

Extracurricular Activities, their Impact on Students,  
and Challenges of Implementation at Charter Schools

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The author thanks Treeside Charter School and their administrators for allowing him to research and be involved with them this past semester. He also wishes to thank his family, for long hours away and his absence from family activities while completing this research and degree.

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper was originally to verify the research which shows that there is a correlation between extracurricular involvement and increased student motivation and achievement. It was intended to help clarify whether this relationship was causal or not. Due to unforeseen circumstances, that was not able to be verified, but the challenges faced by the charter school in question brought to light the financial issues that often plague such schools, and brought about a discussion regarding the validity of such schools. Ultimately, based on the author's experiences and research, he remains convinced that charter schools are worth keeping, but admits that more oversight would help keep abuses and mismanagement to a minimum.

*Keywords: extracurricular activities, student motivation, student achievement, public charter schools, public funds, mismanagement, educational oversight, stakeholders, community, students*

## **Introduction**

This brief addresses the issue of extracurricular activities and their impact on students. The author decided to address this issue because the school that he was interning at, Treeside Charter School, (a Waldorf-inspired public charter school serving grades K-6) in Provo, Utah, was considering implementation of an ambitious after-school extracurricular program. Mr. Wright was curious to better understand the influence and impact such actions might have on the students involved, with input and data from them, their families and their teachers. He wondered what additional research had to say on the impact such involvement had on students and others involved. The author also realized that this was a unique opportunity to determine if extracurricular involvement is merely correlational to, or if it may also be causal to, changes in student motivation and achievement.

## **Research and Literature Foundation**

Activities that are considered “extracurricular” have been defined various ways; Merriam-Webster (2019) defines them as any activity that is “officially or semiofficially approved and usually [consists of] organized student activities (such as athletics) connected with school and usually carrying no academic credit”. The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines the word similarly: “(of activities or subjects) not part of the usual school or college course”. Thus clarified, this study sought to understand what impact such extracurricular activities had, particularly on students, as well as others involved (i.e. parents, teachers, schools, and so on).

Many studies have shown a positive correlation between extracurricular involvement and students’ academic achievement, including testing scores, GPA and other academic outcomes (Dearman, 2017; Furda & Shuleski, 2019; Zhang & Tang, 2017). Additionally, less tangible benefits have been noted as well, such as improved self-concept (Abruzzo, Lenis, Romero,

Maser, & Morote, 2016), as well as more positive views of education in general (Furda & Shuleski, 2019). Parental involvement is a factor in all of this as well (Xu, 2017) and should be a consideration.

### **Field Work**

The author wanted to verify the aforementioned findings, and see if he might go beyond simple correlation of such positive benefits, and instead show definite causation. He has been working the past few months as an administrative intern at Treeseide Charter School in Provo, Utah. While working there, he has focused on several different capstone projects as part of his M.Ed. program through Southern Utah University (SUU). One of these focused on extracurricular activities, and as Mr. Wright has been involving himself at the school, he assisted various times with the Parent's Guild, the name that Treeseide gave its Parent Volunteer Organization (PVO). The leader of the PVO, Megan Luke, with support from the administration, had been planning on implementing an ambitious after-school club program for the students to participate in as they desired. Their plan was to have two different clubs each day available after school, which would be done on a weekly basis. For example, a gardening club would happen every Monday, as would a sports club, and those clubs would repeat every Monday for multiple weeks. Other different clubs would be available on Tuesdays, others on Wednesdays, and so on.

This was a lofty goal, given that in the past, the school had only had a few, intermittent clubs before (including a competent robotics club). However, the school felt like the next step was ready to be taken. Mr. Wright realized that this would be a rare opportunity to carry out a case study to see how student motivation and achievement at the school might be impacted by such an implementation of a wide-scale extracurricular program. He decided to run a small survey, that would primarily utilize a Likert scale to determine student, teacher, and parent

perceptions of their student's motivations and / or achievement both before beginning involvement in the after-school club(s), and afterwards as well. After about a month, the same survey would be given again, and the data was to be compared, after the students had settled into their new routine as a participant in the extracurricular program. Additionally, the same survey would also be given to a control group of students and teachers that were not participating in the extracurricular program, both before and implementation. These results would then be compared, and would hopefully provide accurate data that would show if such involvement increased such motivation and achievement, or if such programs are simply attractive to students that have higher-than-average motivation and academic achievement.

*Figure 1.* Extracurricular Survey, Student Questions Excerpt

**Student Motivation**

The following questions address your motivation!

**I enjoy coming to school every day \***

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**I think that school is fun! \***


	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*Questions 1 and 2 as found in Mr. Wright's questionnaire / survey, to be given to student participants (Wright, 2019).*

Mr. Wright went about creating the surveys (see Figure 1; see also Appendix B) and permission forms (see Figure 2; see also Appendix A), and also made plans to interview staff,

students and the administrators as well, so that a more balanced view of the situation might be realized. As this was a case study, the survey questions are based on perception, which is subject to personal bias. However, the additional interviews that were planned would have hopefully given a clearer picture of all thus surveyed (as well as their motivation and academic achievement levels).

Figure 2. Survey Permission Form Excerpt



**Minor Assent for  
Research Participation**

<b>Study title</b>	Extracurricular Activity's Impact on Student Motivation & Achievement
<b>Researcher[s]</b>	Joseph Wright, SUU Graduate Student, in conjunction with Treeside Charter School

We're inviting you to be in a research study. A research study is a way to learn new things. We are trying to learn more about how being involved in an after-school club may affect your motivation and achievement in regular education classes.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to simply answer a survey before the after school program starts, and then complete another similar survey after you have been involved in the program after roughly a month. You will be asked some basic questions about how you feel and / or think, and asked to give those a score, from 1 to 5 (i.e. 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

*Above is a portion of the permission form that Mr. Wright created, with approval from Treeside & SUU (Wright, 2019; see also Appendix A)*

Several complications soon arose however that left the entire extracurricular program in limbo. First, questions of whether combining with the 4-H organization to help with this extracurricular program arose. The author worked with Brent Bunnell at Merit Academy, and his wife, Jolene Bunnell was the 4-H Coordinator for Utah County. He suggested that perhaps 4-H might be a good fit to assist with the extracurricular program, and so a meeting was held with Mr. Todd Hepworth, Assistant Director at Treeside; Mr. Wright, administrative intern; Mrs. Bunnell, exiting Utah County 4-H Coordinator; and Mrs. Melanie Ogan, the new Utah County 4-



H Coordinator-in-training. After having a thorough discussion, Mr. Hepworth was of the opinion that utilizing 4-H to help organize and provide curriculum to the after-school program would be an excellent idea, and so that ought to be communicated with the Parent Guild, which was planning on starting the extracurricular program just after Fall Break.

Unfortunately, more trouble was brewing. A teacher unexpectedly quit, which left the school in a lurch. Mr. Hepworth was needed back in the classroom, and so he had to juggle not just his administrative duties, but also now teaching full-time again, which he hadn't done since the previous year. Any teacher who has attempted to take over a classroom midyear can attest to the immense difficulties that such a venture entails. As a result, communication lagged between the administration and the Parent's Guild. Additionally, Dr. Benjamin Johnson, Director at Treeside, was kept quite busy dealing with financial issues regarding the school's landlord and some unethical business dealings on their part, which put Treeside as a public school into a difficult situation. As an effort to resolve this challenge, the school filed for bankruptcy in November, 2019 (see Figure 3) (Tanner, 2019).

Figure 3. Bankruptcy Document Excerpt

Case 19-28378 Doc 1 Filed 11/12/19 Entered 11/12/19 17:40:59 Desc Main Document Page 1 of 11

Fill in this information to identify your case:	
United States Bankruptcy Court for the:	
DISTRICT OF UTAH	
Case number (if known)	Chapter <u>11</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Check if this an amended filing	

Official Form 201  
**Voluntary Petition for Non-Individuals Filing for Bankruptcy** 4/19

If more space is needed, attach a separate sheet to this form. On the top of any additional pages, write the debtor's name and case number (if known). For more information, a separate document, *Instructions for Bankruptcy Forms for Non-Individuals*, is available.

1. Debtor's name Treeside Charter School

Source: Bankruptcy documents as obtained by the Daily Herald (Dodson, 2019)

This bankruptcy was ongoing at the time this paper was finalized, but the director and the school board are hopeful that as a result, the “school and what it stands for will be here for a long time” (Tanner, 2019). Due to these challenges, as well as the uncertainty that a bankruptcy brings, the extracurricular program had not gotten underway by the time of this paper’s finalization. This rendered Mr. Wright’s survey portion of his case study an impossibility.

### **Theory to Practice**

While the extracurricular program at Treeside had still not occurred as of yet, the situation that led to the current situation is not unique. Mr. Wright has worked for nearly five years at Merit Academy in Springville, Utah, a public charter school only a few short miles away from Treeside. Sadly, many charter schools both in Utah, and across the country, have suffered from financial troubles and mismanagement, and even claims of nepotism, embezzlement and corruption.

In California for example, Antioch Charter Academy school has been leasing its building from a public school, and owes over \$1.2 million in overdue rent (Prieve, 2019). Another charter school in Florida just announced that it plans to move its more than one hundred students mainly because of “high lease payments” (Java, 2019). And just a month ago the St. George Academy (a public charter school in St. George, Utah) received a recommendation that they be closed. This was due to low enrollment, and financial issues, including several loans made from several of the school’s own board members, totaling in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, which leads to obvious questions of conflict of interest (Bancroft, 2019).

### **Charter School Abuses**

While high lease payments are troublesome, many charter schools often allow such issues to slip into outright embezzlement and other illegal or unethical activity. One such example hails

from Oklahoma, where the state's largest virtual charter school, Epic Charter Schools was accused of letting its two founders embezzle over ten million dollars from 2013 to 2018 (Murphy, 2019). This summer, another scheme was revealed where eleven or more individuals running a series of charter schools ended up bilking California out of more than fifty million dollars (Bruno, 2019).

There are many ways to steal money, and sadly it seems that many public charter schools have become one of the preferred vehicles for such dishonesty. This abuse seems to occur mainly because they are subject to less regulation and oversight, and also because they get their taxpayer funds for every child they enroll (Green, Baker & Oluwole, 2019). With over forty billion dollars of public funds being given over to charter schools each year, it should be no surprise that some may feel entitled to skim a bit off the top for themselves; from 2014-2017 it has been reported that \$223 million of such abuse, fraud, and mismanagement has occurred ("The Center for Popular Democracy", 2017). This includes false enrollment of students, which is meant only to line the pockets of those running the school (Bruno, 2019). Another common tactic is for the creators of the charter schools to also own the land, and then get rent and / or maintenance payments from the school. They'll often overcharge for such services and leases, which is another sneaky way to effectively rob taxpayers and other public schools of money. Such unethical and even illegal activity is rampant, even here in Utah (Jones & Pflaum, 2018; "The Center for Popular Democracy", 2017).

Sadly, Utah is not immune to some charter school travesties as well. For instance, accusations of years of flashy incentives, trips, and wasteful spending sunk the American International School of Utah (AISU), so that it was ordered to close this year, owing perhaps millions of dollars in debt, with over half a million of that debt owed to the state of Utah

(Tanner, 2019). Additionally, Utah's largest charter school (actually six schools in the state), American Preparatory Academy (APA), run by Director Carolyn Sharette, has been accused of misusing the nearly five million dollars they receive from the state each year, and using it to enrich herself and her own family, which through shell corporations own the businesses that lease the school its facilities and are paid for much of its management (Jones & Pflaum, 2018).

Just last year, APA spent over half a million dollars of taxpayer funds on a poorly conceived expansion plan, which required them to create an unwanted emergency access road nearby after some heavy handed tactics in trying to get the city to condemn other property holder's lands as well as claim ownership through eminent domain, which both failed. The school ultimately settled on buying a nearby house, and then demolishing it to make way for their required road (Jones & Pflaum, 2018). Again, this may not rise to the same level as some corruption and unethical use of public funds as has happened in other states, but such actions are certainly disconcerting and deplorable.

### **Politicians Lining their Pockets**

Despite these obvious problems, many in the Utah community believe that charter schools are a viable and worthwhile alternative to regular public schools. For instance, one Utah lawmaker, Travis Seegmiller, said, regarding the St. George Academy's recent troubles: "This is an endeavor that we are all taking very seriously, as a matter of highest priority, to keep [St. George Academy's] doors open for years to come" (Bancroft, 2019). However, such a claim by a Utah politician may be a bit suspect. There are many present and past lawmakers in Utah that benefit financially when charter schools succeed, according to a recent investigation by 2 KUTV News; dozens in fact (Jones & Pflaum, 2019). These include former State Sen. Lincoln Fillmore, who owns Charter Solutions, a company has been hired by over 20 charter schools in the state

and who have paid his company over five million dollars for services rendered over the last three years; and Sen. Jerry Stephenson, whose son runs a different company that also works as a contractor for charter schools, among many others (2019). These are the same people that in most cases regulate and keep an eye on the propriety of such schools. Talk about the fox watching the hen house!

### **Relevance to Professional Goals**

The author has worked his entire career in charter schools. While he has enjoyed his experience, especially at his current position, he has spent a good deal of time (especially while working on his M.Ed.) working with other teachers who see things from the traditional public school perspective. Sometimes those who have interacted with him have dismissed charter schools, or acted as if they are not really all that desirable. This has, in the past, left him wanting to do more research into charter schools, to understand where such animosity has come from. Based on the research he has conducted for this paper, as well as other discussions and research, and the propensity for so many charter schools to get involved in shady dealings and dishonesty, he is no longer surprised at the negative perception that many have of charter schools.

Mr. Wright hopes that by completing this degree, he will also be able to better meet the national standards that multiple organizations have created to guide those who seek to effectively lead teachers, staff, and schools in educating bright and able students for the challenges that await them. For simplicity's sake, he's chosen to strive to follow the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which are outlined as follows: Leadership for Results, Vision & Mission, Teaching and Learning, Knowledge of Students and Adults, Culture, Strategic Management, Advocacy, Ethics, and Reflection and Growth ("Accomplished Principal Standards", p. 3, 2010).

**Standard I: Leadership for Results**

The first of the standards states that the best principals “lead with a sense of urgency and achieve the highest results for all students and adults” (“Accomplished Principal Standards”, p. 19, 2010). Despite the many charter schools that have struggled to maintain their finances and ethics, Mr. Wright admits that in his experience at Merit Academy and Treeside that all he has ever witnessed is a sincere desire by the teachers and the administrators to achieve exactly that: the highest results for all involved. Day in and day out, Dr. Ben Johnson and Mr. Todd Hepworth, the administrators at Treeside, as well as all of the other teachers and staff that Mr. Wright spent time working and interacting with expressed nothing less than a complete and utter commitment to their students and the success of their school. The author was also given the opportunity to work alongside and see these “dynamic, forward-thinking principals lead collaborative organizations that realize and sustain positive change” by example (2010). He felt encouraged and involved with them as a school, and was grateful to be so readily accepted among them. Inspired by their leadership, he desires to continue to follow their lead and be a similar leader in his own present and future endeavors.

**Standard II: Vision and Mission**

The next standard the NBPTS has states that good educational leaders will “lead and inspire the learning community to develop, articulate, and commit to a shared and compelling vision of the highest levels of student learning” (“Accomplished Principal Standards”, p. 27, 2010). In all of his time spent at Treeside, this too was something that Mr. Wright saw exemplified over and over again. Both administrators were fully committed to seeing all students and staff succeed. Their ability to connect and prove their dedication to their school is inspiring. Through the various faculty meetings that the author attended, he saw that Treeside’s leaders

“focus and drive the organization toward the [school’s] vision” with a willingness and passion that is sometimes rare in education (2010). This same passion is evident in the staff and leaders at Merit Academy, and it’s a big part of why the author has stayed put there as long as he has. While some charters seem to struggle to maintain their focus on what should matter, the students, that is not the case as far as Mr. Wright has witnessed.

Figure 4. Case Study B: A Major Mice Mishap Excerpt



The slide features a photograph of two mice, one black and white and one white with black spots, resting on a person's hand. Below the photo is a purple arrow pointing downwards, containing the text 'OTHER FACTS:'. To the right of the photo, the title 'CASE STUDY B: A MAJOR MICE MISHAP' is displayed in large, bold letters. Below the title, the word 'INTRO:' is followed by a paragraph of text.

**CASE STUDY B:  
A MAJOR MICE MISHAP**

**INTRO:**

It all started with such promise, but ended up not going so well. You are the head of your PLC department, and as a PLC you all decided that as a grade you wanted to raise some mice over the course of the year, in order to study genetics and dominant versus recessive genes / alleles as part of your biology unit. You were lucky enough to meet a researcher at a local college over the summer who was willing to lend some of their equipment and breeding stock of mice. Combined with a research grant that they helped you write, you received enough funds to have 7 mice cages in each of your grades' classes.

**OTHER FACTS:**

Source: This was a part of one of Mr. Wright’s training handouts at Treeseide this year (Wright, 2019).

### Standard III: Teaching and Learning

Throughout his internship experience, the author has felt that the admins at Treeseide did indeed encourage him and others to “implement a common instructional framework that aligns curriculum with teaching, assessment, and learning” (“Accomplished Principal Standards”, p. 33, 2010). He was given the opportunity to create two different trainings for teachers (see Figures 2 and 3), as well as be involved as a participant in other staff trainings. These experiences were all clearly part of a carefully chosen framework that seeks to align curriculum with appropriate goals. The way the leadership allows others to do so allows flexibility and choice that can be

lacking at some schools, and this impressed the author. He was grateful to be given the chance to be given some clear direction, and then allowed to proceed as he chose, with guidance from his leaders as needed. It helped him to feel appreciated and also trusted enough to make decisions for himself, thus encouraging productive “conversation, practice, observation, evaluation, and feedback” (2010).

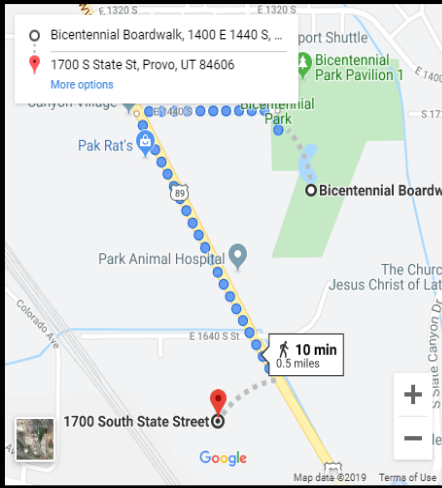
Figure 5. Self-Serve Trip to the Wetlands Training Excerpt

TREESIDE TRIP TO THE WETLANDS

[HOME](#)   [GETTING STARTED](#)   [MORE RESOURCES](#)   [LESSONS](#)

**Time Requirements:**

- Actual trip to the wetlands: (example itinerary; you can adjust as you see fit):
  - **1.5 hours (30 minutes** - sack lunch & recess, **40 minutes** - wetlands visit, **20 minutes** - walking there & back again)
- Additional time will depend on how much you want to prep the students for the visit, as well as follow-up afterwards



*Source: This was a clip from the website the author created to allow teachers at Treeside to easily access training / material for school-wide field trip at their own pace (Wright, 2019).*

#### **Standard IV: Knowledge of Students and Adults**

The next standard the NBPTS created states that “Accomplished principals ensure that each student and adult in the learning community is known and valued” (“Accomplished Principal Standards”, p. 39, 2010). This is one principle that the author takes very seriously. He believes that as an administrator, we all have a special responsibility to know and care about all people under our stewardship. That must be clear, because, as one of his teachers used to say, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Director Johnson



and Assistant Director Hepworth illustrate these characteristics on a daily basis as they go about their duties at Treeside. Over the summer, the author learned that Dr. Johnson had created his own Canvas course to support and train his teachers, thus proving that “individuals [at Treeside] are supported socially, emotionally, and intellectually, in their development, learning, and achievement” (p. 39, 2010). One needs only to follow either of these leaders around each day at Treeside to see how they live these values.

### **Standard V: Culture**

Mr. Wright’s short time at Treeside this past semester also showed him that developing a productive culture at a school can go a long way in staff and student loyalty and achievement. He has witnessed a similar phenomenon at Merit Academy, where he has striven to lead and serve others through a principle of servant leadership. By serving those around us, and being willing to step up and do most anything required, and leading by example, others will also follow. The author admits that he has seen many leaders in his life exemplify this principle of “servant leadership”, but he himself only became fully aware of it after reading Jim Knight’s book “Unmistakable Impact”, where he discusses this value at length (2011).

This model of servant leadership is another principle that Mr. Wright has witnessed being expressed at Treeside. The leaders there are willing to do or say whatever may be needed. There is no reluctance, except perhaps to best consider how to resolve whatever the issue may be. Then, they will take action. Of course, not all problems are solved within a day or even a week, but their dedication to serve those they are responsible for is both commendable and noteworthy, and it is no surprise that they are widely appreciated by most everyone at their school. Truly they are building “authentic, productive relationships that foster a collaborative spirit” (“Accomplished Principal Standards”, p. 45, 2010).

**Standard VI: Strategic Management**

The NBPTS further states that accomplished principals “lead the design, development, and implementation of strategic management systems...in support of a high-performing organization focused on effective teaching and learning” (“Accomplished Principal Standards, p. 51, 2010). With the recent litigation occurring between Treeside and its landlord, the author must be careful in what he shares regarding that situation. Suffice to say however that the bankruptcy filing was in response to a student safety concern that the administrators had and that the landlord refused to address. Certainly such an action does not make for good public relations, yet Mr. Wright believes, as do Treeside’s leaders, that it was a necessary recourse to take in dealing with an aggressive landlord who had ignored student and staff safety in lieu of financial profits.

Leading a school through such a crisis is no easy task, and yet that is exactly what Dr. Johnson and Mr. Hepworth are doing. They are fighting tooth and nail to preserve their school, and the principles that they and their staff espouse, to keep that dream and vision alive. As reported by the Salt Lake Tribune, Dr. Johnson echoed the sentiments of all those at Treeside when he said: “This school and what it stands for will be here for a long time” (Tanner, par. 6, 2019). Under his able leadership, Mr. Wright believes and hopes that this will be proven true.

**Standard VII: Advocacy**

The actions that Treeside’s leadership has taken as mentioned above also reiterate the next standard the NBPTS has, that school leaders: “seek, inform, and mobilize influential educational, political, and community leaders to advocate for all students and adults in the learning community” (“Accomplished Principal Standards”, p. 57, 2010). Another way this is exemplified is through Treeside’s Parent University, an effort spearheaded by Dr. Johnson to improve community outreach by connecting parents, families and community resources together.

The author also assisted in this effort by getting local community centers, such as the Provo Library and a nearby community health organization, to come and share the good things they do and resources they offer to the citizens of the local community, thus strengthening school and community bonds, and helping school families get easier access to community resources of knowledge and healthy living. Despite the fact that Treeside is only a few years old, the connections they have already forged with the school prove it is well guided and led.

### **Standard VIII: Ethics**

The penultimate standard expressed by the NBPTS' Accomplished Principal Standards suggests that the best leaders demonstrate a "high degree of personal and professional ethics exemplified by integrity, justice, and equity" (p. 61, 2010). All that Mr. Wright has been witness to has confirmed that those who lead Treeside, principally Dr. Johnson and Mr. Hepworth, live and practice the highest of ethics. Their comportment and manner in this regard are obvious to all, and if one were to ask their staff or students about their ethics, Mr. Wright is confident that they would agree with his assessment. Their example has given the author a firm foundation upon which he is basing his own leadership responsibilities, small though they currently be. He is grateful for the exemplary modeling that the leaders at Treeside have been, and he plans to carry on their legacy in his own way wherever he may find himself, whether continuing at Merit Academy, or elsewhere in another role. He sincerely appreciates the leadership that they and others he has met in the course of his studies in the M.Ed. program at SUU have demonstrated.

### **Standard IX: Reflection and Growth**

As mentioned before, Mr. Wright has noted that one of the defining characteristics of a leader, especially those that engender the fiercest loyalty, is one of humble servitude to those they lead. Treeside and its leaders are good examples of this, and also strive to "build on their

strengths and identify areas for personal and professional growth” (“Accomplished Principal Standards”, p. 65, 2010). This has been made evident to the author through various conversations with both leaders at Treeside, who have been magnanimous in their attitude towards him and his perspectives, and been open to critique and commentary from him and others. By being willing to “adapt their paradigm and practice” (2010), they illustrate a desire for lifelong learning, and demonstrate this valuable principle to all whom they lead and work with. This is yet another way that they have impressed upon Mr. Wright the necessity to be modest in his own leadership and service towards others.

### **Why This is Important for PreK-12 Students**

While some may believe that charter schools are unimportant, given the fact that they serve a small fraction of American students, consider the following: The Center for Education Reform reports that, as of May 2019, there are over 7,000 charter schools serving over 3.2 million students across the United States (“Choice & Charter School Facts”, 2019). Additionally, they often make due with less, funded on average at 64% of their regular public school district counterparts. For instance, “On average, charter schools are funded at \$7,131 per pupil compared to \$11,184 per pupil at conventional district public schools” (2019).

As has been discussed however, this disparity may be warranted, given the fact that so many charter schools are often in the news for abuse, misuse or embezzlement of such funds. Such funding, as of 2017, had reached over \$40 billion a year across the country (“The Center for Popular Democracy”, 2017). This is a fraction of total public education spending to be sure, (California alone received \$97.2 billion in public funds for public education for the 2018-2019 school year) yet \$40 billion is no small amount of money (Murphy & Paluch, 2018). While there are certainly examples of struggling charter schools, even in Utah, such as St. George Academy

(Bancroft, 2019), and certainly Treeside has had its ups and downs, the author is of the opinion that charter schools are still a valuable alternative for parents and families looking for something different for their students, notwithstanding disreputable examples, such as APA (Jones & Pflaum, 2018). The fact that many of them are successful with a fraction of the funding of regular public schools is also telling. As the Utah State Board of Education states regarding these schools, charter schools offer parents and students "additional choices about where students attend school...[and also] allow educators freedom to try new strategies to inspire students and to experiment with innovative ways of educating students" ("Charter Schools". 2019).

Merit Academy, the school where Mr. Wright himself teaches, is a prime example of an alternative place where a student can come and thrive. Despite the fact that, like Treeside, it has struggled in recent years to maintain a robust extracurricular program (after funding from the local Boys and Girls Club disappeared a few years ago, so did many of the extracurricular clubs, much to the disappointment of many students), it is on the rebound, with a tech club, several different gaming clubs, and a speech and debate club, all led by teachers and generously donated out of their own time. There is no extra funding to support most of these clubs, yet the comradery and closeness that exists at Merit has allowed such to continue to exist, and the author is happy to say that he helps run two of these programs himself.

Additionally, his own sister Emilie Wright is a prime example of the opportunities that charter schools can offer to marginalized students. About 5 years ago, she moved to Utah, and began attending the local high school. She was immediately ostracized and ignored by her peers, despite having cousins and others she knew attending there, and depression quickly ensued. A friend at her church noticed she was struggling, and invited her to attend Merit. It is a smaller school, and most everyone there gets along, he told her. She decided to give it a try. Within a few

years, she was a lead in their premiere theatre program, a starter on the soccer team, and she even ended up graduating as class president (see Figure 6). Her success at Merit even convinced her brother, the author, to see what made Merit special; he has been teaching there since.

Certainly there is a need for more oversight at charter schools, as the facts previously mentioned illustrate. Millions have been wasted and outright stolen from American taxpayers, and this must not be tolerated. The Center for Popular Democracy has a few suggestions, which Mr. Wright agrees are some good starting points. These include more transparency and accountability for charter school managers and operators, as well as surprise audits that will verify that money is where it should be, and is being utilized in ethical and legal ways (2017). However, such measures ought to be equally assessed to traditional public schools as well, and charters ought to be allowed to continue, as they can be highly successful, as with Emilie. There are many other such success stories as well, and without charter schools, they might not exist.

*Figure 6.* Images of a Charter School Student's Successes



*Source: Here we see Emilie Wright, sister of the author, who was very successful at Merit Academy. She ended up being a great success on the soccer field, the classroom and the stage (“Merit Academy Yearbook”, 2017)*

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, there remains much controversy regarding public charter schools. It is an unfortunate fact that these schools have previously been utilized by unscrupulous characters to outright rob both taxpayers and America's schoolchildren of a free and appropriate education. However, despite some horror stories, the majority of the 7,000-plus charter schools across America, and the staff and administrators who work there, are striving nobly to teach, educate, support and uplift millions of American students. There are certainly bad apples in the bunch, but throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater because of that seems a bit of an overreaction.

The author has seen firsthand this worthwhile effort at multiple charter schools, both at Merit Academy, and most recently Treeside. The original purpose of this paper, to investigate the impact of extracurricular activities on students, especially in charter schools, was unfortunately never realized. Thus, this topic remains something that merits more research. No school is perfect, but those leading Treeside are making a valiant effort to push their school and students to their greatest potential. Surely, with such exceptional leadership and people leading the way, Dr. Johnson's prediction that Treeside "and what it stands for will be here for a long time" (Tanner, par. 6, 2019) will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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Appendix A



**Minor Assent for Research Participation**

<b>Study title</b>	Extracurricular Activity's Impact on Student Motivation & Achievement
<b>Researcher[s]</b>	Joseph Wright, SUU Graduate Student, in conjunction with <b>Treeside Charter School</b>

We're inviting you to be in a research study. A research study is a way to learn new things. We are trying to learn more about how being involved in an after-school club may affect your motivation and achievement in regular education classes.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to simply answer a survey before the after school program starts, and then complete another similar survey after you have been involved in the program after roughly a month. You will be asked some basic questions about how you feel and / or think, and asked to give those a score, from 1 to 5 (i.e. 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

A risk is something bad that could happen to you. Being in this study does not pose any foreseeable risks.

A benefit is something good that happens. Participating in this study will allow you to reflect on yourself as a student, and your motivations and achievement / effort in school. Thinking about yourself and your feelings is a good thing, because it helps you consider who you are, why you do what you do, and allows you to think about how you might be better going forward.

This study will also allow us to better understand what effect participating in our after school program has on our students. We want to make sure that it is a good experience for everyone involved.

Know that you don't have to be in this study. It is up to you. No one will be mad or disappointed if you do not, no matter what you decide. If you say yes now, but change your mind later, that's ok too. Just let us know.

When we are finished with this study, we will write a report about what we learned. This report won't have your name in it, or that you were in the study, but if you would like to see the report, we would be happy to share it with you

**Signatures**

If you decide you want to be in this study, write your name on the line below.

---

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---



**Adult Permission for Research Participation**

<b>Study title</b>	Extracurricular Activity's Impact on Student Motivation & Achievement
<b>Researcher</b>	Joseph Wright, SUU Graduate Student, in conjunction with Treeside Charter School

We're inviting you and your student(s) to participate in a research study. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to let your yourself and / or your student(s) participate now, you can always change your mind later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

We are attempting to show a correlation between involvement in extracurricular activities and increased student motivation and achievement. Multiple studies have shown that such involvement has positive correlations with students and their attitudes and academic effort, and this study seeks to verify those result, specifically here at Treeside Charter School.

**What will I and / or my student do?**

Your student(s), as part of the after school program, will be participating in one of our upcoming after school clubs. The first day of the club, we will be letting them know about this study, and sending them home with this consent form, as well as their own. The second time they attend the club, the survey will be administered, and they will be invited to participate if they wish and have the proper consent.

After participating in the club for the next month or so, another survey will be administered. Students that previously participated will again be asked if they wish to fill out the final survey, which they are **not** required to do if they do not want to. You or they may withdraw from the survey at any time you choose. Questions will be simple and straightforward, and based on a scale of 1-5 (i.e. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). They will ask about feelings regarding their efforts in school, their motivation, etc. An example:

**Even when school is tough, I enjoy the challenge:**

- **1 = Strongly Disagree**
- **2 = Disagree**
- **3 = Neutral**
- **4 = Agree**
- **5 = Strongly Agree**

These surveys have only about ~15 questions, and should only take about 2 minutes to complete each time. Thank you in advance for being willing to participate in this study and help further our knowledge regarding student motivation and achievement!

**Risks**

Possible risks	How we're minimizing these risks
Breach of confidentiality (you or your student's data being seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All identifying information will be removed and replaced with a study ID.</li> <li>• We'll store all electronic data on a password-protected, encrypted computer.</li> <li>• We'll store any / all paper data in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office.</li> </ul>



**Adult Permission for Research Participation**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We'll keep you and / or your student's identifying information separate from the research data, but we'll be able to link it to them by using a study ID. We will destroy this link after we finish collecting and analyzing the data.</li> </ul>
Online data being hacked or intercepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a risk everyone experiences any time they provide information online. We're using a secure system to collect this data, but we can't completely eliminate this risk.</li> </ul>

There may be risks we don't know about yet. Throughout the study, we'll tell you if we learn anything that might affect your decision to let your student participate.

**Other Study Information**

<b>Possible benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participating in this study will allow you to reflect on your student and / or yourself as a student, and your student's / your motivations and achievement / effort in school. Thinking about yourself and your feelings is a good thing, because it helps you consider who you are, why you do what you do, and allows you to think about how you might be better going forward.</li> <li>This study will also allow us to better understand what effect participating in our after school program has on our students. We want to make sure that it is a good experience for everyone involved. It will also help verify that previous research data is correct, and perhaps help clarify how impactful such connections are.</li> </ul>
<b>Estimated number of participants</b>	All students, parents, and teachers who teach 3 or more students involved in the program will be invited to participate. No one will be compelled to do so.
<b>How long will it take?</b>	It will take about 5 minutes time; less time than it will take you to read this permission form (so no sweat!)
<b>Costs</b>	Participation in this survey is free of charge & will not cost anything
<b>Future research</b>	De-identified (all identifying information removed) data may be shared with other researchers, in the spirit of knowledge. Any such data will not have any identifiers for any specific teachers, students, or parents.
<b>Recordings / Photographs</b>	<p>We may record / photograph your student. The recordings / photographs will be used strictly to help give context for the study. No one will be identified in said recordings / photographs.</p> <p>The recording / photography is optional. <b>Please</b> let us know if you do not want your student photographed, &amp; we will honor that request.</p>

**Confidentiality and Data Security**

We'll collect the following identifying information for the research: email and grade of the students involved. This information is necessary so that we can compile all of your and / or your student's data, and compare students by age when we analyze the data].



**Adult Permission for Research Participation**

<b>Where will data be stored?</b>	<i>Digital data will be securely stored on the cloud with a password protection security.</i>
<b>How long will it be kept?</b>	<i>Beyond the information published as part of the study results, the remainder of the data will be securely disposed of by the end of 2019, when this paper is published.</i>

<b>Who can see my data?</b>	<b>Why?</b>	<b>Type of data</b>
The researchers	To analyze the data and conduct the study	<i>Identifiable data (with a grade level and an email) will be stored until analysis is complete, and then properly disposed of by the end of December 2019</i>
Anyone (public)	If we share our findings in publications or presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Aggregate (grouped) data</i></li> <li>• <i>De-identified (no names, birthdate, address, etc.)</i></li> <li>• <i>If we quote you, your student, etc., we'll use a pseudonym (fake name)</i></li> </ul>

**Contact information:**

<b>For questions about the research</b>	Joseph Wright, Graduate Student / Educational Researcher	801-850-3305 / <a href="mailto:joseph.wright@meritacademy.org">joseph.wright@meritacademy.org</a>
<b>For complaints or problems</b>	Dr. Benjamin Johnson, Director	385-309-1668 / <a href="mailto:bjohnson@treesidecharter.org">bjohnson@treesidecharter.org</a>
	Dr. Shane Farnsworth, Professor	801-610-8540 / <a href="mailto:sfarnsworth@alpinedistrict.org">sfarnsworth@alpinedistrict.org</a>

**Signatures**

If you have had all your questions answered and give permission for you and / or your student(s) to participate in this study, sign on the lines below. Remember, your participation is completely voluntary, and you're free to remove yourself and / or your child from the study at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Student\* (print) / \*Teachers, please describe grade taught

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent or Guardian or Teacher (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Guardian or Teacher

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents, check this box if you **do not** want your student's picture taken or used for this study

=====  
 Parents, check this box to indicate that you are **also willing** to participate as part of the study



## Appendix B

## Treeside Student Motivation / Achievement Survey (Student Version)

\* Required

1. Email address \*

---

In order to see the impact that our After School Program has on Student Motivation and / or Achievement, we are conducting this anonymous survey. Thank you for your participation! This anonymous data will allow us to have a better idea of where we are and how we can improve (the email will only be used to compare the pretest and post-test data).

---

Most of the following questions are based on a 1-5 scale, like so:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please read each question carefully, and select the number that most closely fits your opinion. We appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. It should take about 2 minutes to complete.

---

### Student Motivation

The following questions address your motivation!

2. I enjoy coming to school every day \*

*Mark only one oval.*

1      2      3      4      5

---

Strongly Disagree                        Strongly Agree

**3. I think that school is fun! \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**4. I know that I can do hard things \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**5. School is an enjoyable experience for me \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**6. Even when school is tough, I enjoy the challenge \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**7. I enjoy the interactions I experience at school \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**8. Coming to school is worth my time \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**9. I like to push myself to be better \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**Student Achievement**



## One Last Bit...

### You've almost made it! Just a few more quick questions!

17. Pick your grade level below: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

2nd

3rd

4th

5th

6th

## Treeside Student Motivation / Achievement Survey (Parental / Teacher Version)

\* Required

1. Email address \*

---

In order to see the impact that our After School Program has on Student Motivation and / or Achievement, we are conducting this anonymous survey. Thank you for your participation! This anonymous data will allow us to have a better idea of where we are and how we can improve (the email will only be used to compare the pretest and post-test data).

---

Most of the following questions are based on a 1-5 scale, like so:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please read each question carefully, and select the number that most closely fits your opinion. We appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. It should take about 2 minutes to complete.

---

### Student Motivation

The following questions address your motivation!

2. My student enjoys going to school every day \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

---

**3. My student thinks that school is fun! \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**4. My student knows that they can do hard things \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**5. School is an enjoyable experience for my student \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**6. Even when school is tough, my student enjoys the challenge \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**7. My student enjoys the interactions they experience at school \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**8. Coming to school is worth my student's time \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**9. My student likes to push him / herself to be better \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**Student Achievement**



## One Last Bit...

### You've almost made it! Just a few more quick questions!

17. Pick your student's grade level below: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

2nd

3rd


4th

5th

6th

Send me a copy of my responses.

---

Powered by  
 Google Forms