

2022

## Charter School Administrators' Perceptions of Local Policies Regarding Transgender Student Access to School Facilities

Derrick Armstead  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Derrick W. Armstead

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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## Review Committee

Dr. Boyd Dressler, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Christina Dawson, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Mary Givens, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2022

Abstract

Charter School Administrators' Perceptions of Local Policies Regarding Transgender

Student Access to School Facilities

by

Derrick W. Armstead

MEd, Grand Canyon University, 2009

BS, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education Policy, Leadership, and Management

Walden University

May 2022

## Abstract

Researchers have focused on the viewpoints of conventional public-school leaders regarding school policies and implementation that influence transgender pupil access to school facilities; the perceptions of charter school administrators are less known regarding this phenomenon. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities that correspond to their gender identity. Raffo and Gunter's combination of leadership for inclusiveness and use of local setting knowledge when implementing policies provided the conceptual framework for this study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 12 charter school administrators with at least a year of experience serving trans students. Interpretive phenomenological analysis techniques of these data revealed that charter school leaders perceived operationalizing public education laws and equal rights, the role of school leadership, transgender student wellbeing, and stakeholder engagement as priority considerations for school policy implementation. School planning and trans pupil policies involving training, facilities access, sports participation, dress codes, and student organizations were also important. Key results of the study elucidated the need for explicit policies regarding transgender student facilities access, charter school leadership roles involving trans student policies, and stakeholder engagement. These findings contribute to positive social change by informing charter school leadership about policy implementation regarding trans student access to school facilities.

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## Dedication

First and foremost, I give thanks to God for His grace and for bestowing upon me the blessings of love, support, inspiration, and perseverance that made possible this stage in my life journey. I dedicate this dissertation to my bride and best friend, Kerry, and two of the most precious blessings from the Lord I could have ever imagined, my children, Mackenzie and Joshua. Thank you so much for believing in me, encouraging me, and sustaining me through this extraordinary, life-changing experience. To each of you—I love you with all of my heart and soul.

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I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to my entire family, friends, and colleagues for their patience, love, and support throughout this challenging yet immensely joyful experience. Thank you all for your cheers, encouragement, and collective shoulders to lean on—it has meant the world to me, and I am forever grateful. I look forward to realizing and contributing to the hopes and dreams of others through promoting positive social change, as so many of you have done for me. May God bless and keep you well.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Some educational administrators lack professional guidance, harbor concerns about negative actions from school community members, and indicate reluctance (Mangin, 2020; Payne & Smith, 2018; Woolley, 2019) concerning local educational policies and implementation that address the needs of transgender students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Marx et al., 2017; Payne & Smith, 2018; Steck & Perry, 2018). Across the United States, the heightened visibility and educational well-being of transgender students enrolled in public schools have garnered increased media focus, federal court involvement, and diverse public sentiment (Barnett et al., 2018; Porta et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016). Accordingly, charter school leaders and traditional school administrators are held accountable by public laws, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution, and stakeholders to provide safeguards and inclusive educational access to transgender pupils, the same as other members of the student population (Barnett et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2018).

As educational leaders of market-driven public schools of choice, charter school administrators are legally and ethically mandated to provide equal educational opportunities to all students, including children and youth who identify as transgender (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Philips, 2017). However, due to equivocal government response, inadequate leadership preparation regarding support for transgender students, and pushback from school community membership regarding transgender pupil access to public school accommodations, many school administrators experience leadership

challenges concerning policies that explicitly address the issue (Farley & Leonardi, 2021; Miller, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2018; Watkins & Moreno, 2017). Exploration of charter school administrators' perceptions concerning local school policies and implementation that affect transgender student access that may cause organizational instability is of considerable import to other charter schools and educational constituencies (Gawlik, 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Steck & Perry, 2018).

As educational authorities of publicly funded schools, charter school administrators, like traditional school leadership, are held accountable by federal and state authorities to ensure protection against sex discrimination for all students as determined by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Lewis et al., 2018; Watkins & Moreno, 2017; Woolley, 2019). However, federal guidance regarding legal protection against sex discrimination for trans students has minimized accountability efforts in some states. Specifically, controversial actions by the U. S. Department of Education (DOE) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) have prompted many state legislators to propose statutes that address the issue (Fleming & McFadden-Wade, 2018). Consequently, public education leaders in districts where restrictive policies have been developed to limit access for transgender students to public school restrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity have faced confrontation from policy disputes and legal challenges in federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court (Hayter, 2016; Philips, 2017).

Throughout Chapter 1, I present an exploration of contextual factors that inform perceptions of charter school leadership regarding their school policies and

implementation that affect transgender student access to public school facilities that correspond to their gender identity. It is essential for educational leaders, including charter school administrators, to be conversant about public education statutes, policy guidance, effective leadership practices, and implementation to ensure civil rights protections and comprehensive support for transgender youth (Boyland et al., 2016). In this chapter, I explore charter school administrators' perspectives regarding leadership priorities and social-environmental influences that they engage in while addressing local policy development and implementation concerning educational access for transgender pupils. Additionally, for contextual purposes, historical references to cultural shifts, legislative actions, judicial determinations, and corresponding policy changes involving the educational well-being of transgender children and youth in public schools are provided in this chapter. Educational leaders of charter schools may better serve transgender students through understanding policy considerations that positively affect the educational well-being of this marginalized population, as well as promoting social inclusion throughout the school community (Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2020; Marx et al., 2017; Payne & Smith, 2018).

### **Background**

Some educational administrators maintain uncertainties regarding explicit school policy development and implementation that affect educational access for transgender students due to a dearth of professional preparedness (Mangin, 2018). Charter school leaders also harbor concerns about negative stakeholder response (Payne & Smith, 2018), while many students continue to attend public schools without official policies that

support transgender students' equal access to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity (Kosciw, 2018). Researchers' perspectives on traditional public-school leaders developing and implementing local school policies that support transgender pupils are well documented (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). However, a gap in the research literature suggests that there is less understanding of the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding this phenomenon, and further inquiry is needed.

Findings reported in the 2017 National School Climate Survey by Kosciw et al. (2018) indicated that bullying and harassment of transgender pupils are more prevalent in public school environments where specific policies, resources, and interventions are not available to protect these vulnerable student populations. Less than 14% of public charter schools in the United States have implemented explicit policies that specifically support transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). As the number of charter schools grows to accommodate increases in student enrollment across the United States, including sexual minorities, it is of critical import that charter school leaders maintain competency regarding applicable federal and state laws, leadership priorities, and educational issues concerning transgender youth (Lewis & Kern, 2018). Transgender students encounter barriers to equal educational access that may also threaten their health, safety, and social, emotional, and academic development (Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020).

According to Weinhardt et al. (2017), transgender students who contend with insensitive and discriminatory school policies are especially vulnerable to adverse educational and medical issues. For example, some transgender students may experience

physical health concerns due to avoiding the use of restrooms while at school to escape stigma and negative attention from others. In a study conducted by Weinhardt et al. (2017) of 120 transgender youth participants, research findings revealed diminished resiliency due to feeling insecure when using gender-assigned restrooms that did not align with their gender identity.

Educational administrators, including charter school leaders, must maintain a thorough understanding of systemic barriers that negatively impact the health and educational well-being of transgender youth when implementing policies that affect student access to public school accommodations. Moreover, while addressing leadership priorities that promote social inclusion and positively affect social change, charter school administrators must maintain cultural awareness and professional knowledge of current laws, resources, and barriers that impact the educational welfare of transgender children and youth enrolled in their schools (Boyland et al., 2016). In a qualitative narrative study, Kurt and Chenault (2017) interviewed four school administrators, three superintendents, and one principal from public school districts located in the Midwestern region of the United States to understand school administrator experiences regarding policy implementation and implications concerning transgender students. Findings addressed how school leaders implement policies, effectively communicate, and collaborate with stakeholders to promote safe and inclusive public-school environments for all students, including transgender youth, regarding equal access to restrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity.

Charter school administrators who oversee campuses in competitive school choice market communities consider federal and state laws, stakeholder involvement, and dynamic environmental factors that impact their organizational sustainability (Jabbar, 2016a). Through qualitative case studies of 30 schools in New Orleans, Louisiana, Jabbar (2016a) interviewed school leaders, conducted observations and surveys, and analyzed school documents to examine how social, historical, and political influences affected market position in competitive charter school environments and how competitive market factors influence charter school leadership responses. For example, research findings indicated that charter school leaders in competitive choice-school markets engage in strategic and creative leadership processes that may adversely impact equitable educational access for marginalized student groups (Jabbar, 2016a).

While some states do not require specific qualifications or educator certification for school administrators who manage public charter schools, educational leaders in these states are still held accountable by charter authorizers and community stakeholders. Federal and state agencies expect charter school administrators to provide educational leadership, adhere to public education laws, and improve academic achievement for all students (Hedges et al., 2018). Possible adverse responses from school community members regarding explicit transgender student policies and implementation efforts underscore the importance of charter school administrators maintaining ethical consideration, statutory awareness, cultural competency, and strong business acumen (Gawlik, 2018). In an exploratory qualitative case study, Gawlik (2018) reviewed school improvement plans and field notes, conducted observations, and interviewed four

principals from four elementary charter schools in Florida to examine leadership practices in charter schools. The research indicated that charter school administrators provided effective instructional leadership, maintained accountability, and facilitated positive school environments.

Insight from the shared lived experiences and perspectives of charter school administrators who have developed and effectively implemented transgender student policies through strategic consideration of socially inclusive leadership priorities may benefit other educational leaders determined to better support transgender pupils. Goodrich and Luke (2016) conducted a qualitative, ethnographic study at a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex (LGBTQQI)-identified charter school for Grades 6 through 12. They interviewed 12 stakeholders, including five experienced teachers, a staff aide, three students, two parents of current students, and one intern, to explore how public schools can improve efforts to address the needs of sexual minority students. Through exploring the experiences of charter school stakeholders, Goodrich and Luke found that stakeholder concerns included the need to negotiate roles and boundaries among stakeholders, state standards, diverse student needs, resource limitations, and inconsistent implementation of educational standards and assessments. The research in this study outlined how charter schools meet the complex needs of sexual minority students, including how stakeholders engage resources and support intended to address their diverse needs.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem addressed in this study was that educational administrators who serve in public schools do not have specific local educational policies that affect transgender students (Green, 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; Woolley, 2019). Moreover, most public-school students report attending schools without explicit policies and guidance specifically supporting transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2020). According to the extant literature, comprehensive school policies that create safe, inclusive educational environments for transgender students positively influence the school climate for all students in public schools (Day et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). However, more than half of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) students reported that their school or district did not have or was unaware of policies or guidelines to support transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2018).

According to Kosciw et al. (2018), 47% of transgender and gender-nonconforming students used restrooms unrelated to their gender identity due to requirements of their school policies. The viewpoints of educational leaders in traditional public schools regarding policies that explicitly address transgender student discrimination and access to public school accommodations are well documented (Green, 2017; Kurt & Chenault, 2017). It is critical to understand how educators implement policies and guidelines in practice (Woolley, 2019) in other types of public-school settings and geographical areas (Green, 2017; Kurt & Chenault, 2017). This study addressed a gap in the research literature about charter school administrator perceptions regarding school policies and implementation that affected transgender students' access

to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity and suggested a need for further research (Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

Educational leaders of public schools consider governmental laws, inclusive leadership processes, and stakeholder involvement when implementing policies that support transgender students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Leonardi & Staley, 2018; Persinger et al., 2019). Accordingly, charter school administrators serving in public schools located in competitive choice-school markets must also contend with the implications of explicit transgender policies and implementation efforts that potentially affect the school's financial and operational viability (Jabbar, 2016a, 2016b; Lubienski & Lee, 2016; Thomas & Lacey, 2016). Educational leaders, specifically charter school administrators, consider contextual factors and implications related to developing and implementing school policies that affect transgender student access to public school facilities due to concerns about stakeholder response, market competitiveness, and governmental accountability (Jabbar, 2016a; Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Research scholars have well documented the experiences shared by educational leadership in traditional public schools regarding transgender student policies (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Leonardi & Staley, 2018; Mangin, 2018). However, a dearth of research studies that explore charter school administrators' perceptions regarding local policies and implementation that affect transgender student access to school accommodations suggested that further research was warranted (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020).

Charter school administrators deliberate regarding sociocultural factors that affect transgender youth, local policy development, and socially inclusive educational

leadership priorities essential to implementing their school policies that specifically create safe and inclusive schools for transgender students while being responsive to all stakeholders (Kosciw et al., 2018; Raffo & Gunter, 2008; Rodela & Tobin, 2017). As more state legislatures pass laws that determine trans student access to public school facilities matching their gender identity, charter school administrators must also be well informed and forward looking. Furthermore, charter school administrators are held accountable for maintaining compliance with statutory requirements that ensure school equity for all pupils, including transgender youth (Mangin, 2018; Orr et al., 2015). Socially inclusive educational leadership and cultural competency are essential to facilitate collaborative, culturally sensitive policy implementation that ensures educational opportunities that promote the well-being of transgender students (Raffo & Gunter, 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study using interpretive phenomenological techniques was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. There is an expectation by government authorities and stakeholders that public educational leaders, including charter school administrators, comply with school laws that affect transgender students (Barnett et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2020). Exploring the perceptions of charter school administrators about school policies and implementation that affect access for transgender students to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity was

critical to understanding how nontraditional school educators create safe, inclusive schools that serve transgender pupils (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). A qualitative, phenomenological research design involving in-depth interviews with charter school administrators provided gainful insight that can inform other charter school leaders about their experiences regarding school policies and implementation efforts concerning transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

### **Research Questions**

Guided by Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership, I addressed the research questions noted below in this qualitative study through phenomenological inquiry.

RQ1: What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding policy implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership informed this research study. Raffo and Gunter proposed a framework that facilitated the analysis of knowledge and perceptions of educational leaders regarding social inclusion and equity, in conjunction with how they coordinate three leadership rationales that derive from educational policy and practice. Through examining

connections between social inclusion, educational policy, and leadership practices, Raffo and Gunter posited that educational leaders determine policy development and implementation efforts while considering delivery-focused, localizing, and democratizing rationales. The delivery-focused rationale involves the strategic engagement of internal and external resources to comply with federal and state legal requirements. The localizing rationale relates to how the school administrator locally operationalizes governmental policies in coordination with specific needs and resources of the school community, while the democratizing rationale pertains to stakeholder investment, collaboration, and response (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). Exploring the perceptions of charter school administrators through understanding leadership rationales outlined in Raffo and Gunter's conceptual framework provided a lens to analyze the experiences and perceptions of charter school administrators regarding local policy development and implementation that affect transgender students' access to public school accommodations that align with their gender identity (Green et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2018).

Understanding of political, historical, social, cultural, and economic aspects of American society that frame social inclusion and influence perspectives, decision-making processes, and policy determinations by policymakers, educational authorities, and school leaders of public schools was a critical component of Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership. While navigating societal structures and contextual factors, charter school administrators in competitive choice market environments engage in policy development and implementation processes that require a multipurpose mindset and skillset (Gawlik, 2018). Guided by their

professional knowledge of education laws, ethical standards and beliefs, school choice market trends, leadership and business management experience, organizational strategic goals, financial and operational capacity, and local stakeholder involvement, charter school administrators consider strategic approaches and leadership rationales while determining policy efforts (Jabbar, 2016a). Consequently, charter school leaders managing schools in competitive choice markets in states where lawmakers consider controversial statutes that affect transgender students may consider local stakeholder responses (Jabbar, 2016a). Furthermore, charter school administrators may strategically implement school policies shaped by market stressors and contextual factors reflective of socio-educational structures that concern marginalized student populations, including transgender youth (Jabbar, 2016a).

Public-school leaders must maintain professional competence and cultural awareness regarding social inclusion, court decisions involving transgender youth, and multilevel governmental actions affecting access to gender-identity-aligned accommodations for transgender students. Moreover, they encounter contextual factors that may determine policy development and implementation that require effective leadership, communication, and strategic thinking skills. Kurt and Chenault (2017) found, through interviews with school administrators, that school leaders were familiar with the socio-political dynamics involved in policy decisions that affected vulnerable transgender students and understood their role in balancing governmental mandates and local stakeholder expectations to meet the diverse and socially inclusive needs for all students. Accordingly, Raffo and Gunter (2008) stated that educational leaders acknowledge

governmental mandates and transform such statutes into local education policies that consider community resources and stakeholder needs to promote social inclusion initiatives through a delivery-focused rationale. Furthermore, by applying a second rationale called localizing, school leaders engage their school leadership experiences, stakeholder relationships, and engagement processes in the community to comply with federal and state educational policy expectations and facilitate local stakeholder expectations (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). Democratizing is a third rationale that school administrators consider when applying leadership strategies and practices that promote school community membership involvement in developing and implementing educational policy considerations that address social inclusion within the school, among all students, and throughout the community (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). The social inclusion framework of Raffo and Gunter guided the focus of this research study. Researchers have documented the experiences of traditional school leadership regarding school policies and implementation efforts affecting transgender students (Farley & Leonardi, 2021; Kosciw et al., 2020). However, identifying and exploring the perspectives of charter school administrators regarding socially inclusive educational leadership priorities involving school policies and implementation that affect transgender students' access to school facilities that match their gender identity necessitated further study through phenomenological inquiry (Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

### **Nature of the Study**

This qualitative research study was informed by research from Patton (2015) and Smith et al. (2009). According to Patton, the qualitative phenomenological research

tradition involves exploring the meaning-making or essence of shared lived experiences through individuals' perceptions of a phenomenon. Specifically, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, as explained by Smith et al. (2009) and Alase (2017), was used for this research study to focus on the essence of lived experiences of charter school leaders through their perceptions regarding school policies and implementation that affect transgender student access to public school accommodations aligned with their gender identity. The rationale for engaging in this qualitative research tradition was that investigating the meaning-making of the lived experiences of study participants through their perceptions of a phenomenon, utilizing in-depth semistructured participant interviews, was most appropriate for this qualitative research study (Smith et al., 2009).

Conversely, a quantitative research approach was not suitable due to the need to engage and conduct in-depth interviews with study participants regarding their perceptions about and lived experiences with the phenomenon. Moreover, the use of a quantitative approach and related research designs would have involved generating numerical data, statistical analysis of specific variables, and generalization of data outcomes to a broader population (Patton, 2015), which was not enough to explore and analyze how individuals construct the meaning of a phenomenon through their lived experiences. However, IPA was an effective and suitable approach (Smith et al., 2009) to investigate how charter school administrators make meaning of their lived experiences. Furthermore, IPA focuses on exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals with a specific phenomenon and their sense-making of their lived experiences

(Smith et al., 2009). IPA was an appropriate approach for qualitative research inquiry to investigate the lived experiences of persons regarding how they make sense of their perceptions of a specific phenomenon (Alase, 2107; Smith et al., 2009).

Accordingly, I interviewed 12 charter school leaders who shared their viewpoints about their experiences regarding local school policies and implementation that affect transgender students' access to public school facilities. I conducted in-depth interviews to gain critical insight from charter school administrators' perceptions about school policies affecting transgender students. Qualitative data collection and analysis yielded patterns and emerging themes about the perceptions of charter school administrators' experiences regarding their school policies and implementation that affect transgender students' access to restrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity. I examined data retrieved by using IPA techniques to identify patterns and themes that emerged from transcriptions of participant interviews (Alase, 2017). Exploring the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding local transgender policy development and implementation that may affect financial and operational viability was consistent with the utility of Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership.

### **Definitions**

*Cisgender*: An individual who maintains a gender identity that corresponds with their biological sex at birth (Mangin, 2018).

*Contextual factors*: Socio-environmental considerations that affect planned policy development and implementation efforts (Green et al., 2018).

*Gender expression:* Visible representations of gender regarding clothes and artifacts worn, mannerisms, name, speech, and other outward features associated with male and female appearance (Orr et al., 2015).

*Gender identity:* An understanding of oneself that corresponds to being what one defines as male or female gender (Orr et al., 2015).

*Social inclusion:* The tolerance and embracement of marginalized persons by the majority and privileged membership of society due to their distinctions and contributions to the entire population (Raffo & Gunter, 2008).

*Trans or transgender:* An individual who maintains a gender identity that does not correspond with their biological sex at birth (Frohard-Dourlent, 2018; Mangin, 2018).

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made while conducting this research study. Charter school leaders would openly share their perceptions concerning implications involving implementing policies that specifically affect transgender students' access to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity. Charter school leaders would disclose honestly their perceptions regarding leadership priorities that address school policies and implementation concerning transgender access to public school facilities that match their gender identity.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Educational leaders who oversee public schools, traditional and charter, must consider government statutes that affect the educational well-being of all students, including transgender students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). In this qualitative study, I

identified and explored the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding local policy development and implementation that affect transgender students' access to school accommodations that match their gender identity using an IPA approach. Specifically, the focus of this study was elucidating the essence of the shared lived experiences of charter school administrators through their perspectives on the phenomenon. Smith et al. (2009) explained that IPA involves exploring how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences with a phenomenon.

Charter school administrators in competitive choice market environments also consider leadership priorities and stakeholder responses that may potentially affect the financial and operational stability of the organization. Due to inconsistent federal guidance, debate in state legislatures, unsettled federal and state court action, and contentious social divides, public education leaders, including charter school administrators, engage in strategic leadership practices and assess the implications of policies affecting transgender pupil access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity (Philips, 2017). Due to in-depth participant interviews with charter school leaders from an area in one state, the study's boundaries were limited. Administrator certification or leadership programs for new and aspiring educational leaders of charter school districts may also use the results of this study.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this qualitative research inquiry were as follows. The population of focus involved charter school administrators, which limited the applicability of this study to all public-school administrators. Study outcomes were not

generalizable due to the narrow scope of the sample population comprised of charter school administrators who served in charter school districts in a state located in the Southeast region of the United States. Another limitation was that I am currently a district administrator with a comparable charter school organization. A reflective journal was maintained to acknowledge biases, practice epoché and bracketing, and promote transparency of the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). I also kept personal memos to provide an audit trail for this study (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Significance of the Study**

As the visibility of transgender students enrolled in public schools increases, along with the growth of public charter schools throughout the United States, qualitative inquiry regarding the perceptions of charter school administrators concerning local school policies and implementation that affect transgender students remains underexplored (Goodrich & Luke, 2016; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017). In this research study, I explored the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. It is essential for charter school administrators to maintain professional competence regarding applicable and pending federal and state legislation, socially inclusive educational leadership processes, and implications concerning their school policies and implementation that affect transgender pupils (Goodrich & Luke, 2016).

The outcomes of this qualitative study using an IPA approach may contribute to charter school stakeholders gaining purposeful insight through in-depth investigation and

critical analyses of what charter school administrators perceive about local transgender student policies and implementation efforts that support gender-expansive students. Charter school leadership could benefit from the insight into the implementation of policies that affect transgender students and be able to support transgender youth enrolled in public charter schools successfully. It is incumbent upon charter school administrators to fulfill their legal and ethical responsibilities as leaders to provide a safe, culturally inclusive educational environment for all students, including transgender youth (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Moreover, not unlike traditional educational leadership, charter school administrators must also promote positive social change by ensuring equal educational access to public school accommodations for all students, especially for marginalized student populations (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2018; Miller et al., 2018).

### **Summary**

Guided by Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, leadership, and the application of phenomenological research methodology, I explored charter school leader perceptions regarding leadership rationales that inform explicit policy considerations that affect all pupils, stakeholder response, and district sustainability; specifically concerning transgender student access to school facilities. Understanding the leadership perspectives of educational leaders who oversee open-enrollment charter schools in competitive choice markets while considering controversial policy actions and implementation that affect transgender students provided information that may serve to improve coordinated efforts of educational leaders and policymakers to

address the needs of transgender youth in educational settings. Potential implications for social change include increased community awareness and sensitivity regarding the needs of transgender students concerning access to public school accommodations that align with their gender identity and expression.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature presents and affirms the purpose and significance of this research study. Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership is reviewed, along with the works of other research scholars regarding the leadership perspectives and social inclusion experiences of school administrators concerning policy development and implementation that affect transgender youth. Furthermore, the literature review details an evolving, historical account of governmental laws regarding transgender student access to public school accommodations, educational leadership and policies that have impacted transgender students, school administrator considerations that concern transgender student access to school accommodations, and transgender student experiences in public schools.

Accordingly, the literature review provides references that underscore the urgency and significance of exploring the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity, as charter schools continue to expand and educate an increasing number of children across the United States.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

A problem exists where educational leaders who serve public schools do not have specific local educational policies that affect transgender students (Green, 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; McQuillan, 2021; Woolley, 2019). The purpose of this qualitative study using interpretive phenomenological techniques was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. The experiences of conventional school leaders concerning policy development and implementation of educational supports for sexual minority student populations are well documented in the research literature. However, there is a gap in the research literature about charter school administrators' perceptions of school policies and implementation that affect transgender students' access to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity, requiring further study (Beck, 2017; Boyland et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Royaltey-Quandt, 2016; Steck & Perry, 2018).

According to Kosciw et al. (2018), nearly 47% of students identified as transgender and gender nonconforming in charter and traditional public schools across the United States used restrooms that only matched their sex indicated on their birth certificates per school policies. As charter school organizations continue to expand their presence in communities across the United States and more youth identify as transgender in public schools, there is a need for additional research about charter schools concerning support provided for this marginalized student population (Kosciw et al., 2020). Inconsistent federal guidance, controversial state policy responses, and multifaceted court

decisions concerning policies affecting transgender youth in public schools continue to pose challenges for educational authorities, including legal and ethical dilemmas for public-school administrators (Fleming & McFadden-Wade, 2018). For example, while charter school leaders adhere to federal and state laws to ensure equal educational access and protections for all students in public schools receiving federal funding, only 11.1% maintained explicit policies that support transgender pupils (Kosciw et al., 2018).

Educational leaders do not generally receive professional development that prepares them to support transgender youth in public schools and may feel apprehensive about serving students who identify as transgender (Mangin, 2018). Payne and Smith (2018) maintained that some public-school administrators are unwilling to engage in efforts that promote awareness and support policies regarding transgender students out of fear of consequential stakeholder community response. Research scholars have documented the experiences of traditional public leaders regarding transgender student policies (Leonardi & Staley, 2018; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2020). However, there is less empirical research that identifies and explores charter school leaders' perceptions about school policies and implementation that affect transgender students, which suggests a need for further research (Gawlik, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

Transgender students enrolled in charter schools experience gender-related bias from discriminatory policies at nearly the same rate as their counterparts in traditional public-school settings while contending with less access to critical support (Kosciw et al., 2018). Kurt and Chenault (2017) conducted a qualitative, narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of school administrators as they create inclusive environments for

transgender students and their classmates while addressing varied reactions from other stakeholders of the communities at large. Study findings shared by the authors indicate that students and faculty were supportive of accommodations provided for transgender students. However, parents and community members were reluctant to support school efforts to accommodate transgender students, which presented some stakeholder relationship concerns for school administrators (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). The authors suggested that future research studies of larger, diverse school districts explore the experiences of school administrators regarding their efforts to develop inclusive environments for transgender students and continue to follow changes to public school laws. Kurt and Chenault stated that further research could also focus on the perceptions of transgender students and how school policies have influenced their educational well-being. As evolving, consequential legislative and judicial actions impact transgender children in all public-school environments, identifying and exploring the perceptions of leadership in charter school settings concerning transgender student policies and implementation could provide further insight for educators (Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

Presented in the literature review is a historical account of federal and state governmental actions that have influenced educational policy debate, reform efforts, and court intervention involving transgender pupils' access to public school facilities that align with their gender identity. Also provided is background regarding the potential implications of explicit and controversial transgender student policies for public charter schools located in competitive choice school markets. The literature review also explains school leadership rationales, marketing practices, decision-making processes, and

contextual factors that may inform policy development and implementation concerning transgender students. Focus on how systemic educational barriers, specifically discriminatory policies, victimization, and school-wide behaviors, negatively affect transgender student experiences in public school settings is also included in the literature review.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature detailed in this review involved multiple electronic research databases and search engines accessed through Walden University and other institutions of higher learning, including Google Scholar, Sage, ProQuest, and EBSCO. The literature search encompassed peer-reviewed journals dated 2015 through 2019 retrieved from the online library of Walden University and texts regarding qualitative research design and methodology. Key search terms and combinations of search terms utilized were *charter school leadership, social inclusion frameworks, transgender student policies, charter school policy development, charter schools and transgender student resources, transgender bathroom laws and charter schools, gender identity, gender nonconforming, charter school leader perceptions of transgender student policies, and experiences of transgender youth in charter schools*. The breadth of this literature review also references federal and state case laws concerning access for transgender students to school accommodations that align with their gender identity.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this study, I explored the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to

school facilities that correspond with their gender identity, while guided by Raffo and Gunter's (2008) social inclusion framework regarding school leadership application of delivery-focused, localizing, and democratizing leadership rationales to inform policy actions. Raffo and Gunter outlined a conceptual framework that elucidates the dynamic relationship between social inclusion, educational policy, and school leadership. The framework emphasized that school leaders consider the three school leadership rationales in conjunction with their understanding of social inclusion. Delivery focused, localizing, and democratizing were three leadership rationales or justifications that school leadership utilized to support policy development and implementation (Raffo & Gunter, 2008).

A study conducted by Kurt and Chenault (2017) serves as an example of how Raffo and Gunter's (2008) framework conceptualized what educational administrators perceived about social inclusion in alignment with their values and professional competency regarding policies that affect transgender students. The researchers used the model to explain leadership rationales engaged by school administrators to underscore their strategic leadership actions regarding policy development and implementation that affect transgender students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Moreover, Kurt and Chenault (2017) found through the application of Raffo and Gunter's (2008) framework that school leaders engaged in each of the leadership rationales and indicated a shared preference to involve stakeholders in local policy development and implementation that are flexible and best conform to the needs of transgender students in their school community.

Exploring what education leaders perceive regarding social inclusion was key to understanding what informs school administrator decisions involving explicit policies

that affect marginalized student populations (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Royaltey-Quandt (2016) conducted a multiple case study to identify the characteristics, patterns, and behaviors of school leadership to develop a theory to explain the phenomena of queer inclusion. Royaltey-Quandt found that through a personal conceptualization of social justice in education, school administrators who participated in the study used administrative authority, transformative leadership strategies, and stakeholder relationships to facilitate school-wide policies and expectations regarding the inclusion of sexual minority students, while also addressing discriminatory institutional practices. Raffo and Gunter's (2008) social inclusion framework involving school leadership through the engagement of delivery-focused, localizing, and democratizing leadership rationales was purposeful in guiding this research study to explore charter school leaders' perceptions of school policy and implementation that affect transgender students.

### **Social Inclusion, Education, Policy, and Social Leadership**

According to Raffo and Gunter (2008), what education leaders perceive as social inclusion is a critical aspect of school leadership and policy development. Mangin (2019) and Payne and Smith (2018) suggested that concern about adverse stakeholder reactions was a key factor that affected the perceptions of some school leaders regarding engagement of professional training and other school efforts related to the inclusion of sexual minority students in educational settings. Through their conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership, Raffo and Gunter maintained that education leaders conceptualized social inclusion through their knowledge and beliefs about school purpose and equity and engaged in policy initiatives that reflected that perspective.

Moreover, educational administrators engaged three school leadership rationales to implement policies that address social inclusion as described in the model (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). The authors identified these three leadership rationales applied by school leadership to qualify policy considerations as delivery focused, localizing, and democratizing.

### **Delivery Focused**

Raffo and Gunter (2008) defined one of the leadership rationales in their social inclusion model as delivery focused. Delivery-focused leadership underscores the policy actions of school leaders engaged in processes that operationalize federal and state educational directives. Federal and state laws guide public education leaders of charter and traditional school districts concerning equal access to educational opportunities for all students, including transgender children (Philips, 2017). Informed by governmental laws, further defined as specific rules and requirements by education agencies, education leaders will develop and implement policies that align with the expectations of government authorities (Raffo & Gunter, 2008).

### **Localizing**

Raffo and Gunter (2008) explained a second leadership rationale called localizing through their conceptual framework. Localizing applies to how educational leaders rationalize the promotion of federal and state educational initiatives through strategic and creative policy efforts that align with the expectations of local stakeholders. School leaders are expected by stakeholders to develop and implement policies that ensure that all pupils, including transgender youth, are afforded a safe, nurturing, educational

environment conducive to growth and academic achievement through accessing district resources and engaging in policy implementation approaches that correspond to the needs of the school community, and that educational administrators facilitate statutory requirements outlined by government agencies at the state and national levels (Raffo & Gunter, 2008).

### **Democratizing**

Democratizing is the third leadership rationale described in Raffo and Gunter's (2008) framework. According to Raffo and Gunter, democratizing involves educational leadership efforts to enlist the participation of community members in district policy development and implementation through effective communication and collaboration. Charter school leaders must actively engage community members through processes that afford culturally responsive, cooperative opportunities for policy discussions and school partnerships (Jones-Goods & Okpala, 2015).

### **History of Governmental Laws Regarding Transgender Student Access to Public School Accommodations**

Due to incendiary social commentary and heightened media focus on public debates regarding transgender students' access to accommodations in public schools that correspond with their gender identity, educational leaders consider school policy implications, including community backlash (Steck & Perry, 2017). In this examination of the literature, I present a historical account of policy actions and legal recourse by federal, state, and local educational authorities regarding transgender students' access to accommodations that align with their gender identity in public schools. Eckes (2017) and

Philips (2017) maintained that the civil liberties of transgender persons and the privacy expectations of all students remain controversial where the interpretation of federal and state government policy is concerned. However, some federal court decisions have influenced and advanced state and local education agency policy considerations concerning transgender students' access to school restrooms that align with their gender identity (*Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, 2020; *Grimm v. Gloucester County School Bd.*, 2020; *Whitaker v. Kenosha Unified School District*, 2017). According to Beese and Martin (2018), the escalation in divisive political rhetoric and state legislative disputes, and local stakeholder reactions regarding transgender students' access to public school facilities matching their gender identity throughout the past several years, has prompted increased national attention and contentious public response.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment ensure protections for all students against discrimination based on sex in public schools (Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Meyer et al., 2018). Meyer and Keenan (2018) maintained that the two federal statutes are considered legal mandates for public educators who serve in publicly funded school systems in the United States to afford protections for transgender students against discrimination concerning their gender identity. Accordingly, educational administrators who oversee public charter schools must abide by federal and state laws that protect students, including transgender youth, from discrimination based on sex (Meyer et al., 2018).

However, Meyer and Keenan (2018) maintained that some school districts and administrators are uninformed and inexperienced regarding inclusive policies and

resources that support transgender students, while other school leaders are unwilling to implement any specific measures that promote the inclusion of transgender pupils, citing governmental overreach. Federal courts have defined Title IX protections for transgender students to include gender identity in the language (*Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, 2020). Charter school administrators who manage schools in competitive markets consider stakeholder reaction to controversial transgender student policies that may impact the district's financial and operational viability. While federal education authorities and the U.S. Office of Civil Rights (OCR) have issued guidance based on changes and clarifications of existing laws that affect transgender student access to restrooms and locker rooms in public education institutions, lawsuits filed against local education agencies continue to be addressed in federal courts (Anderson, 2018).

### **Controversial Laws and Transgender Student Access to Public School Facilities**

Public school leadership approaches policy and implementation that affects transgender students with consideration due to divisive stakeholder reaction to controversial and evolving legislative actions among federal and state educational authorities regarding transgender pupils' access to school facilities aligned with their gender (Eckes, 2017; Steck & Perry, 2017). The OCR issued guidance in 2010 to state and local educational authorities regarding policies that protect and support the educational rights of transgender students enrolled in public schools (Beese & Martin, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019). In late 2015, residents of Houston, Texas, voted to repeal the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, a city-wide law that afforded specific protection against discrimination against transgender persons regarding access to public restrooms

that correspond to their gender identity (Jereb, 2017). The following spring in 2016, a city ordinance approved by the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, was nullified by state legislative passage of the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act or House Bill 2, a controversial statute that prohibited transgender student access to public school restrooms that are not consistent with their sex at birth (Wilson, 2017). These events highlight an escalation in public awareness and media focus on federal and state government responses to address policy divisions and civil rights challenges concerning transgender pupils' access to school bathrooms.

In early 2016, the DOE and DOJ under the Obama administration issued a joint letter to all public schools clarifying that Title IX provisions afford protections against discrimination based on sex, including gender identity. In 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to definitively rule on an appeal by a lower court decision concerning a lawsuit filed by a transgender boy against his school district regarding access to school bathrooms that aligned with his gender identity, only for the lower federal court to reverse its ruling in 2020 (*GG ex rel. Grimm v. Gloucester County School Bd.*, 2016; *Grimm v. Gloucester County School Bd.*, 2020). The following year, the Trump administration issued a guidance letter through DOE reversing the position taken in the previous administration and deferred the issue of transgender students' access to public school facilities that matched their gender identity to the discretion of individual state legislatures. The Trump administration took this action, in part, to avoid pending federal lawsuits regarding the issue from several southern states claiming governmental overreach by the Obama administration (Anderson, 2018; Philips, 2017). However, four

years later, President Biden issued an executive order that once again declared Title IX provisions afford protections against discrimination based on sex and gender identity (Leonard, 2021). While extant research regarding policy implementation that affects transgender students generally accounts for traditional school leaders' shared lived experiences of the study phenomenon, further research regarding understanding how school administrators in other types of educational settings, including charter schools, implement policies that affect transgender students is recommended (Kosciw et al., 2020; Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

### **Charter School Leadership and Policies Affecting Transgender Students**

As public educational leaders, administrators who manage charter schools must consider policy implications concerning transgender students' access to gender aligned restrooms that may provoke consequential reactions from community stakeholders (Steck & Perry, 2017), potentially compromising the financial and operational viability of the school. The first charter schools opened in the United States in the early 1990s (Gawlik, 2016). According to Gawlik (2016), charter schools were considered an innovative public education reform effort by providing school choice and utilizing competitive market forces to increase equal access to quality education and improve student achievement for all students, especially students considered at risk. In exchange for less bureaucracy in establishing educational choice opportunities for communities in failing school districts, private management organizations and entrepreneurs promised quality educational programs to increase student achievement outcomes (Gawlik, 2016). While charter and traditional schools adhere to the same federal laws concerning all public schools,

understanding the differences between the two types of educational institutions is essential. For example, Barden and Lassmann (2016) explained that charter schools are authorized by state agencies, but many are operated by private management organizations through a board of directors, unlike their traditional counterparts governed by an elected school board. Another significant distinction between charter and traditional school districts concerns public funding, whereas charter schools only receive state funding for enrolled students that attend but receive no financial benefit from property taxes (Barden & Lassmann, 2016). Charter schools must also compete with other charters for student enrollment as a matter of parental choice within the geographical boundaries they are authorized to serve. However, as state laws require, traditional public school districts must serve all students who legally reside within each district's compulsory attendance zones (Barden & Lassmann, 2016).

The impact of charter schools on public education is debatable as proponents tout the growing demand for school choice and stakeholder satisfaction (Gawlik, 2016). Opponents of charter schools assert that charter school organizations are responsible for re-segregation of schools in some areas, practice selective enrollment practices or cream-skimming, and siphon public funding from traditional school districts (Jabbar, 2016a; Nelson, 2017). While charter schools may appreciate the autonomy regarding exemption from some state public education regulations, Gawlik (2016) reports that charter school critics assert such differences have resulted in uneven educational accountability and minimal transparency concerning school equity and the use of tax-payer funds. However, regardless of viewpoints about charter school effectiveness, Gawlik (2016) and Mangin

(2019) explained that all public schools that receive federal funding must comply with federal and state education laws that ensure all students' protection and equal access to educational opportunity, including transgender youth. An increase in students that identify as transgender in public schools, coupled with widespread media focus concerning transgender students' access to school accommodations that align with their gender identity, has prompted public school leaders, including charter school administrators, to consider policy actions, legal implications, and stakeholder response (Mangin, 2018; Mangin 2020).

Federal and state statutes and community stakeholders mandate charter school administrators to ensure a safe, educational environment for all students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Beck (2017) explored the experiences of school counselor-administrator teams in their work with LGBT students to promote an inclusive educational environment for sexual minority students. According to Beck (2017), maintaining a positive attitude regardless of challenges to inclusion efforts was essential for administrators and counselors to support LGBT students. Beck also noted that school administrators must exemplify their expectations for school staff to implement effective, inclusive policies that support sexual minority students. Day (2019) reported that inclusive policies and support addressing gender identity also promote safe, educational environments for LGBT students. Charter school administrators and traditional school leadership are required to maintain the safety and educational welfare of transgender students as mandated by legal and ethical standards regarding public education (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2018).

Further research is necessary to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2020). State authorities and stakeholders expect educational leaders of public traditional and charter schools to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities and provide a safe, socially inclusive school environment that promotes educational achievement for all students, including transgender youth (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2020). Boyland et al. (2018) surveyed middle school principals to examine their implementation of school policies promoting sexual minority students and found that using research-based initiatives might provide protection and support to LGBTQ students from bullying and discrimination at school. Green (2017) researched the experiences of superintendents regarding school policies that affect transgender students and found that only half of the school districts in New York had policies that specifically addressed transgender students. Many superintendents were misinformed about some aspects related to transgender students. A dearth of professional training and lack of specific policy implementation related to transgender youth in school settings underscores the need for educational leaders to be knowledgeable and maintain educational awareness regarding the needs that affect transgender pupils (Mangin, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2018).

As public attention focuses more on the experiences and needs of transgender students in public schools, charter school leaders must maintain professional competency regarding federal guidelines and state mandates that inform policy considerations that

affect this vulnerable student population (Fleming & McFadden-Wade, 2018). However, some charter schools have implemented school bathroom policies that were considered discriminatory towards transgender students in recent years and changed their position only when confronted with negative publicity and threats of legal consequences (Kersten, 2016). Understanding the perceptions of education leaders in charter schools regarding transgender student policies may provide insight that can benefit other charter school administrators in policy development and implementation and, most importantly, school-aged transgender children and youth (Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

### **School Administrator Policy Considerations Regarding Transgender Student Access to School Facilities**

Federal court rulings and controversial state legislation have resulted in education leaders considering a multitude of factors and strategic efforts regarding local school policies that affect transgender pupils' access to school facilities that match their gender identity, including lack of professional training and negative stakeholder response (Eckes, 2017; Green et al., 2018). Understanding how educational administrators contend with contextual factors that influence school policy and implementation that comprehensively addresses institutional barriers encountered by transgender youth in school environments is essential to increasing the capacity of educators to serve transgender children and youth. Della (2016) and Mangin (2019) explored the experiences of elementary school administrators that employed inclusive policies and schoolwide processes to support LGBTQ students. Della (2016) researched specific strategies principals used to create more inclusive school environments for sexual minority students. According to Della

(2016), some school administrators presented skillfulness in applying effective strategies to include sexual minority children and youth, but future research is needed to understand how school leaders hone these skills and resources. The author also reported that despite the multiple barriers principals face to creating more inclusive school environments for LGBTQ populations, school leaders applied various strategies to facilitate positive and inclusive school environments for sexual minority students. Further research inquiry is necessary to explore efforts engaged by school administrators to successfully sustain a vision for LGBTQ inclusion in other school communities and strategies employed by school administrators to address stakeholder backlash related to policy and implementation that supports transgender pupils (Della, 2016).

Administrators in traditional and charter schools are concerned about potential implications and stakeholder reprisals regarding policy initiatives that address transgender students (Mangin, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2018; Steck & Perry, 2017). Steck and Perry (2017) explored school administrators' perceptions regarding their experiences with LGBTQ-related curricula included in their schools and found indications of such fears. According to Steck and Perry, school administrators harbored concerns about pushback from the school community, including other adverse consequences due to proposing and implementing schoolwide changes that promote the inclusion of sexual minority students through confronting heterosexual norms. Additionally, Steck and Perry (2018) also reported that secondary administrators' experiences in creating an inclusive school environment for sexual minority students included providing safe spaces for transgender students, promoting student awareness, acceptance of diversity, and

challenging heteronormativity through official policies and practices. The researchers posited that further research should involve a more substantial, diverse sample of secondary school administrators' regarding their experiences and perceptions about challenging a heteronormative school culture (Steck & Perry, 2018).

Most state and local education agencies maintain policies that address bullying and harassment; however, many schools have not implemented specific policies and practices that promote the inclusion of transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2018 & Philips, 2017). According to Barnett et al. (2018), explicit policies that support transgender youth, such as access to restrooms and locker room areas that align with their gender identity, remain especially controversial in some states and local school communities due to contextual factors that reflect differing socio-cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes. Holliday (2016) interviewed high school administrators and examined the role of anti-bullying policies based on perceived sexual orientation and gender identity and found numerous barriers that inhibited schools from implementing antibullying policies and using such measures to protect LGBT students. Holliday suggested that future research address unique differences among school administrators regarding implementing anti-bullying policies that protect LGBT youth, including how schools ensure that all protected classes are positively affected by adopting a broad-based anti-bullying policy?

Kosciw et al. (2018) reported that 57.8% of transgender youth that responded to the 2017 National School Climate Survey indicated their school did not have an official policy that supported transgender students. Wooley (2019) interviewed educators in New

York City (NYC) and concluded that despite the availability of published comprehensive policies and guidelines that support transgender students from the NYC Department of Education, study participants were unaware of the policies and had not received any training. According to Mangin (2019), school administrators who embrace the significance of increasing their understanding of the needs, barriers, and effective practices regarding transgender students generally commit to implementing specific policies and supports that afford equal educational access for transgender students. Mangin examined the experiences of school leaders who employed inclusive, student-focused processes to facilitate school-wide support for transgender pupils enrolled in their schools. The author reported that supportive principals who maintained a student-focused decision-making approach to transgender policy and practices emphasized knowledge and parent involvement to develop an inclusive school environment that promoted positive educational experiences for transgender children and expressed the value of their experiences in further understanding the needs of transgender students.

Some school administrators have not experienced or provided professional training regarding sexual minority issues due to avoidance or reluctance (Payne & Smith, 2018). Consequently, they are ill-prepared regarding transgender school students but are still held accountable by government statutes to ensure educational access and inclusion for all students, including transgender youth (Mangin, 2018; Woolley, 2019). Payne and Smith (2018) suggested that professional development for school leaders and staff concerning LGBTQ schoolchildren is essential to promoting the inclusion of sexual minority students in educational settings. However, according to Payne and Smith, some

school administrators have expressed reluctance to consider professional training related to transgender students because of concerns about adverse responses from school community members.

### **Transgender Student Experiences in Public Schools**

An increased national focus on transgender youth has compelled federal, state, and local education authorities to consider specific policies that affect transgender students enrolled in public schools (Domangue, 2016). The experiences of transgender students in schools continue to be a contentious topic in public discourse, and research findings indicate a need to address matters of concern regarding this critical educational issue (Mangin, 2018). Transgender students experience fear of attending school, using school restrooms, bullying and harassment, emotional disorders, and barriers to equitable educational opportunity in schools (Day et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2018). The National Center for Transgender Equality or NCTE (2017) maintains that transgender students contend with social intolerance from peers and school personnel. More than half of transgender students enrolled in Grades K through 12 across the United States could not access public school bathrooms that match their gender identity (NCTE, 2017).

Successful efforts to address the socio-educational barriers experienced by transgender students necessitate public-school districts, including charter schools, to consider explicit policies and resources that support this vulnerable student population (Kosciw et al., 2018; Lewis & Eckes, 2020; Mangin, 2018). Accordingly, public charter school leaders considering specific policies that affect transgender students are held

accountable by federal and state statutes and school community members. While less than half of the states in the United States have specific laws that protect transgender students, education leaders must be proactive and creative in negotiating contextual factors that challenge efforts to ensure safe, equitable educational access for all pupils (Beese & Martin, 2018; Meyer & Keenan, 2018).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The visibility of transgender students in public schools has increased substantially due to heightened public awareness and governmental response (Mangin, 2018). Legal scholars, education leaders, and LGBTQ advocates agree that congressional legislative action may be necessary to clarify protections for transgender persons under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Accordingly, educational leaders, including charter school administrators, consider the implications of local policy actions and implementation informed by contentious federal and state laws that may result in adverse reactions from some educational constituents (Beese & Martin, 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Researchers have focused on the experiences of traditional public-school leadership regarding school policies and implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities; the perceptions of charter school administrators are less known regarding this phenomenon.

While the debate continues among state legislators, educational authorities, and advocacy organizations regarding government policies that affect transgender students in public schools, local educational agencies may avoid advancing policy that addresses transgender students due to other contextual factors (Mangin, 2018; Payne & Smith,

2018; Wooley, 2019). Green (2017) examined how superintendents' perceptions impact policy implementation for transgender students in K-12 schools within New York State. The author found that less than half of the superintendents overseeing schools in New York had a district-wide policy explicitly addressing transgender students. Green recommended further research regarding superintendents' perceptions and how they influence transgender student policy development and implementation in other locations throughout the United States.

Federal court decisions have provided mixed outcomes concerning the definitive application of Title IX protections regarding transgender students' bathroom access that matches their gender identity (*GG ex rel. Grimm v. Gloucester County School Bd.*, 2016). Consequently, state legislatures across the United States continue to propose bills that support or oppose transgender students' access to bathrooms in public schools (Fleming & McFadden-Wade, 2018). Local education agencies, including charter schools, also contend with divisive public commentary regarding transgender students' rights to use public school bathrooms and the privacy rights of all students, which sometimes results in detrimental loss of student enrollment (Kersten, 2016). Another implication experienced by some local school district authorities in states without explicit laws that ensure transgender students the right to use public school accommodations aligned with their gender is the threat of federal and state litigation concerning civil rights violations (Fleming & McFadden-Wade, 2018).

In Chapter 3, a detailed account is shared regarding a qualitative research approach to address a gap in the research literature by exploring charter school leaders'

perceptions regarding policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity. The following chapter provides a thorough description of phenomenology as a research tradition, including procedures for recruitment and participation, data collection and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and other critical aspects of the research inquiry (Patton, 2015). Results of data collected, analyzed, and interpreted from in-depth participant interviews may inform other charter school administrators and traditional school leaders about policy development and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem addressed in this study is that educational administrators who serve in public schools might not have specific local educational policies that affect transgender students (Green, 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; Woolley, 2019). Charter school administrators must ensure that transgender students enrolled in their district have equal access to public school facilities and a safe, inclusive environment conducive to positive learning experiences compared to cisgender students (Barnett et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative study using interpretive phenomenological techniques was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. In Chapter 3, I describe the research process that I used to explore this phenomenon through an IPA approach.

Throughout this chapter, I describe in detail how I explored this phenomenon systematically and ethically using an IPA approach. In this chapter, I also provide an explanation for engaging the phenomenology research tradition to address a gap in the research literature concerning charter school leaders' perceptions regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to public school accommodations aligned with their gender identity. Other sections of this chapter, including the research methodology, participant selection process, the role of the researcher, and issues of trustworthiness, are also presented. Additionally, I offer an

account of the ethical considerations in this research study involved in protecting study participants.

### **Research Questions**

I addressed the following research questions in this qualitative phenomenological study.

RQ1: What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding policy implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Public charter school administrators must ensure a safe, inclusive educational environment for all students, including transgender youth (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Understanding charter school administrators' perceptions regarding their lived experiences related to local school policies and implementation that affect transgender students may benefit other educational constituents. School leaders contend with contextual factors that can determine policy development and implementation efforts that may address the requirements of contested public educational laws and policies (Steck & Perry, 2018). The central phenomenon of this qualitative research study was the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and

implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity.

The IPA approach was used in this qualitative study to explore the essence of participants' perspectives on their lived experiences through in-depth interviews (Alase, 2017; Patton, 2015; Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). Twelve charter school administrators participated in semistructured, in-depth interviews for this qualitative research study. The use of in-depth interviews to explore phenomena through the perceptions of study participants for a qualitative research inquiry (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015) was an effective means to obtain data and aligned with phenomenology as an accepted, longtime qualitative research tradition first introduced by Edmund Husserl (Husserl, 1913). The rationale for using this qualitative research tradition as an effective and appropriate means to explore the meaning-making of participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon was the use of in-depth, semistructured participant interviews for thick, rich, participant-focused data collection (Maxwell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). In contrast, quantitative research methods would not have adequately addressed the research questions. This study explored the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to facilities that match their gender identity through in-depth interviews.

Understanding the essence of a phenomenon by exploring the perceptions of individuals' shared lived experiences with the phenomenon via in-depth interviews (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015) determined the selection of phenomenology as a qualitative research method. Additionally, due to discordant social and political

sentiments about school policies affecting transgender students' access to restroom and locker room facilities that correspond with their gender identity, charter school administrators' perceptions of their shared lived experiences involving this phenomenon may be challenging to facilitate through the use of a qualitative research tradition. Other qualitative research methods, including case study, which involves exploring a unit of analysis or phenomenon bounded by contextual factors; ethnography, used to understand a specific group culture; or grounded theory, utilized to extend a theory, are research designs that do not intently focus on the meaning-making or essence of a phenomenon through perceptions of persons' lived experiences as indicated by (Patton, 2015).

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher in this study, I interviewed each study participant. Specifically, the primary instrument for data collection was in-depth interviews conducted with study participants while using an interview protocol and interview questions (see Appendix). No prior known acquaintances or professional associations existed concerning any selected study participants. Ongoing consultation with the dissertation chair and committee members was maintained regarding participant selection, the interviewing process, and data interpretation. Following participant interviews, the data collected were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and secured in a confidential file on a password-protected computer.

According to Patton (2015), the use of qualitative research procedures that address potential biases that may stem from preconceptions about the topic held by a researcher is critical to preserving the fidelity of a research study. I addressed researcher

bias in this research inquiry through bracketing and the use of a reflective journal and memos to monitor and document any preconceptions and biases that could have influenced the research process and compromised study findings. It was essential to maintain the integrity of the qualitative research inquiry by engaging in transparent research practices that increased the trustworthiness of the study and managed researcher bias throughout the qualitative research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings (Patton, 2015). Gratitude for each participant's contribution (Patton, 2015) was expressed in a thank you card and a gift card worth \$10.00 at popular restaurant venues.

### **Methodology**

I used a qualitative IPA approach (Alase, 2017; Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009) to conduct in-depth interviews with 12 charter school administrators who had school leadership experience serving transgender students. Specifically, in-depth, semistructured participant interviews were conducted using open-ended questions and were the only data source used for this qualitative study. There were no other data sources used for data collection. According to Patton (2015) and Smith et al. (2009), in-depth interviews are an appropriate method to address research questions aligned with the qualitative phenomenological research tradition. The rationale for employing IPA was to understand how charter school administrators perceive and make meaning of their shared lived experiences with the phenomenon through data collection, analysis, and interpretation of their responses. By using IPA, I facilitated understanding the essence or meaning-making

of the phenomenon by analyzing charter school administrators' perceptions of their shared lived experiences (Alase, 2017).

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I used purposeful sampling to identify study participants who matched specific criteria for inclusion in the sample. Guest et al. (2006) suggested that researchers consider conducting at least 12 participant interviews for qualitative research studies that involve the exploration of perceptions of a homogenous sample of study participants as an appropriate objective regarding data saturation. Accordingly, a sample size of 12 charter school administrators who had experience serving transgender students as an administrator in a public school setting was selected for in-depth interview participation in this phenomenological research study to collect rich, thick participant responses about their lived experiences. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University, I used a state education agency public information website to access contact information for charter school campus administrators who currently served in public charter schools throughout a state located in the Southeast region of the United States. Subsequently, charter school administrators were notified by email with an invitation to participate in the study. Afterward, charter school administrators who met the sample criterion were selected for participation in this research study and sent detailed information about the study, including an informed consent letter that required their emailed response affirming consent to participate prior to being interviewed.

## **Instrumentation**

In-depth interviews were conducted with all participants and were the primary data collection instrument for this study. I audio-recorded participant interviews and securely maintained the recordings for transcription purposes. Accordingly, I also transcribed verbatim, typed, and reviewed audio recordings of each participant interview. Other data management tools included reflective journal entries (Ortlipp, 2008) and handwritten memos that I produced, typed up, and maintained (Maxwell, 2013). I facilitated the organization and categorizing of coded data units to determine patterns, categories, and emerging themes using NVivo qualitative data management software. I used transcript review to increase the study's credibility by ensuring the accuracy of data transcription and analysis by allowing participants to review their transcribed interviews (Patton, 2015).

I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Next, I emailed invitations to participate in the research study to the sample population of charter school administrators. I only selected participant respondents who met the sample criteria for the research study.

I used an interview protocol to facilitate in-depth interviews with charter school administrators selected to participate in this research inquiry. In order to address the research questions of this study, proposed interview questions (see Appendix) that aligned with the qualitative phenomenological research tradition were utilized (Patton,

2015). Specific terminology related to this research topic was reflected in the purpose statement. I used each research question to frame the interview questions (see Appendix).

### **Interview Questions**

This phenomenological research study used in-depth, semistructured participant interviews conducted using open-ended questions and probes. In-depth interviews are an appropriate data collection method to address research questions aligned with qualitative phenomenological inquiry (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Application of concepts from literature resources regarding the works of Patton (2015) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) that provide an understanding of how to conduct in-depth, semistructured interviews aligned with a qualitative phenomenological research design. I consulted my committee chair and committee members regarding developing an interview protocol and interview questions (see Appendix) and included expert reviews from educational professionals. A practice set of interviews was conducted with nonparticipant colleagues to ensure that data collection procedures were consistent with the intention of the study design and within a reasonable time frame (Burkholder et al., 2016).

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The following information outlines the recruitment, participation, and data collection procedures through an interview protocol engaged after IRB approval from Walden University. After receiving IRB approval, I invited 12 charter school administrators to participate in this research study. Prior to the recruitment of charter school administrators, I used a state education agency public information website to access contact information for charter school campus administrators who served in public

charter schools throughout a state located in the Southeast region of the United States. Subsequently, charter school campus administrators were contacted as potential participants in the research study. If recruitment attempts had resulted in a sample of too few participants being identified, charter school administrators from other areas within the state would have been contacted.

Charter school administrators were sent an email invitation to their district email address, and all study participants returned a signed informed consent form affirming their willingness to participate in this study by email. The informed consent form included my researcher information as a doctoral student enrolled at Walden University. Also included in the consent was the purpose and nature of the research study; participant selection process; assurances that study participants' rights would remain protected throughout data collection, content analysis, and after completion of the study; the volunteer nature of the interview; procedures regarding audio recording and transcription of participant interviews; and risks and benefits concerning research participants. I shared other pertinent information in the informed consent form for charter school administrators, which included my contact information, ethical procedures, and assurance of confidentiality regarding study participants' personal identifying information during the research process and after publishing the research study.

The use of in-depth, semistructured interviews is purposeful when it is necessary to collect rich, detailed qualitative research data by exploring the essence of the lived experiences of research participants regarding their perspectives involving a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). I strategically scheduled in-depth, semistructured interviews of 45 to 60

minutes with each study participant to ensure rich, comprehensive data collection opportunities to reach data saturation (Alase, 2017; Patton, 2015). All participant interview sessions were conducted free from interruption and recorded with a digital audio-recording device.

An interview protocol was utilized to facilitate the interview process, ensure ethical procedures concerning interviewees, and maintain consistency regarding the use of open-ended questions and probes asked during individual interviews with study participants. After completing each interview, participants received a thank you and a \$10.00 gift card acknowledging their participation in the research study. The gift card served to thank participants for their contribution to the research study and how their participation provided an understanding of the lived experiences of charter school administrators regarding school policies and implementation that affect transgender students' access to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity. No follow-up interviews with study participants were required.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

A qualitative IPA approach (Alase, 2017) informed data collection and analysis that was essential to identifying and exploring the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and the implementation that affects transgender students' access to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity. According to Patton (2015), a phenomenological research approach is appropriate to explore individuals' perception or meaning-making regarding their shared lived experience of a phenomenon. I conducted in-depth interviews with participants

while methodically utilizing an interview protocol that ensured that appropriate and consistent data collection was maintained. I found no evidence of discrepant cases in study participant data collected through interviews throughout the data collection and analysis process.

In alignment with the phenomenological research approach, I used initial coding as a first cycle coding method and focused coding for data analysis of patterns and categories (Saldaña, 2016). Initial coding is appropriate for content analysis to identify specific data units from participant interview transcripts for further data comparison. I used focus coding as a second-cycle method to find patterns and categories that subsequently lead to emerging themes (Saldaña, 2016).

I used qualitative data analysis software for data management and organizational purposes in this research study. NVivo, a qualitative data management software program, presents multiple practical, applicable, and manageable features to organize and categorize data from study participant interviews (Maher et al., 2018). NVivo software is a technology-based tool that provides data management and retrieval support for professional researchers who conduct data analyses involving qualitative research studies (Maher et al., 2018).

Researchers use the NVivo data analysis software program in conjunction with manual coding methods to support data analysis of interview transcripts and other raw qualitative data (Maher et al., 2018). According to Saldaña (2016), manually coding raw data units from participant interview transcripts can be a methodical exercise that immerses oneself in the data through attention to detail throughout the data analysis. The

time-consuming yet worthwhile research practice of manual coding or labeling specific words and brief phrases from the transcribed statements of study participants requires several readings and a thorough review of each interviewee's transcript to frame the meaning of data units using unique codes. NVivo has product features that facilitate accurate transcription and organization of audio and visual data and conduct various coding methods, including colored coding for data comparison purposes (Maher et al., 2018).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness involves the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of a research study and affects the confidence of research consumers regarding the soundness of the research process and the accuracy of study findings. I addressed the areas mentioned above in the study to be trustworthy to research scholars and other readers. For example, sharing with the reader about the stages involved in the data analysis, from initial coding to categorizing patterns and themes, may increase the researcher's credibility (Patton, 2015). It was also crucial to maintain awareness of how preconceptions regarding the phenomenon as a charter school district administrator and researcher may have influenced study participants. According to Maxwell (2013), it is essential to understand reactivity regarding the researcher's influence on participants and the research process. As Patton (2015) defined, understanding reflexivity in qualitative research was essential to ensuring critical self-awareness of presumptions that affect my interpretations of the research phenomenon that may engender researcher biases.

Credibility can be defined as the probability that research findings presented by a researcher are accurate. For example, sharing with the reader about the stages involved in the data analysis, from initial coding to categorizing patterns and themes, may increase the researcher's credibility (Patton, 2015). Additionally, member checking was utilized in this study to improve credibility by ensuring the reliability of research outcomes. (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability involves the generalization of a research study's findings to alternative settings. The use of thick descriptions regarding sampling criteria for participants provided clarity for other researchers regarding eligibility to participate in this research study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), using thick, detailed descriptions may be considered in attaining validity.

Informed through guidance provided by my committee chair and members, I addressed the study's dependability. I used triangulation to strengthen the dependability of this research study by utilizing multiple data sources that included in-depth interviews, participant transcripts, a reflective journal, and memos (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Additionally, an audit trail involving support from my committee chair and members to ensure dependability of the study and outline activities was conducted throughout the research process to include data analysis and presentation of research outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lastly, confirmability concerns to what degree researcher bias influences the research process (Burkholder et al., 2016). Additionally, a reflective journal and memos were practices used throughout the research process to document and process any

preconceptions and participant interactions regarding the research phenomenon, promote transparency, and monitor any researcher biases that may have potentially affected the research process and study findings (Maxwell, 2013; Ortlipp, 2008).

### **Ethical Procedures**

In qualitative research, consideration of ethical procedures is essential to ensuring the protection of study participants and the integrity of the research process. Maxwell (2013) noted that researchers must understand how participants are affected by the interview process. The well-being of study participants regarding safeguarding their identity and contributions to this study remained a priority concern throughout the research process.

I considered several procedural actions regarding access to study participants. A state education agency public information website provided access to contact information for charter school campus administrators that currently serve in public charter schools throughout a state located in the Southeast region of the United States. Afterward, I emailed an invitation to charter school administrators requesting an email response to the informed consent letter that indicated their willingness to participate in this study. I would contact charter school campus administrators from other areas within the state if recruitment efforts did not yield an appropriate minimum of identified participants.

According to Patton (2015), informed consent protocols and opening interview statements will address “a) what is the purpose of collecting the information? (b) for whom is the information? (c) how will it be used? (d) what will be asked in the interview? (e) how will responses be handled, including confidentiality? and (f) what

risks or benefits are involved for the participant being interviewed?” (Patton, 2015, p.479). Ethical considerations for protecting study participants that adhere to Walden University's Institutional Review Board requirements (IRB approval #04-15-20-0359262) included informed consent and assurance of confidentiality regarding personally-identifying information. I provided all study participants with an informed consent letter that required their signature prior to involvement in the study. The informed consent letter contained my background and contact information as a doctoral student enrolled at Walden University. The informed consent letter also provided the purpose and nature of the research study, participant selection process, assurances regarding the protection of study participants' rights throughout data collection and analysis; as well as, after completion of the study, the volunteer nature of the interview, procedures regarding audio recording and transcription of participant interviews, and risks and benefits of participation. I provided study participants with a thank you card and a \$10.00 gift card for their contributions to this study. There was no monetary compensation provided to participants in this research study.

Interview participants needed to understand that their involvement in the research study was always voluntary. They may have discontinued their participation in the interview and withdrawn all contributions regarding their involvement in the inquiry. Interview participants were allowed to share their lived experiences with the phenomenon through their own words without fear of concern (Alase, 2017). As part of the interview protocol, I reminded study participants that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time. I excluded all data and references regarding

participants who declined to participate or withdrew early from the interview due to any adverse event from the research study's data collection, analysis, and results.

I treated all data collected from participant interviews with the utmost respect for confidentiality and to protect the integrity of the research process. Participant interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interview transcriptions were also coded and analyzed, while the identities of study participants were indicated only by a pseudonym to safeguard confidentiality. As a precautionary measure against loss or corruption of collected data, audio recordings and transcriptions of participant interviews, reflective journal notes, and memos were duplicated electronically in secured files stored on a password-protected personal computer, accessible only by me.

Reports from this research study were kept confidential regarding the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, were not shared. I did not use the personal information of participants for any other purpose outside of this research study. I electronically stored interview responses and participant information in password-protected documents for security purposes.

Additionally, I matched all participants to a unique identifier tied to the response data, and all participant names were stored separately from the data collected. Data collected will be kept for a period of 5 years, as required by Walden University, until such time when all data, including electronic copies associated with this research study, will be permanently deleted.

## Summary

Facilitated by the engagement of IPA (Smith et al., 2009), the aim of this qualitative research study using interpretive phenomenological techniques was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. This chapter provided a detailed account of the qualitative research tradition and the rationale for the study to support selecting an IPA approach as an appropriate research methodology. In addition to a data analysis plan, I discussed the role of the researcher, participant selection and sampling criteria, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures that provided assurances for study participants regarding confidentiality and measures to affirm accurate data collection, transcription, and analysis.

I also explained the use of reflective journaling (Ortlipp, 2008) to increase visibility, the use of memos (Maxwell, 2013) to monitor researcher biases, and member checking (Shenton, 2004) to increase credibility throughout the research process. This chapter also detailed the ethical procedures considered essential to protecting the confidentiality of research participants' identities and the integrity of the research process. This study explored school administrators' perceptions in charter school districts located in the Southeast region of the United States regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to public school accommodations aligned with their gender identity. Chapter 4 presents the results of data

analysis regarding interview responses from study participants concerning the research questions in this qualitative phenomenology study.

## Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. This phenomenological study was aimed to allow charter school leaders to share perspectives on their lived experiences regarding the legal, educational, and socioenvironmental considerations that determined policy development and implementation affecting transgender students' access to school facilities. The following research questions, as guided by Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership, were investigated in this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding policy implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

Chapter 4 comprises several sections that provide a detailed account of how I conducted the study in alignment with the research process. This chapter includes an overview of the research study, participant interview setting, demographics, data collection, analysis of data, evidence of trustworthiness, and study results. To answer the research questions and understand this phenomenon, I explored interview responses from 12 charter school administrators who shared their perceptions of local school policies and

implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity.

### **Setting**

The setting of the study consisted of a private office area where I held phone conferences with 12 charter school administrators who participated in semistructured interviews from their school office, home office, or other alternative space in charter school districts located in the Southeast region of the United States. Beginning in Spring 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued health and safety guidelines that prompted immediate and temporary closures of schools across the nation due to concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, access to public charter schools and availability of school administrators was understandably limited to phone contact, video conference, and email correspondence. All participant interview sessions were conducted free from interruption and recorded with a digital audio-recording device. There was minimal disparity regarding study participant interview conditions beyond individual scheduling preferences generally determined by CDC reopening guidelines for all schools.

### **Demographics**

The research study involved 12 charter school administrators who served in public charter schools throughout a state located in the Southeast region of the United States. According to the study participant criteria, all individuals invited to participate had at least 1 year of experience as a school principal who served students identified as transgender in a charter school setting. Participants in the research study served trans

students at elementary, middle, and high schools and various grade spans. I used participant pseudonyms to protect the identities of the interviewed charter school administrators. Study participant pseudonyms, experience serving transgender students, school level(s) served, and grade span are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participant Pseudonym, Transgender Student Experience, School Level, and Grade Span*

| Participant pseudonym | Transgender student experience | School level(s)   | Grade span     |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Mackeroy              | 2 years                        | Elementary/Middle | Grades K to 8  |
| Boseman               | 1 year                         | Middle/High       | Grades 6 to 12 |
| Robinson              | 2 years                        | High              | Grades 9 to 12 |
| Thompson              | 2 years                        | High              | Grades 9 to 12 |
| Powell                | 3 years                        | Elementary/Middle | Grades K to 8  |
| Hollings              | 2 years                        | High              | Grades 9 to 12 |
| Haverson              | 3 years                        | Elementary/Middle | Grades K to 8  |
| Gamble                | More than 3 years              | Middle            | Grades 6 to 8  |
| Zegler                | 2 years                        | Elementary        | Grades K to 5  |
| Ameson                | More than 3 years              | Middle            | Grades 6 to 8  |
| Donaldson             | More than 3 years              | High              | Grades 9 to 12 |
| Ritner                | More than 3 years              | Elementary/Middle | Grades K to 8  |

## Data Collection

Data collection involved semistructured interviews with 12 study participants via phone conference. A state public information website provided access to contact information for charter school campus administrators who served in public charter schools throughout a state in the Southeast region of the United States. I emailed charter school administrators an invitation to participate in the research study. Afterward, I selected only those charter school administrators who responded to the invitation and met the sample criterion for participation in this research study.

Accordingly, I emailed detailed information about the study to selected participants, including an informed consent letter that required their emailed response affirming consent to participate prior to being interviewed. After receiving consent from the study participants, I scheduled an interview via phone conference for an agreed-upon date and time. I conducted all 12 participant interviews by phone and audio recorded the interview using a digital recording application. The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 35 to 45 minutes. Interview recordings, reflective journal entries, and memos concerning my thoughts as the researcher about study participants and responses were secured on a password-protected computer.

As outlined in the Appendix, all interview questions were asked in the same order throughout every interview session with each study member. There were no exceptions to the data collection process. There were brief occasions when two of the study participants requested that I repeat a question I had previously asked during their interview session. The 12 charter school administrators involved in this study responded to all seven

interview questions regarding their perceptions of local school policies and implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity.

All audio recorded interviews with study participants were uploaded and transcribed through an online professional transcription service, Scribie.com (<https://scribie.com>). Within a week after the interview session, the study participant was provided a written transcription of the audio recorded interview with a reminder to conduct a transcript review and report any inaccuracies or verify accuracy via email to me within 1 week upon receipt. Subsequently, all interview transcripts were verified as accurate by study participants and imported into the NVivo software program to assist in the organization and analysis of data.

Throughout 2020, the U.S. population experienced COVID-19, a global pandemic that temporarily closed public school districts and disrupted educational systems serving most U.S. students. Per guidance from the CDC and directives from state education authorities, local school administrators prioritized heightened school community health measures and alternative instructional continuity efforts. As a result, due to public safety and educational mandates related to the COVID-19 pandemic, I encountered challenges recruiting potential study participants and securing their availability for an interview regarding this research study.

### **Data Analysis**

An IPA approach guided the analysis process used to understand charter school administrators' perceptions regarding their school policies and implementation that

influence transgender students' access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. Before engaging in data analysis, I assigned a pseudonym to each study participant. Participant pseudonyms helped protect the identities of charter school administrators who participated in semistructured interviews for the study.

The data analysis process involved using the NVivo data analysis software program to organize transferred study data, which included interview transcriptions reviewed for accuracy by study participants, reflective journal notes, and memos. The initial coding cycle was facilitated by applying NVivo software to identify and highlight words and phrases commonly mentioned throughout most participant transcripts. The second cycle of data analysis involved focused coding and was used to organize the data into categories: governmental laws, leadership, institutional barriers, and school community.

The categories emerged from patterns of similar meaning codes. Further analysis of interview participant response data resulted in four emergent themes: public school laws and equal rights, the role of school leadership, transgender student well-being, and stakeholder engagement. Moreover, data analysis revealed that these emergent themes were common considerations regarding charter school administrators' perceptions of their school policies and implementation that influenced trans students' access to school facilities that matched their gender identity (see Table 2). There were no discrepant cases found throughout the data collection and analysis process.

**Table 2***Codes, Categories, and Emergent Themes*

| Codes  | Categories  | Emergent themes                     |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Rights, same, all, equal, policy, treat, law, district, federal, gender, education, discrimination, school, ethics, protections, explicit  | Governmental laws<br>Equal rights for students  | Public school laws and equal rights |
| Expectations, leader, training, administrator, implementation, role, challenges, facilitate, fair, responsibilities,   | Educational leadership<br>Implementation  | Role of school leadership           |
| Transgender student, restroom, locker room, facilities, participation, comfortable, needs, student safety, comfortable, sports, activities, accommodations, barriers, access, dress code             | Institutional barriers<br>Facilities access<br>Transgender student needs<br>Safety and security | Transgender student well-being      |
| Culture, community, fears, safe, parents, conflict, communication, teachers, student, meetings, supportive, collaboration, stakeholders, staff, feedback, committee, engagement, beliefs, strategies | School community<br>Stakeholder concerns<br>Engagement efforts                                  | Stakeholder engagement              |

In relation to the research study questions, I reviewed each emergent theme through the lens of school leadership rationales, delivery focused, localizing, and democratizing, as defined in Raffo and Gunter's (2008) conceptual framework of social inclusion, education, and leadership (see Table 3). Results of data analysis indicated that study participants perceived public school laws and equal rights, the role of school leadership, transgender student well-being, and stakeholder engagement as similar reflections that influenced their local policies and implementation concerning transgender student access to school facilities. Moreover, I considered themes that emerged from the analysis of participant data, Raffo and Gunter's school leadership rationales, and the literature review and explored what charter school administrators perceived and made meaning of their shared lived experiences with the phenomenon.

**Table 3**

*Emergent Themes, Aligned School Leadership Rationales, and Research Questions*

| Emergent themes                     | Aligned school leadership rationales | Research questions |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public school laws and equal rights | Delivery-focused rationale           | RQ 1               |
| Role of school leadership           | Localizing rationale                 | RQ 2               |
| Transgender student well-being      | Localizing rationale                 | RQ 2               |
| Stakeholder engagement              | Democratizing rationale              | RQ 2               |

I used Raffo and Gunter's (2008) school leadership rationales, delivery focused, localizing, and democratizing, as context to explain what charter school administrators perceived regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender

student access to facilities. Their blended model of educational leadership for social inclusiveness, knowledge of local setting needs and resources, and stakeholder collaboration concerning school policy implementation provided the conceptual framework for this phenomenological study. A review of participant data indicated that charter school administrators perceived operationalizing public education laws that concerned equal rights for students, the role of school leadership, transgender student well-being, and stakeholder involvement as considerations regarding their school policy implementation that influenced transgender student access.

### **Emergent Theme 1: Public School Laws and Equal Rights**

A review of the study results showed that charter school administrators perceived operationalizing public education laws and equal rights for students as a consideration regarding their local school policies that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that align with their gender identity. Public school laws authorized by federal and state government agencies have served to inform local education agencies regarding compulsory education—specifically, equal rights and protections afforded to all students who attend public schools. According to Raffo and Gunter (2008), educational leaders apply a socially inclusive, delivery-focused school leadership rationale involving strategic and external resources to comply with federal and state legal requirements.

To elucidate the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies that influence transgender students' access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity, I referenced Raffo and Gunter's (2008) delivery-focused school leadership rationale. Study participants shared similar perceptions about their local

school policies that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that align with their gender identity. Many interview participants remarked that students were treated equally per public school laws. Ameson said, "We wanted to make sure everybody was given equal opportunity. Transgender students have every right."

Principal Haverson asserted, "School laws required us to serve all our students the same. I wouldn't tolerate any discrimination of our kids by staff or students. Because they all have the right to an education, even my transgender students."

Hollings explained, "We treated them as equal as the other students. There was no discrimination because we didn't see any difference."

Data analysis suggested a consensus among participant responses that indicated that federal and state laws contributed to their consideration of policies that addressed the equal treatment of transgender students. Donaldson shared, "Obviously, as a public school and working with the state education agency, we've got to be for all students here." Zegler stated, "All students have equal protection in education under the law, and we must provide a safe environment from discrimination for the students because they have the right to participate in all areas like every other student." Hollings shared, "I think all students should be treated equally in schools."

Boseman said, "All students have the same rights to attend school just like every other student." Mackeroy responded, "Same as the public laws, our policy is that every person will be treated equal regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or color. We do not discriminate." Ritner shared, "The policies that we have, we are responsible to treat all children equally."

However, what some participants said about equal treatment of students and alignment with school laws provided further understanding of charter school administrators' perceptions regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. More specifically, policy actions described by some participants as equal treatment of students when they considered transgender student access to school facilities seemed more equitable than equal. Principal Ameson shared, "The student played volleyball, and we allowed the student to change in another room because she didn't feel comfortable in the same-sex locker room. The student was allowed to use one of the classrooms, instead." Hollings said, "One of the girls told me she didn't feel comfortable with a transgender student him in the restroom when she was in there. Can he go somewhere else?" So that's when we started allowing the transgender student to use the teacher facilities."

### **Emergent Theme 2: Role of School Leadership**

The role of school leadership emerged as a theme from data analysis that indicated charter school administrators perceived their leadership actions helped facilitate policy implementation regarding transgender students' access to school facilities that matched their gender self. A second school leadership rationale, localizing, posited by Raffo and Gunter (2008), was used to consider participant responses about their school leadership role concerning what charter school administrators perceived regarding policy implementation that influenced access to gender-aligned facilities for transgender people students. Localizing provided a point of view about how educational leaders rationalize

the promotion of federal and state educational initiatives through strategic and creative policy efforts that align with the expectations of local stakeholders.

According to the data, study participants perceived that their involvement as a school leader regarding communication and knowledge of their school community needs to facilitate their local policies in concert with school laws. Haverson reported, “It was the leadership team’s responsibility to communicate, model, and maintain our policies that protected equal rights for all of our kids.” Gamble said, “My role in implementing the policies is to facilitate and be accountable. To me, the rationale is that we must provide training for staff, educate students, and treat everybody equally who comes to our school.”

Through access to local resources and engaged policy implementation approaches that correspond to the school community's needs, educational administrators facilitate statutory requirements outlined by government agencies at the state and national levels (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). According to the data, charter school leaders offered like-minded answers about their role in implementing policies and administrative actions that affected transgender students' access to facilities that matched their gender identity. In brief, most participants shared about their school leadership effort concerning the implementation of school policies that aligned with public school laws that concerned transgender students. Powell commented, “We wanted to create a policy and its core that was reflective of school laws; and supportive for our transgender student population.”

Zegler explained, “Along with my leadership staff, I intended to make sure that staff was trained, and everybody knew the law around the policies.” Thompson also

shared, “My role as the principal is to implement these policies by addressing any challenges and supporting our school community.” Principal Donaldson stated, “We wanted to make policy decisions that had been well thought out before we communicated with our parents and students.” Ritner reported, “I made sure we aligned the campus expectations as best we could with the laws that protected all students from discrimination.”

Boseman remarked, “As a school leader, if I had not approached it right, I would have dealt with a lot of challenges from parents and students, especially my parents that had strong beliefs about transgender student access to the restrooms.”

Another participant, Ameson, responded, “I think the policies that we set in place along with the procedures and the manner in which we educated our parents and students, helped ease their fears about the policies we were implementing.”

### **Emergent Theme 3: Transgender Student Well-Being**

Through another application of school leadership rationale called localizing, charter school administrators that participated in this study engaged school leadership experiences, stakeholder relationships, and engagement processes in the community to comply with governmental policies and negotiate stakeholder needs and barriers. Data analysis suggested that charter school administrators operationalized federal and state laws in coordination with their local knowledge of specific school needs and resources. In short, study participants communicated like responses regarding their perceptions about the needs and well-being of transgender students as it related to policy implementation that influenced access to gender aligned facilities for trans students. Principal Hollings

said, “Whatever they needed from us, that’s what we needed to do.” Powell maintained, “We wanted to get good feedback from our transgender students to understand what they felt was important to them in regard to having access to lockers and restrooms they were comfortable with.”

Through examination of the data, it was evident that most charter school leaders reported they referred to public education laws passed by government entities and engaged school resources that addressed local policy implementation regarding transgender student access to school facilities correlated with their gender id. Furthermore, several interview participants reported they implemented explicit policies that influenced transgender students’ access to school accommodations. Haverson claimed, “Some policies and procedures about restroom access were necessary to put in place. I also felt the district should have been clearer about the expectations concerning transgender students.”

The use of an alternative restroom space, if available, was a consistent response regarding what some charter school administrators used to accommodate transgender students as well as other stakeholders to avoid any potential conflict. Many study participants reported comparable responses concerning policy implementation that influenced transgender students' access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. Donaldson said, “Many times, we’ll try to find a neutral solution. We used a unisex restroom, and typically that’s always been kind of the answer and it seems to work out.” Robinson responded, “We designated a single occupancy restroom on campus and changed the door sign to indicate private use for any student.”

#### **Emergent Theme 4: Stakeholder Engagement**

Participant response data showed that study participants shared common perceptions about stakeholder involvement in implementing local school policies that influence access for trans students to school accommodations that match their gender identity. According to Raffo and Gunter (2008), democratizing rationale pertains to stakeholder involvement, collaboration, and response. Haverson shared,

I made sure that I met with my teachers, parents, and students to bring awareness to the issue and ensure that my expectations for all of us were to make sure everyone on our campus was treated with respect and dignity.

Some participants commented on strategies to engage and inform stakeholders, especially parents, about their transgender policies. Ameson said, “We sent pamphlets home because there was a lot of talk from the parents about the issue of transgender and what that means, many of them weren't educated about it.” Zegler asserted, “We had parent meetings so we could discuss the policies and rules and the legislation about transgender students and their right to participate like every other student in the school.”

In coordination with other school leadership rationales, democratizing was used by charter school administrators as a rationale, specifically to facilitate cooperative efforts with school community members regarding policy implementation that influenced transgender student access to restrooms and other gender aligned facilities. Some charter school administrators shared their concerns about ensuring their school staff participated in stakeholder conversations regarding implementing policies and administrative actions that affected transgender students' access to facilities that matched their gender identity.

Zegler reported, “The attitudes of the staff on the campus, I needed to make sure that they were informed of the policies and strategies. We continue to educate ourselves on the transgender issues.”

Powell reported, “Our leadership committee wanted to implement policies that addressed transgender access to a gender aligned restrooms and school facilities, so we sought out the input of our teachers, students, and parents.” Data analysis of study participant responses revealed four emergent themes, public education laws and equal rights, the role of school leadership, transgender student well-being, and stakeholder engagement as priority considerations regarding their perceptions about local trans student policies involving facilities access.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

I addressed credibility matters to maintain the integrity of the data collection process and the authenticity of participant data. I conducted interviews with multiple study participants with a year or more of school administrator experience serving transgender students in a charter school environment in accordance with the interview protocol as approved by the institutional review board at Walden University. In an effort to maintain consistency, participant interviews were all conducted in a private location of their choice by phone conference and audio-recorded using a digital application. Data collection through semistructured interviews with each participant was methodical and intended to preserve the integrity of the research process. Prior to engaging in the data analysis process, I used transcript review to afford research study participants a week to

review their interview transcript and approve as an accurately recorded account of their lived experience and to improve the credibility of this research study.

### **Transferability**

The transferability of this research study may be feasible when applied to charter school administrators that serve transgender students in other regional locations throughout the United States. Maintaining transferability of this study depends on strict adherence to qualitative research protocols necessary to replicate this study in alternative settings regarding further research inquiry. Thick, rich descriptions of study participant perspectives could provide clarification for researchers regarding the eligibility criteria of participants in further research of the study phenomenon.

### **Dependability**

Triangulation used in this study involved a combination of several data sources, including in-depth interviews, study participant transcripts, a reflective journal, and researcher memos, to strengthen data quality and the overall integrity of the research study. Using an audit trail that documented an account of data collection activities engaged throughout the research process, I intended to increase the dependability of this research study (Burkholder et al., 2016). For example, all study participants were presented with the same interview questions in a consistent manner as outlined in the interview protocol and documented in an audit trail.

### **Confirmability**

I addressed confirmability by using a reflective journal and memos to diligently monitor the research process regarding any influence by researcher bias to preserve the

integrity of the study. A reflective journal and memos were also maintained for documentation purposes and facilitated thoughtful consideration of researcher-participant engagements associated with the study phenomenon. Moreover, using these researcher practices, I intended to promote transparency of the research process and ensure trustworthiness regarding data analysis and study results.

### **Results**

I presented the study results according to each of the research questions. An IPA approach guided the analysis process used to address the two research questions of this study. Specifically, I explored the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and policy implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. Data collected for this research study was comprised of interview responses from 12 charter school administrators with experience serving trans students, my reflective journal entries, and memos. Facilitated by NVivo, a qualitative research software program, study data were organized, coded, and analyzed.

#### **Research Question 1**

What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

Through the analysis of participant responses, it was apparent that charter school administrators perceived that adherence to public education laws and equal rights for all students was an essential consideration regarding their school policies that affected

transgender student access. Study participants shared that their local school policies were in accordance with public school laws that addressed equal opportunities and consideration for all students. Thompson said, “As a charter school administrator, I always try to go by the letter of the law.” Zegler commented, “Transgender students have the right to participate in educational activities and have access to restrooms as the other students, and it needs to be equal, no discrimination.”

Charter school administrators’ perceptions about their policies concerning trans student access and consideration of governmental laws also aligned with Raffo and Gunter’s (2008) delivery focused school leadership rationale. Zegler stated, “We needed to follow the state policies.” Donaldson said, “We’ve always found very workable solutions for these 3-4 situations that have kind of arisen over the last couple of years.” Powell said, “It was our responsibility to ensure all students were treated equally.”

Data analysis also revealed that some charter school administrators perceived their school policies that explicitly addressed transgender students’ access to school accommodations were equitable but not equal for all students. Haverson reported, “Using the restroom was a concern because the student wanted to use the girl’s restroom. After meeting with the parent and the child, we all agreed the student would use the gender-neutral staff restroom primarily but could use the girl’s restroom when no other student was in there.” Donaldson commented, “We haven’t allowed transgender students to use locker rooms where kids of the other sex were changing clothes. We utilized a gender-neutral restroom as that access point to either use the restroom or change clothes.”

**Research Question 2**

What are the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding policy implementation that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity?

An analytical review of the research data resulted in emergent themes that charter school administrators in this study perceived as their role as a school leader, trans student well-being, and stakeholder involvement regarding policy implementation. Accordingly, the emergent themes correspond with Raffo and Gunter's (2008) framework of school leadership rationales, specifically, localizing and democratizing. Localizing is how school administrators engage governmental laws to facilitate local school policy implementation per their knowledge and understanding of school community needs and resources (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). "Hollings shared, "So, we had two transgender female students. When they wished to use the girl's restroom, we allowed them to do that."

Another school leadership rationale, democratizing, is related to educational leaders' use of strategic communication and collaborative engagement with school community stakeholders to determine policy decisions (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). Charter school administrators who participated in this study indicated that stakeholder engagement was included in their policy implementation that influenced transgender students' access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. Ritner said, "There were disagreements during the meetings I had with some stakeholders. Some individuals remained negative, but more people seemed positive about the new policies."

Powell reported, “I took every opportunity during parent meetings or faculty meetings to communicate, and also to disseminate information about our transgender policy.” Zegler commented,

We needed to make sure that the parents and the school staff are on board. We had parent meetings so we could discuss the policies and rules and the laws about transgender students and their right to participate like every other student in the school.

### **Summary**

In reference to research questions in this study, I explored the perceptions of 12 charter school administrators regarding their local policies and implementation that influenced transgender students' gender-aligned access to school accommodations. I engaged interpretive phenomenological analysis techniques to understand study participants' perceptions regarding their school policies and implementation that influence trans pupil access to public school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. After completing the data collection process, using the NVivo data analysis software program, I organized, coded, and analyzed participant response data for patterns and categories that later developed into emergent themes.

Research data analysis identified four emergent themes, public education laws and equal rights for students, the role of school leadership, transgender student well-being, and stakeholder involvement. The shared perspectives of 12 charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influenced transgender student access to gender-aligned school facilities were explained by

analyzing the themes. Moreover, I considered these themes in relation to Raffo and Gunter's (2008) delivery focused, localizing, and democratizing school leadership rationales.

In conclusion, through interpretative analysis of participant interview responses, data results showed that charter school administrators perceived public school laws and equal rights for students regarding their policies that affected transgender students' access to restrooms aligned with their gender self. Also, the role of the school administrator and transgender student well-being were reported and perceived similarly by study participants as important considerations with respect to policy implementation regarding trans student access. It was also evident from data analysis that participants perceived strategic communication and collaborative-decision making with school community stakeholders influenced policy implementation for charter school administrators as they considered gender aligned facilities access for transgender students. Charter school administrators consider policy implications concerning transgender student access to gender-aligned restrooms that may provoke consequential reactions from community stakeholders (Steck & Perry, 2017). Excerpts from study participant interview responses described stakeholders' engagement and collaborative efforts to obtain feedback, explain policy rationales, and enlist cooperation and support for transgender student policy considerations. Gamble said, "We maintained open communication and facilitated meetings. We needed their buy-in to support our transgender student policies." Ameson shared,

We sent pamphlets home because there was a lot of talk from the parents about the issue of transgender and what that means, many of them weren't educated about it. So, by doing what we did, it really, it eased the fears of everybody.

Chapter 5 provides a review of key findings, interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research regarding the research study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. In Chapter 5, I discuss the key findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research resulting from a review of the study data. Data analysis revealed four emergent themes regarding 12 charter school administrators' perceptions about their school policies and implementation that addressed transgender student access to gender-aligned school facilities. These four themes included *public education laws and equal rights, the role of school leadership, transgender student wellbeing, and stakeholder engagement* as critical considerations regarding the meaning-making of what charter school administrators perceived about their transgender student policy implementation.

Key findings of the study outline considerations for charter school administrators concerning policy implementation that addresses transgender student access to school facilities. These findings elucidate the need for charter school districts to consider explicit policies regarding transgender student facilities access, what charter school administrators understand about their school leadership role concerning transgender policy implementation, and strategic stakeholder engagement efforts involving policy implementation about facilities access for trans students. Moreover, the findings of this phenomenological research study provide insight intended to inform charter school leadership about policy and implementation regarding transgender student access to gender-aligned school facilities.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of this study contribute to the knowledge and understanding of educational leadership by exploring charter school administrators' perceptions about their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Key findings of this study include the following:

- Charter school districts need to include explicit policies that address transgender students' access to restrooms that align with their gender identity.
- Charter school administrators understand their school leadership role in balancing governmental mandates and local stakeholder expectations to meet the diverse and socially inclusive needs of all pupils.
- Study participants perceived stakeholder involvement and collaboration as a priority consideration regarding their policy actions concerning gender-aligned facilities access for trans students.

The key findings of this study reflect Raffo and Gunter's (2008) combination of leadership for social inclusiveness and the use of local setting knowledge when implementing school policies. Specifically, three school leadership rationales, delivery focused, localizing, and democratizing, were considered along with emergent themes to frame what charter school administrators perceived regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender student access to gender-aligned school facilities (see Table 3). Accordingly, study participants consistently shared similar responses about public education laws and equal rights, the role of school leadership,

transgender student well-being, and stakeholder engagement as principal considerations for policy implementation concerning access to school facilities for trans students.

### **Key Finding 1**

One key finding that extends the research is the need for charter school districts to provide explicit policies that address transgender student access to restrooms that match their gender self (Kosciw et al., 2020). There continues to be a dearth of specific policies at the charter school district level to address the needs of transgender students, including equal facilities access. It was evident from a review of the data that participants found it necessary to consider school-level policy implementation that relied on the use of gender-neutral restrooms and alternative so-called locker room spaces. At most, these arguably comparable solutions afforded the school's trans students only equitable but not the same access to gender-labeled facilities that were otherwise almost exclusively available to their cisgender peers.

Accordingly, charter school administrators engaged a school leadership rationale termed "delivery focused" to facilitate their school-level policies regarding transgender students' access to school facilities that match their gender self in reference to government policies that promote equal rights for all students. One study participant explained, "I felt it was important that the campus was inclusive of all children as required by law and our school policy." The use of government policies to qualify local policy implementation aligns with the policy actions of school administrators (Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

**Key Finding 2**

A second key finding emerged that also aligned with extant research. Regarding this finding, it was evident that charter school administrators were principally involved in their school-level trans student policy implementation with little to no district support and understood their school leadership role in balancing public school laws and stakeholder expectations to meet the socially inclusive needs of all pupils (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Participants shared how they navigated public school laws vis-a-vis innovative policy implementation for transgender students accessing school facilities aligned with their gender identity.

Study data showed that charter school administrators consistently applied Raffo and Gunter's (2008) school leadership rationale, localizing. Participants perceived that their knowledge of their school's needs and resources to operationalize government mandates was a factor regarding their school policy implementation that influenced transgender students' access to gender-aligned school facilities. Some charter school administrators mentioned that they had to use limited facility resources in an effective manner to maintain overall school operations (Gawlik, 2018). Principal Gamble explained, "With us being a small charter school that leases the building, changing our facility would be difficult."

**Key Finding 3**

A third key finding showed that participants perceived stakeholder involvement and collaboration as an effective consideration regarding their policy actions concerning facilities access in schools for transgender students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin,

2018). Participants mentioned similar actions regarding their efforts to engage stakeholder involvement in their school policy implementation that influences transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity, including community meetings, staff meetings, parent discussions, and distribution of information pamphlets. Charter school administrators engaged in democratizing to facilitate stakeholder collaboration regarding policy implementation that addresses trans student access to school accommodations to their gender identity. Democratizing is defined as a school leadership rationale used to explain educational leaders' actions regarding the engagement of stakeholders in collaborative policy discussions (Raffo & Gunter, 2008).

### **Limitations of the Study**

In this qualitative study, the limitations included the sample size of the study population and geographic location. Participants of the study were only 12 charter school administrators, which minimized the applicability of this research study to other public-school administrators. A second study limitation was the participation of charter school administrators who served in schools located in a single geographic region of the United States. A third limitation concerned reflexivity, as I was the primary researcher of this study and a former principal of a charter school. The possibility of researcher bias was duly considered and addressed through bracketing, memos, and a reflective journal that I used to acknowledge any biases and promote the research process's transparency (Ortlipp, 2008). A fourth limitation involved trustworthiness concerning dependence on credible and authentic responses from study participants. Overall, I found all participants

to be forthcoming and truthful in their responses to interview questions. There were no apparent issues of trust regarding any of the participants involved in this research study.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for further research stem from the limitations and results of this study. A review of the results indicated that charter school administrators perceived several like-minded considerations regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. Like their traditional school counterparts, charter school administrators must maintain a safe public school environment that ensures no student experiences discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

I recommend that other researchers further explore the phenomenon by expanding the scope of the study to include a sample population size that encompasses other regions, which could further inform educational leaders about policy and implementation in charter schools regarding facilities access for trans students. Another recommendation for future researchers is to include perspectives from charter school administrators about their policy implementation regarding transgender students' access to and participation in traditionally competitive sports that align with their gender identity. Furthermore, a review of study results suggests that future researchers consider exploring other stakeholders' perceptions and different policy issues that affect transgender students. For example, another study could address the perceptions of teachers in charter schools regarding their school policies that influence transgender students' access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. Another suggestion for further research is to

explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies regarding transgender students' preference for a school dress code correlated with their gender identity.

Charter school administrators serve a diverse and growing population of students in schools throughout the United States, including youth who identify as transgender (Goodrich & Luke, 2016). Kosciw et al. (2018) reported that nearly half of transgender students enrolled in schools were required to access school restrooms that did not align with their gender self. Accordingly, exploring what teachers, parents, and students in charter schools perceive about policy implementation regarding access for transgender children may lead to further positive social change for this marginalized student population (Kosciw et al., 2020).

### **Implications**

The purpose of this qualitative study using interpretive phenomenological techniques was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Educational leadership, including charter school administrators, contribute to positive social change by ensuring equal access to public school facilities and addressing institutional barriers for transgender students through adherence to public school laws, local policy implementation, professional development, and stakeholder involvement. One implication of this study suggests the need for professional development that may assist charter school administrators and other educational professionals in effectively addressing the needs of

transgender students (Payne & Smith, 2018) while facilitating positive social change throughout the school community. As posited by Kurt and Chenault (2017), the role of school leadership, public school laws, and stakeholder engagement are critical considerations for educational administrators regarding policy discussions that minimize institutional barriers to social inclusion and support for transgender students. Moreover, charter school administrators and teachers who serve trans students in districts that do not have explicit policies and have limited support may benefit from community-based advocacy organizations that provide training resources and guidance to schools regarding transgender children and youth.

Another implication that I determined from review of study results indicated a need for charter school administrators to engage in schoolwide planning that specifically addresses institutional barriers that impact transgender student access. Participants in this phenomenological research study who shared their perspectives regarding policy implementation involving transgender student facilities access evidently responded through local policy actions after being informed about an enrolled student who identified as transgender. There is an apparent need for charter school administrators to proactively consider schoolwide planning regarding transgender students, the same as school leaders routinely plan for all students, including gifted and talented pupils, student-athletes, or students with learning disabilities. School-level planning and policy considerations involving professional development, restroom and locker room access, sports participation, dress codes, and student organizations are needed to effectively address the

social inclusion of transgender students who have yet to enroll or confidently emerge among the current student population.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study using interpretive phenomenological techniques was to explore the perceptions of charter school administrators regarding their school policies and implementation that influence transgender students' access to school facilities that correspond with their gender identity. As public schools that are government-funded and regulated by state government agencies, charter schools have to ensure the rights and protections afforded to all students, including transgender pupils. Accordingly, charter school administrators must understand ongoing federal and state legislative efforts that may affect local transgender student policies that address equal access to school facilities (Phillips, 2017).

Charter school administrators perceived that public education laws and equal rights, the role of school leadership, transgender student well-being, and stakeholder engagement were important factors concerning their school policy and implementation regarding trans student access to gender-aligned restrooms. The results of this study addressed a gap in the extant research and may help inform charter school administrators and traditional school leadership about policy implementation regarding transgender pupils' access to school accommodations that match their gender self. Charter school leadership may better serve transgender students through understanding policy considerations that positively affect the educational well-being of this marginalized

population, as well as promoting social inclusion throughout the school community (Kosciw et al., 2020; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2020).

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## Appendix: Interview Queries

1. Tell me about your experiences regarding your school policies that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. (RQ1)
2. Describe your role, if any, in implementing these policies. (RQ2)
3. Share with me your feelings about your school policies that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. (RQ1)
4. What implications did you consider while planning to implement school policies that influence transgender student access to school restrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their gender identity? (RQ2)
5. What leadership challenges did you experience, if any, affect your implementation of policies that address transgender student access to school facilities that match their gender identity? (RQ2)
6. Describe your experiences regarding stakeholder disagreements, if any, related to your implementation of school policies that influence transgender student access to school facilities aligned with their gender identity. (RQ2)
7. Share with me your reasons for the leadership strategies you used regarding policies that influence transgender student access to school accommodations aligned with their gender identity? (RQ1)