

CHARTER LEADERSHIP

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Most charter schools are run by educators who took their jobs because they wanted to achieve excellence or gain more freedom than traditional public schools offered, according to a recent survey.

In a poll of charter school leaders taken by the Washington-based nonprofit consulting group StandardsWork, 48 percent of respondents said they entered the charter school field because they wanted to “have an opportunity to achieve excellence,” while 22 percent said they wanted to “escape the constraints” of the traditional public school system.

“The picture emerges of a professional educator hungry for the opportunity to do well in his job and attracted to the possibility to combining entrepreneurial and education interests in an environment freed from bureaucracy,” Leslye Arsht, the president of StandardsWork, said in a prepared statement.

Surveys were sent to 1,674 charter school leaders last December; 391 responded.

Almost 80 percent of the respondents said they had worked in the education field just prior to taking a position in a charter school. Thirty percent were former teachers, 10 percent were private school principals, 17 percent were public school principals, and 22 percent were school administrators. The rest of the respondents came from other professions.

“I think a lot of people believe charter schools are being started either by disgruntled parents or profit-seeking businessmen and women,” Ms. Arsht said. “The results suggest, instead, that they are serious educators looking for improved learning environments who are willing to take a leadership role in changing the status quo.”

StandardsWork also found that 48 percent of the administrators who responded held master’s degrees, 55 percent said their undergraduate study was related to education, and 78 percent said their graduate study was in education.

In addition, the poll found that the majority of charter school leaders—58 percent—are men.

“The gender finding was interesting given that the education industry overall is so much more dominated by women,” said StandardsWork Project Director Barbara R. Davidson.

According to the Virginia-based National Association for Elementary School Principals, however, men also account for 58 percent of all regular elementary school principals.