainable development is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony, and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations. (as quoted in Redclift, 1991, p. 36; WCED, 1987, p. 46)

These aspects of the agenda also mirror issues that school district leaders encounter and often grapple with. It is likely the Brundtland Commission foresaw the political and ideological issues a sustainability agenda would encounter. Diesendorf (1999) also described Brundtland’s definition as emphasizing “the long-term aspect of the concept of

sustainability and introduces the ethical principle of achieving equity between the present and future generations” (p. 3). These conceptual understandings easily correspond with issues of sustainment in education.

Education. Overall, the literature on sustainability specifically in education reform is relatively scarce and trends toward ambiguity. However, much of educational research has been working toward understanding sustainability without necessarily using the term—instead using terms such as institutionalization, implementation, and entrenchment. For the purposes of this paper, this section focuses on the literature using the term sustainability specifically in order to determine what frameworks exist, and then to identify what other terms are related and should be explored in the subsequent stages of my research study.

There is a relative dearth of in-depth study of the specific topic of sustainability in education, with most research published between the 1990s and 2005, but in parallel with the term’s public popularity, more recent literature has begun to mention sustainability of reforms—typically through study of one specific initiative. Key educational sustainability scholars include Larry Cuban, David Tyack, Andy Hargreaves, Dean Fink, and Amanda Datnow. Ambiguity and broadness to a certain extent is necessary, as policy needs to be flexible and responsive to changing contexts and different policy landscapes. However, for a framework to be applicable in practice, for the policymakers and advisers themselves, more specificity in guidelines may be helpful (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Hargreaves and Fink (2000) summarized the concept of sustainability similarly to Brundtland (WCED, 1987): “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the

development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future” (p. 32).

Therefore, effective educational policy should neither be self-depleting nor depleting of other policy.

Tyack and Cuban (1995), in their classic book, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, described three criteria for the measurement of successful reforms: (1) fidelity to the original model; (2) achievement of predetermined goals; and (3) longevity (pp. 82-83). Referencing John Dewey (1938/1963), Tyack and Cuban (1995) described the importance of continuous interaction of aims and practices, and flexibility and responsiveness to changing contexts, and evolving goals focused on continued relevance. Reforms that have been sustained “have typically been gradual and incremental—tinkering with the system” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 5). As Hargreaves and Fink (2000) warned, sustainability also requires the consideration of another both in our present and future surrounding ecosystems. This concept is reminiscent of the definition of a pure public good and the unremitting debate over public education and public goods: “nonexcludable and nonrival in consumption” (Plank, 2014, p. 581). However, public education in the US is not a pure public good and the reality is far more complicated.

Hargreaves (2002) wrote that understanding and promotion of sustainability in educational reform requires: recognition of the “significance of social histories of educational change over time,” and consideration of the “nature and impact of social geographies of educational change across space” (p. 212). He defined social geographies as involving “the study of physical space and human constructions, perceptions and representations of spatiality as contexts for and consequences of human interaction” (p. 194). He also described five fundamental and interconnected characteristics of

educational reform sustainability: “(1) improvement that sustains learning; not merely change that alters schooling; (2) improvement that endures over time; (3) improvement that can be supported by available or achievable resources; (4) improvement that doesn’t impact negatively on the surrounding environment of other schools and systems; and (5) improvement that promotes ecological diversity and capacity throughout the educational and community environment” (Hargreaves, 2002, p. 193). The last two characteristics may be particularly applicable to the study of school choice sustainability and the framework. The fourth characteristic is similar to Brundtland’s; the fifth is part of one argument for choice expansion, however in many cases choice can limit diversity further and even dampen the capacity of the community in reforms. Hargreaves (2002) found that “over time, for too many educators, change is a serial killer. Its repeated actions defeat and destroy improvement instead of developing it,” citing poorly designed individual efforts at reform as a frequent cause of failure (p. 189).

Nocon (2004) used cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and what she referred to as “Cuban’s framework of sustainability” to analyze two independently operated after-school educational programs and the community-university coalition that was formed as an effort to ensure the programs’ sustainment (p. 710). Nocon referred to a keynote address presented by Cuban (2001) in which he questions about sustainability, and a related interview he gave with O’Neil (2000), which both provide important insight into the sustainability literature. In the keynote, Cuban (2001) provided insight on how and why to sustain reforms. He described the primary criteria used by policymakers for why to sustain reform as effectiveness, fidelity, popularity, and longevity. He drew attention to policymakers often rushing to develop and implement a reform, only to later

consider the critical question of why amidst failure. In his interview with O’Neil (2000), Cuban described the education reforms “that have the best chance of sticking are those that have constituencies that grow around them” (p. 7). An additional factor contributing to sustainability is “that the reform reflects some deep-rooted social concern for democracy, for equity, or for preparing students to lead fulfilling adult lives” (p. 7).

Datnow (2005) studied the sustainability of comprehensive school reform (CSR) models within changing state and district contexts. One noticeable contribution she made to sustainability literature is discussion over the terms sustainability versus institutionalization. She demonstrated that newer studies use the term sustainability and earlier studies use institutionalization, but that the definitions are indistinguishably related: “For a reform to become sustained, it must become institutionalized. So too, when a reform is institutionalized, it has been sustained over time” (Datnow, 2005, p. 123). More recent studies by Reckhow (2013) and Marsh (2016) also made considerations of sustainability. Reckhow (2013) echoed Cuban (2001) and Patashnik (2008) on the importance of constituencies and their investment in a new policy for its sustainability: “Reform that is sustainable in the long term reconfigures the political system, making it unlikely that the policy will be reversed” (p. 7). Reckhow (2013) drew from civic capacity as “a key feature of reform sustainability” (p. 7); described below is my intention to also draw from civic capacity for the framework. Marsh (2016) studied the case of the Public School Choice Initiative (PSCI) in Los Angeles, finding that “the reform’s enactment became a broader referendum on school governance and reform writ large,” when its intention was to improve learning for the district’s low-performing students and schools and overall accountability (p. 32). She brought greater attention to

“the effects of the politics of *surrounding* reforms and broader issues” (p. 2). This literature has helped to form the conceptual underpinnings of sustainability in the development of the framework for assessing policy.

Overview of Literature Contributing to Active Sustainability Framework

This section describes the early research into what a framework for traditional public school (TPS) and educational policy could look like. It explores relevant research in education and other disciplines, such as public administration. In education, this framework draws from research on civic capacity and other concepts related to sustainability by authors such as Tyack, Cuban, Hargreaves, Goodson, Reckhow, and Datnow. It also draws from different disciplines, such as public administration, and research on co-production. It involves the governance and power structure of decision makers and influencers in consideration of public values; these are critical considerations in the development of policy and programs if they are intended to last (Williams, Kang, & Johnson, 2016). This echoes Cuban’s emphasis on the importance of constituencies (O’Neil, 2000).

The process of developing this framework was to aim to learn about the sustainability of a system—in this case, traditional public school (TPS) districts. It sought to contribute to research on LESBs, how they understand their districts own sustainability situation, factors affecting sustainability, and the role that charter schools and a state’s charter law play. Table 1 outlines potential indicators to consider in district sustainability. It was based from work the researcher did in L.A. on behalf of the WTG Study and reflects those findings since this dissertation study is on LAUSD. The indicator itself is

listed in the left column and the right column provides an explanation of each indicator.

This list of indicators is not in any particular order of significance.

Table 1.

Potential indicators of district sustainability

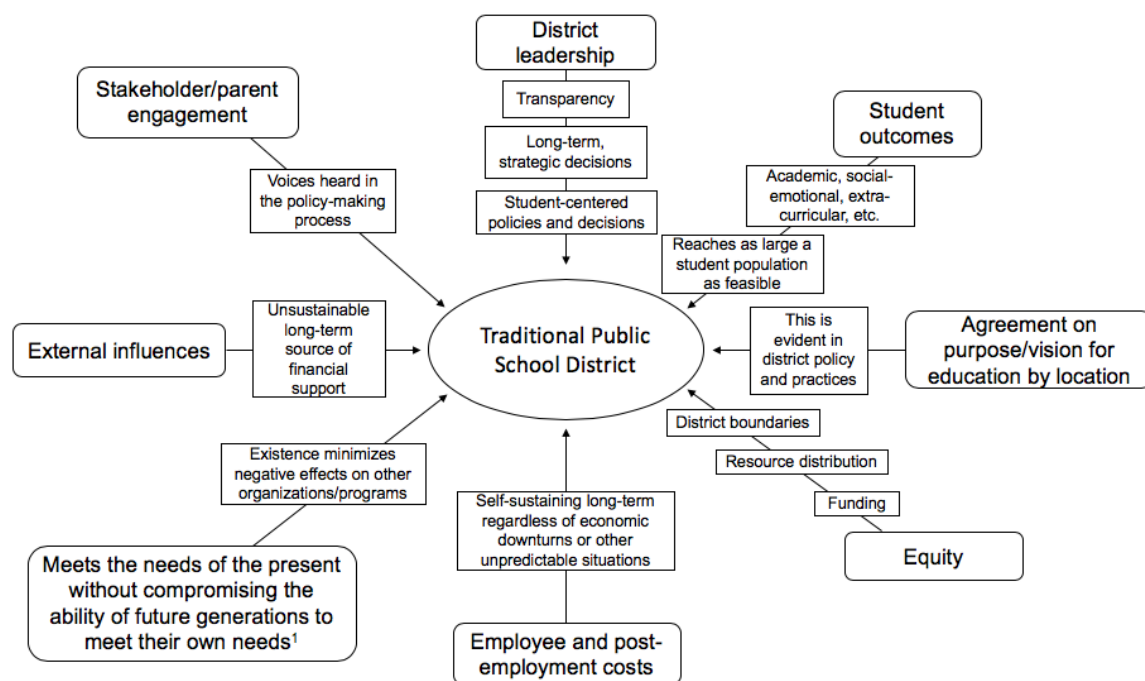
Sustainability Indicator	Explanation
Leadership	Transparent Stable Debate and actions incorporate long-term thinking and are student-centered Ability to make difficult decisions that support sustainability
District strategic plan	Incorporates long-term goals and plans Incremental change
Stakeholder engagement	Stakeholders' voices are heard Needs and demands are sought after, seriously considered, and incorporated into policy by decisionmakers
Funding equity	Federal, state, and local levels
Student outcomes	Positive student outcomes are met for as many students as possible
Student-centered policies and decisions	Adult needs are not met above student needs
Risk of state takeover	Self-reliant Risk of state takeover is low
Influence of intermediary sector	Any involved external organization supports district sustainability efforts No separate agendas that influence district policy and decision-making
Relationship with school choice system	Charter-district collaboration Strict and detailed charter accountability and regulation Consideration of traditional public schools when authorizing/renewing charters (e.g., fiscal, equity) Efficient spending of public funds on charters and facilities (e.g., charters using district facilities are paying what is owed)
Racial/SES integration	Diversity is valued Districts work to intentionally integrate schools Districts work to hire a diverse teacher labor force across schools
Current employee costs	Sustainable healthcare, pension contributions, and other benefits plans over the long-term

Post-employment costs	Sustainable healthcare, pension plans for former employees over the long-term
Facilities	Efficient spending on district facilities (e.g., no vacant buildings; ensure charters pay for use of district facilities)

Figure 4 is an initial concept map of this sustainability framework applying what appeared through research to be the most foundational indicators for the majority of large urban public school districts. This map intended to illustrate how many different factors push and pull at each TPS district.

Figure 4.

Original concept map of sustainability framework



1. (WCED, 1987)

Supporting Concepts

Civic capacity. Stone (2001) defined civic capacity as concerning “the extent to which different sectors of the community—business, parents, educators, state and local

officeholders, non-profits, and others—act in concert around a matter of community-wide import” (p. 596). Reckhow (2013) described additional “basic ingredients of civic capacity: the stakeholders are diverse, the coalition is formalized, and the agenda is clearly articulated” (p. 137). There have been several studies using civic capacity, connecting to sustainability and provide insight into what districts succeed or fail at.

Reckhow (2013) described:

Civic capacity [as] a key feature of reform sustainability. Yet studies of civic capacity have not systematically demonstrated why certain cities develop civic capacity and others do not ... There are some factors associated with cities that possess greater civic capacity, such as institutionalization of coalitions through formal organizations and mayoral involvement; however, civic capacity retains an elusive quality that makes it difficult to assess why some cities are fortunate enough to develop broad and sustainable civic coalitions. (pp. 7-8)

DeBray, Hanley, Scott, and Lubienski (2018) found that, “In terms of civic capacity, L.A. highlights the tensions between the ‘donor-driven’ environment and the historic patterns of local grassroots activism” in the collective capacity of these various sectors to address and solve problems in urban education (p. 21; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). Reckhow (2013) reaffirmed Cuban (O’Neil, 2000) regarding the necessity of constituencies for the fostering of sustainability and civic capacity—“The failure to win over key constituencies—including major advocacy organizations and groups representing public school parents—may jeopardize the long-term success of the reforms” (p. 103). Reckhow also indicated that “policy sustainability can occur with entrenchment alone” (p. 103). Marsh (2016), drawing from Malen (2006), signaled that study of civic capacity: “Unlike past studies characterizing politics as obstructing reform, this research emphasizes the potential for politics to advance and sustain reform” (p. 4).

One limitation of civic capacity is that “civic life is not geared to wide and sustained engagement in big problems. Mostly people deal with issues that are immediate in their daily lives, not wider concerns of the community” (Long, 1958; Stone, 2001, p. 596). Similarly, policymakers and district officials may find it difficult or unrealistic to authentically engage the community in the policy process directly based on their needs. Marschall and Shah (2005) described how the politics and institutions of urban public education can “hinder the emergence of civic capacity because of the diverse interest represented, the difficulty in identifying and employing appropriate selective incentives, and the limited role of policy entrepreneurs” (p. 164).

Co-production. Boyle and Harris (2009) defined co-production as:

Delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change. (p. 11)

In a book edited by Fugini, Bracci, and Sicilia (2016), the words ‘sustainable’ and ‘sustainability’ are mentioned over thirty times throughout their work on co-production. Bracci, Fugini, and Sicilia (2016) described Ostrom and Ostrom (1977) as having begun a debate in co-production that the “collaboration between the *supply side* and the *demand side* of services is a key aspect in achieving the desired results (outputs and outcomes) in most public services (p. 4). Education, as a public service, is no exception, however co-production is more nuanced than just citizen involvement in public services—that definition limits “the conceptual, practical and political significance” (p. 4).

Bracci et al. (2016) also provided several main elements of what co-production is (included are the most relevant to this framework): “(1) An active rather than a passive

involvement of users;” (2) “Should encompass the *whole policy process* (from design to delivery);” (3) “Requires *interdependency* among the involved actors, both in terms of supplied inputs and provided information, and of achievement of outcomes;” (4) “Has to be *transformative*, for the professionals and for all the involved actors;” (5) “Should be *innovative* and able to cope with the *changing technology and needs*;” and (6) “Fosters the *sustainability and resilience of public services*. Co-production may mobilize new resources, most of private type, and find ways for doing more with less” (p. 7).

Boyle and Harris (2009) described “why a radically new approach—sharing the design and delivery of services with users—can break this logjam and make services more effective for the public, more cost-effective for policymakers, and more sustainable for all of us” (p. 3). They discussed what co-production is and isn’t in great detail, but two elements stand out in regards to sustainability. The first was that co-production promotes equal participation; they state that it “has to have *equality* at its heart” as it necessitates involvement from *everyone* and not just those with social advantage. This requires consideration of the “underlying causes of inequality and how these can be tackled, and embrace very different ways of framing participation” (p. 17). The second was that co-production is essential to building sustainable public services; they also argue it “has to be about *sustainability*” (p. 17). This reference of the sustainability of resources in terms of ensuring the long-term provision of public services requires the long-term thinking that is essential to the policy process in my proposed framework.

Finally, and relating back to school choice, Boyle and Harris (2009) described choice as sometimes representing “the failure of empowerment, rather than its realization” (p. 7). The authors provided some commentary on the downfalls of choice in

relation to education—“the reality of provision has often failed to live up to the rhetoric of choice. In education, in effect it is schools which choose pupils, and many parents find themselves outside any catchment areas” (p. 6). In the case of the U.S., this is realized through barriers of zoning and assignment to public schools that dictate a student attends a certain school based on where they live, and how choice has often fueled segregation, not integration (Lafer, 2017; Wells, 2002; Windle, 2015). Even when a student has multiple choices for where to attend school, it is often difficult to obtain adequate information to inform the choice or the process is overly complicated to navigate.

Inevitably there are challenges, or a “dark-side” of co-production faced in practice—Williams, Kang, and Johnson (2016) called this co-contamination (p. 694). Prior to their exploration of this dark side, agreed upon challenges or costs confronting co-production included: “conflicting values among co-producers, institutional rigidity, risk aversion, lack of mechanisms to ensure accountability, shortage of capacity or incentives, and inherent conflicts that impact all group processes in general” (Williams et al., 2016, p. 694; see also Birchall & Simmons, 2004; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Evers & Ewert, 2012; Follett, 1981; Mayo and Moore, 2002; Williams, LePere-Schloop, Silk, & Hebdon, 2016). Williams et al. (2016) described “the dark side of CP [as] a result of public value co-contamination occurring during the interaction between service providers and users” (p. 710).

Co-production and civic capacity work together in the framework, as co-production provides understanding of what is needed to improve design and delivery of public services, and civic capacity provides greater insight into the accompanying political aspects. Both involve the strong formation of constituencies around particular

reforms—what has been described as a key element of sustaining reforms. Additionally, co-production and civic capacity help to better understand the emergent role played by IOs as their influence within/over education continues to evolve. The following chapter presents the study research design and methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation uses a qualitative research design to examine the sustainability of the Los Angeles Unified School District (hereafter referred to as LAUSD) in relation to the expansion of charter schools and other potential threats to the district's long-term fiscal sustainability. As described in Chapter 2, sustainability remains a contested space and therefore the research design for this dissertation aimed to cover multiple perspectives of the sustainability debate through the case of LAUSD. This study sought to understand these challenges through in-depth examination of related policy and legal processes in California and the confluence of intermediary organizations (hereafter referred to as IOs) with public entities.

This chapter describes the research design, rationale, the case and relevant context, data collection, and analysis. Also integral to this chapter, is the following section describing a grant study funded by the William T. Grant Foundation that the researcher worked on, and specifically how data collected for this grant were used for this dissertation.

William T. Grant Foundation Study

This dissertation research is an offshoot from a grant study the researcher worked on for three years, entitled: Intermediary Organizations and Education Policy: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Political Contexts of Research Utilization (hereafter referred to as the WTG Study). This study was funded by the William T. Grant Foundation and lead by

co-principal investigators (PIs) Janelle Scott (University of California, Berkeley), Elizabeth DeBray (University of Georgia), and Christopher Lubienski (Indiana University). It investigated how political contexts and IOs in New York City and Los Angeles inform research utilization and influence incentivist education policies, such as charter schools and teacher merit pay.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the PIs approved the use of data collected from Los Angeles. This data were collected by the PIs, myself, and other Graduate Assistants (GAs) in Los Angeles between 2016-2018. (See Appendix C for further details regarding the WTG Study, including data collection, analysis, and publications, and additional information on how WTG data was used for this dissertation.)

Relationship Between the WTG Study and Dissertation

This dissertation research evolved from analytic memos written by the researcher during work for the WTG Study. During fieldwork trips and remote interviews, a gap in the literature was identified for understanding how TPS districts understand and agree, or disagree, on their own sustainability threats. The WTG Study had a focus on charters and other incentivist educational policies and a pattern emerged that certain participants emphasized the fiscal effects of charters on the LAUSD and others de-emphasized such effects. The political and economic complexity of these statements was much more nuanced than is discussed in media reports and even in LAUSD board meetings.

This study drew from each L.A.-related WTG Study participant interview transcript, as each contains context of the political climate and dynamics, questions about the nature of IO influence and involvement in the policy process and in relation to the LAUSD board, and information specifically related to charter schools in L.A.

Additionally, during the researcher's second trip to L.A. for the WTG Study, the PI's granted permission to ask each participant interviewed specific questions about sustainability—including how each participant perceived sustainability in education and issues within the district, what sustainability threats were most imminent for LAUSD and why, and what barriers to improvement exist.

The WTG Study and this dissertation differ in several ways. Foremost, this dissertation research specifically explores the sustainability of LAUSD itself and the perspectives of local decision-makers regarding how they understand and approach solutions for sustainability challenges. Secondly, the attention to the California charter law and its role in TPS sustainability differentiates this dissertation from the WTG Study. This dissertation was a separate analysis from the WTG Study but using parts of the WTG data (in addition to data collected by the researcher specifically for this study). This dissertation asked different questions of the WTG data and used different qualitative codes for analysis. The WTG Study data were re-analyzed using the codes developed specifically for this dissertation. Findings from applying the dissertation codes to WTG data did inform the updated active sustainability framework. For example, research utilization, the primary focus of the WTG Study, was found to be a factor for traditional public school (TPS) district sustainability, however both data sets provided evidence of an overall lack of research use in practice by policymakers.

Breakdown of the Dissertation Study

Structure and Research Questions

This dissertation used a case study design to examine the relationship between the expansion of charter schools in Los Angeles and the fiscal sustainability of LAUSD.

Detailed case description includes the path to passage of the original California Charter School Act of 1992, subsequent major amendments to the law, and political dynamics at the national, California, and Los Angeles local-levels. This evolving issue of TPS sustainability was investigated amidst charter growth in L.A. through the perspectives of local leaders and involved IOs to provide insight into what and/or who influences the LAUSD School Board's decision making and policy actions regarding the district's sustainability, and how state-level governance decisions can affect those at the local level. Data were analyzed using qualitative coding, guided primarily by *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* authored by Johnny Saldaña (2016). This study answers the following research questions:

1. How has the California Charter School Act of 1992 changed over time through the legislative amendment process?
2. Which amendments to the California Charter School Act from 1992 through 2019 affect the sustainability of traditional public schools (specifically the Los Angeles Unified School District)? How does the California charter law relate to district sustainability from the perspective of LAUSD school board members? From the perspective of intermediary organizations and their backers involved with the board?
3. How can data from this study contribute to the development of an emerging active sustainability framework for traditional public school districts and their decision makers?

Research Design and Rationale

The Case and Context

This dissertation is a study of the case of LAUSD. The rationale for LAUSD as a striking case is its unique context: size, the power and presence of its teacher unions, and the robustness of its charter and IO sectors. LAUSD is the second largest school district in the U.S. (the largest with a locally elected school board) and has the highest percentage of students attending charter schools (approximately 27 percent of students TK-12) in the U.S. This study is bounded between the years 2014 and 2019—from a point of peak political tensions between charters and traditional public schools in Los Angeles to the Fall 2019 signing of the latest CA state charter amendments into law. An exception to the boundaries of the case is the historical context answering Research Question 1 and the first part of Research Question 2 about the original 1992 California Charter School Act and subsequent amendments to the state’s charter law that help to explain the sustainability circumstances between 2014 and 2019.

LAUSD student enrollment has been in decline since 2003 when enrollment peaked at 750,000 overall total students; this past school year (2022-2023) counted approximately 571,000 students (Burke & Willis, 21 April 2020). Factors for LAUSD enrollment decline include birth rate decline, families moving outside the district, students leaving for different school types (e.g., independent charter schools, private schools), and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2.

Present day LAUSD case characteristics, 2022-2023

Characteristics	Details
Enrollment and district size	571,002 overall total students (includes all students, i.e., adult education, Pre-K) 399,201 total graded enrollment (TK-Grade 12) Approximately 4.8 million people live within LAUSD boundaries LAUSD boundaries cover 710 square miles, including the City of Los Angeles in addition to all/portions of 25 cities/unincorporated L.A. County areas
Schools	Total: 1,438 Independent charters: 224
School demographics	Latino: 73.8% White: 9.6 % African American: 7.1% Asian: 3.3% Filipino: 1.6% American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander: <1% Not reported: 1.5%
Policy context	Tensions between traditional public schools and charters LAUSD Board is currently split 3-4 between charter-backed and union-backed members
Governance structure/leadership	Superintendent of LAUSD: Alberto Carvalho (began March 2022) Local district superintendents within LAUSD: 6 Each board district represented by an LAUSD elected school board members (7 Board Members) Mayor of Los Angeles: Karen Bass (Democrat; previously Chair of Congressional Black Caucus and U.S. Congresswoman from California)
Employees	23,553 K-12 teachers 2,895 K-12 administrators 74,000 total employees
School system structure	Types of schools include: traditional public, independent and affiliated charter, magnet, special education, option
IO sector	Robust and developed sector including local and national foundations, nonprofits, local and state advocacy groups, think tanks

Source: (LAUSD Fingertip Facts, 2022-2023)

LAUSD presents a diverse case through which to explore multiple stakeholder perspectives and decision making. In addition, California's state charter law provides an exemplary case of possible effects of charter laws on the fiscal sustainability of educational government institutions and how IOs may (or may not) influence public policy and lawmaking. The IO sector is deeply involved with charter schools in Los Angeles and across California, which provided evidence of the underlying forces of IOs in education, how they work collectively (or do not), and together with policymakers. The influence of IOs in L.A. has been exemplified by recent school board elections in 2017 and 2020 when campaign contributions set national records for the most expensive LESB elections ever. Between 2011 and 2013, campaign donations jumped from approximately \$1.3 million to \$4.6 million; the percentage of contributions from large national donors compared with individual (local and metro) donors increased from 13 to 48 percent (Henig, Jacobsen, & Reckhow, 2019).

Expansion of the context and actors who inform the case includes: the California Charter School Act; certain individuals involved in the writing and passage of the original 1992 and subsequent amendments; and group convenings of experts from different areas of California education. Highlights of the CA state charter law and major amendments between 1992-2019 provided responses for Research Question 1 and historical context for Research Question 2 findings. Major amendments to the charter law were identified through amendments mentioned by interview participants and supplemental research.

The seven-member LAUSD School Board is a central player for this case, and the broader ecology surrounding them and connected to their work were also key to context

and understanding sought through the research questions (Scott et al., 2019; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). This included related IOs, media coverage, and those outside of L.A. but involved in CA charter schools. Similarly, certain members of the Governor-convened Charter Task Force are Los Angeles-based, but their work for that group was state-level. Portions of the interview protocol intended to better understand how their perspective of circumstances in L.A. informed their work for this group.

Case Study

The post-positivist epistemological approach for case study research methodology advanced by Robert Yin guided the research design for this study (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018). The case study research method met several criteria for this dissertation including research questions asking “how,” the research was focused on a contemporary set of events, and the researcher had little or no control over those events (Yin, 2018, p. 11). Simons (2009), drawing from Adelman, Kemmis, and Jenkins (1980) and Yin (1994), points out that a case study is not defined by methodology, but rather helps form the shape of the study—enabling it to include quantitative data and not strictly qualitative, which was the case with certain documents included in my data collection (e.g., LAUSD financial documents; California state education budget data).

Yin (2002) describes a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not yet clearly evident” (p. 13). This intrinsic case study sought to learn about the case of LAUSD in and of itself; it explores and presents “rival claims and alternative perspectives” in order to push on the boundaries between the phenomenon of LAUSD fiscal and political sustainability and the

context, and to support validity and reliability (Yin, 2018, p. 245). It is an examination of LAUSD, but also the inner workings of the system within its political, economic, and social contexts (i.e., its policy ecology) (Weaver-Hightower, 2008), its relationships both within and outside the system, and effects of external factors. As is the situation in LAUSD, this study brings attention to the real-life context of what is critically involved in sustaining a traditional public school system in concurrence with the phenomenon of charter school injected directly into the boundaries of that original system. Charters as a relatively newer education reform effort and their long-term effects on the sustainability of traditional public school districts are in fact not yet clearly evident.

Data Collection

This section describes the data collection process for this study, including the types of data collected, collection process, and organization. Data collection trips to Los Angeles were in October 2016, November 2017, and August 2018; the first two were for the WTG Study and the third trip was for this dissertation study. The third and final trip there was funded by a small dissertation study grant awarded the researcher through the University of Georgia. The timing for this trip was prior to prospectus, however it was approved by the Dissertation Chair and Committee due to demonstration of being far enough into the process. The remaining data collection was approved by the Committee to be conducted remotely due the researchers' high-risk pregnancy and subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Management

Data were organized within Microsoft Office, Google Suite, and backed up in Dropbox. Google Sheets were used for annotation of each source for the systematic

literature review in order to track references, where to find the source, and memo writing throughout research. Google Sheets were also used to categorize and track relevant documents (e.g., LAUSD reports and presentations; charter school studies) and interview organization (e.g., interview participant information, dates contacted, and scheduled interview dates). Google Docs were used for analytic memo writing throughout this project. Additionally, a Google Doc was created for each interview and included: the master interview protocol (see Appendix D); questions specific to the participant's role, the common questions for all participants, and space at the end for a post-interview memo. Google Docs were also used for each observation and post-observation memo writing. All audio-recordings, transcripts, and documents (including collected documents for data and documents for writing the study), were stored in a password-protected Dropbox account. WTG Study data is stored in a password-protected Box.com account.

Interviews

The interview protocol was developed with the purpose of guiding conversation between the researcher and interview participant with semi-structured open-ended questions. This provided a structure for the interview, but also left space for individual perspective and identification of potential patterns between participants and each of their own perceptions (Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2003). The interview questions were designed to limit any influence of the researcher on the conversation and perspectives given by participants.

Each participant was asked the same set of general questions including those related to the political context and educational policy landscape in L.A., how participants define sustainability, and perspectives on various sustainability threats and solutions. The

remainder of the interview questions were categorized by interview participant—policymaker, IO representatives, California Governor-appointed California Charter Task Force members, and researchers. The interview protocol was slightly modified as necessary throughout the interviewing period and those changes were noted and dated within the protocol.

All interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher (with permission from each participant). The average time for interviews was 30 minutes, with each interview ranging from between 15 to 60 minutes (note: only one interview was 15 minutes—with an LAUSD Board Member who had to cut our interview short due to time constraints). Interviews were conducted in person, through Zoom, or over the phone when in-person was not possible. There was one data collection trip to Los Angeles for dissertation-specific fieldwork and three participants were interviewed in person; however, one had to cancel last minute and conduct the interview over the phone. The remaining interviews conducted were through Zoom or by telephone. For remote interviews, the researcher requested meeting through Zoom and changed to telephone at any participant request. Each interview was transcribed using the website Temi.com. Temi.com is a for-pay software that uses advanced speech recognition software to transcribe recordings within minutes. These transcriptions did not always have a 100 percent accuracy rate—therefore, to ensure complete accuracy, each transcription was read through while listening to the audio recording, making corrections when necessary.

During each interview, the researcher wrote detailed notes of location, context, and participant responses (for reference and in case of recording device failure). Each participant was given the option to review selected quotations or relevant portions of the

paper prior to their being used in the final study; this was approached by writing the specified section and sending it to the participant for overall approval for use of the quotation and/or approval of accuracy on any relevant descriptions.

Sample Selection

Interview participant selection used a purposeful snowball sampling strategy; starting with participants from the WTG Study, those interview transcripts were re-read for any mention of other people to contact, then researched to determine whether they would be relevant to this study (i.e., policymakers and advisors involved with CA charter law; LAUSD Board members and advisors; IO representatives involved in charter schools and LAUSD; scholars researching the effects of charter schools on TPS; charter school sector leaders in CA; etc.). One interview participant from the WTG Study had previously spoken about fiscal sustainability and held a leadership position in an organization that frequently works with LAUSD, so he was interviewed a second time for this study. The interview protocol included a question asking each participant for suggestions for additional people to contact. (Yin, 2016).

Separate from the WTG Study, the remaining participants sought were LAUSD Board members, members of the Action Team on Charter Schools and Charter Task Force. Other participants included: representatives of local and national IOs whose work is related to charter schools in CA (e.g., charter management organizations (CMO's); foundations; think tanks; non-profits); and university researchers who have studied and written on this topic in L.A. These participants were chosen for their in-depth knowledge of and experience with charter schools in California and/or Los Angeles. The LAUSD School Board Members were chosen as they serve as the charter authorizers for Los

Angeles and are the primary decision-makers regarding fiscal sustainability for the district.

After speaking with one member of the Action Team, the researcher discontinued attempting contact with the remaining members. This participant described the group as one in name only that neither met nor produced anything of substance. This one member was also the only person the researcher received a response from out of thirteen members.

Each participant was contacted through an initial e-mail letter describing the researcher, the purpose of the study, and what would be required should they agree to participate. Some connections were made through direct e-mails between past WTG Study or this study's interview participants and suggested future participants. Cold-emailing potential participants was relatively successful; however, response and interview scheduling rates were higher when the researcher was directly connected through another participant. Each recruiting email included a consent form further detailing these requirements; if they agreed, they would sign, return the form, and the researcher would sign.

Table 3.

Distribution of interview participants (summer 2018-winter 2021)

Participant
LAUSD district official, Innovation Office*
LA Area Chamber of Commerce EVP*
Researcher, University of Oregon
Researcher, University of Southern California
Hewlett Foundation official, Action Team Member
LAUSD Board Member
LAUSD Board Member
LAUSD Board Member

LAUSD Board Member
Chief of Staff, LAUSD Board Member
Former Senator, California State Senate
Senior Director, Association of California School Administrators/Charter
Task Force Member
Educator and Administrator, Aspire Public Schools/Charter Task Force
Member
Board of Directors and Educator, California Teachers Association/Charter
Task Force Member
Executive Director & Founder, Charter Schools Development Center

TOTAL: 15

*Interviewed twice—once for WTG Study, once for dissertation

Observations

The observations used for this study were primarily conducted remotely, with several conducted in person on behalf of the WTG Study but with significance for this dissertation. This study used the same observation protocol from the WTG Study for continuity and because the protocol used for the WTG Study was semi-structured to limit observer bias and interpretation during observation and subsequent analysis. Monthly LAUSD Board meetings were the primary events observed—two were observed in person and the remainder observed through Live Stream and previously recorded video through the LAUSD Board website.

The trips to Los Angeles were timed to coincide with the monthly Board meetings, and more specifically, when charter school issues were front and center in the agenda. During one fieldwork trip for the WTG Study, the researcher was observing outside the LAUSD headquarters with hundreds of protesters from LAUSD independent charter schools because it was rumored that the Board might vote to revoke the charter for several charter schools. Subsequent Board meetings were observed remotely based on the proposed agenda and whether there would be votes/discussion on charter schools and

other items related to fiscal sustainability (i.e., budget presentations and major board decisions). Media reports (before and after Board meetings) from the Los Angeles Times, L.A. School Report, and other sources also helped to identify which meetings to observe.

Documents

Document sources for this study were extensive and included CA legislative documents (e.g., the CA Charter School Act of 1992 and amendments); charter school studies (CA-specific and national); reports released from the Charter Task Force; and LAUSD Board meeting minutes. Document collection was executed through searching a variety of portals such as the LAUSD, CA State Legislature, and CA Department of Education websites; the Los Angeles Times and other traditional news outlets; blogs and other information websites such as LA School Report, EdSource, the74, and Education Week. These media outlets provided reports and insights for relevant situations and interviews with sources that supplemented the interviews conducted by the researcher. LAUSD documents included: Board meeting minutes; PowerPoint slides and Excel spreadsheets of budget planning and fiscal updates; and policy implementation plans and reports. These documents were used for the historical timeline for Research Question 1, and supplemented findings for Research Questions 2 and 3.

Data Analysis

This section describes the data analysis process for this study and carefully details the function of WTG study data in relation to data collected for this study. This qualitative analysis relied on inductive and iterative strategies, including concept mapping, two coding cycles, analytic memo writing, categorizing, and thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2016; Simons, 2003). Google Sheets were used for coding and each coding

cycle was separated in an individual tab. The findings resulted in an updated active sustainability framework.

Coding

This study analysis was primarily guided by *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* by Johnny Saldaña (2016) and related sources recommended for making qualitative inquiry decisions. Coding was determined to be an appropriate analysis method, and specifically the use of Saldaña as guide, because it provided for adaptability throughout analysis, while necessitating meticulous structure and organization of data and upholding of analytical validity and reliability. This study sought to provide perspectives from different participants involved in the case, recognizing that interpretation of interview data required incorporation of context, position, and the complex nuances of the politics of education into analysis and the presentation of findings.

Saldaña's perspective of coding as a heuristic fit well with the inductive approach of this study: “coding is a heuristic (from the Greek, meaning ‘to discover’)—an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas or algorithms to follow” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). This dissertation study originated from observations of LAUSD fiscal sustainability challenges during the WTG Study, which led to initial analysis and hypothesizing what increases and decreases TPS fiscal sustainability. Charter schools were observed to be one challenge to LAUSD that contributed to fiscal instability while also being defended to contribute to improving the LAUSD through competition. The observations and data collection began again with the start of this study to explore, through the lens of charter schools and TPS sustainability, what more broadly

in policymaking could improve the fiscal sustainability of a large urban school district such as LAUSD. “Once a code is applied to a datum during first cycle analysis, it is not a fixed representation but a dynamic and malleable process ‘through which to consider and interact with further observations and ideas’” (Locke, Feldman, & Golden-Biddle, 2022, p. 6, as cited in Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). Each coding cycle in this dynamic process “actively facilitate[d] the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9).

Analytic Memo Writing

Merriam (2009) emphasizes that “Qualitative data analysis should also be conducted *along with* (not after) data collection” (p. 269)—a strategy which was followed by coding after each conducted interview and frequent analytic memo writing (Saldaña, 2016). Simons (2003) further distinguished between analysis and interpretation, which also served as a guide throughout data collection:

Though it is possible to make this distinction between analysis and interpretation, it is also important to state that these are not discrete processes. Each may be present to different degrees at different stages; they are interactive and iterative throughout the research and in your thinking. Flashes of insight, images or metaphors may come as you engage in the formal categorization of data. Connecting themes identified through a specific analytic process may lead to a particular interpretation and so on. The process is one of moving backwards and forwards between the data, the understandings that you are gaining, the questions you are refining and the next field visit, set of observations or interviews. (p. 118)

Analytic memo writing enabled that movement “backwards and forwards between the data;” they provided space to maintain consistent records and for the deconstruction and construction of analytical interpretations (Simons, 2003, p. 118). They served as decision checkpoints, and a space for reflection throughout the study. Memo writing facilitated

critical thinking about the challenges being investigated; it served as a structured place to brainstorm and work through problems and solutions (Saldaña, 2016).

Following each interview or observation, a memo was written to note anything of significance prior to the first coding cycle. Memos were also written in between coding cycles and included concept mapping for the sustainability framework, observations through each coding cycle, and general thoughts or ideas. Frequent concept mapping aided the development of the categories and themes, and the codes for the second coding cycle using Pattern coding. These drafted memos and visualization exercises were maintained in a Google Doc in a journal format. Each memo was written in the same format with the date in bold at the top left corner, and italicization, brackets, and colored fonts were used to differentiate entries (i.e., by chapter, research question, source, coding, etc.).

First Coding Cycle: a priori and In Vivo

A priori codes were developed as an initial foundation for the emergent sustainability framework, interview protocol, and to steer other study design decisions. These preliminary codes were developed from the researcher's analytic memos, interview transcripts, and observations from the WTG Study, in addition to extensive research on related topics (e.g., LESBs; state charter school law; charter schools; sustainability of organizations/institutions in education and other sectors; policy sustainability; and interest groups), and prior general knowledge. The *a priori* codes were predicated on this researcher's observations, research, and memo writing during the WTG Study, which limited researcher preconceptions and without distorting fieldwork interpretation and analysis (Saldaña, 2016). This pre- data collection and analysis strategy also guided the

study toward differentiation from the WTG Study. Table 4 below shows the *a priori* coding as part of the first coding cycle.

Table 4.

Study definitions and a priori codes by category

Working study definition of sustainability in policy decision-making	
Meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs	
Minimizes negative effects on other organizations/programs/policies	
Categories	<i>a priori</i> codes
Stakeholder/parent engagement	Voices heard in the policy-making process
District leadership	Transparency Long-term, strategic decisions Student-centered policies and decisions
Student outcomes	Academic Social-emotional Extracurricular Reaches as large a student population as feasible
Agreement on purpose and/or vision for education by location	Evident in district policy and practices
Equity	Funding Resource distribution District boundaries
Employee and post-employment costs	Self-sustaining long-term regardless of economic downturns or other unpredictable situations
External influences (i.e., IOs)	Unsustainable long-term source of financial support

In Vivo Coding was used for the first coding cycle to identify and explore, in their own words, what participants discussed as most important for this investigation. In Vivo Codes are put in quotation marks to show they come directly from participant interviews. The codes were therefore “participant-inspired rather than researcher-generated” and

provided “a crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant’ ‘to the participant and may help to crystallize and condense meanings”” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 135, as quoted by Saldaña, 2016, p. 107).

Through intermittent analytical memo writing, In Vivo Coding inductively directed the researcher toward potential patterns and categories based on what participants chose to emphasize in their interview responses. The In Vivo codes, and in certain cases the larger paragraphs they came from, were then used as evidence to support the argument of what belongs in the sustainability framework as it stood at the completion of this particular study. This coding cycle paved the road for the emerging sustainability framework to be deeply rooted in the interview participant’s words and language (Saldaña, 2016).

Coding Transitions

After the first cycle of coding, those codes were organized and reorganized several times in order to assess and make subsequent analytical decisions. Code mapping, concept mapping, diagramming, and memo writing were all critical at this juncture for choosing to recode the data in a second coding cycle (Saldaña, 2016). Table 4 provides one example of code mapping and working through possible categories and themes in between cycles. Concept mapping and diagramming provided visual iterations of the active sustainability framework, and memo writing supported thinking through each iteration and exploring the first cycle codes. As the researcher worked through these transitional methods, it became clearer that the primary findings of this study would be an updated active sustainability framework (as opposed to analyzing the data through the original framework presented in the prospectus defense); a second cycle of coding would

take the initial summarization of data segments and provide a “way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236). Pattern Coding was determined to be a fitting second coding cycle method to work toward identifying emergent and more meaningful themes to further build the framework.

Table 5.

Transition mapping between coding cycles

Categories	Preliminary Patterns from In Vivo Coding
Sustainability	Fiscal sustainability of district, other entities Relationships between district and other influential organizations/factors Any discussion of threats and/or supports to sustainability Sustainability an important consideration in policymaking (or not) Perceptions of sustainability debates Sustainability strengthened by a certain factor/IO Sustainability threatened by a certain factor/IO Effects of charters of TPS district sustainability
CA charter law	Noticeable effects on charter authorizer abilities Perceptions of threats to sustainability within law Amendments/failed amendments to law Perceptions of why amendments did/didn't pass
Intermediary organizations	Influence and advocacy positions on charter law Perceptions of influence on policymaking process Influence on groups (Advisory Team and Task Force) created to propose amendments to law Perceptions on who appointed to these groups Political differences
LAUSD Board	Perceptions on how charter law influences their responsibilities as charter authorizer Influences on their roles as policymakers Perceptions on real or perceived threats to sustainability of LAUSD Perceptions on solutions to mitigate possible sustainability threats Leadership rhetoric versus action
Political context	Tensions between TPS and charters Differences between IOs and policymakers Elections (recent gubernatorial race, CA Superintendent of Public Instruction, LAUSD Board)

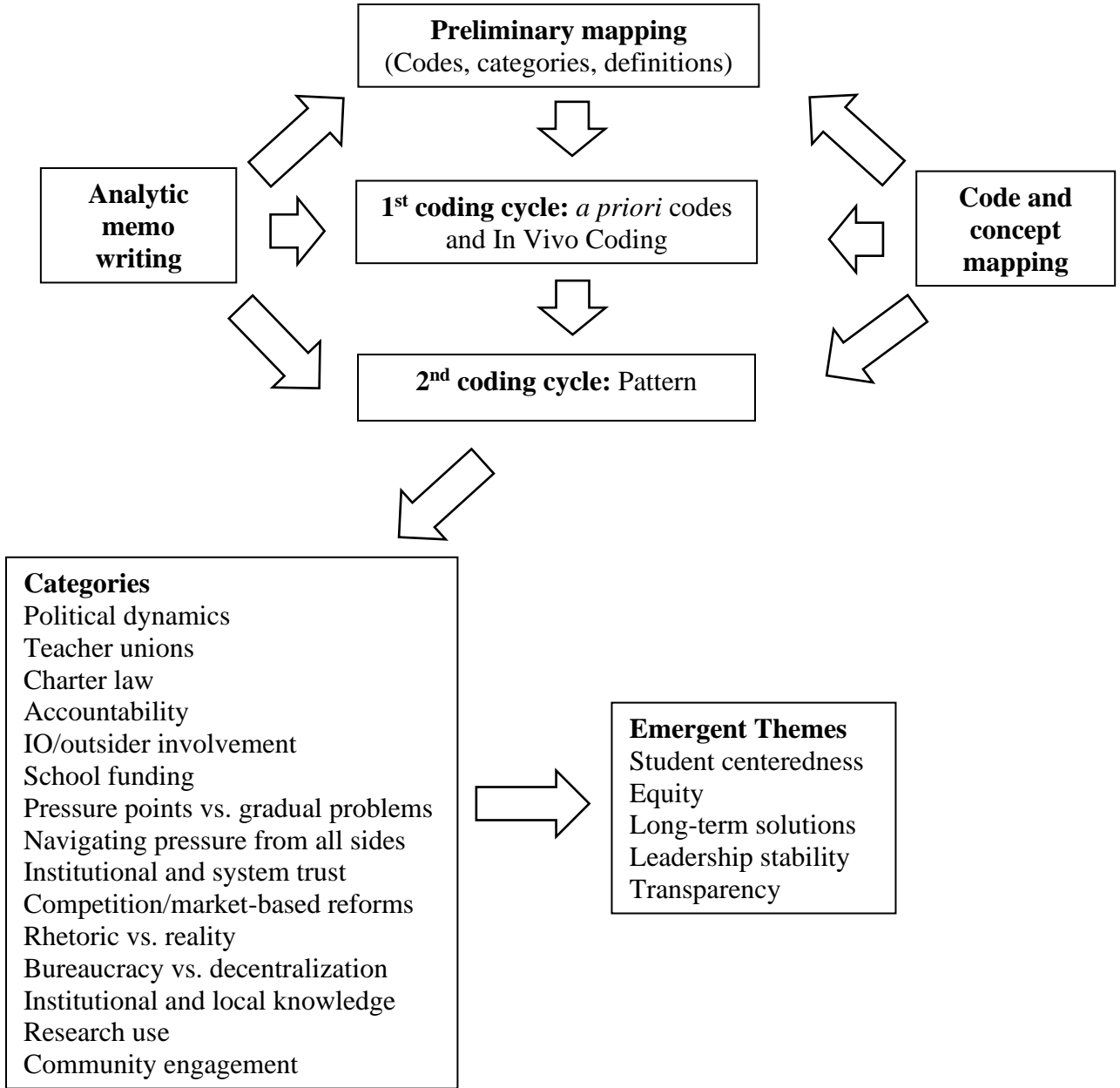
Second Coding Cycle: Pattern Coding

Major themes from the data began to develop during the second coding cycle—using Pattern Coding, ultimately becoming the key principles of the sustainability framework (presented in the findings chapters). Through the process of In Vivo coding the interview transcripts, then Pattern Coding for categories and themes, the categories and themes stemmed directly from the participants—who were all practitioners, policymakers, and other officials who worked within the case of LAUSD.

Themes that were termed “contested factors,” were themes that emerged as recurring in a pattern but disagreed upon across participants. For example, participants from charter organizations or identified as pro-charter believed that competition from charters in relation to LAUSD would (or at least should) lead to LAUSD improvement and therefore a strengthening of stability. Conversely, those seen as on the opposite side believed that competition from charters further exacerbated and threatened the long-term sustainability of LAUSD. The key principles were identified through recoding the transcripts with Pattern Coding and its function in condensing the large data corpus into smaller, more manageable portions (Saldaña, 2016). Certain codes in the first and second cycle overlapped and that facilitated identification of those agreed upon key principles.

Figure 5.

Summary of analysis process



Source: Brooks (2015)

Validity and Reliability

Strategies followed for validity and reliability for this study draw from Tracy (2010), Yin (2003; 2018), and Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014; 2016). Each step for this study's research design described above was chosen to with intent to strengthen qualitative rigor and caution to prevent researcher bias and preconceptions. Reliability was also pursued through maintaining painstaking records of every aspect of this case study to ensure repeatability of the research design (Yin, 2003; Yin, 2018).

“Coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act” and Saldaña's exhaustive guidebook navigated this study toward its ultimate presentation of sustainability findings for LAUSD (Saldaña, 2016, p. 5). There are certain critiques of coding as a method of qualitative data analysis which Saldaña (2016) recognizes as legitimate. Criticisms related to this study include: coding is a limited data analysis method, it is outdated, reductionist, mechanistic and “distances you from your data,” and that coding claims objectivity (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 40-42). Coding is only one method for qualitative data analysis and is not appropriate for every study; it was a sound method for this case study because emphasis on the participants' words and concepts was essential for investigating their perspectives and basing the active sustainability framework on what issues are most important to practitioners in LAUSD and L.A. education. Coding could be viewed as reductionist, however one of its strengths and purposes is to explore intricately complex issues and assign meaning for other researchers and outsiders to gain new knowledge from. Mechanistic aspects of coding positively contribute to validity and reliability, and in order to “code *well*,” you must inherently be immersed in the data as it “requires that you read, reread and reread yet again as you code, recode, and recode yet

again” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 41). Finally, objectivity in research is a noble but unachievable aim. Frequent analytic memo writing is indispensable to identify and scrutinize biases, assumptions, and limitations, and success varies by researcher topic. "Objectivity has always been an ideal yet contrived and virtually impossible goal to achieve in quantitative research. So why should qualitative inquiry carry their baggage? We do not claim to be objective because the notion is a false god” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 41).

Triangulation was also used as a manner of supporting construct validity throughout the research process; using multiple sources of evidence (i.e., interviews, observations, documents, and fieldnotes), helped converge lines of inquiry (Yin, 2003; Yin, 2018). Tracy (2010) reminds that triangulation is achieved when multiple sources of evidence all reach the same conclusions—thus increasing validity of findings. There are arguments that it does not always ensure enhanced accuracy, but does deepen understanding of different aspects of the problem being studied and overall improves validity in this way (Denzin, 1978).

Bias, Assumptions, and Limitations

Several biases, assumptions, and limitations were identified as this dissertation developed. Prior to and during graduate school, the researcher worked as a teacher in private and charter schools, and for the State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia as a research analyst and charter governing board monitor. As a result, there was some bias regarding the researcher’s in-depth understanding of the challenges of the charter authorization and monitoring processes, and the daily demands and pressures on school governing boards. The intricacies of running a school district and satisfying as many stakeholders as possible are incredibly complex—in addition to considering effects on

other surrounding schools, programs, and communities. LESB members generally appear to have good intentions, but unfortunately, political dynamics and supporters who helped get them elected can have a profound impact on how they govern.

Assumptions include that the resulting framework from this study is a new contribution to the literature on fiscal and political sustainability for traditional public schools, especially in relation to charter school expansion. Thus far, there has been little similar work found. The population of LAUSD will continue to decline.

One limitation of this study is that a study of organizational sustainability requires time and long-term investigation. Sustainability is inherently an enduring question, but a dissertation required a bounded timeframe through which to capture the politics and nuances as well as possible. Close attention was given to stakeholder perspectives on sustainability in the present time, given data available on the current fiscal situation for LAUSD, what has been done in the past to improve it, and more deeply understanding what is presently being done to ensure the district does not go bankrupt. This involved assessing any actions that do or have occurred within the bounded time frame of this study to better understand whether the rationale and data backing the decision carefully considered long-term effects or could be categorized more as “punting” on the issue knowing it will have to be dealt with again in near future.

Other limitations of this study included the ongoing nature of these issues and participant willingness to speak with me. For example, on the Advisory Team and Task Force, those groups were still in the process of meeting their designated responsibilities and some were unwilling to speak with me while the work in ongoing. However, this is always a risk with interviewing as a primary data source. Another major limitation was

not being able to return to L.A. for more fieldwork due to the high-risk pregnancy and then the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these restrictions, the participants interviewed represented a wide-ranging sample of perspectives and experiences for the purposes of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the first part of the findings from this study of district sustainability, and the relationship between charter school expansion and locally elected school boards through the case of the Los Angeles Unified School District. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How has the California Charter School Act of 1992 changed over time through the legislative amendment process?
2. Which amendments to the California Charter School Act from 1992 through 2019 affect the sustainability of traditional public schools (specifically the Los Angeles Unified School District)? How does the California charter law relate to district sustainability from the perspective of LAUSD school board members? From the perspective of intermediary organizations and their backers involved with the board?
3. How can data from this study contribute to the development of an emerging active sustainability framework for traditional public school districts and their decision makers?

The purpose of this study was to learn how charter schools can affect the fiscal and political sustainability of traditional public school (TPS) districts, in this case in a large urban district, and to advance the development of a framework for examining and

addressing these sustainability concerns. This study investigates this through a focus on locally elected school boards (LESBs) decision-making: to examine how LESBs function, consider how their roles may have changed since the advent of charter schools, and better understand the many competing issues they juggle. It is incredibly difficult to be a decisionmaker and leader in education. The pressures are immense and board members, superintendents, and any education leader has to factor in many competing needs and considerations into their decisions. Adding to the complexities of LAUSD, nationwide LESB elections are attracting greater attention and spending (Henig, Jacobsen, & Reckhow, 2019); LESB elections—“often formally non-partisan and held off-cycle from higher-profile elections for general-purpose offices—are usually marked by low levels of attention and participation, making it easier for an active group to hold disproportionate sway” (Henig, 2013, p. 148; Moe, 2011).

The sustainability framework for the purposes of this study considers LESB decision-making exclusively through the context of charter schools as a potential threat to the sustainability of the LAUSD. The findings presented in this chapter fuel the development of the framework. It is critical to note that the proliferation of charter schools is only *one* factor of many affecting the sustainability of LAUSD and other U.S. districts. Other factors include, but are not limited to: rising costs of pension and health benefits (Aldeman, 31 August, 2017; LAUSD, 2017); changing demographics in Los Angeles (decreasing student population equals overall decrease in funding); and overall local, state, and federal funding issues. This varies by state, city/town, and district, however many of the factors are similar and widely applicable. The prevailing dynamic in L.A. is about where the money is going and where all the fighting is, so they get much

of the attention in California— “most districts don’t have that kind of fighting” (J. Fensterwald, personal communication, April 11, 2020).

The findings are divided into two chapters—Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 describes study findings by providing the answers found to the first two research questions, expounding on what was learned. This includes a brief history of the California Charter Act of 1992, and contributing perspectives from various interview participants into how the latest amendment to the CA charter law affects the sustainability of the LAUSD. Chapter 5 then applies these insights to further development of the active sustainability framework begun in Chapter 2.

A Brief History of the California Charter Law, 1992-2019

This section presents findings for Research Question #1: How has the California Charter School Act of 1992 changed over time through the legislative amendment process. This brief historical account includes evidence from interview participants involved in its inception, perspectives on the consequences of the way the law was originally written, subsequent amendments over time, and lessons learned. These major changes to the law were identified through study of the California Legislative Information website, relevant media articles, observations of LAUSD Board meetings, and guidance from interview participants (from those participants directly involved in these legislative changes and/or with in-depth knowledge of the CA charter law).

Understanding the origins of and amendments to the California charter law is important to setting the stage for the sustainability framework through learning to what extent a charter law could affect TPS district sustainability. Each charter law varies state to state in the U.S. in what is included and excluded in its contents; the influences behind

those inclusions and exclusions also vary and have changed as charters have expanded. This portion of the history is based on conversations with Senator Hart, prior to his death in January 2022, and a representative from the Charter Schools Development Center in Sacramento, CA and former legislative analyst deeply involved in the formation and implementation of the original charter law. The purpose of focusing on this side of the history was to better understand the original thinking and development behind the charter law in its nascent form.

Amendments AB 544 and AB 1505 and Proposition 39 are discussed in this section; they are not the only changes that have been made to the legislation, however they were the most impactful and were chosen based on frequency of mentions by interview participants in response to questions on how the law has changed over time and how they incorporated and/or considered TPS sustainability. The final part of this section brings the discussion back specifically to the law and TPS sustainability.

Origins of the 1992 Legislation

The California Charter Schools Act of 1992 was the second charter school law to be passed in the U.S. (the first being in Minnesota in 1991). In California, State Senator Gary Hart and Assembly Member Delaine Eastin were working on concurrent bills for the state's first charter law. Eastin's bill included a state role and was more prescriptive and restrictive with a charter school cap (25) and other inclusions; Hart's bill emphasized a local role in the charter approval process, a larger cap (100), and limited collective bargaining and credential mandates (Hart & Burr, 1996). Sen. Hart ultimately prevailed in Governor Pete Wilson signing his version into law.

In our interview, in addition to articles written, Hart described the growing voucher threat as the primary motivation for promoting a charter law for California. At the time, in 1992, there was a ballot initiative that was gaining support: “This was not a modest voucher pilot proposal, but a full-blown effort to reconstitute public education in California” (Hart & Burr, 1996). Having been a high school teacher, Sen. Hart intimately understood public education and the struggles it faces, and in S.B. 1448 he sought to address the dissatisfaction with public education while simultaneously protecting the institution from the voucher threat. He was very concerned that the voucher initiative could pass and had learned of the charter idea through a working relationship with Al Shanker: “I thought charters would be a good political alternative that would make it less likely that vouchers would pass if we had something we could show the public was a move in the direction of greater freedom and creativity for public schools in California” (G. Hart, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Sen. Hart had also heard from many superintendents, school board members, and other education decision makers and administrators that new reforms and ideas proposed by the state legislature burdened them and stifled their ability to put energy and creativity into their jobs—Sen. Hart believed this could “provide a mechanism by which they operate more independently” and could relieve some of the bureaucratic pressures felt (G. Hart, personal communication, May 13, 2020). He met with teacher units to learn what problems with the charter law they might have and learned they had two demands. The first was that collective bargaining be protected and charter schools be unionized. “And that was something that was unacceptable to me, I didn’t want there to be a requirement that there be unionization. I was pro-collective bargaining and believed that something

that teachers ought to be able to pursue, but it should not be mandated. So that was a big stumbling block” (G. Hart, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

The second demand was that educators at charter schools were not required to have a teaching credential. “I think it was an important and logical concern because they thought it was a diminishment of the profession if people did not have certification. But the union issue as it relates to collective bargaining was so they wanted most of those issues to be addressed in the legislation to their accommodation” (G. Hart, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Ultimately, Sen. Hart chose to not cede to either of the teacher union demands and as a result, S.B. 1448 experienced their fierce opposition. Despite that opposition, he and others involved in its writing and garnering support maintained that: “...our belief that teachers should be at the center of the charter school movement. Our hope was that many charter schools would be teacher-led” (Hart & Burr, 1996). Sen. Hart attributed the bill’s eventual passage as through “a legislative maneuver that caught them [the opposing bill from the Assembly and general opposition to Hart’s bill] kind of asleep at the switch and we were able to get the bill through the legislature with sort of a bunch of legislative jujutsu” (G. Hart, personal communication, May 13, 2020). They still had a long road ahead explaining this new education reform to the public and implementing it, but intended for it to be an education reform that would serve several purposes: to push public schools to improve, reduce bureaucracy in districts, and provide freedom for innovation to be shared across schools. They couldn’t have fully anticipated what the charter school movement would become nationally in the ensuing 30 years.

Major Legislative and Voter Initiative Changes, 1998-2019

The first several years after the passage of the original charter law saw little substantive changes and a focus on implementation, which the representative from the Charter Schools Development Center described as “a stunning lift.” He described his role as working full-time doing “bureaucratic prodding and whack-a-mole” and further reflected on early challenges of the original bill’s implementation:

The state education bureaucracy, largely through inaction, did everything it could to make it almost impossible to implement the bill, whether it was implementing a funding system or just about anything and without money and without these other pieces, it's very difficult and constantly attempting to draw charters back into the full hairball or red tape that is our traditional education system. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

Since its initial passage, there have been several notable legislative changes to the California charter law and one notable ballot Proposition that are inextricably linked to charter schools and the sustainability of the LAUSD. The changes described in this section were chosen and included based upon interviews from this study, a broad consensus among participants that these changes relate most closely to the objective of this study, and systematized study by the researcher.

One major takeaway of changes to the CA charter law since 1992 is that it has become increasingly restrictive and its original flexibility and broadness has slowly been eroded. Depending on the background of interview participants, this was described as either a positive or a negative trajectory—delineated primarily along the lines of charter supporters viewing the changes as mostly negative and charter opposers viewing the changes as primarily positive and necessary. The CSDC representative described this timeline of erosion: “The original law had an enormous amount of flexibility built into

it,” with no requirements for teacher credentialing, state curriculum, or instructional time. He shared that in 1998, there were “some major upgrades to the law that really put it on a much stronger footing. Between then, in recent years, it’s been a battle of what I call death by a thousand cuts ... over time, those key flexibilities have been substantially eroded and, in many cases, eliminated” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020).

1998 – Assembly Bill 544

Later in the 1990s, there were several pushes to “address a lot of the shortcomings in the original law, including a cap on the number of schools and a dysfunctional appeals process,” resulting in Assembly Bill 544 (AB 544) (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). Reed Hastings, the Co-CEO and Co-Founder of Netflix, and other charter supporters such as Don Shalvey, attempted a ballot measure to address those identified shortcomings of the law. This was an early example of outsiders and outside money influencing policy in education. Hastings spent over one million dollars garnering support and signatures and he had strong opinions of what should be included in the initiative—primarily that the charter law needed to permit further charter expansion (CCSA, May 8, 2012). The representative from the CSDC had worked with Hastings on this initiative and described it as having “enormous flaws.” He told of the experience of persuading those involved to shift directions and instead use the measure as leverage to push the legislature to make major changes to the law (CCSA, May 8, 2012; Personal communication, November 24, 2020). The 1998 AB 544 was the result, which made the first substantive changes to the CA charter law.

In a 2012 interview with the California Charter School Association (CCSA), author of the bill, Assemblyman Ted Lempert, described his motivation for AB 544: “As

a parent and policymaker, I felt like something needed to change, or it would've left the charter movement dead in its tracks. ... My goal was to ensure that charter schools had all the rights to be able to grow and end the unfairness in the authorizing process, so that charters would be treated fairly" (CCSA, May 8, 2012). Lempert, Hastings, Shalvey, and other charter supporters believed the 100 charter school cap (and 10 per district) was leading to schools boards denying charters and discouraging growth of a popular education reform. AB 544 strengthened the charter law in favor of charters with little evidence of concern or consideration of how this would affect TPS districts in CA in the long-term as charters expanded.

2000 – Proposition 39

Proposition 39 (Prop. 39) was passed by California voters in 2000 and represented another major change for charters schools there—this time targeting the sharing of state-funded school facilities between TPS and charters. Prop. 39 was mentioned by interview participants across the spectrum as having a negative impact on TPS. Co-locating of TPS and charters became one result of Prop. 39's passage where a TPS and charter school share LAUSD facilities but maintain their separation as different, and competing, schools. Before Prop. 39 passed, charters were allowed to use district facilities at no cost, so it did provide some revenue back to districts, however it added pressure to districts through a mandate "that public school facilities should be shared fairly among all public school pupils, including those in charter schools" (CCSA, 2013). Prop. 39 gave charter schools the same access to state and local bond-funded facilities and reduced the vote passing threshold for those facilities bonds from two-thirds to 55 percent (CCSA, 2013). Figure 6 explains Prop.39 as shown on the LAUSD website.

Figure 6.

Proposition 39 information

Proposition 39: Sharing Public School Facilities Fairly

California Education Code 47614(a): "The intent of the people in amending Section 47614 is that public school facilities should be shared fairly among all public school pupils, including those in charter schools."

The law requires LAUSD to share with each operating charter school facilities sufficient to accommodate all of the charter school's in-district students in similar conditions – not to merely provide surplus or unused space. Through a process involving various stakeholders, LAUSD carefully considers the safety and welfare of all students when reviewing possible co-locations. The school district charges each charter school a pro rata share of facilities costs for use of the site.

State Regulatory Timeline

- **November 1:** Charter schools submit written requests for facilities for the following school year.
- **December 1:** District reviews Charter ADA projections and responds with what it considers reasonable
- **January 2:** Charter schools respond to District's ADA projections
- **February 1:** District makes preliminary proposals of space to charter schools
- **March 1:** Charter schools respond to preliminary proposals
- **April 1:** District makes final offers
- **May 1:** Charter schools accept or decline the Final Offers

Charter schools occupy sites 10 working days prior to their first day of school instruction

For More Information, Please Visit:
<https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/14291>

- Co-Location FAQ
- Principal's Resource Guide
- State Board of Education Implementing Regulations
- Related District Bulletins and Reference Guides

Resources Provided for LAUSD Co-Located Sites

- Co-Location Coordinator Stipend
- Funding for Custodial Supplies
- Operations Support Services

Contact Information for Prop. 39 Operations Coordinators

- Local District Northeast and Central: **Oswaldo Bonilla** - oswaldo.bonilla@lausd.net
- Local District East and South: **Lori Pawinski** - lori.pawinski@lausd.net
- Local District West and Northwest: **Jan Davis** - jdavis02@lausd.net
- Or by phone at (213) 241-0399

Public Schools Community Spaces

SCHOOL

Source: <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/14291>

Conceptually, it is described by the CCSA: “The principle behind Prop. 39 is one of equity and fairness for all public school students, irrespective of whether they attend public district schools or public charter schools in their communities” (CCSA, 2013). However, this study found it is another example of not fully considering immediate and future impact on the public school district in which a charter is operated. David Rattray, President and CEO of UNITE-LA, described Prop. 39 as “one of our biggest changes to the charter law because it wrote *around* the charter law, something that compelled the sharing of facilities” (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018). He described how Prop. 39 turned out to work in practice to “further kind of commoditize kids” and fueled tensions between TPS and charters in L.A. Prop. 39 further illuminates

ongoing confusion between the concept of charter schools and in practice in relation to the district they are included in.

The lines are blurred because they are supposed to be public schools part of the district, but the CA charter law did not provide any guidance for encouraging this and ensuring it would happen. Prop. 39 is a similar case: it enabled charters to have a legal claim to district property and directly impacted the district's authority to use property in the best ways they see fit to serve students. In practice, Prop. 39 fueled existing tensions between charters and TPS in L.A. and appears to be one significant example of a change to the CA charter law that was focused on a short-term solution without many precautions taken to ensure it would play out as sound and sustainable policy in the long-term

2019 – Assembly Bill 1505

Adding a new dimension to the sustainability debate is the most recent major amendment to the California charter law—Assembly Bill (AB) 1505. Signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom in October 2019 and implemented in July 2020, AB 1505 has been touted as the most consequential change to California's charter law since its inception. AB 1505 targeted changes to the California charter school authorization process, and was the primary focus of this study due to rhetoric and public coverage that it was connected with the protection of TPS district schools in relation to ongoing charter school expansion.

This new legislation has been portrayed as a compromise between charter advocates and opponents, however study findings demonstrate the reality was more complicated. It remains too soon to understand the longer term effects of AB 1505 on charters and TPS sustainability, but findings from this study contribute understanding to

conversation about the effects of charters on TPS districts and that there are attempts being made to write these understandings into law (or to rewrite charter law to reflect learnings). More time will provide insight into whether those attempts and conversations make a real difference or if more specifics will be needed in subsequent amendments.

AB 1505 was authored by democratic member of the California State Assembly, Patrick O'Donnell. O'Donnell has represented the 70th District since 2014, and prior to becoming an Assemblymember was a teacher for over twenty years. O'Donnell serves as the Chair of the Education Committee. On September 9, 2019, AB 1505 passed the California Senate Floor 27-11 (with a No Votes Received (NVR) of 3 members), and on September 10, 2019 it passed the Assembly Floor with a vote count of 60-16 (and NVR count of 3) (California Legislative Information, 2019, September 10).

Leading up to the passage of AB 1505, Governor Newsom convened a Charter Task Force to be led by the California Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond. The group met regularly for months in 2019 and was comprised of eleven selected members “representing diverse educational perspectives” (Thurmond, 2019, June 6). The group was convened “with the purpose of examining the impact of charter school growth on school districts’ budgets and providing recommendations” (Thurmond, 2019, June 6). Based on data from this study, it remains unclear whether the CTF was convened as merely a hollow display of collaboration between charter supporters and opponents, or if it actually contributed to what was included in the final version of AB 1505. Findings point to somewhere in between, but perhaps leaning toward to the former. Interviews with participants from the CTF provided perspectives along the spectrum,

from a more negative experience with the group and reticent to discuss the experience to believing the group made progress toward improving charter and TPS tensions.

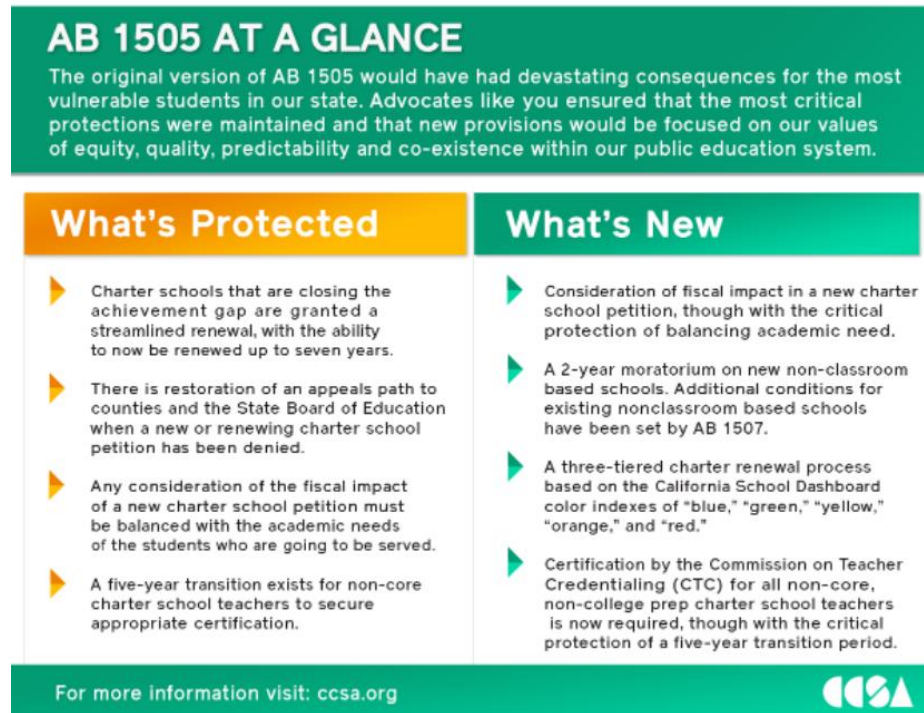
One study participant, a member of the CTF, is a former LAUSD official and is now with the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). He discussed his organization's perspective on the CTF's work in relation to the agendas of labor colleagues, legislators, and Governor Newsom:

Ultimately, ACSA had a sense that the Governor may not have been ever interested in going as far as where some of our labor colleagues wanted to go. Or he wouldn't have been the one to create this task force. He could have just gone along with it. So, we had a sense that the starting point was never going to be the end game. I think it caused some frustration because some folks saw that this task force was getting in the way. And I think there was even some frustration from the author of the legislation, Patrick McDonnell, too. That we were getting in the way of what could get accomplished in the legislation. (Personal communication, May 20, 2020)

The timing of the convened CTF and the bill working through the legislature was frustrating and the CTF's work ultimately had little effect on AB 1505. Nevertheless, both charter and labor organizations publicly expressed praise for the final version of the passed amendment. The California Charter Schools Association's resources webpage for AB 1505 declares it "a new era for California's charter public schools" and that "a compromise law on charter public school-focused legislation, AB 1505, affirms that charter schools are here to stay as a permanent and valued fixture of California's education system" (CCSA, 2022). Figure 7 was created by CCSA and breaks down the highlights of AB 1505. The California Teachers' Association (CTA), declared the signing of AB 1505 into law as a "landmark victory" through which "All California students won today" (California Teachers Association, October 3, 2019).

Figure 7.

CCSA infographic for AB 1505



Source: California Charter Schools Association (2019)

Findings for Traditional Public School District Sustainability

This section presents the study findings for traditional public school district sustainability in California and the California charter law through describing the findings for Research Question 2:

- (a) Which amendments to the California Charter School Act from 1992 through 2019 affect the sustainability of traditional public schools (specifically the Los Angeles Unified School District)?
- (b) How does the California charter law relate to district sustainability from the perspective of LAUSD school board members? From the perspective of intermediary organizations and their backers involved with the board?

The first part of Research Question 2 draws from the historical information and context from Research Question 1, and distills down to those changes to the law that were found to have an effect on TPS sustainability in LAUSD. The second part of Research Question 2 explores perspectives on any relationship between the charter law and charter proliferation with the sustainability of LAUSD, and contributes further to the sustainability framework development for RQ3 explained in Chapter 5.

This study confirmed that the long-term impact on TPS districts was not considered when writing the first CA charter law. It also confirmed that those effects are gaining greater attention, but there continue to be many competing challenges facing LAUSD. The tensions in L.A. between charter supporters and TPS supporters are particularly high and causes include local political dynamics, IO involvement, the flexibility of the original CA charter law, and certain voter initiatives. All of these factors have fueled rhetoric that the LAUSD public schools are “failing” and charters provide another choice for families who otherwise would have to send their children to those “failing” schools. This narrative has been used by charter supporters to aide charter proliferation. District supporters, such as UTLA, counter with condemnation of charters as a fiscal drain on LAUSD and threat to its long term sustainability. No one is right and no one is wrong. In this case, however, the tense rhetoric and narratives perpetuated by all sides obscure and take focus away from solvable challenges and real systemic changes. The LAUSD school board is responsible for overseeing all district schools. Simultaneously, the board is also in charge of authorizing and monitoring the independent charters in their district, creating a paradox of sustainability—the board is

responsible for objectively managing charter schools that drain funding away from their district TPS.

Original Charter Law

Senator Hart described the atmosphere at the time of passing the original California charter school law as one of great uncertainty and waiting; they didn't know what would happen and if anyone would take any advantage of it. For the first few months, there wasn't a line of people wanting to establish charter schools. The original law also had a cap of no more than one hundred charter schools:

I did that number one, because this was a fairly radical approach to basically do away with most of the laws in the state education code and allow people to operate as they saw fit. That's a bold experiment and before just sort of saying let's have thousands of these schools without knowing what the potential problems might be. As it was implemented, I thought it was cautious and appropriate. (G. Hart, personal communication, May 13, 2020)

The cap was also a politically savvy decision in order to get the law passed, as it removed the possibility for opposition if it was too open-ended of an experiment without knowing the consequences:

At least initially, I did not anticipate and would not have predicted that we would be where we are today with over a thousand charter schools in California. So, the idea of how it was going to impact traditional public schools, it didn't seem to need to be a big deal. It didn't seem to me to be that much of a potential negative particularly say financially as it's becoming situations where, the school district has 20 percent of its children that traditionally would have been in their traditional schools and now in charter schools that has an impact upon their or their finances and their ability to sort of just kind of do business as usual. (G. Hart, personal communication, May 13, 2020)

During an interview with a Board Member, he mentioned the original charter law and expressed surprise that nobody writing the original charter law had considered what

would happen if charter schools became popular and multiplied throughout districts in California:

Some years later, the act was changed that allowed the state to add one hundred [charters] every year, which has gotten us up to about 2,500 statewide. I was reading an article just over the weekend because of the anniversary, where the Senate author of the charter school act was musing about how this was nobody's vision. Nobody thought that hundreds and hundreds of charter schools as part of a portfolio of schools is what this was about. This was about small laboratory lab schools that would be developing practices that could then be exported and shared with neighborhood schools. They are not an alternative to traditional public education. (Personal communication, August 27, 2018)

One problem was that charters began to be seen more as an alternative to traditional public education as opposed to the original intent of incubator that shares positive practices across schools and districts. In the case of California, that intent never came to fruition because no mechanisms or incentives were put in place to encourage collaboration and relationship building between charters and school districts. As a result, in Los Angeles and other cities across the U.S., the narrative of charters versus traditional public schools took hold.

One enduring debate over charter laws is whether greater or lesser regulation is “best.” In the case of this study, charter supporters (e.g., officials working with a charter organization, policymakers involved with the original charter law) were overall on the side of less regulation; unsurprisingly, those participants against or skeptical of charter schools/charter expansion were supportive of amendments to the law that increased regulation (e.g., caps on charter openings; open meetings and transparency for the public). The connection between greater and lesser charter regulation and TPS sustainability is less clear. The CSDC representative described the success of the original law scope, but how that affected its own sustainability for protecting flexibility for charters:

The original charter law was unusually brief and broad and sweeping. So, at least on paper, it was very powerful and deep, but by not being, painfully specific, left it open to the bureaucrats to kind of pick it apart. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

It was left open to interpretation and successive amendments, but the original broadness also left it open for IOs and foundations to use the opportunity for varying aims that haven't always been student-centered.

Major Legislative Changes to the Charter Law and Voter Initiatives, 1998-2019

Assembly Bill 544

AB 544 addressed all key policy areas (except facilities): approval and revocation process, governance, student admissions, teachers, and funding (EdSource, June 2004).

AB 544 clarified the charter petition criteria for approval or denial; permitted charter schools to appeal rejected petitions to the County Office of Education (COE) or State Board of Education (SBE); and, in specified circumstances, authorized the SBE to grant and revoke charters (Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), 2019, March 12). One study participant emphasized the strengthening of the appeals process as a primary objective of the changes. Greater clarification on charter petition criteria provided authorizers (in this case, the LAUSD school board) with more guidance for decision-making, and it added a requirement that charter school teachers have teaching licenses equivalent to those required for public school teachers (LAO, 2019, March 12). However, the ability to appeal petition decisions to the COE or SBE took some authority away from the Board, and did little to provide any further guidance to encourage collaboration between charters and the district.

Proposition 39

The passage of Proposition 39 (Prop. 39) presented additional complications to relations between LAUSD and charter schools, making collaboration even more a distant dream. When charters make their case for authorization to the Board, they often argue their school will be a good (or better) choice for parents in the neighborhood—an argument that David Rattray, from the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, maintained has negative effects on existing schools: “The neighborhood school effectively is being positioned as less effective. We’re a better choice for those parents. So, the neighborhood school in a way has been put in a label to suggest that it’s failing” (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018). Rattray continued to describe the post-Prop. 39 atmosphere and its consequences:

It’s these classic good intentions, or maybe there aren’t even good intentions, but it’s totally dysfunctional. This is not rational. If you ever really were drawing up what’s a good way to have adults play nice and serve kids well, it’s the dumbest thing you’d ever do in your life, right? Just makes no sense. Why would they play well and behave at their highest and best behavior when everything that you’ve structured around them puts them almost pitted against each other for their employment life. Like my long-term job security is at risk because of you or you because of me. But I’m supposed to say we’re going to work together. That’s stupid, but that’s what we did. So, it’s a big problem. (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018)

One interview participant, an LAUSD teacher, was a member of the Governor Newsom-convened Charter Task Force (CTF). She described the complexities of Prop. 39’s passage and any reconsideration of its reversal:

It’s become a big issue. During the charter school task force, I actually brought up Prop 39. We didn’t get to it: folks didn’t want to talk about it at that time because it was a voter initiative. And it was one of those things where it was like energy efficiency. And so, voters voted ‘Yes’. And then, in the small little lettering it basically stated, ‘and facilities are going to be given to other outside entities from

public schools.’ So, [to change Prop. 39], we would have to take it back to the voters. (Personal communication, April 2, 2021)

She further recounted her personal experience as an LAUSD teacher with Prop. 39 as an initiative “implemented based on lawsuits” and a fiscal drain on the district and major factor in fueling charter versus TPS tensions in L.A.: “I would have to say it is probably the most contentious direct fight between traditional public schools and charter schools” (Personal communication, April 2, 2021). She continued to describe the on-site situation:

Interviewee: You’re literally giving away space on campus to a charter school space that could be used for science labs or art rooms or anything else. And we’ve had a lot of instances where the charter school that’s been placed on that campus, still underperformed compared to that campus. However, they’ve gotten physical resources. We have a school in particular, when I left elementary schools, that’s primarily a black elementary school and the charter school is a completely different student demographic. It’s right there in your face, right on this campus ...

Interviewer: Does the district lose money on those?

Interviewee: They do. And the charter schools are supposed to pay. We went through a series of, I think it was, five to ten years where no one at the district was even collecting the money from the charter schools because they were so charter school friendly. And now supposedly they are collecting the money, but they’re still losing out on facilities. But the other side is it’s almost like this cancer that eats away at the traditional public community school that’s there. ... All these programs that actually entice students to go to those schools that are closed, but then the charter school can open up those programs. And so, then you’re losing students. You’re just siphoning students away ... That’s probably been one of the biggest drains on LAUSD because it causes direct student loss. It’s caused a lot of tension. (Personal communication, April 2, 2021)

Prop. 39’s exacerbation of tensions between TPS and charters further illuminated differences in treatment between them regarding facilities. Because it was a voter initiative, the long-term implications and sustainability for the district were likely not fully understood by voters.

Assembly Bill 1505

Prior to the passage of AB 1505, an interview with a political economist who has studied charters and fiscal impact on traditional public schools, provided insight into factors that may have led to changes to the California charter law and were having an impact across the U.S. The interview was about eight months prior to the passage of AB 1505; he speculated that no one really knew how far the legislation would go, but that the November 2018 elections in California for governor and the legislature were hard fought and very important. Regarding the potential inclusion of fiscal impact in the new CA charter law, he emphasized the significance for public education:

Basically, I feel like we're in a fight to preserve public education and to preserve the idea that every kid has the right to a decent education. And I'm not trying to be rhetorical about this, but I feel that kind of dawning realization that something like that is at stake here and is happening in different degrees around the country and has to do with the [teacher] strikes in conservative places in West Virginia, Arizona, and Oklahoma, then L.A., a non-conservative place. And so, in terms of California's law, the thing of being able to take into account, the financial impact on the rest of the students is huge. (Personal communication, January 31, 2019)

The final version of AB 1505 did include the legalization of California LESBs to consider fiscal impact in their authorization of charters. The CSDC representative described this inclusion and AB 1505 overall as the major rewrite of the charter law compared with the previous fragmentary changes:

After several years of that kind of piecemeal erosion, we had a major rewrite of the law and those major rewrites are just taking effect right now, but they give districts the ability to deny charters based on perceived negative fiscal impact and create a fairly high stakes test score-based rebuttal thresholds, and a number of other things that have us profoundly concerned about what the future holds. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

His use of the word 'perceived' sows doubts in the abilities of CA school boards to methodically and accurately assess the fiscal impacts of charter schools on neighborhood

schools. He was also candid that the version of AB 1505 that was signed into law is a threat to his organization's work in the charter sector in California.

AB 1505 was unanimously described as the most significant changes to the California charter law since 1998, when AB 544 passed. One participant asserted that: "to a large extent it rolls back much of what 544 did. It doesn't put a cap on, but it substantially guts the appeal process, and adds additional for districts to deny charters, which is essentially what we were trying to do in AB 544" (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). One interview participant, who has been involved in the charter law and changes from the beginning, voiced remorse for certain inclusions and changes to it over the past 30 years—he believed that lifting the cap on charters in California was especially a mistake. AB 1505 appears to have perhaps passed during a period of publicly lower tensions, but interview participants indicated that those tensions were as strong as ever and were definitely present behind closed doors. For example, one member of the CTF was hesitant to talk about her experience with the group on the record because of how frustrated she was with experience, but she did not elaborate.

Another member of the CTF remarked that there wasn't a clear stated objective given to the group regarding how the final report would be put out and whether their published recommendations would only include recommendations of consensus. He characterized the groups' convening as almost a formally convened/encouraged collaboration between CA charter schools and public schools/labor groups:

I was of the opinion that the governor would have never asked this diverse set of people to come in and get in the same room if they didn't want us to compromise. If it was just going to be an exercise where we took votes and the majority position was going to reign supreme, we could have done that without three months of conversation. (Personal communication, May 20, 2020)

Unfortunately, the CTF’s convening came at a challenging time for their work to influence anything occurring in the CA legislature. As one member explained, the CTF met at the same time the state legislature was deep into writing CA charter law changes and those changes exceeded the task force’s recommendations. Some IOs and their representatives were pushing for certain inclusions in the legislation while they concurrently had representatives working on the task force:

It made it for a very politically challenging situation, I think to the criticism that we could have gone for and we could really resolve this. No, I don't think that the taskforce report set the stage for a number of issues, but it didn't have the intended purpose of bringing folks together. I think to my frustration, I feel like once this process ended, everybody seemed to go back to their corner. Their political corner if you will. And I think this got me in trouble a little bit with our labor colleagues, even post-task force because I was still in the spirit of trying to find some compromises. And this is where there was some frustration that we weren't siding more with the traditional public system advocates, with the teacher's unions, and even some of our colleagues like CSBA, the school boards. I am proud of the work we accomplished. I think we could have accomplished more. (Personal communication, May 20, 2020)

Another interview participant reflected on lessons learned through the experiences of policy implementation and unintended consequences of previous iterations of the law. Others suggested that the eventual legislation passed was predetermined and that external debates had little effect on changing its contents. Additional interviews pointed toward inclusions in AB 1505 reflecting recognized negative consequences of rapid charter expansion—that those lessons had been learned and these amendments to the law reflected those learnings.

Fiscal impact, unintended consequences, and implementation.

With AB 1505, charter authorizers in California can now consider the fiscal impact of approving a charter on the local traditional public schools. Rhetorically, this

change is a major accomplishment for TPS fiscal sustainability. However, when interviews were conducted when the law was in its nascent implementation stages, the reactions varied and were inconsistent across participants. John Fensterwald, a reporter for EdSource, described what he had found through his fieldwork:

I've already heard that school boards were not happy with they want, to open it up and look at this financial impact. The way it is, automatically if you're in identified as under financial stress by a process, that shows you three level process. If you're clearly identified as in danger of going under within the next three years, then you can automatically reject a charter for financial reasons, but otherwise then you get into this argument of what is financial impact and what's serving the community and that kind of thing. There are school boards that think that they ought to have the ability to reject because of financial issues out of hand. So, they like it, but I don't think Gavin Newsom wants to. I think he took care of this issue. I don't see any changes. I do see court cases coming to define some of the things that we talked about. I think my guess is it's good where it is for the next three years. (J. Fensterwald, personal communication, April 11, 2020)

Several other participants also predicted that litigation would ultimately define how the fiscal impact piece works in practice. The skepticism of those practitioners brings up questions of whether the fiscal impact inclusion was a concession of surface-level long-term policymaking for TPS sustainability, or whether it was a deliberate attempt to protect TPS. The consensus thus far seems to be that it is another example of a well-intentioned policy that didn't provide enough guidance for decision-makers to actually make a difference for TPS sustainability.

In the interview with the political economist, he mentioned a recent case with Inglewood Unified School District, which is a low income district surrounded by LAUSD. Prior to the passage of AB 1505, Inglewood went bankrupt and was therefore overseen by the State Superintendent's office (at the time, the State Superintendent was Tom Torlakson). A new charter applied for authorization within Inglewood and the law

didn't allow for Torlakson to reject that charter or take the district's fiscal situation into account, and authorizing a new school was a bad choice for the district that would take students and more money away. AB 1505's passage changed the options for similar situations. "It's how clear it's become to people that there's just things that weren't anticipated when this law was written in 1992" (Personal communication, January 31, 2019).

One IO representative described ACSA's position on the charter law amendments as concerned about the unintended consequences of including the fiscal impact piece. He provided more context from the labor and practitioner perspective regarding fiscal impact:

Even though we [ACSA] represent the traditional public schools and those administrators that are making the recommendations, we always thought it went too far. And we also didn't think that it was going to be a topic where it was going to resolve a lot of the local issues. So, in other words, we were always worried about the unintended repercussions of just giving broad authority to school districts to say no, even if there's a specified need, even if you know there's a need for programs or there's a service or program that'd be provided if a district can just say no, we thought it would actually cause more litigation. (Personal communication, May 20, 2020)

He noted the same pattern from previous iterations of the California charter law—there is evidence that broadness in the law without much guidance can lead to unintended consequences and further definition of the law through litigation. And when unintended consequences aren't sufficiently considered in educational law and policy, this inevitably has an effect on sustainability and student outcomes.

Implementation of AB 1505 is not under the purview of this study, however some interview participants mentioned initial considerations in planning. One Board Member

provided some insight into the board’s AB 1505 implementation and sustainability considerations:

We are revising our implement, the 1505 details, in a couple of ways. The fiscal impact piece has not been as acted upon in my experience. ... And it doesn't come up a lot in part because to your point, we have so many fiscal issues facing the district, the healthcare and pensions, all that is definitely something I'm very concerned about and is a huge structural challenge, but also just general declining enrollment. That is a big need for the district to figure out how to focus on.
(Personal communication, December 22, 2021)

At the time of this conversation, AB 1505 had been in effect for six months, and it is possible that there had been no new charter petitions submitted to the Board during this time. It is also important to note that the fiscal impact inclusion in AB 1505 only applies to new charter petitions—not to existing charters when applying for renewal (Burke, 2020, August 10). On August 11, 2020, the Board adopted an implementation plan for AB 1505.

Notwithstanding evidence of some intention toward TPS sustainability, the process could have been coordinated better. Despite a goal of consensus and collaboration, the timing and setup of it just didn’t create the conditions necessary for that to occur. Chapter 5 continues the presentation of findings and answers the third Research Question for this study: How can data from this study contribute to the development of an emerging active sustainability framework for traditional public school districts and their decision makers?

CHAPTER 5

ACTIVE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

This findings chapter builds from Research Questions 1 and 2 and is organized in the form of the updated development of the active sustainability framework originally drafted in Chapter 2. Data collected for RQ1 provided the foundation of understanding for what has changed in the California charter law from its inception to nearly 30 years later, including critical insights for what has been learned throughout that time and how that knowledge has (or hasn't been) applied to subsequent amendments. Data and findings for RQ2 provided important evidence for the continued development of the framework; those findings contributed critical insight into how interview participants from different institutions and backgrounds understand and prioritize these issues. This chapter presents the findings for Research Question 3: *How can data from this study contribute to the development of an emerging active sustainability framework for traditional public school districts and their decision-makers?*

Study Developments

As we continue to learn from the case of LAUSD, the clearer the complexity of the case becomes. Any change within LAUSD—long-term or short-term—is convoluted and multifaceted, and sustainability threats clearly extend well beyond the expansion of charter schools. Institutional change attempts over the past decades, leadership turnover, declining student enrollment, and frequently toxic political dynamics have all contributed to difficulties the board and other district leaders face today (Kerchner, et al., 2008;

Marsh, Allbright, Brown, Bulkley, Strunk & Harris, 2021; Reckhow, 2013) make this sentence more balanced—p. 142, etc.). One LAUSD Board Member summarized challenges the Board faces:

It's complicated. People want to be able to find an easy answer or point blame, you know? That's hard because there's not exactly one silver bullet here. But I won't say that the growth of charter schools has not been a challenge to the district's fiscal school sustainability. There are things that we should have been learning and we can still be learning. (Personal communication, December 22, 2021)

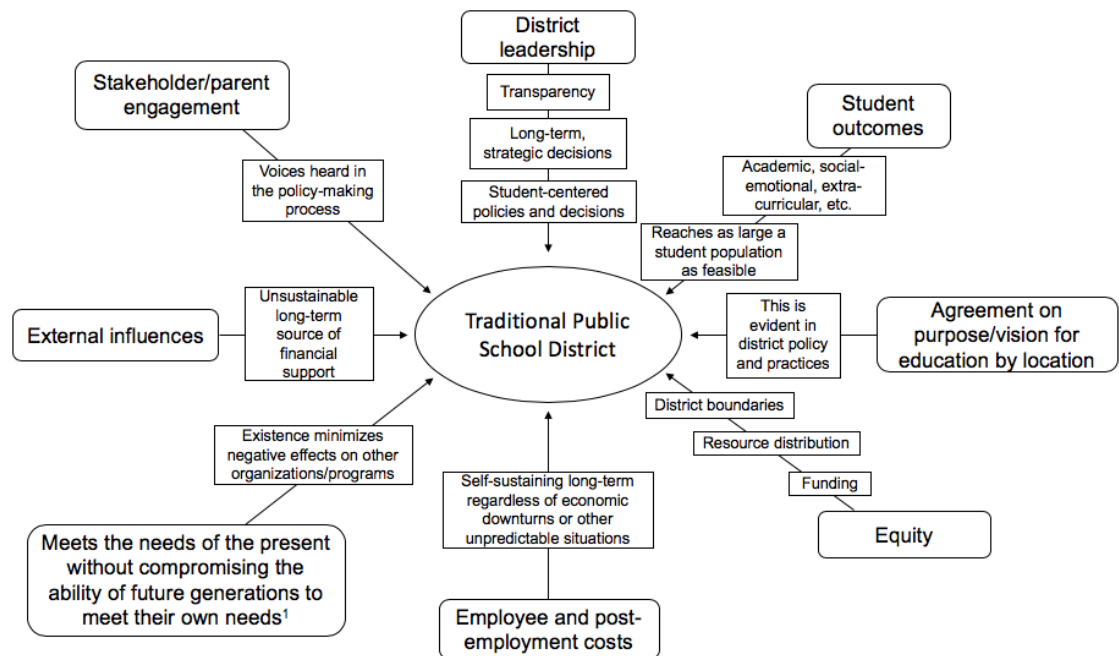
This study continued to illustrate the challenges LAUSD faces through the perspectives of those leading the district and involved in its charter schools and the California charter law. It sought to further develop a more specific framework for LESB decision-making, however throughout data analysis, that the focus of this study on charter schools was limiting to the development of a broader framework. Each participant agreed that charter schools have an effect on the fiscal health of LAUSD, but they also agreed that to what level was lesser known and that there were other factors that were more dire. The challenges facing the district needed to be more clearly determined and understood.

As a result of these findings, the earlier purported active sustainability framework remains nascent but illustrates all sustainability-related pressures the LAUSD school board faces from the angle of charter expansion and what has occurred there since the 1992 California Charter School Act was passed. This study sought to better understand how it is perceived whether charter expansion in Los Angeles has changed the role and function of the LAUSD board, in addition to roles other factors may shape outcomes (e.g., IO involvement, politics, employee and post-employment costs).

The following sections present these findings grounded in data directly from participants involved—including LAUSD board members, district officials and teachers, those involved with writing the charter law and its subsequent amendments, and intermediary organization (IO) representatives from the charter and labor sectors. Analysis from this study provides both insight for its continuing development and directions for future research. Findings for this part of the study include a further developed definition of sustainability, in regards to TPS districts and educational policy, and increased understanding of what challenges LESB Board members face that are and are not within their control. Figure 8 shows the initial concept map, originally presented during Prospectus Defense and in Chapter 2, and this chapter contributes the updated version based on study findings and continued research of relevant literature.

Figure 8.

Initial concept map of active sustainability framework (from prospectus)



1. (WCED, 1987)

Initial development of the framework originated from literature on policymaking in education and data collected from fieldwork conducted in Los Angeles for the WTG study. This initial framework conception informed the interview protocol used for this study and *a priori* codes for the first coding cycle. Its original intent was to guide investigation of any factors affecting the fiscal sustainability of any TPS district, attempting to incorporate consideration of the innumerable and immense differences across the thousands of school districts in the U.S.—that each district faces different challenges, contexts, and variations in factors affecting sustainability.

Updated Sustainability Framework

Revisiting the Sustainability Definition

As stated in Chapter 2, the guiding definition of sustainability for the purposes of this study is meeting the “needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987, p. 41). This definition began as one hypothesis for what sustainability means in the policy and politics of education—a lens through which to think through policy decisions with the present students as well as future students at top of mind and therefore the long-term health of the district that serves them. Policy decisions that serve as many stakeholders as possible while simultaneously minimizing negative effects on existing institutions and programs. The researcher sought to provide a foundational definition for policy and TPS district sustainability in straightforward terms and through which to study and analyze the case of LAUSD and their district sustainability situation.

Study participants were asked questions such as: “What do you believe are potential metrics for measuring sustainability of educational reform? What about for the district [LAUSD] itself?” and “What factors do you believe pose the most significant threats to the long-term sustainability of LAUSD?” The intention was to learn how those involved in the case site characterized and considered sustainability within this context, and to use those answers to evolve the original definition.

The Updated Framework

Building upon initial research, and for the purposes of this dissertation, the framework continued to narrow in scope to look at sustainability through the lens of charter school proliferation—one prominent and lesser understood factor affecting the fiscal health of LAUSD specifically. Charter school proliferation emerged as one of those factors through which LAUSD stands out: LAUSD has experienced one of the largest increases in number of charter schools and there has been a consistent pattern of debate over the effects of charter schools on LAUSD 's fiscal health and their effectiveness for students (e.g., across interviews, the media, and national, state of CA, and L.A.-specific coverage). Therefore, the resulting framework for this study specifically looks at the issue of how charter school proliferation affects the political and fiscal sustainability of LAUSD (between 1992 and 2019).

This specific lens was chosen to investigate LAUSD 's sustainability for five factors: (1) charters are frequently cited as one of the greatest threats to LAUSD's sustainability by charter critics and opponents; (2) LAUSD has the largest percentage of students attending charters in the nation; (3) charter schools have only been in California for 30 years and there is still a lot to learn about their effects on the broader ecosystem

(i.e., school district) they are located within; (4) nationally, charter schools are a highly fraught topic in education and those tensions are powerfully felt in LAUSD; and (5) facilitation of a deeper investigation into additional issues that LAUSD and many other urban school districts are facing (e.g., IO/outsider involvement in education; TPS and school choice; increasing distrust in government and public institutions; pension and health benefit obligations; school funding; the politics of education).

This remainder of this chapter presents the resulting key principles—long-term solutions, leadership stability, and transparency—and provides evidence and analysis for each within the context of LAUSD. These principles are comprehensive based on data collected for this study, but are by no means exclusive or final—as previously stated, this framework is continuing to evolve. Each principle is defined in the following sections, incorporating evidence provided from interview participants from both this and the WTG study, additional data collection, and related research based on data collection. The key principles were not wholly undebated, but were the most consistently agreed upon and/or mentioned across study participants and presented a clear pattern. They are not ranked or categorized in any particular order. It is also important to note that with certain principles, they were cited as critical by participants but simultaneously discounted as unrealistic or idealistic—that it is something they believe important but either doesn't happen or would be very difficult to measure or ensure.

There are only three key principles due to charter schools being an ongoing contentious topic in public education: the interview participants chosen for this study reflected and represented these tensions within Los Angeles from both sides of the debate. The key principles are useful guidance for thinking through less contested aspects

of LAUSD's sustainability, and provides grounding for sifting through the contested factors discussed further in Chapter 5 and 6. They are grounded in the participant responses of policymakers and practitioners involved in LAUSD decision-making. The key principles emerged as a pattern of three ideals for sustainable policymaking in LAUSD, and simultaneously, the principles with the most barriers to attainment. This dissertation has underscored previous research on LAUSD's difficulties with flexibility and responsiveness to changing contexts—particularly in comparison with the charter sector (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

As stated previously, this is based solely on research conducted on LAUSD and its charter schools and therefore is not directly generalizable to other school districts and factors affecting district sustainability; however, it is possible that school board leaders of other districts could consider these principles through their own institutional knowledge and perspectives. These implications are discussed in the following chapter.

Figure 9.

Active sustainability framework (as updated based on study findings)

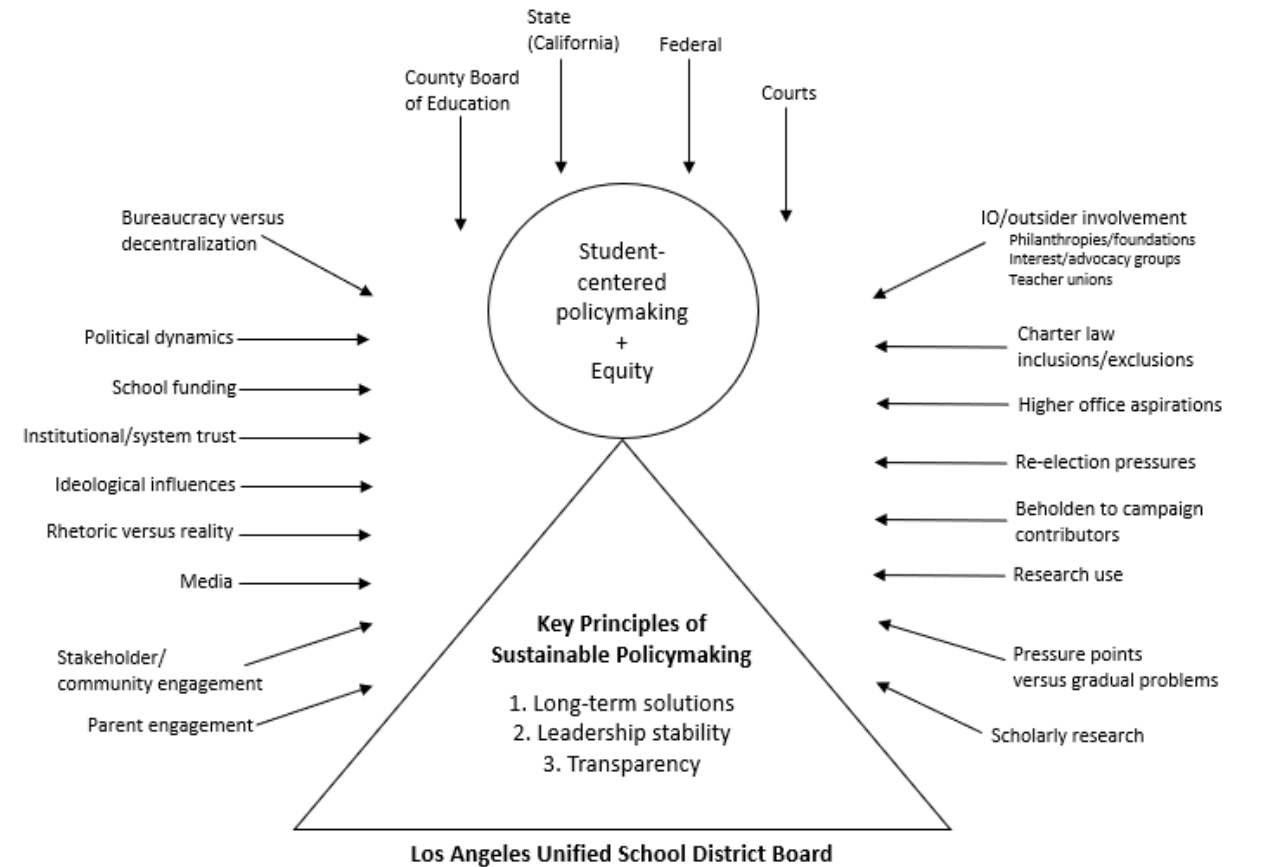


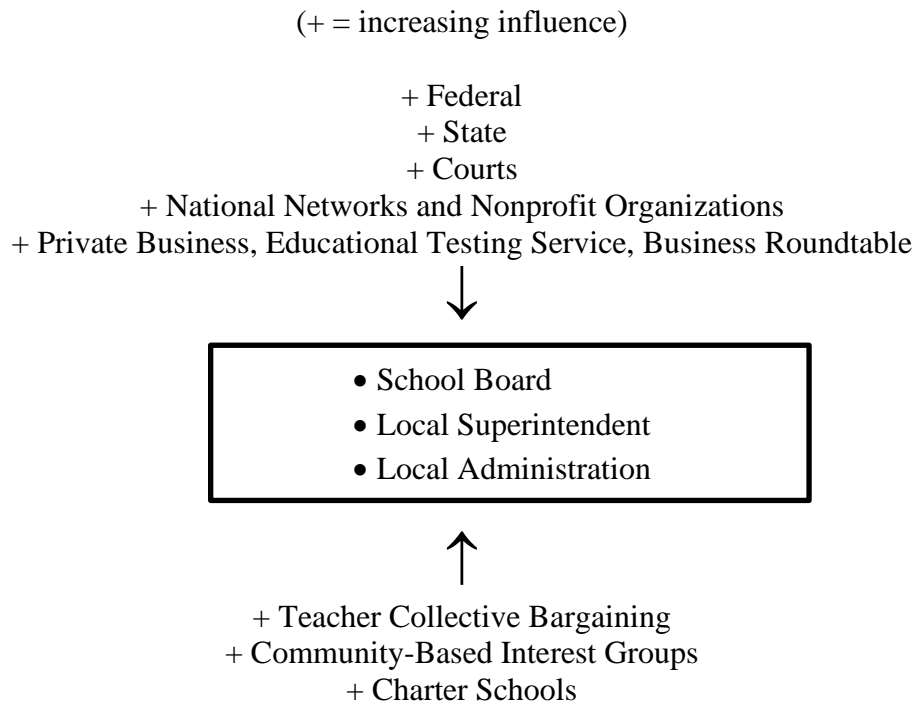
Figure 9 above shows the updated active sustainability conceptual framework based on the findings from this study. The three key principles listed in the triangle—long-term solutions; leadership stability; and transparency were derived directly from decision-makers and practitioners working directly in LAUSD, charter schools, and California education. These key principles are not absolute, but rather meant as lofty guideposts for decision-making. These principles are explained further in the following section, informed specifically by study data and supplemental research. The circle shows student-centered and equitable policymaking at the top but in a precarious position with

any of the factors on either side threatening to move it from its spot as the primary goal of educational policymaking—what is best for the students. Each arrow and corresponding factor illustrate the wide variety of factors that affect the sustainability of LAUSD — specifically in relation to navigating charter expansion, but also can apply to most Board decisions. Those arrows represent more contested factors discussed in interviews and observations. They are factors that developed a pattern as producing more friction and divergence over what the problem is and how to solve it. Finally, the framework also includes a list of critical questions (see Appendix E) intended as prompts for policymakers to consider long-term and unintended consequences and maintain emphasis on the students. They are questions that were asked or mentioned throughout data collection and supplemented with policymaking research.

One of the central questions of school governance is who should be in charge of schools. Findings from this study build upon considerations of this question in Kirst and Wirt (2004). Figure 10 below shows trends in education governance over the past several decades from 1960-2004 and influenced the framework findings described in this chapter. Kirst and Wirt (2004) illustrate how pressures and outsider involvement (outside of districts, e.g., IOs) were increasing nationally for school boards, superintendents, and local administrators. The sustainability framework in this study builds from this map of trends to the present day and hones in on those pressures at a more micro level for LAUSD.

Figure 10.

Trends in education governance, 1960-2004 (adapted from Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p. 25)



Student-Centered Decision-Making

Student-centered decision-making should be the aim of educational policymaking. However, as the framework above shows, it is a constant challenge for policymakers. Policymakers in public education are elected or appointed to serve a school district and the constituency that it serves—the students. This may seem redundant; however, it is a difficult reality that it too often isn't the case. “Boards often find themselves entangled in issues detached from this simple ideal and lose sight of the fact that schools exist to benefit students” (Lorentzen & McCaw, 2019, p. 53). Politics at the local, state, and federal level often create barriers for policymakers to overcome, or that detract and

distract from a student-centered focus. What exactly is a student-centered focus for decision-making is a debate in itself.

The purpose of education and the function of the U.S. public education system continue to be central questions for policymakers and another example of the difficulty in problem definition within education. Many scholars have well-documented the national outcry and rhetoric over the past few decades that the U.S. public educational system is failing to adequately prepare students to become the next generation of workers. Larry Cuban provided representative comments of this attitude such as: “A semi-literate population cannot support a productive economy” (Chester Finn, Assistant US Secretary of Education, 1987); and “Poverty and ignorance cause shortages of qualified workers and threaten America’s stance in a global economy” (Committee for Economic Development, 1987) (as quoted by Cuban, 2022, p. 101).

While training and teaching students academic and applicable skills is critical, their well-being and life skills can be obfuscated in those debates. Positive student outcomes (e.g., (but not limited to) graduation rate; college or technical training program acceptance; state and national test scores) also too often don’t reach the public’s attention because media coverage and rhetoric tend to focus on deficits and failures. David Rattray noted that successes in education get far less public attention It promotes a focus and pressure on policy and outcomes and mutes questions of what can be done to give students the best chance for their own definition of success once they graduate. Rattray also commented on this in relation to competition and charter schools: “We can't see sometimes when competition becomes destructive and has a net negative effect that

whatever the benefits of competition are, they can be over washed with negative effects” (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018).

The local government in Los Angeles and the LAUSD board have proved no exception, and the expansion of charter schools there have played a role in that diversion and exacerbated divisions and tensions. Then, how much is the state charter law of CA at fault for this environment of political infighting? Its inclusions, exclusions, amendments, and corresponding voter initiatives have played a role, and the IOs and campaign donors involved have changed the landscape in L.A., as exemplified by the more recent board elections. It has also consolidated the labor side and public education supporters in opposition, perhaps more powerfully than before. All of these dynamics have altered the abilities of LESBs to center students in their decision-making, but the question remains whether it has improved it or made it more difficult. According to David Rattray, who has been involved with each iteration of the charter law, fundamentally the way charter schools were positioned within districts was destined to instigate problems:

One is we sort of commoditized kids because of the way we developed this charter regime. If you get a kid and I lose a kid, you get the money, I lose the money. We basically made kids bartering chips. And by that we almost guaranteed that there would be a win-lose relationship that would make a district hostile to a charter and a charter hostile to a district. (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018)

In LAUSD, the broadness of the law left a lot of it open for interpretation and for less well-intentioned actors to take advantage. It also left interpretation up to the California LESBs charged with authorizing, renewing, and overseeing the charters encouraging students away from their district schools. The intention was to promote learning and

collaboration between the TPS and charters to improve student outcomes, but that scenario wasn't fostered:

It depends on the nature of the state charter law here in California. We're one of the few remaining states where school boards have the primary say on whether to grant charters. When we originally wrote the law, we thought that school board members would essentially look at charters as a co-equal option. Vis-a-vis running a traditional public school in house, if you will. What we learned was that there was instead an intense loyalty on the part of the vast majority of school board members toward the pre-existing schools. Even when the charter option was manifestly superior by any reasonable analysis. We hadn't originally anticipated a strong need for a heavy duty appeal process. And later we learned this hard lesson. So, in theory, school board members are trustees who make balanced decisions on behalf of, student interest, but in practice, for the reasons Kerchner and others do a good job of explaining, they don't. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

From the start, charters were seen by teacher unions and others as a threat to public education, fueling adult tensions and detracting real attention from the students. What remains murky is whether the collaboration wasn't guided intentionally or due to insufficient long-term considerations.

There is much evidence and history however that policymaking and decisions in American education has been fraught with these tensions for centuries. It keeps going back to our fundamental disagreements on defining problems and therefore creating and implementing effective solutions. There has been an ongoing fundamental disagreement over the purpose of public education that fuels political strife. LESBs have almost always experienced all of this and it can be difficult to make student-centered decisions if they know the resulting aftermath will be perpetuated by angry adults and parents. Too often, LESB members face either making decisions they know are in the students' best interests, or losing their next election. LESB positions in larger urban school districts are also widely seen as a gateway political position to city council and beyond.

In the near to midterm, [policymakers] have to survive elections. That's a painful lesson. We're learning, long-term, they actually have to be in the interest of the core constituency or client. And so, the fact that the traditional system is not doing that does not bode well for that system over the long term. They can survive for the next x-many years and maybe even a decade or two on their political strength. But we're already seeing severe cracks under that support. It's in my view only a matter of time. You can only get so far from the fundamentals and the longer you go without serving your constituency, the more at risk you are no matter your political strengths. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

One LAUSD board member during the time period of this study proposed a resolution to put kids first (Szymanski, 2017, August 21). Ref Rodriguez, the Board President at the time, felt so strongly that kids were not being put first that he put forth this resolution. Regrettably, Rodriguez was later forced to resign and was convicted and sentenced in a board campaign funding misuse scandal (Blume & Alpert Reyes, 2018, July 23; Koran, 2018, July 23). Findings of this study underscored how difficult it can be in LAUSD to evaluate a school board's ability to maintain a decision-making focus on students, and a dearth of those in leadership positions authentically drawing attention to this issue and how it affects the district's sustainability:

But I just don't see that discussion happening in Los Angeles. Unless you're willing to go and to think first about how you design the experience of a student, of the real workers in this system, unless you think about that first, you're not going to solve these adult political problems, you need to work on solving the kid experience problem first. (Personal communication, November 15, 2017)

Those discussions aren't always happening *publicly*, but something that stood out in conversations with the three LAUSD Board members and some of their staff is the focus on students in those conversations. There is evidence that actors outside the district, such as IOs, wealthy philanthropic donors, and national/state level politics can make student-centered decision-making difficult. The ongoing debate on the efficacy of charters and

whether more charter schools are better for students. Again, the differing views on what is best for students affects this debate.

Equity and Sustainable Policymaking

A critically important aspect of student-centered decision-making is equity, and it is central to the debate over charter schools and their efficacy in improving student outcomes for LAUSD students. As of 2019, approximately 80 percent of LAUSD students qualified for free or reduced price meals (FRL) (LAUSD, 2019, August 9). It is difficult to tease out factors fueling the charter wars; this study affirmed other research showing that there are excellent charter schools making a significant difference in students' lives, and there are also unsuccessful charters with poor management and teaching—just as is the case with traditional public schools.

It is outside the purview of this case of LAUSD to measure and research deeper into the actual effects of charter expansion on student outcome improvements, but rather to provide insight into the perspectives of policymakers and others involved from the political and rhetorical perspective. To ask questions of the data such as: have the charter wars really been about what is best for students?

One board member described challenges of serving students better and unfair advantages charters have within LAUSD. He spoke to the challenges within public education and the critical needs from schools to help with far more than just academics:

They have an unfair advantage on a lot of that stuff. We certainly think that some of our neighborhood and traditional schools need to serve kids better. And that's really hard because number one, we have very challenging communities, very, very challenging kids who come to us for everything ... We don't just educate kids. We've got to take care of kids and some kids are harder to take care of than others. I think we do have to acknowledge that it would be great if we had the

wraparound resources to really address what kids need to be more successful. (Personal communication, August 27, 2018)

Due to the arrangement between the independent charter schools and TPS within LAUSD, the TPS educate more students coming from more low-income families and challenging circumstances. Charter schools can push the narrative that they are public schools when it helps soften their reputation, but when it is more inconvenient, their independence and differences from TPS are emphasized. For example, discipline in TPS versus charter schools highlights one major difference between them:

If you go to a charter school and you don't want to wear the uniform, you're out. No, I can't say you're out to my kids. You're in and I have to work with you. They say all the time, 'the discipline is much better at charter schools than it is at traditional public schools.' Well, if you don't behave, you're out. So, where do you go? You go back to your traditional public schools. (Personal communication, August 27, 2018)

Questions of equity and charter schools are complex within this study because the interview participants largely agreed on its importance, however in practice, it is very difficult to push through effective policy for. Another board member described the difficulty in the Board even agreeing on a definition of equity:

Then I wrote a resolution around defining equity and procurement items as the start, but items before the board going through a rubric analysis of how they recognize historical inequities, how they redistribute dollars based on student need. And if they're likely to result in closing opportunity gaps for kids, and that was a four-three vote. We couldn't align on a definition of [equity] and part of that is the different neighborhoods we represent. Part of that is our own experiences. Part of that is, to your point, the political capital and who is endorsed by whom or feels allegiances to various groups of people, that of course do their best to influence the board, to make decisions that meet the needs of their constituents. (Personal communication, December 22, 2021)

Equity is central to the sustainability question at the heart of this study and a critical aspect of student-centered policymaking. In the mid-1980s, one interview participant

described a realization of people in L.A. that something could be done to improve things within LAUSD and there were many reports written and civic groups gathered, but it activated very little real change (Personal communication, November 15, 2017). In these cases, it demonstrates that co-production of educational policy in L.A. is very difficult—particularly when the students and equity are not the authentic goal each actor is striving for.

Inadequate funding for LAUSD schools from the state and federal levels was another frequently mentioned issue—by Board members, district officials, IO representatives, and many speakers at LAUSD monthly school board meetings. An increase in funding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has helped for now, but there was a pattern of concern for when that runs out for the district. David Rattray, from the L.A. Area Chamber of Commerce and UNITE-LA, described their fiscal advocacy work on behalf of California TPS:

Generally, our fiscal advocacy is that we're inadequately funding all education, cradle to career, so we have constant advocacy in both California, and in other states, and nationally, that we need to better fund K-12, we need to better fund early childhood care in education, we need to better fund higher ed. Now it's not always just more money without more change, so we certainly have advocated for more resources, but more wisely positioned. (D. Rattray, personal communication, December 1, 2017)

There was evidence of IOs, such as UNITE-LA, working hard to learn from past mistakes. Rattray often referred to fiscal sustainability and efforts to center policies that boosted that around the students and equitable school experiences. Another interview participant mentioned the rising cost of living in L.A. and the cycle of students moving to more affordable districts lead to LAUSD losing more funding for their schools: “The cost of housing is actually what’s driving students away. You can’t afford to live here. That’s

one of the biggest issues. When we lose students, we lose funding. It's this cycle of doom and gloom" (Personal communication, April 2, 2021).

Key Principle 1: Long-Term Solutions

The ability and willingness of policymakers to make long-term decisions was one factor of sustainability that continued to be mentioned throughout fieldwork. Failure to make long-term decisions has also meant that LAUSD has been making decisions from a place of permanent crisis for decades. Fiscal responsibility in and of itself is a long-term decision. Generally, there were references to policymakers in LAUSD pursuing solutions that just "kicked the can down the road" and served more as bandaids than root cause and long-term solutions. This is a drastic oversimplification of what has been occurring in LAUSD; however, it is an omnipresent challenge in L.A., and across the US public education system, that the problems are so massive, particularly in large urban school districts, that addressing the root causes of problems can be nearly impossible—at least by the district by itself without local and state government support. Declining student enrollment, for example, was identified in Board meetings, numerous media reports, and by most interview participants as one of the biggest challenges LAUSD faces. Board members stated that, at the time of this study, they haven't seriously addressed the issue.

One Board Member described another challenge the board as a governing body faces:

We have a real challenge in L.A. and I do bring this up at board meetings all the time where we just want to keep adding initiatives, right. We're like here's the next great thing, we're going to try this. We're going to do that. But we avoid saying what we're going to stop doing what's not working for kids. (Personal communication, December 22, 2021)

It is difficult for the board to make substantial changes and their power has gradually eroded over the past several decades (Kerchner, et al., 2008). There is a place for smaller,

incremental changes, however, to the board member’s point, solid and sustainable policymaking also must take into account what is *not* working and policymakers have to be willing to discontinue what isn’t working. Otherwise, it creates a situation such as if you never clean your desk and allow papers to pile up—nothing is dealt with and eventually that mess will come crashing down; in the case of L.A., it has also meant squandering money on initiatives proven to be ineffective for students and continuing to pay for buildings no longer in use (Lafer, 2017).

Proposition 39 aimed to make better use of underutilized LAUSD facilities, however serves as an example of a lack of long-term thinking or not thinking through all the unintended consequences. David Rattray explained how initially, in the early years of the California charter law, it was difficult for charters to secure facilities. Charters argued that they were growing rapidly, “providing a favorable alternative to a district that’s failing,” and that they should be able to use the underutilized facilities (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018). However, the longer-term consequences increased tensions between TPS and charter schools:

If you walk through that step by step by step, it’s logical. There’s a logic to it and that’s the case [charters] made to the voters and then voters said, yes, sure. But if you think about it in terms of the functionality of having what I described as two warring parties that are supposed to co-deliver education on the same physical site, it’s ridiculous. So, you can see that that’s a challenge of policymaking. You can have some semi-rational policies that become completely dysfunctional, unintended consequences, unintended or quasi-intended. (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018)

It is understandably difficult to predict the long-term effects of policies, and part of the scenario Rattray illustrated was one positive intention of Prop. 39 to make use of facilities already owned by LAUSD. In retrospect, it absolutely fueled tensions between

TPS and charters because there had never been any framework in place for collaboration between them in the first place.

Rattray provided another example of policy in California education made without enough regard to the long-term implications. In 2009, President Obama and Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, announced the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition to encourage states to make systemic changes to public education in order to receive funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (The White House Archives of President Barack Obama, 2016). States were struggling in the Recession and were desperately cutting programs and laying off teachers and then Sec. Duncan presented “a carrot that looked like a watermelon because [California districts] were so broke.” He created the competition “with an attempt to get states voluntarily to make radical changes in their policy that would have long-term effects,” and without the promise of receiving the funding (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018). California made many of the changes, including lifting the cap of charters, and they ended up not receiving any of the money. Rattray reflected on what he learned from this experience:

It taught me a big lesson. You have to just maintain your discipline. I guess we shouldn't have been induced into long-term policy decisions and a short term fiscal crisis with no commitment. But we did, we gave in and we did. We felt like we should do it. We thought we were making good policy decisions at the time, but in retrospect, I think they were poor. Some of them are good, but that one I think was poor. That was probably the biggest single change we've made [to the charter law]. Other than that, they've been very modest. There's been several attempts to increase transparency, accountability, various kinds of things, and they've almost all failed. (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018)

This experience also illustrated that the concept of market competition in education can be in direct conflict with TPS district sustainability. RTTT provided incentives to get districts and states to make significant changes, but making such overhauling changes

without knowing if you will get the funding was hazardous and not necessarily in students' best interests.

Regarding fiscal responsibility and long-term solutions, in 2013-2014, California did pass major public education funding reform for the first time in 40 years, called the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). While it is still in its nascent years, as of 2018-2019 it was fully funded (California Department of Education, 2023). Rattray's organization strongly advocated for the LCFF "which eliminated more than 40 categorical programs, and empowered school boards to have more discretion over how to use their resources, and also improve the allocation to districts with greater need" (D. Rattray, personal communication, December 1, 2017). Despite intentions of equity and the pursuit of a long-term solution to a major challenge, LAUSD remains in a difficult fiscal position.

IO involvement also can be inherently at odds with sustainable and long-term solutions, both in regards to funding and support for policymaking, programs, and certain election campaigns. IOs, such as philanthropic foundations, choose what they provide funding for and likewise, choose what to stop providing funding for. When initiatives and programs funded by IOs crash and burn, in many cases, the board and district officials are left to clean up the mess. This environment makes long-term solutions difficult to implement unless a long-term strategy is in place. Likewise, the charter expansion in LAUSD supported by IOs forged ahead, leaving the board and superintendent to initially figure out how to protect LAUSD and cohabitate with charters. Not until 2019, did Governor Newsom's Charter Task Force represent one of the first real state-level attempts to better understand what effects charter expansion in California was having on

traditional public school districts. Additionally, the challenge of leadership stability also affects the ability of leaders and policymakers to see through longer-term plans.

Key Principle 2: Leadership Stability

The second key principle that stood out from the data was leadership stability, specifically for the LAUSD board and superintendent. Over the past decade, from 2013-2023, LAUSD has had seven superintendents. Since the origin of charter schools in LAUSD in the early 1990s, there have been thirteen superintendents; in comparison, there were only five LAUSD superintendents between 1962 (when the two Los Angeles districts were merged) and 1992 (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2023). In response to an interview question about measuring sustainability of reform or policy, one board member responded:

That's a really good question because in education, people often talk about pendulum swinging, right? We swing so far on this reform idea and then we try for a few years, it's not dramatically improving outcomes to our highest need kids. So, then we swing back to the other direction. Part of that is our own leadership sustainability. We have not had a superintendent in L.A. last longer than six years since I was a kid. And usually it's about three years, sometimes less than that. And that has real repercussions. There have been a lot of folks in classrooms for 20-plus years, even principals and at the local district level. I was guilty of this myself as a classroom teacher. I was only there for five years, but there's this culture of this too will pass. I'm just going to keep doing what I know to do right for my kids. The district, far away downtown, doesn't know, my kids are community. Like they're going to decide what they want to do, but I'm going to just do the thing that I need to do. So, I do think with hopefully our new superintendent's history of tenure in Miami, that he has a similar experience in L.A. (Personal communication, December 22, 2021)

This superintendent turnover, at least with the past three choices by the board, have not been due to lack of effort to find someone who could truly effect lasting change.

Leadership stability and sustainability of LAUSD has appeared to be forefront in the board's searches.

During the timeline of this study, from 2014 to 2019, there were four superintendents. Dr. Michelle King was superintendent from 2016 to 2018 until she became ill and resigned (and died not long after). She had been an LAUSD student, teacher, administrator, and then Superintendent—one of the most 'insider' superintendents the Board had appointed in recent history. Then, Superintendent Austin Beutner (in office from 2018 to 2021), a former businessman, was brought on by the Board believing his financial background could be the catalytic change needed to guide the district in making better long-term fiscal policy decisions to improve the district's condition. Alberto Carvalho, the former superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools from 2008 to 2022 is now serving as the superintendent for LAUSD. His longevity and success in Miami were an important aspect of his appointment.

One interview participant, who wished to remain anonymous, is a friend of a former LAUSD superintendent, shared that he told her he would never work for an elected school board again because the politics get in the way and he couldn't move the district forward in the ways he thought were important because of the politics. She continued, "The average is less than three years for superintendents, and it has so much to do with Boards ... Elections have consequences" (Personal communication, June 8, 2020).

Likewise, the board and superintendent also face challenges to their political capital with increased IO involvement and the power of the teacher unions from United Teachers Los Angeles and California Teachers Association. One consequence of greater

IO involvement in public education and LESB elections is that certain Board members are somewhat beholden to their backers. If they step out of line, their reelection to the Board or election to other offices is in jeopardy. The superintendent turnover has not helped with public trust of the district, and conversely, several participants indicated that the Board has had a lot to do with the superintendent turnover. Unfortunately, for many policymakers to make difficult but sound policy decisions, they risk not getting re-elected, which adds to leadership turnover, which in some cases will affect sustainability. In the case of the superintendency, they risk their contract not being renewed by the Board.

Key Principle 3: Transparency

For the purposes of this study, the researcher defined transparency as including governing body transparency in decision-making and challenges faced by the district, charter law amendments, voter initiatives (e.g., Propositions), LESB election campaigns, and transparency of intentions from IOs. One researcher described the snowball of eroding trust LAUSD experienced over the past several decades:

When writing [a book about LAUSD], what we thought we were writing was a story of an institution that was in deep transformation from what it used to be, to what it needs to be. The school district in Los Angeles, like most school districts, was established as a creature of the progressive movement of the 1910s, the last major alteration in the business of constitution of LAUSD was made in 1903, so when the school district was separated from the city. For the last 40 years people have tried to say hey, this isn't working for us. First it was the Civil Rights movement ... the point here is less about the school's desegregation issues, although those were huge, but it was that what was called the logic of confidence got withdrawn from the school district, and people started to look at it critically. And then people got to say, you know, it may be working for you, but it's not working for me. And so, the sort of critical look at how well the school was doing, it went from high trust to low trust, over a period of about 20 years, and so it went from an institution that everybody liked to an institution that nobody

trusted pretty fast, maybe 1960 to 1980. (Personal communication, November 15, 2017)

Theoretically, if board members are making sound and effective policy decisions, the public should hear about it, and this should increase institutional trust. In Chapter 4, one participant reminded the researcher that, “School districts are really good at not being totally transparent with what the budget dollars are” (Personal communication, August 29, 2018). And therefore, outsiders can presume budget dollars are not the only challenges districts are good at obfuscating. As David Rattray reminded us, the public generally only hears about what is going wrong and what is failing in public education. The media therefore plays a role in transparency too.

Policymakers will always have differences in perspective and belief in what is best for constituents, and the constituents may also disagree—that is a strength in our democratic process that should challenge those in power to make the best decisions they can. But in reality, policymakers do too often make decisions that are shadowed by politics, who funded their election campaign, and getting re-elected or to a higher office. Of course, it is necessary to have certain discussions between policymakers behind closed doors—not everything can be discussed in front of a camera while decisions are being made. However, greater transparency coming from LAUSD leadership should assist with discerning rhetoric from reality and discrediting false stories that LAUSD schools are failing. This narrative has been perpetuated by the charter sector in particular to garner support for expansion. Below, a board member responded to the question, “What factors do you think have driven charter expansion in Los Angeles?” with:

False stories about what’s happening at our schools. I don’t know where people have these ideas that our schools are not being successful. Sometimes our

traditional public schools need some work and we are on top of that all the time. But I don't know where parents have these ideas. (Personal communication, August 29, 2018)

One researcher built upon this, describing the politics of charters and what it has done to the political dynamics in L.A. and the narrative hanging above LAUSD: “The politics of this has just been enormously poisoned. It’s really hard for me to think about how you can successfully reform public schools by telling everybody that they’re bad” (Personal communication, November 15, 2017).

A board member and others recounted stories of parents being persuaded on charters at locations such as a local mall; there would be teachers or charter administrators at a table there asking parents whether they want a good education for their child and asking them to sign something. What they were signing was a petition for a charter school. It is a similar approach to Propositions such as Prop. 39; the language at the voting booth was worded so you can't possibly disagree with it. If you haven't done background research and aren't informed enough to consider any unintended and negative consequences, you would likely vote for it. One Board Member described closed sessions where members discussed student expulsions—that despite the reputation that charter schools have better discipline records than TPS, this is not remotely the case:

I sit in closed session for all of these expulsions and plenty of them are from the charter schools, selling Xanax, marijuana. All the beating each other up. And these are charter schools, but nobody ever hears, cause it's in closed session. But I hear it. We [TPS] can't just throw kids out. We take everybody that walks in the front door and if a child isn't doing well in a school, then we're looking for alternatives because that's what we do. That's what public education is about. (Personal communication, August 27, 2018)

This board member is referring to a lack of transparency from charters in two perspectives—that when they call themselves public schools, but then aren't held to the

same requirements as TPS, and also the not necessarily justified public conversation on the superiority of discipline in charters over TPS. These narratives are perpetuated by media reports, information that IOs push to the public, national rhetoric on charters versus TPS, and more.

Increasing IO involvement in public education has also contributed to challenges of transparency. The role of IOs in education in L.A. has led to several district sustainability concerns. First, funding from foundations and other IOs can be inherently obscure and unstable because they don't answer to anyone within the district. They can push or pull funding based on their evolving agendas. On the other hand, IOs are nimbler than LAUSD to shut down initiatives when it is clear it's not working. Second, funding unpredictability also applies to the school board elections. Finally, IOs flexibility to work around LAUSD is a transparency and sustainability threat. One researcher explained a shift in 1999/2000 of the Los Angeles "civic elite" giving up on LAUSD and deciding to try to turn things around by getting their own people on the school board:

And so, they put up a slate of candidates, they get elected, then they get defeated in the next election. And this started this enormously costly trench warfare. The idea that a candidate for a school board election would spend \$150 a vote. Mitt Romney spent \$20, that was the most expensive presidential election ever, Barack Obama spent \$16. Donald Trump spent \$5 because he got all that free media. But \$150 a vote, we're talking \$15 million that went into one school board race for Steve Zimmer's seat. This is obscene amounts of money. It is corrupt on its face. You can't collect that much money and not be owing somebody something. (Personal communication, November 15, 2017)

The school board race referenced was after two decades of trench warfare culminated in the most expensive LESB election ever in 2017 when \$15.5 billion was spent on three LAUSD Board seats (Blume & Poston, 2017; DeBray et al., 2018; Scott, DeBray, Lubienski, Hanley, Castillo, & Hedges, 2017).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The LAUSD school board contends with major long-term challenges on multiple fronts. Student enrollment decline, rising healthcare benefits, and post-employment costs emerged as the greater threats affecting the LAUSD's sustainability. Charter expansion has added additional challenges, although there is evidence that over the long-term, charter expansion has also pushed the LAUSD board toward greater consideration of their own sustainability. Those challenges have fewer viable solutions and charter schools have provided somewhat of an obvious scapegoat for the district's challenges:

It's complicated. People want to be able to find an easy answer or point blame, you know? I think that's hard because there's not exactly one silver bullet here. But I won't say that the growth of charter schools has not been a challenge to the district's fiscal school sustainability. I think there are things that we should have been learning and we can still be learning. We also just have other work to do around district union contracts and how we take care of the people who take care of our kids is important. But also, I'm really worried that with this recovery dollars and just growing ballooning, honestly are staffing, and committing to raises, that might not be sustainable for too long, but we're going to have another recession that is going to potentially cause another giant set of layoffs that I experienced myself when I was a teacher in L.A. Unified in 2010. So big challenges. (Personal communication, December 22, 2021)

Juggling the many competing demands make board members' district governance positions incredibly challenging, and charters have changed LAUSD and to some extent, the roles and responsibilities of the board. The following three research questions guided this study:

1. How has the California Charter School Act of 1992 changed over time through the legislative amendment process?
2. Which amendments to the California Charter School Act from 1992 through 2019 affect the sustainability of traditional public schools (specifically the Los Angeles Unified School District, or LAUSD)? How does the California charter law relate to district sustainability from the perspective of LAUSD school board members? From the perspective of intermediary organizations and their backers involved with the Board?
3. How can data from this study contribute to the development of an emerging active sustainability framework for traditional public school districts and their decision-makers?

This chapter includes an overview of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for policy and practice, suggestions for future research, and concluding thoughts.

Overview of the Study

This dissertation set out to investigate the fiscal and political sustainability of LAUSD and any role charter school expansion may play. It also questioned whether charters have changed the role of the LAUSD school board. Beginning with literature on how different sectors define and consider sustainability, this study drew from a conceptualization of sustainability from environmental studies in forming the framework through which this research was grounded: that in the case of LAUSD, policy decisions made to ensure the sustainability of a traditional public school districts require “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p.41). From this initial

conceptualization, the active sustainability framework developed further—drawing from civic capacity, co-production, and literature on educational governance, policy adoption, and implementation.

The findings of this study provide historical evidence of what lead to the original passage of the California charter law in 1992, significant amendments that relate with traditional public school district sustainability in California, and notably, the lack of consideration as to how potential charter school expansion would affect the sustainability of TPS districts. It is incredibly difficult to make long-term policy decisions that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet future needs and minimize negative effects for those the policies are intended to help. The results of this research suggest that if there is a specific policy intention, it is critical that guidance is provided to permit a chance to meet those intentions for those in charge of implementation. This highlights the importance of the key principles discussed in Chapter 5—the difficulties in planning and implementing long-term solutions, leadership turnover and instability, and lack of transparency each affect this. What is included and excluded in the state charter law was also shown to have some effect on TPS sustainability, but evidence was limited and further research is needed.

Study findings concluded with further development of active sustainability framework. This augmented greater understanding of factors affecting the LAUSD board's ability to protect district sustainability within the environment of 20 percent charter enrollment. Through analysis of data collected, three key principles of the framework emerged: (1) long-term solutions; (2) leadership stability; and (3) transparency. These emerged as consistent themes from across conducted qualitative

interviews. This is not to say that the key principles are free from debate—rather, within the limits of this particular study in the case of LAUSD, these were the components of sustainability determined as consistently most important consistently across interviewees. These resulting principles and implications are discussed below in greater detail.

Discussion and Policy Implications

This research is situated at the intersection of complex political and fiscal challenges for LAUSD, the policy ecology of Los Angeles, and the large percentage of LAUSD students attending independent charter schools within the district—making it a compelling case for exploring how the LAUSD school board and IO leaders involved perceive sustainability threats to the district. The rhetoric surrounding charters there (and nationally) and the timing of the passage of AB 1505 in 2019, the most recent major amendment to the California charter law, brought questions of LAUSD sustainability and charter expansion to the forefront. This study provides greater insight into how the LAUSD board and IO leaders understand and approach these issues, what their priorities are, and how the politics of education in Los Angeles is interwoven throughout. This research endeavored to weave through the rhetoric, media, and personal interviews to understand more of the unfettered story.

As Kirst and Wirt (2009) warned, locally elected school boards are in danger of extinction, yet a pillar of the revered localism of US public education (Henig, Jacobsen, & Reckhow, 2019). In recent years, LESBs have increasingly come under the public microscope; while this is exposing many shortcomings, it also may contribute to improvements. The results of this study suggest that the role of the LAUSD board has shifted as charters have emerged and multiplied in the public education landscape. Today,

Alsbury (2008) describes one prevalent distinction between the roles of the board and superintendent is the board works as policy developer and the superintendent as policy implementer. This is still a broad distinction, and school board identity struggles have vacillated between whether their focus should be governance, student outcomes, or a combination (Alsbury, 2018).

Hess (1999) posited a doubtful view of the ability of the existing public school governance system to ever improve. Elmore (2000) summarized Hess' perspective:

Relatively unstable political factors advance new "reforms" as ways of satisfying their electoral constituencies, pausing only long enough to take credit for having acted, and quickly moving on to new reforms, with no attention to the institutionalization or implementation of previous reforms. The political rewards in the pluralistic structure, Hess argues, are in the symbolisms of initiations and enactment of reform, not in its implementation. Among the pathologies the incentive structure creates is high turnover of leadership, both political and administrative. Factions are fickle, political opportunists abound. Board majorities hold onto superintendents just long enough for them to advance their reform proposals, and at the first sign of opposition, move onto the next superintendent. (p.19)

This summary speaks to many characteristics of the case of LAUSD. The active sustainability framework and key principles of sustainability simultaneously provide clarity in what could be strived for and frustration at the obstacles in the way. The contested factors putting pressure from all sides on the LAUSD board make student-centered policies, equity, long-term solutions, leadership stability, and transparency mostly an ideal. Kerchner, et al., (2008) describe the shift in LAUSD more toward the circumstances that Hess and Elmore described:

Over the last forty years, schooling in Los Angeles underwent a radical transformation in how it operated and in how people thought about schooling. School board members used to be civic elites, elected city-wide. The school board had the independent ability to raise taxes in order to pay for operations. The board did not meddle too much in how the schools operated. The superintendent was a

largely unquestioned leader who commanded loyalty from administrators and obedience from the teachers. Fledgling teacher unions spoke meekly and officially did not bargain. Over four decades, LAUSD had changed in ways that challenge virtually every traditional assumption about how to govern and organize public education. (Kerchner, et al., 2008, pp. 19-20)

It remains difficult to discern just how much power the LAUSD board maintains. Results of this study suggest that the board is unwilling and/or unable to do much to make inroads toward solving the two greatest threats to their sustainability—rising post-employment obligations and declining student enrollment.

Lessons from civic capacity and co-production point to the possibility that IO involvement in LAUSD may ultimately be helping the district work toward improved fiscal and political health (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). In her study of LAUSD, Reckhow (2013) also drew from civic capacity as “a key feature of reform sustainability”: “Reform that is sustainable in the long term reconfigures the political system, making it unlikely that the policy will be reversed” (p. 7). Cuban (in O’Neil, 2000), described constituency growth around education reform as a key factor in sustainability (p. 7). Co-production also contributes to considerations of TPS sustainability and the framework, bringing together research from public administration together with political learnings from civic capacity. Presciently, Boyle and Harris (2009) described choice as sometimes representing “the failure of empowerment, rather than its realization” (p. 7).

There are examples of improved sustainability from attracting outsider support that isn’t beholden to the bureaucracy. Charter school expansion in LAUSD, while contributing to political tensions and student enrollment decline, may also be somewhat of a catalyst pushing the district to improve. There was consensus across this research

that charters were there to stay in Los Angeles: “I think [charters] fundamentally change [the base district] for sure. They are not like a lot of reforms. They're not a flavor of the month. They have become a well-developed sector of the public education system and they're here to stay (D. Rattray, personal communication, August 29, 2018). Rattray continued with the question: “The hardest thing to figure out is, is what, what is the nature of that change?” (Personal communication, August 29, 2018).

Another study participant considered the positive effects of charter expansion on LAUSD as affirming the findings of Kerchner et al. (2008) that LAUSD was at the time still in a phase of institutional change. However, he saw the 2019 passage of AB 1505 as representing another blow to the autonomy and other functions of charter schools that had been pushing LAUSD to improve, whereas others touted AB 1505 as protection for TPS districts and necessitated regulation of the California charter sector:

If you look at it through the lens of Chuck Kerchner's book, I just see Chuck being able to now add two or three chapters to his book explaining how the charter concept was the first thing that really started to gain traction and really started to put some very strong pressure on the district. It didn't wipe the district out, but in combination with horrific labor and spending decisions, led to this cataclysmic fight in the legislature that ultimately ended up stunting the growth of charter school [AB 1505] so that the district could continue for another 10 or 15 years. So, eating more of its young and nobody wanting to take on as profoundly dysfunctional, larger structure known as the Los Angeles Unified School District. (Personal communication, November, 24, 2020)

The fiscal impact inclusion in AB 1505 addressed a key disparity between the California charter law and protecting the sustainability of TPS district—legally permitting LESBs to consider their own fiscal well-being when acting as charter authorizer. This demonstrated evidence that the content of a state charter law can influence the sustainability of TPS districts; however, as evidenced through this study, it

also showed that a change in the charter law does not necessarily translate to changes in practice. Longer-term study of the implementation of AB 1505 is necessary.

There is evidence that charter expansion in LAUSD was in response to the LAUSD traditional public schools not meeting the expectations of parents for their children's educations. This research provided some evidence that this was the case. When asked why he thinks the significant number of LAUSD students attending charter schools is a good thing, Board member Nick Melvoin responded:

You know I don't know that it is. I think it's symptomatic of our collective failure to educate our kids. So, to me, charters were kind of the response to the failure of traditional districts to educate kids. And so, in L.A., you have 130,000 kids in charters, 40,000 on waitlists. And you have a growing demand. And I think there are two ways to satisfy that parent demand - either build more charter schools or improve traditional schools. And I actually ran for our board of education to do the latter. (Garcia-Navarro, 2017, August 6)

Another interview participant, more unconvinced of traditional public education to improve itself and serve students better, compared the future of public education with the fate of public transportation:

My sense is that long-term, if we don't do something about this in their structure, that public education will become much like public transportation. In Los Angeles, if you don't have a car, you're in a very unfortunate position of being dependent on a horrifically a badly managed and expensive public transportation system that doesn't work very well. The other 90 to 95 percent of the population has its own car and they just bypass that system. I think there's a strong potential over the next 20 years or so for a huge chunk of the public to essentially give up on public education much like, in the forties and fifties, the public gave up on public transit. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

Noteworthy concluding findings deal with broader lessons learned from those interview participants on the ground in LAUSD. The charter law does influence district sustainability, but it depends on how the district interprets and implements. Outsiders involved in education in LAUSD influence board elections, charter law, and more. The

challenges in compromise and problem definition will likely continue to hamper TPS sustainability efforts, in addition to the difficulty of LAUSD to be responsive to changing contexts. When describing California’s actions in attempting to get Race to the Top funding, Rattray summarized his lessons learned as: “When you’re broke, you’re susceptible to bad policy” (Personal communication, August 29, 2018). If the fiscal health of LAUSD continues to suffer, they will likely continue to be susceptible to policy that doesn’t support district sustainability.

Directions for Future Research

There are many natural progressions from this research to guide further work. Considerably more work will need to be done to further develop the active sustainability framework. This dissertation found evidence to support its initial development and a greater focus on the key principles and contested factors and pressures could provide further insight for LAUSD school board members, and perhaps eventually school boards more broadly, to consider and use in practice. Further study to assess the long-term effects and possible solutions to LAUSD’s rising pension costs is critical. Additionally, more research is needed into the effectiveness and appropriateness of LESBs serving as authorizers to charter schools—particularly in regard to TPS district sustainability. Building from the finding of the disparity between the law’s intentions and unintended consequences could provide insight for the California charter law and others states as well. Continued following of the implementation and long-term effects of AB 1505 would also produce interesting insight into questions of sustainability and charter law.

Concerning LESB elections, more research into changing the election day to be on-cycle with federal and state elections in November is also intriguing. Preliminary

positive considerations may include larger voter turnout and a reduced role of IOs in education spending because there may be other elected offices they choose to focus on. Finally, further study into the effects of what is included (or not) in a state charter law on TPS districts could continue from this dissertation study. Actionable, sustainable, and politically tenable research for these reforms could benefit efforts toward TPS sustainability.

Concluding Thoughts

There are no straightforward paths or solutions to the challenges investigated throughout this dissertation. Many divisive arguments were highlighted from this case study and merit further investigation. Educational policymaking for any district is an important and difficult job, and in a large, urban school district such as LAUSD, it appears that factors discussed throughout this study put amplified pressure on the school board and district leaders. In this case, legislative amendments to the California charter school law appear to have had a modest effect on the sustainability of the LAUSD traditional public schools. The passage of AB 1505 may ultimately protect TPS sustainability over further charter growth. Charter school expansion has fundamentally changed the dynamics of LAUSD, but the evidence is clear that rising post-employment costs and student enrollment decline present greater fiscal sustainability threats. The findings from this research informed the further development of an active sustainability framework and provided insight into pressures facing the LAUSD board. Consideration of these insights and the key principles contribute to ongoing research for school board effectiveness and student-centered and equitable decision-making.

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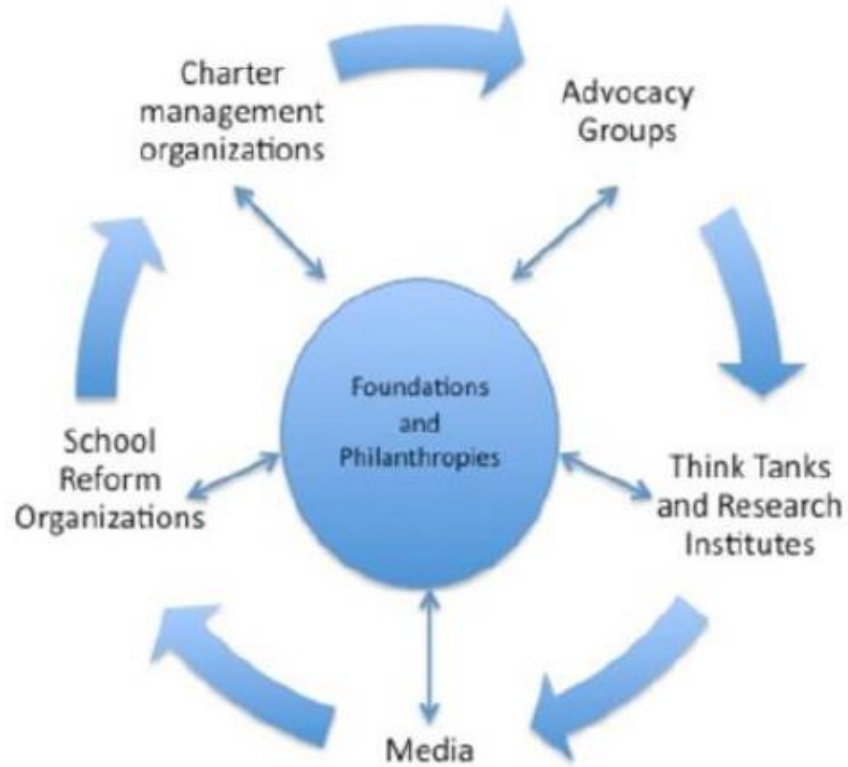
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APPENDIX A

Scott and Jabbar's (2014) hub and spoke relationship between intermediary organizations and foundations.



APPENDIX B

Conceptual and definitional scope of intermediary organizations (Scott, DeBray, Lubienski, La Londe, Castillo, & Owens (2017).



APPENDIX C

WTG Data Collection and Analysis

WTG data was collected through six trips to Los Angeles by the PIs and graduate assistants from 2016-2018. I personally went on two fieldwork trips—conducting numerous in-person interviews and observations. In between trips, multiple interviews were conducted by video or phone by each member of the research team. Potential interview participants were gathered by the WTG team primarily through two approaches: individual research and knowledge of the L.A. IO sector and each IOs leadership team, and snowball sampling through asking interview participants who they believed we should also speak with. We reached out to each participant using the same recruitment/informational letter, including a consent form informing the participant of what the interview would entail and providing them to option of our using their name, remaining anonymous, or using a pseudonym in subsequent published work. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes, with one being as short as 15 minutes, and others lasting for two hours. The consent form also notified the participant that the interview would be audio-recorded for later transcription unless they chose for it to not be recorded. In cases of no recording, the researcher took detailed notes and agreed with the participant that anything included in later reports would first be shared with them for approval.

During interviews and observations, each researcher followed the same interview protocol and meeting observation protocol; for interviews, questions varied depending on

the participant (i.e., IOs, Policymakers, Journalists & Bloggers, and, Traditional Researchers). Each participant was asked to describe the political climate and dynamics in L.A., and other questions attempted to gather information about partnerships between IOs, how research evidence is used, and what involvement the participant/their organization has with incentivist reforms.

Interviews were coded by the graduate assistants (GAs) using an inductive thematic coding process (Saldaña, 2016) and Dedoose software. Dedoose was used for all coding, in addition to a shared Google Sheet tracking codes, preliminary findings, and relevant quotes. Shared Google Docs were used to develop the case context, cross compare findings by theme by each GA, and then GAs met to discuss any common themes and any areas of disagreement/different findings. The first cycle of coding involved searching for patterns, common themes, and using these to further develop the preliminary codes. After the first cycle of coding, the GAs compiled a summary of findings/themes/patterns, discussing each and eliminating overlapping findings, and sharing this with the PIs. Once approved, the GAs went through each transcript a second time to confirm findings and add anything previously missed. In addition to coding, the GAs also continuously added to a case template for each case site bounded to the 2016-2018 timeframe including any related updates on political context details, governance changes, and more. This case template was compiled primarily using media and scholarly reports.

Meetings attended were the LAUSD monthly board meetings; I attended one during each of my trips to L.A. The meeting protocol included a description of the venue and attendance; meeting notes; notes on any research or media reports cited; and general

comments by the observer. Each researcher also took fieldnotes throughout each data collection trip and been used to inform context of certain events and interviews. For example, during my first trip to L.A., the LAUSD board was scheduled to make multiple decisions on charter school renewals and expansions and it was rumored they were going to deny several schools; as a result, hundreds of students, teachers, administrators, and families from these schools showed up in support of their schools with signs and cheers. There were numerous police officers, media, and others there and it was an incredible scene that I wrote careful fieldnotes on based on what I heard those around me talking about and the message this massive group was sending to the LAUSD board. At the other monthly LAUSD board meeting attended, the three graduate assistants went together, each took notes using the observation protocol, and then discussed each observation and eliminated those which overlapped. Fieldnotes and the observation protocol notes have primarily been used to provide context in publications and cross-check with other sources such as media and scholarly reports and data collected from interviews.

Publications from this 2016-2018 L.A. grant data include a chapter entitled, “The politics of charter school evidence in local context: The case of Los Angeles” in Berends, Waddington, and Schoenig’s (2018) *School Choice at the Crossroads: Research Perspectives*. We originally presented this chapter at the 2017 AERA Annual Meeting, and presented a comparison paper between Los Angeles and Atlanta at the March 2018 Annual Meeting of the Urban Affairs Association.

Distribution of Los Angeles WTG Interview Participants, 2016-2020

Participant type	Number
Local advocacy organization	4
State advocacy organization	1

Local foundation	5
Media	1
Nonprofit	2
District policymaker	7
Research organization	2
University Researcher	1
TOTAL	23

APPENDIX D

Master Interview Protocol

Questions for IO representatives

Organizational structure and mission:

Please describe your role in this organization.
How long have you been in this position?

Please describe the structure of the organization.

Prompt: What are the main divisions, and what activities do they oversee?

Prompt: How many field offices are there, where are they located, and what are their various responsibilities?

What is your organization's primary goal or goals?

Prompt: Advocacy, research, funding, etc.

What groups support your organization financially? In other ways?

Where do you place your organization's efforts (or mission) within the broader movement [for charter schools]?

Is your organization formally partnering with others, whether at national, state, or local levels?

Prompt: What form does the partnership take?

Prompts: special convenings, state-level lobbying or referenda, other?

If goal is to influence: Who does your group hope to influence? How do you decide whom to target or engage?

Prompt: State or local policy makers, district leadership, school board members, policy panel members, teachers unions- any of these, and why or why not?

Prompt: Who controls whether the policy your group is interested in gets adopted, funded, evaluated, etc.

From your perspective, what is the political climate in Los Angeles? What are the hallmarks?

How often do you interact with other organizations?

What do you believe are potential metrics for measuring sustainability of educational reform? What about for school districts?

Prompt: Student outcomes; stability for students; facilities; student mobility; parental involvement, etc.

How sustainable are charter schools in Los Angeles?

Prompt: Defining sustainability:

- “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000, p. 32).
- Fiscal, political, equity, and access considerations for students

-If not seen as sustainable, why? What do you believe would make it more sustainable? Is it something that should be sustained?

-Does it depend more upon fiscal and/or political considerations?

How sustainable is the LAUSD district itself?

I’m hearing a lot about the growing LAUSD budget deficit—what do you make of it?

What do you see as major factors for this?

Prompt: employee pensions and benefits, declining student enrollment, lack of resources, facilities, inefficient use of funds, growth in charter market share, etc.

Do you see charter schools as having fundamentally changed the public school system in Los Angeles? Or as just another cycle of education reform?

Questions for LAUSD Board members

How long have you served as an LAUSD board member?

Could you please tell me about your experiences in education prior to becoming a Board member?

What is a typical day like for you as a Board member?

What, if anything, is unique about your specific Board district ___?

Prompt: number of charter schools; student mobility between TPS <-> charter schools or other choice options; demographics

What are your top priorities while in office?

What do you see as the primary obstacles to achieving these goals?

What about priorities and obstacles for the Board as a collective?

What sources do you typically draw from for your work?

Prompt: specific researchers; think tanks; media reports; blogs; social media; etc.

Are there any specific reports that you have found particularly useful? Which ones?

Prompt: CREDO; Berkeley; UTLA fiscal impact report; etc.

From your perspective, how would you describe the political climate or dynamics in education in Los Angeles?

Have there been any recent notable shifts? If so, what events/occurrences have contributed to these shifts?

How much political capital do you believe the Board has to successfully move its collective initiatives forward?

What about Superintendent Austin Beutner?

How does he differ in his goals, initiatives, connections, and public welcoming from Superintendent Michelle King and other past LAUSD superintendents?

Are there any external organizations/groups that you are frequently in contact with?

Prompt: interest groups; community organizations; foundations; think tanks; researchers

What is the nature of these relationships?

Has there ever been an instance where your collaborations/communications with them has shifted your perspective on a certain issue? Can you describe this example?

How do local/national philanthropies and/or interest groups affect your work on the Board?

Do any philanthropies and/or interest groups seem to have a coordinated strategy? If so, what is it around?

What, if anything, has shifted their strategies and has this changed your work and mission?

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Do you perceive the expansion of charter schools both nationwide and locally as having changed the role of locally elected school boards in any way?

Has it changed your role as charters have continued to expand in L.A.?

How do you view charter expansion in L.A.? Should it be continued or halted? What is the threshold for a “right level”?

Prompt: Closure/opening rates; mobility

What factors have driven expansion most?

Is there a possibility or necessity of increased district-charter collaboration over time?

Why or why not?

How sustainable are charter schools in Los Angeles? Do you view them as having fundamentally changed the public school system in Los Angeles? Or as just another cycle of education reform?

Prompt: Defining sustainability:

- “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the

development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000, p. 32).

- “...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED/Brundtland Report, 1987, p. 41).
- Dependent more upon fiscal, political, or equity considerations for students?

If not seen as sustainable, why?

What would be evidence that charter schools are sustainable? (post-secondary enrollment/completion; academic achievement)

Do you see charter schools as a threat to the sustainability of LAUSD over the long-term?

Over what potential time frame?

Under what set of circumstances?

To what extent should concerns about racial segregation in charters be part of consideration over their sustainability?

What about other potential sustainability factors...

How do teacher benefits/salaries differ between for charters/non-charters?

How might this factor into fiscal deficit solution considerations?

LAUSD FISCAL DEFICIT

I’ve heard and read about the ongoing fiscal deficit the LAUSD faces. What is your take on it?

What are the primary causes?

What do you believe are the most necessary and feasible solutions?

What would happen if the LAUSD were to go bankrupt?

Would it be taken over by the state? What are the implications for this?

SUSTAINABILITY

What do you believe are potential metrics for measuring sustainability of educational reform?

Prompt: Stakeholder/parent engagement; student outcomes; stability for students; facilities, student mobility, academic performance, transparency, equity, etc.

What about for the district itself?

Prompt: Stakeholder/parent engagement; sustainable fiscal deficit solutions; integration; relations with UTLA; post-employment benefit reforms; greater regulation of charters; school funding; academic performance; student mobility; racial/SES segregation

What do you see as key(s) factors for the sustainability of policy?

What about evidence for sustainability of the district itself?

What factors do you believe pose the most significant threats to the long-term sustainability of the LAUSD?

By what metrics/measures?

Questions for members of Governor's Action Team on Charter Schools and Task Force for determining fiscal impact of charters on TPS in CA

*Added February 2020

Please describe how you came to be involved with this team/task force.

What is your role on this team/task force? What about externally?

What are your responsibilities? What are the responsibilities and broader mission of the group?

How often does this group convene? Is it in person or remotely?

For how long will this group continue to convene?

What are dynamics like among the group? Is there a leader of sorts? How is work delegated?

What data and methods are the group using to conduct research?

How will the findings be presented? To whom will they be presented and available?

What are the findings thus far?

How do you perceive findings will be used at the local and state level? Is CA charter legislation likely to be amended as a result? If so, how?

How do you perceive findings will affect charter schools in CA? TPS?

*Added late March 2020 (in light of one AT member describing the group as lacking substance)

Tell me about the meetings you did attend/call in for why do you think the committee was less substance/more name only?

what were the dynamics like for the group?

how were members chosen?

how did it end/disband? there was no output?

what did you think would be the outcome/output when first appointed?

how were you appointed?

what do you think of the CTF following the AT?

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Do you perceive the expansion of charter schools both nationwide and locally as having changed the role of locally elected school boards in any way?

What about in LAUSD specifically?

How do you view charter expansion in Los Angeles? It seems to have slowed some, but some have mentioned the market is oversaturated, etc. → is this only in certain areas of Los Angeles or across the district?

What factors have driven charter expansion most?

Is there a possibility or necessity of increased district-charter collaboration over time?

Why or why not?

How would you characterize the relationship between charter schools and TPS in CA? In Los Angeles (if applicable)?

How would you describe the relationship between charter schools and TPS in terms of fiscal long-term sustainability?

How sustainable are charter schools in Los Angeles? Do you view them as having fundamentally changed the public school system in Los Angeles? Or as just another cycle of education reform?

Prompt: Defining sustainability:

- “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000, p. 32).
- “...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED/Brundtland Report, 1987, p. 41).
- Dependent more upon fiscal, political, or equity considerations for students?

-If not seen as sustainable, why? What do you believe would make it more sustainable? Is it something that should be sustained?

-What would be evidence that charter schools are sustainable? (e.g., post-secondary enrollment/completion; academic achievement)

-Does it depend more upon fiscal and/or political considerations?

SUSTAINABILITY

What do you believe are potential metrics for measuring sustainability of educational reform/policy?

Prompt: Stakeholder/parent engagement; student outcomes; stability for students; facilities, student mobility, academic performance, transparency, equity, etc.

What about for the district itself?

Prompt: Stakeholder/parent engagement; sustainable fiscal deficit solutions; integration; relations with UTLA; post-employment benefit reforms; greater regulation of charters; school funding; academic performance; student mobility; racial/SES segregation

What do you see as key(s) factors for the sustainability of policy?

What about evidence for sustainability of the district itself?

What factors do you believe pose the most significant threats to the long-term sustainability of the LAUSD?

By what metrics/measures?

Questions for Researchers

Could you please start by describing the focus of your research.

Prompt: What experiences do you have studying LAUSD; charter schools in Los Angeles/CA; school boards; CA charter legislation, etc.?

From your perspective, how would you describe the political climate/dynamics in education in Los Angeles?

Have there been any recent notable shifts? If so, what events/occurrences have contributed to these shifts?

How much political capital do you believe the Board has to successfully move its collective initiatives forward?

What about for Superintendent Austin Beutner?

How does he differ in his goals, initiatives, connections, and public welcoming from Superintendent Michelle King and other previous LAUSD superintendents?

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Do you perceive the expansion of charter schools both nationwide and locally as having changed the role of locally elected school boards in any way?

What about in LAUSD specifically?

How do you view charter expansion in Los Angeles? It seems to have slowed some, but some have mentioned the market is oversaturated, etc. → is this only in certain areas of Los Angeles or across the district?

What factors have driven charter expansion most?

Is there a possibility or necessity of increased district-charter collaboration over time?

Why or why not?

How sustainable are charter schools in Los Angeles? Do you view them as having fundamentally changed the public school system in Los Angeles? Or as just another cycle of education reform?

Prompt: Defining sustainability:

- “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000, p. 32).

- "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED/Brundtland Report, 1987, p. 41).
 - Dependent more upon fiscal, political, or equity considerations for students?
- If not seen as sustainable, why? What do you believe would make it more sustainable? Is it something that should be sustained?
- What would be evidence that charter schools are sustainable? (e.g., post-secondary enrollment/completion; academic achievement)
- Does it depend more upon fiscal and/or political considerations?

What about the sustainability of the LAUSD itself?

Do you see charter schools as a threat to the fiscal sustainability of LAUSD over the long-term?

Over what potential time frame?

Under what set of circumstances?

To what extent are concerns about racial segregation in charters considered by district governance, etc. and how does this affect their sustainability?

What other factors do you think contribute to the sustainability conversation for LAUSD?

How do teacher benefits/salaries differ between for charters/non-charters?

How might this factor into fiscal deficit solution considerations?

LAUSD FISCAL DEFICIT

I've heard and read about the ongoing fiscal deficit the LAUSD faces. What is your take on it?

What are the primary causes?

What do you believe are the most necessary and feasible solutions?

What would happen if the LAUSD were to go bankrupt?

Would it be taken over by the state? What are the implications for this?

SUSTAINABILITY

What do you believe are potential metrics for measuring sustainability of educational reform/policy?

Prompt: Stakeholder/parent engagement; student outcomes; stability for students; facilities, student mobility, academic performance, transparency, equity, etc.

What about for the district itself?

Prompt: Stakeholder/parent engagement; sustainable fiscal deficit solutions; integration; relations with UTLA; post-employment benefit reforms; greater regulation of charters; school funding; academic performance; student mobility; racial/SES segregation

What do you see as key(s) factors for the sustainability of policy?
What about evidence for sustainability of the district itself?

What factors do you believe pose the most significant threats to the long-term sustainability of the LAUSD?
By what metrics/measures?

All Interviewees

I've been hearing a lot about...what is your take on that?

Governor's task force for CA charter school law
Action team studying fiscal impact of charters on TPS in CA

The UTLA strike in January 2019...what is your take on this?
What are the implications for the district? What have the outcomes been so far?

Hard Choices Report...
How likely are LAUSD Board members to make these hard choices? How much is sustainability considered?

Upcoming LAUSD board elections...
Do you think it will mirror the previous elections in terms of spending? Rhetoric?

The possibility that the LAUSD as a school district could actually go bankrupt...
How real a possibility is this?
What would happen?

At many monthly Board meetings, there seems to often be a coordinated message from parents...
-Does someone/an organization typically facilitate this consistency of message?

Is there anything you think I am missing or do you have anything further to add?

Do you have any suggestions for other people to contact and speak with?

APPENDIX E

Critical Questions to Encourage Sustainability-Centric Debate

1. What is at the root of our debates?
2. Are we arguing with the same definitions for varying topics?
 - a. Or do we need to start from the ground up and ensure definition consensus?
3. How are we holding everyone accountable? Including ourselves?
4. Who should authorize charters? How does this authority affect LESB work?
5. Is this a fiscally responsible decision?
6. Who is this helping? Who is this hurting?
7. What lessons have been learned? How can we apply these lessons?
8. What is working? Why?
9. What is not working? Why?
10. What can be eliminated or simplified?
11. Is this an example of power over or power with?
12. Is this a pressure point or a gradual problem?
13. What is worth sustaining? Why?
14. Is this a student-centered decision or policy?
 - a. How can this be more authentically student-centered?
15. Are there any underlying motivations? From where?
16. Where is pressure coming from?
17. What is the narrative being told?
 - a. How can we discern rhetoric from reality?