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Parent and Administrator Perspectives Regarding Transportation Availability and Student Enrollment at Charter Schools

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College of Education

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Amy Summers

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Walden University

2021

Abstract

Parent and Administrator Perspectives Regarding Transportation Availability and Student

Enrollment at Charter Schools

by

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BS, Potsdam College, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

The demand for charter schools has increased during last two decades. Scholarly literature lacked deeper understanding of the perspectives of administrators and parents on transportation availability with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation is perceived to affect parental capability or willingness to enroll children in charter schools. This basic qualitative study, with the theory of school choice as the framework, used interviews with 8 parents of students enrolled in charter schools and traditional public schools and 4 administrators of charter schools. Two research questions focused on administrator and parent perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access to charter schools. Data were analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis aligned with key constructs of the theory of school choice. Key findings from parents indicated that families needed transportation to be able to have their children attend charter schools and that parents perceived charter schools having less diversity when compared to neighborhood schools. Further key findings, from the administrator perspective, included a need for consistent transportation to allow equity in access to charter schools and that intentional administrative decision-making must be present in order to extend charter schools access to more families. Recommendations included administrators using creative busing options to reach more families, administrators listening to families to understand needs, and administrators reaching out to diverse populations to help them navigate attendance at charter schools and hear their needs.

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Enrollment at Charter Schools

by

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to the staff, students, and families who have touched my life throughout the last 25 years of my teaching career and have helped me push myself to become a better educator. The road was not always easy or clear but the motivation from all of you was real.

Acknowledgments

This original journey began 20 years ago and upon the birth of my sweet little girl I decided to just not write the last two chapters of my dissertation and spend my time with her. However, to pursue some goals that I had I started the journey over at the very beginning. The first person that I would like to acknowledge is Dr. Monique Lynch for pushing me to do this and starting the journey over. The people that deserve the most acknowledgement are my husband, Bob, and my daughter, Bailey. They pushed me and dealt with me throughout this journey, holding things together when I just had to sit and write. Bailey, I know it was tough when dad was gone and I was sitting and working but you understood, supported me, and kept yourself busy. I know you value what I have done and will always reach to your fullest potential. I would like to thank my parents for instilling in me the true value of pushing myself and valuing education. Additionally, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Don Jones, who offered great conversation to help get me focused and pushed me to get this written in the timeline I had set for myself. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Sally Everts, my methodologist, who offered feedback and insight when I needed a second perspective.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The following basic qualitative study helped provide a better understanding of parent and administrator perspectives regarding transportation availability and equity in student enrollment at charter schools. A qualitative study uses methodological inquiry to understand phenomena and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study was necessary because as school enrollment at charter schools is on the rise, fewer students living in poverty and fewer students with diverse backgrounds are enrolling in charter schools and more information was needed as to how transportation affects enrollment at charter schools (Dustan & Ngo, 2018; Gristy & Johnson, 2018). Possible social implications of this study for social change include the opportunity for school administrators to look explicitly at how transportation or lack of transportation to charter schools is affecting school enrollment and the ability of families at all socioeconomic levels to enroll in charter schools. The results of this study may potentially allow administrators to adjust their policies to best serve a diverse population of families. In this chapter, I provide a background of charter schools and current trends in transportation, as well as the gaps in both practice and knowledge regarding transportation and enrollment at charter schools. I present the problem statement and purpose of the study in addition to the conceptual framework for this study, the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968). I also define definitions, assumptions, and limitations and discuss potential significance of the study.

Background

Over the last 20 years, charter schools have become increasingly popular (Hill, 2016). Through charter schools, parents are allowed to choose the school that their children attend. Though the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002) was recently reauthorized with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015), much of the charter school movement was influenced by the reform of NCLB, through which more and more opportunities became available for parents to choose the schools in which they enrolled their children. The NCLB education reform increased the accountability that public schools and school districts had in assuring that all students received an equitable education and were working toward closing the achievement gap. This act required that all students in all states were performing at proficient levels by 2014 (NCLB, 2002). Ramifications of not meeting this progress resulted in school takeovers by the state or restructuring of schools. When schools had not met adequate yearly progress after 3 years, school districts had to provide parents with choices of alternative schools in which to educate their children, with many districts creating charter schools for this alternative. Parents then had the power to choose which school to send their children to and school districts responded with more charter school choices for families.

Charter schools, which began in the 1970s, have had their enrollment more than triple in the last 20 years (Berends, 2015). These schools, though funded by state governments, operate under a charter typically through a public school district or other nonprofit and have certain freedoms that other public schools in the system do not have (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2019). These freedoms allow the school

administration to explore new and alternative approaches to teaching and learning to best benefit their students, including decisions regarding transportation availability to the school. While these freedoms vary from state to state and charter school to charter school, they typically include the ability to implement unique instructional approaches and accountability measures outlined in their charters that are not present in other public schools in the system to attract families (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2019). Through the creation of a charter, each school is also given the ability to create their own criteria for admission procedures and concerning transportation availability.

Though attendance at charter schools is on the rise, Lareau and Goyette (2014) noted that 70% of children in the United States attend the school assigned to them by their school district. Lareau and Goyette explained that middle- and upper-class families tend to factor in the school of attendance when they are considering where they live. However, families who live in poverty often have fewer choices about where to live based upon their economic means, which often leads to segregation in schooling. Lower achieving students and students of lower socioeconomic status (SES) tend to not apply to charter schools as much as higher-achieving students or families of higher SES and increased availability of public transportation in big cities might change this (Dustan & Ngo, 2018).

More families are beginning to attend charter schools and nonneighborhood schools that involve a commute (Jochim et al., 2014). However, while most public schools provide transportation for families who do not live within walking distance of the school, typically charter schools do not provide transportation. According to Education

Commission of the States (2018) only 16 of the 50 states in the United States have laws where a district must provide transportation to a charter school, and most of those require the transportation only if it is a reasonable distance, and on a first come first served basis, or a fee is charged to families. According to Gristy and Johnson (2018), more research must be done to look at the effects of these commutes on families and school enrollment. Providing transportation is not mandatory at many charter schools, with many administrators choosing not to provide transportation, but this becomes a barrier to equity in access to charter schools (Jochim et al., 2014). Charter schools must more thoughtfully consider how transportation policies are influencing access and enrollment to be inclusive of all socio-economic groups (Dustan & Ngo, 2018; Jochim et al., 2014). Further research is needed regarding school administration and superintendent decisions to provide transportation to charter schools and why this is a barrier to attendance. This study identified potential transportation barriers to enrollment and equal access to charter schools from both the parent and administrator perspectives.

Problem Statement

Increased satisfaction with charter schools and parental satisfaction with options available are major contributors to enrollment in charter schools being on the rise (Berends, 2015). Erickson (2017) found that parents are choosing charter schools for their children because of the higher levels of academic achievement present in charter schools, programs offered, lower levels of free and reduced lunch populations, and the location of the schools. However, through separate research Burgess et al. (2014) and Crutchfield

(2015) both concluded that families of higher SES have greater access to these schools and have higher enrollment in charter schools than families with lower SES.

Hamlin (2018) researched reasons for increased access to charter schools by families of higher SES, finding that families in big cities who choose charter schools tend to have greater transportation availability, parental involvement in schooling, and more stable home lives than families who do not choose the school their children attend.

According to Wao et. al (2017), there are many obstacles for families concerning attendance at charter schools, but one of which is transportation, and more studies need to be conducted to discover the depth of these obstacles. Lack of transportation to charter schools is a barrier to equal access for families and further research is needed to discover potential transportation arrangements and the overall influence of transportation on school enrollment (Hamlin, 2018). The problem was that while the demand for charter schools has increased there was a lack of understanding of the perspectives of administrators and parents on transportation availability with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation was perceived to affect the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools in the Northwestern United States.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand administrators' and parents' perspectives on transportation with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are administrator perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

RQ2: What are parents' perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the theory of school choice, which provides support for opportunities for school choice in the current educational system (Betts & Loveless, 2005). This theory was founded on the idea that choice and competition in the education sector are important and vital to the success of schools and student learning (Friedman, 1968). Chubb and Moe (1990) noted that when schools are deregulated there is increased independence to differentiate the principles on which a school is founded, promoting choice and demand for enrollment. Parents will choose schools that best meet the needs of their children and family. All schools do not and will not be able to meet every child's needs; however, administrative decisions to provide transportation to a charter school may become an equity issue if it potentially limits the families who can enroll their children in a school (Blumenberg & Agrawal, 2014). Therefore, this study was grounded in key constructs of this theory: (a) deregulation through school choice allows administrative decisions to create structures to provide varying options for families, in this case, availability of transportation and (b) enrollment

and access to a school will be dependent upon parental satisfaction with a school's founding principles and the ability of these principles to meet a family's needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968). Key elements of connections to this framework will be discussed in Chapter 2 in more detail.

The purpose of this study was framed by the theory of school choice as information about administrative decisions to provide transportation to a school and a parent's decision to choose a school are key constructs of this theory. I developed research questions to gain deeper knowledge into the effects of transportation availability from both parent and administrative perspectives. Data analysis was grounded in the framework with open coding and thematic analysis around key constructs of the theory of school choice.

Nature of the Study

I conducted his research using a basic qualitative methodology, examining data gathered from interviews with parents of students, some of whose students were enrolled in charter schools and others who were enrolled in conventional neighborhood schools, and interviews with administrators at charter schools. I chose a basic qualitative study over other methods to be able to study the phenomena within the specific context of the school district study site. As mentioned by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), basic qualitative studies such as this study allow the researcher to construct knowledge about the reality of the phenomenon to better understand the participants' experiences.

Due to the limited availability of charter schools in the region, this study was strictly limited to studying the responses from four parents who have children enrolled in

charter schools, four parents who have children enrolled in conventional neighborhood schools, and interviews with four administrators from charter schools. I used snowball sampling for the parents being interviewed; I asked parents to refer another participant for the study. I asked parents who had children enrolled in a charter school to refer another parent who had a child enrolled in a charter school, and I asked the parents enrolled in conventional public schools to refer a parent who had children in a conventional public school. If a parent chose not to participate in the study, I sought additional names. I randomly chose the first administrator by entering all the names of administrators from charter schools and choosing one name. I asked each administrator to refer another administrator for the study. In the interviews, I asked parents and administrators questions regarding their perspectives specifically tied to transportation to charter schools, enrollment at charter schools, and equal access (see Appendix). I analyzed data using coding through content analysis and identification of themes.

A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study in that it allowed me to examine beliefs, feelings, and describe behaviors associated with a phenomenon (see Burkholder et al., 2016). With the focus of the research questions being on parent and administrator perspectives with respect to transportation to charter schools, a qualitative approach allowed me to specifically examine the experiences and perspectives of the parents and administrators in the study. The purpose statement and the problem statement were also focused on gaining an understanding of the parent and administrator perspectives around transportation issues, and the qualitative approach provided for this understanding. A qualitative analysis of parent and administrator perspectives regarding

transportation allowed me to discover and examine trends in their perspectives with respect to enrollment and equal access to charter schools.

Definitions

For this study, the following definitions applied.

Administrator. A school principal, vice-principal, or school district leader, such as the superintendent or assistant superintendent who is responsible for running the school affairs (Merriam-Webster, 2019) .

Charter schools. Schools funded through taxes but that are free of standard educational regulations (National Charter School Resource Center, 2019). The charter for each of these schools outlines its goals and accountability standards.

Socioeconomic status. The economic standing of families based upon income as measured by free or reduced income eligibility guidelines (APA Taskforce on Socioeconomic Status, 2007; Child Nutrition Programs, 2018).

School choice. According to Ed Choice (2019), *school choice* allows students to attend either a public or private school that is not their public home school. Parents have a greater input into the schools their children attend through the school choice movement.

Assumptions

There were three assumptions of this study with respect to participants. The first was that the parents and school administrators responded truthfully. Honesty in reporting was important to the validity of the study. The second assumption was that participants were able to thoroughly express their views and responses to the interview questions. These assumptions were important because the accuracy of the data was dependent upon

honest and thorough answers from the participants. This honesty in reporting was important for the validity of the study. The final assumption was that the participants chosen had enough similar experiences to produce similarities related to the phenomenon.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope and delimitations of this study were defined to help clarify the design of the study. First, I used the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968) as the conceptual framework for this study. The study was focused on potential transportation barriers to enrollment and equal access to charter schools from both the parent and administrator perspectives. I chose this focus in order to gain insights to see if a lack of transportation provided by a school affects enrollment and equity of access.

Because the number of charter schools in the region where this study was conducted was limited, I used a small sample size. I interviewed four parents who had children enrolled in charter schools and four parents who had children enrolled in neighborhood schools, as well as four charter school administrators. The study was intentionally limited to charter schools and not to other schools of choice.

I chose the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968) as the conceptual framework for this study because this theory centers on choices of parents in selecting in which schools to enroll their children along with the choices by administrators to enact school policies to draw in families and encourage competition among schools. However, the research is transferable to charter schools across the United States given similar charters and rules governing the schools.

Limitations

This study had several potential limitations. The study was limited to interviewing parents and administrators from one school district. Because of the demographics and uniqueness of the community, the results of this study may not easily be generalized to other charter schools. Without conducting additional case studies in similar settings, this research may not be generalizable. Therefore, this study may be limited to analytical induction only.

Another limitation of this study was the number of participants in the study. Because of the limited number of charter schools in the area where the study took place, a total of 12 participants were interviewed, four parents from charter schools, four parents from neighborhood schools, and four charter school administrators. Saturation in the data was reached because the information learned after several interviews was not new and there were no new themes present. However, if the experiences of those involved had not been similar then there was potential that saturation in the data could not have been reached and more participants would have been needed.

Two additional limitations existed regarding the participants. First, parents may not have been fully open in discussing their thoughts regarding the schools in the district because I was a teacher in the district. Additionally, parent input may have varied greatly depending on their familiarity with charter schools, whether their child was enrolled or not enrolled in a charter school, or by parent reasons for enrolling their children in a charter school; thus, there may have been many different responses with fewer trends. A final possible limitation in this study was potential research bias. Because I was a teacher

in the district at the time of the study and having taught previously at a charter school, I could have brought potential bias to this study.

I took reasonable measures to minimize the limitations of the study including ensuring the confidentiality of the respondents, as I was a teacher in the school district. When interviewing parents, I ensured that all interviewees understood what a charter school was, by reading a blanket statement to all interviewees. Interviews were not conducted with administrators or parents that I had previously worked with in a school setting. When interviewing, I ensured the questions were on the interview question list or the questions asked resulted from statements provided by participants.

Significance

With a gap in practice with respect to transportation to charter schools to allow for greater diversity of families who attend charter schools, many could benefit from this research including administrators in charter schools, school leaders in districts that have charter schools, or administrators who are in the formative stages of implementing a charter school. Additionally, the information gained from this research could help administrators at charter schools to be more aware of those affected by transportation or lack of transportation to charter schools, to gain more insight into how transportation affects families' potential enrollment, and to use this information to make administrative decisions regarding availability of transportation to school. This information could be used by administrators to best serve their families, minimize barriers for families to attend charter schools, allow greater equity and access for all families, and improve

schools. Providing increased equity and access is a tool for social change (Johnson, 2011).

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an introduction to this qualitative case study about parent and administrator perspectives around enrollment, transportation, and equal access. I discussed information about charter schools and current trends in transportation to show the gap in practice with transportation and enrollment at charter schools. I identified the problem as a identified as a lack of understanding of the perspectives of administrators and parents on transportation availability with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation is perceived to affect the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools in the Northwestern United States. The purpose of this study was to understand administrators' and parents' perspectives on transportation with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools. The goal of this study was to provide school administrators with information about transportation availability to best help meet the needs of families and provide equity in access to charter schools.

Chapter 2 contains an extensive literature review on charter schools, administrator and parent decision making, and trends in transportation. The chapter also provides conceptual foundations of the theory of school choice and how this theory was tied to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While the demand for charter schools has increased, there is a lack of understanding of the perspectives of administrators and parents on transportation availability with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation is perceived to affect the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools in the Northwestern United States. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand administrators' and parents' perspectives on transportation with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools. Parents enroll their children in charter schools or leave their children enrolled in neighborhood schools for varying reasons. Research by Burgess et al. (2014), Brown and Makris (2018), and Davis (2014) indicated transportation and equity issues with school enrollment. Burgess et al. found that students with lower SES tend to attend neighborhood schools over schools of choice when compared to families of higher SES. Similarly, Davis studied the correlation between enrollment and SES equity in schools of choice versus traditional public schools finding that fewer students with lower SES attend schools of choice compared to students with higher SES. Brown and Makris attributed much of this inequity to the lack of availability of transportation.

This chapter will detail the literature search strategy used to provide an exhaustive search on transportation and equity in schools of choice. Next, I connect research surrounding key constructs of the conceptual framework, the theory of school choice, and to how school choice promotes positive competition, parent choice to attend charter

schools, and transportation decision making. Finally, this chapter closes with a literature review of studies related to transportation and equity in enrollment at charter schools, charter school enrollment patterns, and transportation availability to charter schools and ties to enrollment. I tie background information on how families choose schools, how transportation affects their decisions, and administrative decision making around transportation to the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968).

Literature Search Strategy

The search for current peer-reviewed literature relevant to this study began with searches in EBSCO Host, Academic Search Complete, and ERIC Database. I conducted keyword searches to identify studies tied to charter school enrollment and to general transportation studies at public and private schools. Keywords I used in the searches included: *charter school transportation, transportation to schools of choice, charter school enrollment, school transportation, community schools and equity, charter schools and equity, principals and charter schools, principals and charter schools and equity, and principals and transportation*. From there, I conducted additional searches using variations in terms from articles informed by the initial search. This included *educational equalization, equal access in charter schools, and obstacles to school choice*. I sought out additional sources by browsing articles in the reference lists of all articles that I found through the initial search. Final database searches revealed many of the same sources that had been previously discovered and presented few additional resources, showing an exhaustive review of the current literature.

I found many resources pertaining to charter school enrollment and equity with school choice. Fewer resources were available around transportation and charter schools so the search was extended to include school transportation as a whole. Research was very limited regarding administrative decision-making regarding equity, transportation, and school enrollment. I found no sources specifically about administrative decisions to provide transportation to charter schools. I then extended the search to include administrator leadership practices and roles in charter school enrollment. This limitation revealed in the search showed a gap in practice surrounding transportation to allow for equity in enrollment at charter schools.

Conceptual Framework

The theory of school choice provides much of the framework and support for opportunities for school choice (Neves, 2018). While some of the foundations of the theory of school choice lie in economics, the theory itself was founded on the idea that choice and competition in the education sector are important and vital to the success of schools and student learning. According to Arveseth (2014), the way individual schools are run and student performance at different schools pushes other schools to improve. Schools draw families because of the programs that are offered and the student performance that is present. Schools drawing families to them create competition that will improve the overall education system (Arveseth, 2014).

Origins of School Choice Theory

Friedman (1968) first introduced the theory of school choice recognizing that choice and competition are vital to the success of schools. Chubb and Moe (1990) later

expanded on this theory stating that by offering schools of choice and allowing parents to be involved in choosing the schools their children attend, schools will become better. The improvement in schools is present because schools are offering a service and parents are choosing the service that best meets the needs of their children and their family (Arveseth, 2014).

According to Cookson (1995), growing discontent in the public-school system led to a movement for the privatization of schooling in the 1980s and 1990s, which allowed school choice to become more popular. Research that supports the theory of school choice claims that school choice has improved the quality of schooling opportunities and there is increased parental satisfaction when parents have the option to choose the schools their children attend (Colburn, 2012; DeAngelis, 2018). Research not in favor of school choice emphasizes that despite trends in research showing academic benefits of choice and competition, there is an inverse relationship between school choice and student well-being (Heller-Sahlgren, 2017).

Key Constructs of the Theory of School Choice

Many advocates of school choice and the theory of school choice believe that “families are ‘customers’ and schools are ‘service providers’ competing for market share by catering to diverse tastes and preferences while delivering high test scores” (Ferrero, 2004, p. 287). The concept of schools as service providers and families are the customers falls directly in line with the theory of school choice emphasizing: (a) deregulation, (b) competition, and (c.) parental demands (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968). By providing parents with choices about where to educate their children and what programs

are available to them, advocates believe schools are providing a more beneficial service to families because families are drawn to different qualities in schools (Neves, 2018). It is important to note that even though Arveseth (2014) and DeAngelis (2018) recognized that variety in schools is drawing more families, Neves noted that schools must do a better job of providing more competitive opportunities and better meet the needs of a more diverse number of families.

Application of this Theory in Similar Studies

The theory of school choice has been present in similar studies where researchers have sought to identify trends around proximity, SES, and family decision making in schools of choice (Alves et al., 2015; Butler et al., 2013; Davis, 2014). These studies researched the availability of school choice options and how parental ability to choose a school influences attendance at these schools. The results showed the need for careful planning when creating a school of choice. An example of this planning was evidenced by Alves et al. (2015) where the relationship between proximity to a school and SES was examined with respect to school choice. Alves et al. found that more low SES families tend to send their children to neighborhood schools compared to those families with high or middle SES. Additionally, Alves et al. noted that more families with middle and high SES tended to opt-out of a neighborhood school if it was identified as low SES. Instead, these families chose to have their children attend a school of choice. When compared to the rate at which students with low SES opted out of a neighborhood school, students with higher SES opted out of neighborhood schools more often (Alves et al., 2015).

Davis (2014) researched the economic status and racial diversity of students in both neighborhood schools and schools of choice. Davis found that schools of choice are less diverse both racially and socio-economically compared to the public schools where the study was conducted. The schools of choice that Davis studied had a lower enrollment of African Americans students. While the racial mix was similar in some schools, Davis found that the socioeconomic differences between students enrolled in schools of choice and students in neighborhood schools were significantly different. The findings of both Alves et al. (2015) and Davis (2014) are similar to school choice findings by Butler et al. (2013). All of these studies showed that offering charter schools and other schools of choice provides competitive opportunities to meet the needs of families. Certain types of families are more drawn to schools of choice based upon offerings available and their family situation.

Rationale for Choosing Theory of School Choice

I selected the theory of school choice as the framework for this study because the choices that administrators make when creating charter schools are an example of the foundations of Friedman's (1968) theory. The first construct of this theory, deregulation, is present when school choice administrators decide to provide varying options for families, in this case, availability of transportation. The second construct of this theory, competition, is present as access and choice to attend a school will be dependent upon parental satisfaction with a school's founding principles. The final construct, parental demands, is present when schools meet a family's needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968). Each of these constructs of the theory of school choice is closely related to the

major components of this study. First, parents make decisions to attend or not attend a charter school based upon family situations and the school offerings. Second, administrative decisions to include transportation to a charter school may affect enrollment at the school of choice. Finally, the presence of parental demand to attend a charter school can be based on the ability of the school to meet a family's needs.

Theory of School Choice and Tie to the Current Study

Administrative decisions to provide transportation to a school and a parent's decision to choose a school fall within the constructs of this theory. While advocates promote the benefits of choice in schools and believe the positive outcomes far outweigh the negative, Hill (2016) recognized that "choice does not cause any of those outcomes directly. Instead, choice sets in motion a chain of events that might or might not lead to a particular outcome" (p. 143). All schools are not the same; student success and the success of the school are highly reliant upon many factors, including the quality of the school and family needs. All schools do not and will not be able to meet every child's needs (Blumenberg & Agrawal, 2014). Therefore, careful planning and consideration need to be taken by parents before enrollment.

In addition to parental decisions, administrative decisions regarding transportation to a charter school may become an equity issue if it limits the families who can enroll their children in a school (Blumenberg & Agrawal, 2014). Deregulation through school choice allows administrative decisions to create structures that provide varying options for families, in this case, availability of transportation (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968). Enrollment and access to a school will be dependent upon parental satisfaction

with a school's founding principles and the ability of these principles to meet a family's needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968). The decisions of parents and administrators have strong ties to the theory of school choice.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

As more innovative and alternative schools and educational opportunities become available, more parents are seeking out what these schools have to offer (Hill, 2016). With the increasing enrollment in charter schools, which is discussed later in this chapter, it is important that parents understand the educational opportunities available to their children and make informed decisions about their children's schooling. At the same time, schools and school districts must examine the reasons that parents are exploring alternative schools and create options to draw families in and inclusive of families with diverse backgrounds.

Charter Schools

School choice reform dates back to 1954 as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) when the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools violated the 14th amendment of the United States Constitution. This decision allowed parents of children in racially segregated schools the opportunity to choose other schools in which to have their children receive an education. Soon following this legislation, magnet schools were formed to help promote open enrollment and desegregate schools. Over the next 40 years, the opportunities for school choice quickly grew to include the use of school vouchers, homeschooling laws, most recently charter schools, as well as NCLB legislation that has allowed for school choice in that it requires

schools that do not meet the proficiency level standards to allow their students to attend a different school of their choosing in the district or nearby area.

The concept of charter schools first became popular in the 1970s, but they were not named as such until they grew in popularity, and in 1991 Minnesota passed the first charter school law (US Department of Education, 2018). Since then, 42 other states have adopted charter school legislation, with nearly 6,900 charter schools operating in the United States servicing 2.8 million students (US Department of Education, 2018). These schools are founded with the idea that they would operate under a charter from the public school system, yet have freedoms that other public schools in the system would not have. These freedoms allow them to explore new and alternative approaches to teaching and learning to best benefit students. While these freedoms vary from state to state and charter school to charter school, they typically include the ability to implement unique instructional approaches and accountability measures that are outlined in their charters, something that is not present in other public schools in the system (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Through charters, each school is also given the ability to create its own criteria for admission procedures.

Charter schools, though typically part of the public-school system, differ in the way in which they receive funding. School districts or educational organizations must sponsor a charter school (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The sponsor receives educational funding from the state and distributes it directly to the charter school. Even though charter schools are sponsored by a school district, they operate independently

from all regulations of the public-school system, including the freedom to establish their own curriculum and assessment standards (DeAngelis, 2018).

Charter schools need to show accountability for elements expressed in the charters written at the school's founding; however, charter schools are not responsible for regulations imposed by federal, state, and local education agencies. Laws for charter schools vary from state to state and from school district to school district. Examples of these differences include exemption from some state testing mandates, the ability to create their own transportation rules and arrangements, mandatory parent volunteer hours for students to attend, and inability to service students with learning disabilities (Berends, 2015). Typically charter schools have a strong focus on educational attainment (Berends, 2015). Charter schools can choose whether or not to provide transportation for their students.

Though charter schools are founded under different circumstances, anyone can start a charter school as long as there is a vision present (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Parents, teachers, and school districts have all been known to independently form charter schools. Districts may form charter schools in an attempt to help a failing school or may choose to initiate a charter school to target a specific population of students that they feel need specialized learning. For students, charter schools offer an alternative to failing schools (Gonzalez, 2014).

Charter schools are often founded on the principle of alternative teaching and learning methods, incorporating principles of authentic learning tasks, cooperative learning, and small class sizes (Miron & Nelson, 2002). Typically charter schools

promote increased community and parental involvement, emphasizing the important role of the community in educating its students. Admission to charter schools is typically sought through open enrollment or a lottery (Shuls, 2018). In some areas, like Kansas, vouchers or tax credits are provided to attend charter schools in an attempt to improve underperforming schools (Davies, 2019).

Why Families Choose Charter Schools

Research is slowly building to find out why parents are choosing charter schools over the neighborhood schools designated by the public-school system (Bosetti, 2004; Hill, 2016; Meyer & Kucerova, 2017). Bosetti commented that choosing schools is a major decision-making process for families and often what influences parents to choose these schools is very complex. Top characteristics that families are looking for when choosing schools included diversity, academic rigor, child-centered practices, community involvement, the opportunity for parent involvement, teacher experience, proximity, and overall quality of the school (Hill, 2016; Meyer & Kucerova, 2017). The following paragraphs discuss more detailed research-based findings on why families are choosing these schools.

Academics

Parents use a mix of rationales for enrolling their children in schools of choice, including smaller class sizes, teaching styles, academic reputation, and shared values and beliefs (Bosetti, 2004). Each of these has a strong tie to the academic offerings that a charter school presents. With many parents looking at school test scores, quality of instruction, and the available curriculum to help in decision-making about enrolling their

child in a school of choice, it is important that schools provide a complete picture of the school to best help parents make an informed choice (Hardy, 2005; Yoon et al., 2018). Krings et al. (2018) had respondents note that the quality of teachers and instruction were two of the key qualities they looked for in a school. The smaller class sizes of charter schools compared to the larger class sizes in neighborhood schools have also led parents to choose charter schools (Hill, 2016).

Peer Groups

In addition to academic reasons for choosing charter schools, Yoon et al. (2018) concluded that some families choose schools to help influence their child's peer group. Families who choose charter schools based on peer groups are families living in communities where the SES of most of the other families in the neighborhood school is below the family's economic status (Yoon et al., 2018). Thus, more parents of higher SES are enrolling their children in alternative schools. Many of the families who choose charter schools are looking for a school where families that attend are in similar financial situations as their own, as to not stand out from the student population (Brown & Makris, 2018). Condliffe et al. (2015) studied low SES families in Baltimore who decided not to enroll their children in charter schools to keep them with their SES peer groups. Thus, a trend was shown that many families were choosing schools where SES enrollment was similar to their own (Condliffe et al., 2015).

Proximity

The proximity between the family residence and the school of choice was another key factor that parents noted when choosing a school (Hill, 2016; Meyer & Kucerova,

2017). Benson et al. (2015) studied middle-class families in London and Paris and found that many of them were choosing homes based upon charter school location. Higher SES families would often relocate to be able to attend a school of their choosing.

For low SES families, proximity to a school was also a key factor in families choosing a school, except with a different perspective. The student safety perspective was what kept parents from choosing certain charter schools (Condliffe et al., 2015). Condliffe et al., Hamlin (2018), and Wilson et al. (2010) all found trends around families feeling unsafe with the commute to a school of choice. All three studies noted high crime and unsafe conditions for their children who would have to walk to a school of choice. They carefully considered a school with close proximity when choosing the school for their children to attend. In most of the situations, families chose their neighborhood school over the unsafe charter school commute (Hamlin, 2018; Wilson et al., 2010).

Charter School Enrollment

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2018a), there were changes in charter school enrollment by ethnicity from 2000 to 2015. White enrollment in charter schools dropped 10% from 43% to 33%, African American enrollment dropped 6% from 33% to 27%, Hispanic enrollment rose 13% from 19% to 32%, and other minority enrollment stayed the same at 5% (NCES, 2018b). NCES (2018a) reported that 35% of charter schools are targeted as having students that are living in high poverty, which is defined by 75% or more of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. This is compared to 24% of public schools having 75% or more of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. While these statistics contradict Shuls (2018)

argument that there was an equity issue for low-income families in charter schools, the sheer number of public schools versus charter schools in the United States may be enough to skew the representation of the NCES data.

Diversity and Equity in Access at Charter Schools

The lack of student diversity present in charter schools is of some concern, as several studies have shown this lack of diversity in charter schools and other schools of choice (Hamlin, 2018; Roda, 2018; Saultz & Yaluma, 2017; Yoon et al., 2018). In a study of New York City Schools, Roda found that parents were choosing their neighborhood school instead of a charter school because they valued diversity present. This diversity was not present in the charter school options families had.

Krings et al. (2018) interviewed African American and Hispanic mothers living in Detroit regarding educational equity for their children. Several mothers noted that their children attended neighborhood schools where they were receiving poor academic instruction, teachers were inadequate, violence was high, and class sizes were unmanageable. However, these mothers noted that transportation to other schools, including charter schools, was an obstacle. The charter schools were some distance from the family home. Due to family circumstances, parents could not transport their children to the charter school (Krings et al., 2018). Several families mentioned that walking to school would be unsafe because the children would have to walk through violent and high crime neighborhoods to attend the charter school as no public transportation was available (Krings et al., 2018).

Similarly, Carlson and Cowen (2015) studied a voucher program for attendance at charter schools and other schools of choice in Milwaukee and found that more economically disadvantaged students initially took advantage of the vouchers than students from more economically advantaged neighborhoods. Carlson and Cowen's initial findings were that these families were in pursuit of schools with a higher quality education. However, longitudinally, the students from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds and African American students tended to withdraw from schools of choice noting family mobility, transportation availability, and neighborhood conditions as their reasons for withdrawing.

While Carlson and Cowen (2015) and Krings et al. (2018) focused their research on access to charter schools, Goldring and Hausman (1999) researched characteristics of families who were choosing alternative schools, specifically magnet schools. More Caucasian families and families not living in poverty tended to seek out alternative schooling opportunities for their children when compared to minority families and those living in poverty (Goldring & Hausman, 1999). Many families chose alternative magnet schools to get away from lower-performing community public schools, which coincides with Carlson and Cowen's (2015) findings. Transportation to school was an issue for 17% of the families, which kept them from choosing schools that they would have liked to have chosen (Goldring & Hausman, 1999). Families with concerns around transportation instead attended their neighborhood public school, which again, supports concerns for access to charter schools.

Diversity Present

With respect to racial diversity, Logan and Burdick-Will (2016) found greater racial segregation in charter schools, particularly for African-American and Native American families. Kotok et al. (2017) and Villavicencio (2016) supported this with their findings of lower numbers of African-American and Hispanic students attending charter schools. Heilig et al. (2016) had similar findings but also found that English Language Learners, Special Education students, and low SES students were underrepresented in charter schools. Villavicencio additionally noted the lower number of special education students represented in charter schools. According to Lee and McCandless (2016), in Colorado families with parents who did not have a college education were underrepresented in charter schools. Each of the above studies noted the considerably higher numbers of Caucasian families that attended charter schools (Heilig et al., 2016; Kotok et al., 2017; Lee & McCandless, 2016; Logan & Burdick-Will (2016).

Access to Charter Schools

In 2015-2016, 57% of charter schools were located within cities, while 25% of public schools were located in cities (NCES, 2018a). Of traditional public schools, 29% were located in a rural setting while only 11% of charter schools were in a rural setting (NCES, 2018a). According to Brown and Makris (2018), the more prestigious charter schools tend to be located just outside of cities. The intent of schools of choice is to provide options for families, options that are not tied to where families live and the school they are assigned to (CREDO, 2015). However, for many families, the location of the charter school often limits potential access (Scott & Marshall, 2019).

Transportation

The means of transportation to school varies by individuals and families and can include walking, biking, school bus, public transportation, or family transportation. With school choice options on the rise, more needs to be known about how families are transporting to schools of choice and how transportation affects parent decisions to choose schools (Gristy & Johnson, 2018). As more charter schools and other schools of choice become options for families, more research is needed on how transportation to these schools can be improved (Gristy & Johnson, 2018; Sener et al., 2019). Gristy and Johnson suggested that there is a gap in the research with little research on how enrollment in charter schools is changing and how transportation is affecting families and their attendance at charter schools.

The State of Transportation

In the United States, 44 states have laws that govern transportation to charter schools (Education Commission of the States, 2018). Seven states make no specification as to who must provide transportation to a charter school, 20 states do not specify who should transport but have clauses that transportation might be provided in certain situations or that charter schools must inform families of a transportation plan. Seventeen states have laws of varying degrees that provide for varying levels of cooperation between the school districts and the charter schools to provide transportation for charter school students.

According to Blagg et al. (2018), after researching in Denver, Washington, DC, New York City, Detroit, and New Orleans, transportation to schools looked very different

and looks very different in districts across the United States. While all of the school districts where the research was conducted provided some type of school bus transportation or public transport access for students in public schools that are not within walking distance to homes, only New York City provided school bus transportation to charter schools as well as public schools. Washington, DC and New Orleans provided some type of public transit options to charter schools, while Denver did not provide any form of transportation to charter schools. With 30% of families not owning a vehicle in these cities, students who ended up using public transit ended up commuting up to 35 minutes one way (Blagg et al., 2018).

Legal Cases Around Transportation

In at least two states, Wisconsin and Ohio, precedence over transportation has been set through legal cases. In 2005 in Wisconsin, Racine Charter School One took a case to the United States Court of Appeals, pleading the unconstitutionality of charter school laws that kept their students from being bused by the local school district and lost the case (Racine Charter School One vs. Racine Unified School District, 2005). The Court of Appeals found that Wisconsin law does not mandate transportation to charter schools and it would create an extreme and unnecessary cost to school districts if they were to begin transporting.

Ohio state laws mandate school districts to provide transportation for students attending charter schools (Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 3314.01(B)). These laws were taken to the court of appeals by a local school district and the law was upheld, noting that district transportation of students attending charter schools must be considered on a case-by-case

basis (*Akron City Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ. v. Parents of Students Attending Edge Acad. of Akron*, 2002). These cases set precedence in support of transportation to charter schools and for districts not providing transportation to charter schools (Education Commission of States, 2018). These laws differ from state to state and along with other transportation barriers affect families who choose to attend charter schools.

Transportation Barriers

Current research has found that many barriers exist to providing equity in access to charter schools and schools of choice (Hamlin, 2018; Roda, 2018; Wilson et al., 2010). These barriers include family need for transportation to attend a charter school, safety, and long commutes, whether transportation is provided or not. These barriers can limit a family's ability to attend a charter school or deter them from attending.

Distance from school

Wilson et al. (2010) studied transportation methods to magnet schools versus neighborhood public schools. Students who attended a magnet school traveled further distances to the school than children who attended the neighborhood public school, typically commuting a distance almost 3 times greater. When compared to the neighborhood school, magnet school students were less apt to walk or drive to school and were two times less likely to take a bus. In order for children in underrepresented groups to attend the magnet schools, 72% of the families noted that they would need bus transportation compared to 37% of the white families (Wilson et al., 2010). All families noted that their distance from the school and safety of the route to school was keeping their children from being able to walk or ride a bike.

Student Safety

Hamlin (2018), in inner-city Detroit, found that transportation was a barrier to attendance at a family's preferred school, with 58% of neighborhood school families not having access to transportation to take their child to the charter school they would like them to attend. While city bus transportation was available, parents expressed concern about the safety and reliability of transportation via a city bus so that a child could attend a charter school that was not near their home. Children's safety and the distance of travel were two of the major concerns around transportation to school, in a study in Texas (Senar et al., 2018). With new charter schools, often travel distances to school increase. Parents felt that walking was not always a safe option and with increased distance to charter schools, parents felt even more strongly about this.

Long Commutes

In a New York City middle to upper-class suburb, Roda (2018) found that it was not realistic for full-time working families to be able to transport their children to and from school or travel the further distances to attend a charter school. Instead, for many of the same reasons mentioned by Hamlin (2018), these families decided to stay at their neighborhood school (Roda, 2018). In New Orleans, public transit or school bus transportation was provided to schools of choice, including charter schools (Valant & Lincove, 2018). Families were provided with free transportation to accompany their children to school (Valant & Lincove, 2018). Despite this free access to transportation, Valant and Lincove found the length of commute on public transit and parental safety concerns associated with the commute still created barriers to these families accessing

charter schools. This commute on public transit for some students was sometimes upward of one hour (Sattin-Bajaj, 2018).

With a lack of busing available, Senar et al. (2018) found that parents were left responsible for arranging transportation to schools. Some families, who had access to transportation, noted their work schedule kept them from being able to transport their child to the charter school they would like them to attend (Hamlin, 2018). Unless a working parent had a flexible schedule or the route to school fit into their daily commute, Senar et al. noted the challenges that transportation can present families.

Challenges of public transit

Outside of school-provided transportation and personal vehicle transportation, Dustan and Ngo (2018) explored how potential mass transit by train affected choosing schools of choice and school access. From their research, even though more families are considering commuting longer distances to attend schools of choice, only high SES families noted they would use a train to attend schools of choice further from their home. This is similar to the social class inequities in access to public transit that Hernandez (2017) and Xiao et al. (2017) discussed and the impact of these inequities on jobs and education for lower SES families. Charter schools in Philadelphia offer public transit to their families free of charge since no school bus transportation is available to these charter schools (Scott & Marshall, 2019). Even with free public transit, for some families, the availability of public transit routing or commute times limited the charter schools they could attend.

The lack of school-provided transportation to schools of choice created strong barriers to attendance for all ethnicities, but particularly non-Caucasian families (Wilson et al., 2010). Wilson et al. concluded that bus transportation to alternative schools is an important factor in parents choosing schools outside of their neighborhood public school and is something that school planners should consider offering to promote equity in access and choice for families.

School Availability and Location

The location of a charter school, for many parents, is one of the most important factors in choosing the school for their child to attend. When studying schools in Czechia, Meyer and Kucerova (2017) found that the location of the school was the key determinant for parents to choose a school. Thirty-six percent of families noted that the location of the school was their top influencer in choosing a school (Meyer & Kucerova, 2017). With a greater number of school choices available in cities, families are more apt to commute the shorter distance to a school they want their children to attend. However, when a family lives in a rural area, Meyer and Kucerova found that families tend to attend their neighborhood school because of the inconvenience of the commuting distance. Families in urban areas were more apt to choose a different school only if the school was on their daily commute.

Similarly, Phillippo and Griffin (2016) conducted research in Chicago Public Schools, and like Meyer and Kucerova (2017) discovered that families choosing a school to attend was strongly based upon the geographical location of the school. Families in Chicago noted familiarity with the area that the school was located was important. Some

families avoided schools because they were in a neighborhood with higher crime and lower socio-economic neighborhoods, all of which led to Phillippo and Griffin's recommendation for the need for more research on and careful placement of charter schools to ensure more diversity is present and that segregation is not taking place.

In a study not tied to school choice, but on modes of transportation to school in large cities in China, Liu et al. (2018) found the greater the spatial separation barriers between home and school, the greater the impact on families. With no school bus transportation available, participants either walked, biked, rode the city bus, or used the family car to get to school. The distance between work, home, and school strongly impacted how families transported children to school. The further the school was from home, the more likely parents were to use a car as the means for transportation, thus emphasizing that the location of a school strongly impacts families, particularly working families (Liu et al., 2018). For many families, decisions to choose a school are highly impacted by the geographical location of the school with respect to the location of the family home and work location.

Obstacles to Enrollment

Key similarities regarding obstacles for families being able to choose charter schools were mentioned above. These include: no personal transportation available for parents to transport children to school, the availability of a personal vehicle for transportation but unrealistic constraints due to work hours or distance or direction of schools from home, and unsafe feelings associated with the use of mass transit (Alves et al., 2015; Hamlin, 2018; Roda, 2018). Brown and Makris (2018) also emphasized a

financial obstacle for families who wanted to send their children to a charter school. Financially they were able to get by but the cost of transporting their child to a charter school each day would place a financial burden on the family. With a direct correlation between family income and use of a car for transportation to school and an indirect correlation between family income and the use of a city bus for transport to school, researchers concluded that the distance between school and home can create barriers for families when transportation needs to be provided (Liu et al., 2018). Scott and Marshall's (2019) findings supported this as an obstacle to school enrollment and concluded that it is important for families to highly consider transportation options when choosing schools for their families.

Administrative Perspectives

In any school, the administrative leadership in a school highly impacts the quality of the school. Carpenter and Peak (2013) emphasized the important transformative role that an administrator plays in a charter school and the business knowledge that it takes to run a charter school compared to that of a neighborhood school. Charter school administrators must work within the bounds of some state and local district requirements while moving their school vision forward (Thomas & Lacey, 2016). Because of differing charter school missions when compared to public schools, the role of the administrator can look slightly different (Foreman & Maranto, 2018). Charter school principals can often be more centered around student needs because of the fewer red tape ties to district policies (Foreman & Maranto, 2018).

Often the role of a charter school principal is much bigger than that of managing students and teachers as they have to make major decisions and actions that often a central office is doing for an entire school district. Foreman and Maranto (2018) conducted a study with charter school principals who were at one point in their career public school principals. These principals felt they had more autonomy to make decisions at charter schools and felt that their role at charter schools was much more entailed, including curriculum, budget, hiring, and overall decision making. Charter school principals also noted a greater feeling of greater autonomy in making decisions that were best for the school (Gawlik, 2018a).

Placement of Charter Schools

While decisions on the location of a charter school tend to go beyond an administrator's decision, some administrative involvement is present as often administrators are involved in the creation of charter schools from the ground level. Koller and Welsch (2017) indicated four key factors in the placement of charter schools including: a recent shutdown of a neighborhood school, low reading scores, an area with a lower percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch, and areas with lower Hispanic populations but higher African American populations and overall higher racial diversity. Strongly prevalent in both Koller and Welsch's research and Saultz and Yaluma's (2017) research, was the finding that it is more likely that after administrative review of data charter school leaders choose areas with higher SES, areas with overall denser populations, and areas with poor reading scores. In contrast to this, Logan and

Burdick-Will (2016) found that charter schools in the southern states tended to be placed in low SES areas.

Diversity

Advocating for student diversity in enrollment at charter schools is a key role of an administrator. Gawlik (2018a) emphasized that a good charter school administrator, typically those in the highest performing schools, goes the extra mile to advocate for and promote cultural diversity. While many factors go into enhancing diversity in schools and ensuring that segregation is not taking place, Phillippo and Griffin (2016) noted the importance of school location to promote diversity. Through their research, Phillippo and Griffin found that schools become less diverse when they are placed in lower SES areas and areas with higher crime. Families with higher SES tend to opt-out of their neighborhood schools, particularly when they are located in lower SES areas (Yoon et al., 2018). More high SES families choose charter schools because of the rigorous design of the program (Walters, 2017).

Even when the administration has chosen to use a voucher system in charter schools, research has shown that this system still benefits middle and high SES families and fewer low SES families attend the charter school (Davies, 2019). Through their research on charter schools in New York City, Villavicencio (2016) recommended the use of targeted recruitment in addition to examining charter school enrollment policies. Through targeted recruitment, administrators in several New York City Charter schools have increased the number of African American and special education students that attend the charter school. By re-examining their enrollment policies, the charter has also

amended their charter to be more inclusive of the area from which they can draw students which has helped improve the diversity of the school.

Budgeting and Transportation Decisions

In most charter schools the decision to provide transportation to a school is an administrative decision. While some charter schools do offer transportation, many do not. Brown and Makris (2018) noted a consensus among participants in their study that administrators were choosing not to provide transportation to limit the levels of poverty and behavior problems in the school, as generally, these students tend to withdraw from the school because they do not feel they fit in.

Separately, in an in-depth study conducted by Gawlik (2018b) on leadership in charter schools, there was mention of many key aspects and decision making that charter school administrators must consider, along with the challenges of budgeting to take care of facility needs. None of the administrators in Gawlik's (2018b) study mentioned transportation as a key decision that they must consider. Likewise, Robey and Helfenbein (2018) noted the financial challenges that both charter schools and private Catholic schools face when budgeting operating costs.

In New Orleans and Detroit, where charter schools are providing the transportation with some state funding available, costs of busing were \$400,000 per school or \$100,000 for purchasing public transit passes (Sirard et al., 2015). With these high expenses and limited budgets, the administrative decision-making process and ability to provide transportation to families being budget dependent weighs heavily on charter schools. Many charter schools, being on a limited budget, are not able to provide

transportation. Sirard et al. emphasized that the expensive cost of transportation puts large constraints on charter schools and administrators must carefully balance these decisions. Schools in New Orleans and Detroit (Sattin-Bajaj, 2018) specifically noted the burden it places on the school budget but feels that the money that they do spend on transportation is important in providing equitable access for families.

Solutions to Transportation Problems

Milliman et al. (2017) found that even though competition between charter schools and neighborhood schools is on the rise and the competition is dependent upon many different factors, overall there are concerns around charter schools and transportation. With the high expense of budgeting transportation to charter schools, different options for transportation may need to be explored. Charter schools could potentially benefit by cooperating with school districts to plan for transportation and sharing transportation options. Eguizabal et al. (2018) recommended an optimization model for bus transportation to save student time en route to school and for schools to save money on transportation. This model includes schools combining resources and routes to transport children to multiple schools. Sattin-Bajaj (2018) also recommended this model, referring to it as tiering. Sener et al. (2019) emphasized that their research shows that districts and schools need more intentional planning around transportation, particularly with the development of more charter schools.

Siegel-Stechler (2017) emphasized that schools and communities must work together to solve the transportation problem and increase access to schools. Collaboration between schools and communities includes school districts looking at ways to improve

access and collaboration with transportation plans and communities looking at current routes on public transit to help families gain better access to schools. Similarly, Sattin-Bajaj (2018) recommended schools contracting with public transit to provide transportation for students.

Support for Conceptual Framework

It is clear that the ability of a family to attend charter schools is influenced by many factors including school ranking and performance, SES, location of schools, family preferences, and transportation availability, all of which are key components of the deregulation and competition promoted through school choice and the theory of school choice (Alves et al., 2015; Carlson & Cowen, 2015; Davis, 2014). Examining administrator and parent perspectives on how transportation availability at charter schools affects access for parents and overall equity of access charter schools, through the lens of the theory of school choice, provides foundational support for this study. Transportation can be a burden to families whether they are struggling financially or not (Blumenberg & Agrawal, 2014). This equity issue could potentially play a role in a family's ability to choose and attend a charter school and limit choices for families.

Summary and Conclusion

After a review of the literature, there was concern over transportation availability with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation is perceived to affect the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools. Beyond the very few states and school districts that do provide district busing or alternative transportation to charter school families, the responsibility to transport

students typically lies in the hands of the family. Blumenberg and Agrawal (2014) noted the burden that transportation can place on families. Families of lower SES typically chose a school within one kilometer of their home compared to families of middle and high SES who more often chose schools outside of this radius (Alves et al., 2015). It is known from limited research that some families, particularly in large cities, may not attend a charter school because of lack of transportation availability, school proximity, student safety, and that families are looking for a homogeneous school that more closely reflects their family's SES (Hamlin, 2018; Roda, 2018; Senar et al., 2018). However, there was a gap in practice surrounding school-provided transportation with respect to equity in access to charter schools.

From the research available it was clear that there are some state laws around transportation to charter schools and that transportation to charter schools can be an expensive budgeting decision (Sattin-Bajaj, 2018; Sirard et al., 2015). However, there was a clear gap in the practices regarding administrative decision-making around providing transportation to charter schools and how provided transportation affects parent perspectives and equity in access. With these gaps, the following study will help provide a better understanding of administrator and parent perspectives on transportation with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to understand administrator and parent perspectives on transportation with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects the parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools in the Northwestern United States. The intent was to explore and better understand how transportation provided to schools is perceived to affect parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools and administrators' perceptions regarding equity in access to charter schools. Data collected helped provide school administrators with information about transportation availability to best help meet the needs of families and provide equity in access to charter schools. This chapter outlines the methodology and design of this study. It begins with an in-depth look at the qualitative design chosen for the research and justification for choosing this method. This is then followed by the design of this study, to include the participants selected, as well as data collection and analysis techniques that I used.

Research Design and Rationale

I used a basic qualitative approach in this study. Qualitative research is inquiry-based research that measures data through a more subjective means than other forms of research to help the researcher better understand human perceptions in a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because data collection in this type of research is primarily through interviews where perceptions and observations are included, more values enter into this collection technique and reporting of data becomes more holistic and analytical and can help make changes to policy (Brady, 2015). Qualitative designs provide for real data

collection and an opportunity for deeper data analysis than other research methodologies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Examples of this type of research may include free-response surveys, interviews, or observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this type of research, the researcher would search for common themes and express any patterns thematically in the results.

I chose a basic qualitative design for this specific study because the main goal was to gain an understanding of the parent and administrator perceptions regarding transportation to charter schools and equity in access. Through parent and administrator interviews, the qualitative method helped me better understand and classify parent and administrator perceptions around transportation and equity in access to charter schools. From these interviews I correlated the data and drew conclusions to answer the research questions:

RQ1: What are administrator perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

RQ2: What are parents' perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

I chose a content analysis approach for data analysis. Through content analysis, research is coded and specific themes in the research can be identified (Johansson, 2019). Identification and counting of keywords can help the researcher make comparisons and

identify themes. In this study, I used these themes to identify core perceptions around transportation and equity in access to charter schools.

Role of the Researcher

I was an instructional coach in the school district in the Pacific Northwest where I conducted this research. I was solely responsible for creating the data collection tool, conducting the interviews, and analyzing the data. There was potential that I may have known the participants or their students because I lived and worked in the same community as these parents and administrators. With my role in the school being in a coaching capacity, I mainly worked with teachers to improve instructional practices and there was no supervisory role with any of the participants. Therefore, there should have been no situations where I was in a position of power over the participants. If the interviewee was a colleague, I ensured anonymity to gain truthfulness in their interview answers.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researcher bias is a possibility in any study. To minimize this bias, Merriam and Tisdell recommended that a researcher “examine his or her biases and assumptions about the phenomenon of interest before embarking on a study” (p.27). The use of epoche and horizontalization helped minimize bias in this study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Epoche is the process of the researcher listing their personal biases about the phenomenon to examine them before the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), a practice which this researcher has done. The biggest potential bias that was identified through this process was the belief that transportation to charter schools can cause a problem for many families if transportation is not provided. I

used horizontalization and coding in the data analysis to help minimize this bias as it helped me identify all themes with equal weight, as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Methodology

The school district in which this study took place was in a metropolitan area of the Pacific Northwest. The district serviced approximately 14,500 students in 34 schools, 22 of which were elementary schools, four were middle schools, 5 were high schools, and three were schools containing Grades 7 through 12. Of these 34 schools, six schools were charter schools. Only one of the charter schools provided full bussing for their students and one charter school provided partial transportation, varying the days and pick-up/drop-off locations at nearby elementary schools. Three of the charter schools were located within the city limits of the major city in which the district was located in and two of the charter schools were located in a town about 20 miles outside of the city. Participants of the study were parents and administrators of students in this district.

Participant Selection

I selected parents and administrators using snowballing, a purposive sampling technique where an initial participant is chosen, an information-rich interview is conducted, and then each participant is asked to refer another participant who meets the criteria of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this case, the referring participant identified another parent who had children who attended a charter school or children who attended a neighborhood school. The referred parent may have transported their child to school themselves or their children may have been bussed to school. This sampling

method allowed me to find participants who had the same or different perspectives from the initial interviews conducted, helping to confirm or add different perspectives (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Merriam, the referral of other participants in this type of sampling allows the researcher to gain rich information from participants who meet the criteria for the study. I discuss an overview of the population, sampling method, and sampling size further in this section.

Four parents who had children enrolled in charter schools, four parents who had children enrolled in conventional neighborhood schools, and four charter school administrators participated in this study. I initially chose one parent whom I knew had children who attended a charter school, one parent who had children who attended a conventional neighborhood school, and one charter school administrator. I asked each parent to refer another participant who had children who attended a charter school or a conventional neighborhood school, whether they transported the child to the school or school transportation was provided. I asked that participants refer someone whom they felt would be a good source of information regarding transportation to charter schools. I asked the charter school administrator to refer another charter school principal to participate in the study, someone whom the administrator felt had good information to provide regarding transportation to school and equity in access.

This study was strictly limited to studying the responses from four parents who had children enrolled in charter schools, four parents who had children enrolled in conventional neighborhood schools, and four charter school administrators. If I felt that more interviews were needed to reach saturation because different responses and themes

were developing from interviews, more interviews would have been conducted. This sample size was appropriate for this study as snowballing, the purposive sampling strategy used creates information-rich data and ensures that those interviewed are a good source of information for the topic, as supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant, with the same interview questions being used for parents and the same interview questions for administrators (see Appendix). At the end of each interview, parents and administrators had the opportunity to add any additional thoughts on transportation and equity in access to charter schools and were told that they could expand on questions throughout the interview. Initially, interviews were to take place in a private location convenient for each interviewee and to last approximately 25 minutes. The first two interviews were conducted that way. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions that were implemented in March 2020, I conducted the remaining interviews via Zoom video or audio conferences. I recorded each interview on an audio-recorder with the consent of the interviewee, and I carefully took notes. Each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym to assist in coding and reporting the data. Within a week of the interview, I created a transcript of each individual interview and shared it with the interviewees allowing the opportunity for each interviewee to add or change any part of his or her interview responses. If a participant chose, they could withdraw from the interview or study at any time without consequence.

Instrumentation

I developed the interview questions for this study (see Appendix). They were developed based upon the problem statement and gaps in the literature that indicated a lack of knowledge regarding parent and administrator perceptions on transportation to charter schools and equity in access to these schools. The questions were designed to gain more specific insight about obstacles parents faced regarding transportation to charter schools, administrator perceptions regarding the availability of transportation, and parent and administrator perceptions of equity in access to charter schools with respect to transportation. Gristy and Johnson (2018) discussed a gap in the research on how transportation affected enrollment and family ability to attend charter schools. The review of the research showed a clear gap in administrative decision making concerning transportation to charter schools (Gawlik, 2018b). These interview questions were designed to fill these gaps and elicit specific details about transportation to charter schools and equity in access.

I used an expert committee to ensure that the interview questions directly informed the research questions and that there was no bias. Agee (2009) emphasized the important role of an expert committee in refining the research questions to ensure the questions inquire about and are designed for gathering the best information for the study. This committee consisted of one school district administrator and two university education instructors. The committee was asked to review the interview questions to ensure that the questions evoked the type of answers that were relevant to the purpose of this study.

Data Analysis Plan

After the interviews were conducted, I used content analysis, interpretational analysis, and horizontalization, to analyze each response individually followed by an analysis of all interviews as a whole, as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Using these methods of qualitative analysis, I coded the data according to overarching themes identified from the interview questions. The themes I examined included information about how parents transported their children to school, transportation elements of the current school that best meet family needs, trends in obstacles to transportation, benefits of transportation situations, and equity in access, all of which tied directly to the research questions. When reviewing administrator responses, I looked for themes around diversity in the school, decision-making procedures on providing transportation to schools, and equity in access.

I also used content analysis to tie the data to themes presented in the conceptual framework with respect to the theory of school choice as presented by Bauch and Small (1986). With these semi-structured interviews, parents and administrators had an opportunity to provide input in addition to the interview questions. Therefore, other potential common themes or contrasts might have arisen in the data and I examined also. I then analyzed each theme for any further subthemes.

Trustworthiness

Dependability and validity can be two of the biggest challenges with any qualitative study. Dependability addresses the accuracy of the study while validity addresses whether the research measures what the researcher intended it to measure. In

essence, they both test the trustworthiness component of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

Because I was the only coder, intracoder reliability needed to be considered to ensure the protocol for coding was appropriate (Lacey et al., 2015). To ensure dependability, I included extensive use of quotations and identify comparisons with respect to the literature on school transportation to charter schools and equity in access. To ensure dependability in this study, I reviewed the interview recordings and notes several times, as recommended by Lacey et al., to be consistent in coding. Lacey et al. noted that coding that takes place over an extended period can be less reliable, therefore I coded all of the interviews immediately following the conclusion of all of the interviews. Additionally, I coded then recoded the interviews after two weeks to ensure that the results were the same, a practice recommended by Anney (2014).

Validity

Two components of validity need to be considered in qualitative research, internal and external. Internal validity reflects the credibility of the research and external validity reflects the transferability of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Potential threats to validity in this study included the small sample size, potential researcher bias based on preconceived notions, and inaccurate translation of the data and conclusions. To ensure validity with the small population I used triangulation, collecting data from administrators, charter school parents, and parents from conventional neighborhood schools. To minimize inaccurate translation of the data I included extensive use of

quotations and identified comparisons with respect to the literature on transportation and equity in access to charter schools.

Confirmability

Confirmability in a qualitative study is the degree to which the results could be confirmed by others, ensuring that the representation of the data reflects true information from the participants and not bias from the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To maximize confirmability I used an audit trail, a tool discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), where the researcher describes in detail the data collection and category creation. The audit trail was kept in a journal where I recorded the specifics of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, including reflections on codes that were used and why they were used.

Ethical Procedures

Informed Consent

All interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent letter that stated the purpose of the interview, the confidentiality of their responses, and their consent to participate in the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time without any consequences. All informed consent and permission to conduct research documents that were required from the school district were obtained.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All interviews were performed in a private setting, outside of school hours. No one, other than myself, knows the names of the parents and the administrators who participated in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in that parents

were not asked to identify their children or their child's teacher. Parents were assured that their names would not be used anywhere in the publication of the results and any specific names of schools they mentioned would not be repeated.

If specific quotes or data were referenced from the parent interviews, the pseudonyms that were assigned to each interviewee were used in the reporting to maintain confidentiality. Administrators were assured that their names or the names of the school they worked at would not be used anywhere in the publication of the results. Specific quotes from administrators used the pseudonyms that were assigned to each interviewee to maintain confidentiality. I will keep the written and recorded interview data for ten years in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

Summary

Through this study, parent and administrator perspectives around transportation to charter schools and equity in access were examined. The data that was collected will help provide charter school founders and administrators to make them more aware of those affected by transportation or lack of transportation to charter schools, how transportation affects families' potential enrollment, and use this information to make administrative decisions regarding availability of transportation to school. In chapter four I will discuss, in detail, the data from the research that was conducted.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand administrators' and parents' perspectives on transportation with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools. The focus was on two research questions:

RQ1: What are administrator perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

RQ2: What are parents' perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

I conducted semi-structured interviews to gain deeper knowledge into the effects of transportation availability from both parent and administrative perspectives and identify potential transportation barriers to enrollment and equal access to charter schools from both the parent and administrator perspectives. I used the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968) as the framework to examine decisions parents make to attend or not attend a charter school based upon family situations, school offerings, and administrative decisions to include transportation to a charter school. I will analyze data using open coding and thematic analysis consistent with key constructs of the theory of school choice. In this chapter, I will discuss the setting of the study, data collection, and analysis procedures. Finally, the chapter will close with results and themes present in the study.

Setting

This study was set in a suburban area in Northwestern United States. I obtained Walden University IRB approval #02-25-20-0114036 and school district permission to conduct the research. The district serviced roughly 14,000 students in 30 schools, of which six were charter schools. Five of these charter schools were K-8 schools and one was a 7-12 school. Five of the six charter schools were located within the main city limits, in an area that is approximately 33 square miles. One charter school was located within the city limits of a small town about 20 miles away. The district serviced students from an area that was approximately 7,000 square miles.

Demographics

A total of 12 participants were interviewed for this study, four charter school parents, four charter school principals, and four parents who have children who attended neighborhood schools for this study with snowball sampling used to obtain participants. Three of the principals interviewed were from K-8 charter schools and one principal from a 7-12 charter school. The four parents interviewed who had students who attended charter schools were from all different charter schools. The four parents of children who attended neighborhood schools did not have children who attended the same school. All parents who were interviewed, except one, were parents of elementary school children. One parent had an elementary school child as well as one child in middle school and one in high school. Three of the principals interviewed were K-8 school principals and one was a 7-12 school principal. I assigned a letter of the alphabet to each participant when

the interview was conducted. I gave pseudonyms to all participants with the name that was given corresponding to the letter of the alphabet that was assigned to them.

Table 1 shows each parent participant and details about the type of school their child(ren) attended, the number of children who attended these schools. Table 2 shows school information for administrators who participated in this study and transportation availability to the schools.

Table 1

Parent Participant Demographics (8 Parent Participants)

Parent (pseudonym)	Number of children	Type of School children attend	Grade level of children	Busing
Alyssa	3	Neighborhood	Elementary, Middle, & High	full
Beth	1	Neighborhood	Elementary	full
Carol	1	Neighborhood	Elementary	full
Denise	1	Neighborhood	Elementary	full
Elaine	1	Charter	K-8	limited
Fannie	1	Charter	K-8	none
George	1	Charter	K-8	none
Henry	1	Charter	K-8	limited

Table 2

Administrator Participant School Demographics (4 Administrator Participants)

Administrator (pseudonym)	Type of school	Enrollment	Grade levels	Busing
Ann	Charter	187	K-8	before and after inconsistent satellites
Bill	Charter	162	7-12	full
Charles	Charter	206	K-8	after school consistent satellites
Diane	Charter	150	K-8	none

Transportation Arrangements

The busing arrangements for each school were unique. All four parents of students who attended neighborhood schools had full busing available to them both to and from school. Alyssa and Beth did not use this school provided transportation and instead transported their child(ren) to and from school. Carol transported her child to a grandparent 's home where the child was then bused to and from the grandparent's home each day. Denise transported her child to school and the student took the bus home. The school day at each of these schools was six and a half hours.

The transportation arrangement and availability of transportation for the charter school families were different from what was available to families who attended neighborhood schools. The school that Elaine's child attended did not have busing available in the area where they lived. There was one bus to homes located close to the school, where families received grandfathered attendance rights. The mother took the child to and from school each day. Two days a week school was conveniently located on

Elaine's way to and from work. Three days a week Elaine made the trip to school from home twice a day, as she did not work those three days. Fannie's child attended a school where no transportation was available. The school was on the way to the father's work, so he transported in the morning and the mother did not work so she picked them up in the afternoon. The school day at these two schools was six and a half hours long.

George's school did provide transportation in the afternoon. The father and mother both had flexible work schedules so that they could go to work late, take a flexible lunch, or stay late to be able to make the transportation arrangement work. Henry's child attended a school where there was no morning transportation, but afternoon satellite transportation was provided to one elementary school or one middle school where the students could catch a bus home from there if they lived within those school attendance boundaries. To be able to use this busing opportunity, Henry sought and used a daycare in the elementary school attendance area. The school day at both of these schools was six and a half hours long.

Principal Ann used satellite busing from one of the local elementary and middle schools. Every morning the students who lived in the school boundaries of the middle school could catch the bus from student homes to the middle school where they caught a shuttle bus to the charter school. Monday through Thursday afternoon students could take a bus to one of the two local elementary schools if they lived in that elementary school's boundaries. Students then transferred buses and rode the bus home with students who attended these neighborhood schools. On Friday there was an early dismissal so the students could shuttle to the middle school and take the bus home from there if they lived

within the middle school boundary area. Daily, students were transported to school on a bus with high school and middle school students. The school day was six and a half hours long.

Principal Bill provided afternoon transportation only, by which students could shuttle to a local elementary school if they lived or had daycare in that school's boundary area. There was also a shuttle bus available to the three town middle schools where students could take the shuttle to their neighborhood middle school and then take the bus home. There was a 20- to 30-minute wait at these satellite areas to catch the bus. The school day was six and a half hours long.

At Principal Charles' school students had full access to bus transportation using a shuttle bus system to and from all local middle schools. This allowed anyone in the district to be able to catch buses to and from the school. The local middle schools had the latest start and end times which is why these were used as the transfer sites. After allowing time for students to shuttle to and from school, the school day was five hours and forty-eight minutes long.

Principal Diane did not have any transportation available for the families. All parents dropped their students off or carpoled. One student walked to school from their parent's place of work that was close by. The school day at this school was six and a half hours long.

Data Collection

I interviewed four charter school parents, four charter school principals, and four parents who had children who attended neighborhood schools for this study. I used in-

person or Zoom interviews to collect data. Initially, the intent was to have all interviews conducted in person but due to COVID-19 restrictions, interviews were changed to Zoom or FaceTime interviews. The first interview was conducted on March 5, 2020, and the last interview was conducted on May 14, 2020. I audio recorded all interviews on a computer, and I transcribed the recordings. I conducted two semi-structured interviews in-person at private locations, and I conducted the remaining 10 interviews were via Zoom or FaceTime because of COVID-19 restrictions. This was the only variation from the original data collection plan for this study. Interviews lasted between 15 and 40 minutes each. I sent transcriptions to participants for them to review, change, and add additional comments as they felt necessary. All administrators responded that the transcripts looked good and one provided some additional information. Only four of the parents responded regarding the transcripts. Those who did respond stated that the transcripts looked good and added no additional information.

I used snowball sampling to obtain participants for this study. I chose the initial parent who had children who attended a charter school, one parent who had children who attended a conventional neighborhood school, and one charter school administrator. Each parent was asked to refer another participant whom they knew had children who attended a charter school or a conventional neighborhood school, someone whom they felt would be a good source of information regarding transportation to charter schools and equity in access. The charter school administrator was asked to refer another charter school principal to participate in the study, someone whom they felt would have good information to provide regarding transportation to school and equity in access. All

participants who were referred participated in the study and all signed informed consent forms. This study was strictly limited to studying the responses from four parents who had children enrolled in charter schools, four parents who had children enrolled in conventional neighborhood schools, and four charter school administrators. I did not feel that more interviews were needed because saturation and overlap was reached from the responses and themes that developed from the interviews.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data using coding through content analysis and identification of themes. As recommended by Lacey et al. (2015), to be consistent in coding, the interviews were coded immediately following the conclusion of all of the interviews. I recoded interviews again two weeks later to ensure the results were the same, as recommended by Anney (2014). Each group of participants was initially coded separately.

The first step was to use content analysis through open coding, as discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Merriam and Tisdell, along with Ravitch and Carl (2016), recommended that the first step in open coding is to review transcripts several times, highlighting keywords and phrases from the data. This step should be followed by assigning keywords or phrases to code the responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, I reviewed all transcripts twice and keywords and phrases from the transcripts were circled. After this, I looked at the circled key words and phrases in each transcript and summarized these key words or phrases that were written in the margins. During the first round of coding, I created a spreadsheet where I identified and recorded key words

and phrases from each participant's responses into columns for each interview question. As Merriam and Tisdell noted, this first round helps the researcher find that data that stands out. At the end of the first round of coding there were 35 keywords or phrases for parents with children in neighborhood schools, 36 keywords or phrases for parents with children in a charter school, and 52 key words or phrases for charter school principals.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended focusing on the data that is strictly tied to research questions. To begin the second round of coding, I examined the data in the spreadsheet to look for content that was specific to the research questions and removed keywords and phrases that were not specific to the research questions. To align with the theoretical framework, research questions, and the data analysis discussed in Chapter 3, themes in the parent responses centered around how parents transport their children to school, transportation elements of the current school that best meet family needs, trends in obstacles to transportation, benefits of transportation situations, equity in access, and any other additional themes were identified. When I reviewed administrator responses, themes around school diversity, decision-making procedures on providing transportation to schools, equity in access, and any other additional themes were looked for. Keywords for information that was not specific to the research questions were removed.

During the second round of coding, the keywords or phrases should be broken down into categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Keeping the content organized by interview questions, I used keywords and phrases to identify categories. For parents with students in neighborhood schools, 15 categories were identified. Twenty categories were identified for parents with children who attend charter schools and 22 categories were

identified for principals. I used tally marks when keywords or phrases were repeated by more than one person in the interviews and all keywords or phrases were recorded under the categories on a spreadsheet.

In the last step of the coding, I reviewed these categories and identified themes present, the final step in coding as stated by Ravitch and Carl (2016). Using color-coding of cells in the spreadsheet, categories were color-coded to identify themes and subthemes. Categories were also broken down into themes and subthemes that were guided by each research question. I identified themes for parent responses, administrator responses, and overall themes. Four themes were present within parent responses with seven subthemes and four themes were present within administrator responses with nine subthemes, three of these themes overlapped with both parent and administrators, one of the themes was distinct to administrators alone, and one was distinct to parents alone. The themes and subthemes are present in Table 3.

Table 3
Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Research Question 2 themes	Research Question 1 themes
Theme 1: Transportation Affects Access	Ability of families to provide transportation Consistent busing	Ability of families to provide transportation Consistent busing
Theme 2: Parent Needs	Flexible jobs Time commitment	
Theme 3: Diversity	Neighborhood schools Charter schools	Neighborhood schools Charter schools District admin concerns
Theme 4: Socio-economic impact	Struggles for low socio-economic families	Free and reduced lunch availability
Theme 5: (administrators only): Administrative Decision-making Regarding Transportation		Recognition of parent and family needs School hours and instructional time Budget expense

Theme 1: Transportation Affects Access, Theme 2: Parent Needs, and Theme 5: Administrative Decision-making Regarding Transportation related directly to the conceptual framework used for this study, the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968). With two research questions for this study, all themes tied explicitly to parent or administrator perspectives with respect to transportation availability and equity in access to charter schools. *Theme 1: Transportation, Theme 2: Diversity, Theme 4: Socio-economic impact, and Theme 5: Administrator Decision-making Regarding Transportation* were all tied to the first research question. *Theme 1: Transportation,*

Theme 2: Parent Needs, Theme 3: Diversity, and Theme 4: Socio-economic Impact were all tied to the second research question.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all essential elements in ensuring trustworthiness of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This section highlights the measures that I took to ensure trustworthiness and quality representation of the data. These measures included examining the dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability of the study.

Dependability

To ensure dependability in this study, I reviewed the interview recordings and notes several times, as recommended by Lacey et al. (2015) to be consistent in coding. Coding took place within two weeks following the interviews and over a short period of time; then, I recoded the research two weeks later to ensure the same results. These were practices recommended by Anney (2104) and Lacey et al. to ensure dependability in the findings.

Transferability

Developing and including specific details of the study is important to transferability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To maximize the accurate translation of the data, I made extensive use of quotations when discussing the findings and the themes. Additionally, when discussing the findings, I used quotations and comparisons to the literature on school transportation to charter schools and equity in access, as recommended by Lacey et al. (2015).

Credibility

Due to the study's small population and to ensure credibility I used triangulation and collection of data from administrators, charter school parents, and parents from conventional neighborhood schools. To maximize accurate translation of the data and to minimize researcher bias, I used extensive quotations and identified comparisons with respect to the literature on transportation and equity in access to charter schools.

Confirmability

To maximize confirmability, I used an audit trail was used to describe the detail of the data collection and category as well as theme creation, a tool discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I also used an electronic journal and a paper journal to record my thoughts and details during the data collection and during category and theme creation. I included reflections for data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reflections on codes.

Results

Five themes resulted from the interviews with the four administrators, four charter school parents, and four conventional neighborhood school parents. I broke the themes down into overall themes and themes identified separately for parents and administrators.

Theme 1: Transportation Affects Access

Theme 1 pertained to parents and administrators with respect to transportation. This theme included, from the parent perspective, the ability of families to provide transportation and consistent busing. From the administrator perspective this theme also included the ability of families to provide transportation and the known need for busing.

Ability of Families to Provide Transportation

This subtheme emerged from both parent and administrator responses to the interview questions.

Parent Perspectives. I asked all eight parents a question about transportation to charter schools and their ability to transport their children. Parents with children who attended a conventional neighborhood school were asked, “What role, if any, would transportation availability play in your child attending a charter school?”. Charter school parents were asked, “What role, if any, does transportation play in your child attending a charter school?” Three of the four parents with children who attended neighborhood schools noted that they would consider enrolling their children in charter schools but could not because of the inability of the families to provide transportation to charter schools for varying reasons. Alyssa stated, “The charter schools are as close as you can get to that type of hands-on learning the way a child learns. But there was no way we could get the girls there without depending on public transportation.” For three of the four parents with children who attended neighborhood schools, the closest charter school was between 15 and 25 miles away until the current school year when a charter school opened locally.

Charter school parents all stated that their ability to be able to transport their children affected their decision to enroll in charter schools. Three of the four parents noted that they were uncertain about enrolling their children in the school and had to think about their ability to make transportation work for their children to attend. Elaine said that a major limitation for their family was that with no bus transportation available

when something happened and that they could not transport the children to school, this issue caused a problem for the family. Fannie said, ‘If something were to happen to us, and neither one of us could drive them then it could be a big problem.’ Fannie noted they had a family situation last year in which her husband was unable to drive and was the primary transporter. If it had not been for the decision to close the schools because of COVID-19, she was not sure how she would have gotten her child there.

Henry, whose son also was accepted into a charter school a few blocks from his house, chose a different charter school because of the curriculum the school offered. Henry said, ‘The quality of the school outweighed the disadvantages in transportation. We felt like the curriculum was a lot better and sacrificed the transportation issues.’ However, Henry did note that without daily transportation in the afternoon they would not have been able to have their son attend the charter school that he did.

Administrator Perspectives. Consistent with parent responses about their ability to transport, all administrators expressed the need for transportation for some families to be able to attend and have had families tell them this. Ann said:

We have had people tell us that they cannot accept a seat that we offer to them because they don’t have afternoon transportation, as well as people who come to our orientation meetings and decide not to apply because of the lack of transportation.

Two administrators, Bill and Charles, noted that access to their charter school was only equitable for those families who could transport their children, if transportation were not provided. Bill noted that some families could not transport in the morning and therefore

did not have access to the charter school. Charles had full busing available to the school, but a few weeks of the year had no busing. When the buses were not available the school's attendance rate was less than 50%. Charles stated, "You can't burden families with transportation." In his interview, Charles noted that school-provided transportation was a key to access for the majority of the students who attended his school.

Conversely, when Diane was asked if the transportation or lack of provided transportation affected the diversity of enrollment and access to the school she responded:

I don't know. I feel like the people who are coming to our school are part of the school community. I feel like that's a big part of our charter, school and parent involvement and parents being at our school. And so if they're not able to do that, then I don't know they would be interested in our charter.

Consistent Busing

When asked "What role, if any, would transportation availability play in your child attending a charter school?" and charter school parents were asked, "What role, if any, does transportation play in your child attending a charter school?" the subtheme of the need for consistent busing came through from answers given by five of the eight parents.

Both Alyssa and Denise noted that consistent busing was needed for their children to attend charter schools because the schools were not located close to their homes.

Henry, who noted that his son would not have been able to attend the charter school if afternoon transportation had not been available, was thankful for the consistent afternoon busing. Concerning the transportation, Henry said, "It is inconvenient (student shuttles to

a satellite school and then buses to a daycare) but it is better than us having to leave work to go pick him up.”

Parent Perspectives. Both charter school parents and parents with children who attended neighborhood schools noted the need for consistent busing. Of the neighborhood school parents, three of the four noted the need for consistent busing both ways in order for their children to attend the school. One neighborhood school parent, Carol, who did not work, noted that busing was not an issue but transporting her children to school would be an issue if she and her husband were both working. Before the interview, Carol had not thought about her child attending a charter school, but she felt that they could easily transport the child to school without any problems.

Of the neighborhood school parents, two noted that they would consider enrolling their children in the charter school that was closest to them. However, these two parents noted that the inconsistent busing schedule, when on some days busing was available in the morning and then on some days busing was available in the afternoon did not work for their families so their children could not attend the school.

The charter school families also noted the need for consistent busing to make it easiest for their children to attend charter schools. Two parents discussed the inconveniences of the inconstant busing arrangements that currently were in place. One parent had only after school busing available to them but was thankful they had after school busing every day, which was consistent and helpful. These parents all noted that inconsistent busing arrangements would be challenging for them to get their child to and from school each day. While noting that parents there was busing available at their

school, two parents said that they could not use it because the buses did not transport to or from the area where their families lived.

Administrator Perspectives. The known need for consistent transportation was a subtheme present in administrator interviews. Of the four administrators, three expressed their awareness of the known need for busing to allow better access to their schools. These same three administrators discussed their intentional decision making around providing transportation for students. Ann said they knew they wanted transportation when they started the charter school and decided to reach as many students as they could through the use of shuttle busing from the local middle and elementary schools, even if it were not consistent busing on a daily basis. Intentional busing arrangements were made to maximize the number of students who could get to school each day.

Noting that they believed including transportation in the planning process contributed to access for all, two administrators confirmed that when busing was added positive changes in enrollment and diversity occurred. Bill noted that adding transportation had some positive effects on their enrollment diversity, but the diversity still fluctuates very little because of the few numbers of open student spots each year in their lottery.

Theme 2: Parent and Family Needs

The second theme that emerged from this study was parental needs. From the parent perspective, certain family needs must be met to successfully allow parents to have their children attend charter school when transportation was not available. Subthemes in this area were flexible jobs and time commitment.

Flexible Jobs

All charter school parents and parents with children who attended neighborhood schools noted that job flexibility was a key component that made the difference in parent ability to transport students to school if they needed transportation. All four charter school parents noted resounding flexibility in one or more of the parents' jobs that allowed them to transport and not have to rely on full or partial busing for their child to attend a charter school. Similarly, parents with students who attended neighborhood schools discussed this issue as well. Two of these parents noted that their jobs were flexible but not flexible enough to be able to transport their children the distance to the nearest charter schools. Alyssa noted, "Because we are within eight to fifteen minutes driving of our house, we can do it [transport]. If they were further away it would be impossible, and the kids would have to ride a bus." Similarly, Denise said:

If we could afford for me to be a stay-at-home mom, none of this would be a problem. I'd have all the time in the world to take my child to whatever school I desire. But in a household of two working parents, you heavily rely on transportation to get your kids where they need to go.

As charter school parents, Fannie, George, and Henry emphasized that they or their spouses had flexible work schedules that allowed them to transport their children. Fannie noted, with respect to transporting children and from school, "Some people have crazy schedules with their jobs and just couldn't." According to George, one element that allowed them to transport their child to school was his wife's flexible work schedule. However, according to George, by doing this, "She's got to go to work later. I gotta go to

work. I could ask my boss by then there would be limitations and I'd be losing money by showing up late.”

George went on to discuss that families who do not have this flexible work schedule and cannot transport do not have equal access to charter schools, stating for some, “They have to go with the easiest option which might be throwing your kid on the bus.” Henry, who discussed their family situation noted that he and his wife had flexible works schedules in the morning which allowed them to transport their son to school. Henry stated, “Every morning, either myself or my wife are late to work and have to make that up at the end of the day or a shortened lunch.” Henry summarized that families who do not have this flexibility would have difficulty getting their children to charter schools.

Time Commitment

The time commitment to providing transportation was a subtheme in looking at parent and family needs. Three of the four parents of children who attended neighborhood schools noted that without transportation to charter schools the time commitment would be challenging for the families. For two of the parents, part of this time commitment was also discerning how to get all children to where they needed to be if they had to transport to different schools. Of the eight parents, seven noted this time commitment was more challenging, with several specifically noting how challenging it would be to transport their children when they were not enrolled in the same school. Beth stated, “As long as there's room for siblings in the classrooms. If not, it would mean they pick up at different times or at the same time.” Similarly, when asked about limits of

transportation availability to charter schools, Elaine said, “It would certainly limit some people who are not able to take their kids or if they have a child that did not get into a charter school and other children who did.”

All four charter school parents noted that the time commitment to transport their children to charter schools was challenging but they were committed to making it work for their children to attend a charter school and noted that it was worth the inconvenience of having to transport their children daily. George and Frank discussed the major inconvenience, though both clearly stated the benefit was the curriculum of the school. Frank stated that every day, “My wife has to pack up all four kids in the car and drive to school and come back.” Likewise, Elaine continues to say that transporting her child, “is not necessarily convenient.”

On the positive side, Elaine, who transported her daughter to a charter school 25 minutes each way, with the school being on the way to and from work only two days a week, stated that by transporting she, “doesn’t have to worry about her when she’s on the bus or meeting the bus. It gives me that dedicated time in the morning and afternoon with her.” A total of seven of the eight parents noted the location of the school was a potential barrier to the time commitment.

Theme 3: Diversity

Theme 3 from this research study was diversity, including parent and administrator perspectives on neighborhood schools and charter schools, as well as administrative concerns. Table 4 contains the diversity data for each of the schools that a participant of this study belonged to, as reported by the school district report card to the

public. School names contain a *C* if they were a charter school or *N* if they were a neighborhood school.

Table 4

School Diversity Statistics

School	Caucasian	Hispanic	African American	Asian or Pacific Islander	Alaska or American Native	Multi ethnic	Economic disadvantage
N1	59.5%	6.2%	2.3%	0.9%	8.2%	23.2%	36.1%
N2	64.1%	7.1%	2.1%	1.9%	7.3%	17.5%	31.6%
N3	71%	6.7%	1.6%	2.6%	4.8%	13.3%	25.9%
N4	68.8%	7.4%	1.2%	0.7%	3.2%	18.7%	28.1%
N5	45.1%	10%	8.8%	3.2%	9.1%	23.8%	51.7%
C1	76%	8.5%	0%	0%	1.5%	14%	3.5%
C2	73.9%	3.3%	1.6%	0%	3.3%	17.1%	9.3%
C3	14.2%	5.8%	4.3%	0%	53.5%	21.6%	64.1%
C4	77.8%	7.0%	2.1%	0%	2.4%	10.7%	16.4%
C5	60.5%	8.9%	3.5%	3%	3.4%	20.2%	22.2%

Neighborhood Schools

All charter school parents and parents with children who attended neighborhood schools stated that the majority of neighborhood schools in the district were diverse both racially and socio-economically. All administrators agreed that district neighborhood schools are diverse both racially and socio-economically. Alyssa and Charles felt that

most neighborhood schools were indicative of the diversity in the surrounding community from which they drew students.

Charter Schools

All charter school parents and parents with children who attended neighborhood schools stated that there was minimal racial and socioeconomic diversity in these charter schools. All administrators agreed that there was little racial and socioeconomic diversity in their charter schools. Elaine stated, “There is some diversity in her daughter’s charter school but not as much as some of the others.” Similarly, Fannie stated of the diversity in her son’s charter school, “There’s a little bit, a few Native students, but not very many. There are not many black students, like two in the whole school.” George and Henry noted that their sons’ charter schools and other charter schools were, “mostly White/Caucasian.”

From the administrative standpoint, Ann felt that her school was more diverse than other schools and representative of the town in which the school was located. This school has some low-income families and some military families as well. Bill said that there was a low number of free and reduced lunch students and that the current Caucasian population is slightly lower than the original 78%.

Charles’ school diversity was different from that of the other charter schools, but the charter was targeted to draw a certain population of students. Free and reduced rates were between 60% and 70% according to Bill. Beyond the targeted population of students, Charles stated that he was seeing greater diversity in the other populations of students who were attending the school.

Diane stated that there was some diversity in her charter school, with roughly 74% Caucasian, 17% two or more races, 3% Hispanic, and 1% African American. All students must bring their lunch so free and reduced lunch was not available.

Administrative Concerns

Two administrators mentioned concerns that district administrators and school board members had addressed regarding the limited diversity in these charter schools. Bill expressed his predecessor wanted busing, “He thought that it was a barrier to access to charters. When it became feasible, I offered it.” Additionally, according to Bill, the school board and central office administration staff were having “conversations about the diversity or lack of non-white diversity in the school. The school was 78% Caucasian, and this continued year after year, so the school board became worried about access and outreach to bring these families in.” According to Bill, the school board believed families having access to transportation was the key to changing the diversity of the school. Similarly, in Charles’ school, school district administration never considered not having full transportation to meet the needs of the students to help impact the diversity levels in the school.

Theme 4: Socio-economic Impact

The fourth theme to emerge from this study was socioeconomic impact. From the parent perspective, this theme included struggles for low socio-economic families or even added expense for middle-class families and single-parent families if they have to transport their children to school once or twice a day. Administrator perspectives included concerns over free lunch availability, an element that was not always available

to families in charter schools, limiting access to the families who might not be able to attend because this free lunch was needed.

Struggles for Low Socio-economic Families

A subtheme identified within charter school parents was the challenge that lack of provided transportation would present to families who might be struggling financially. Six parents identified this subgroup as one whose members would not have equal access if they had to transport their children because of the expense involved. These parents noted the expense of gas for daily transport or families who might not be able to afford one or more cars might keep families from having equal access.

In response to the question, “Do you believe that all families have equal access to charter schools?” Denise answered, “Some people only have one car. Their income doesn’t provide them having more than one car. They would still need to have transportation so they wouldn’t be able to afford to take their kids to school.”

With respect to these added expenses, Elaine stated, “We’re definitely paying more in gas, certainly wear and tear on a vehicle and driving in winter conditions.” Similar to Denise and Elaine’s responses, George stated regarding the economic impact on families, “Some people have to work two jobs and don’t have time.”

Free Lunch Availability

Of the four district administrators, three shared that their schools did not offer free and reduced breakfast and lunch availability. Only one of the administrators had the flexibility in their school to offer free and reduced lunches for students. While Charles was able to work with the district to get free lunch availability at his school, the others

stated that they did not have a high enough free and reduced lunch population to be able to offer a free lunch to students who qualified.

Theme 5: Administrative Decision-Making Regarding Transportation

The fifth theme that emerged from this study was administrative decision-making regarding transportation. This was solely from the administrator perspective with subthemes identified as parent and family needs, impact on instruction, and budget expense. These subthemes were key components that administrators mentioned were considered when making transportation decisions at their school.

Recognition of Parent and Family Needs

All four administrators discussed the importance of listening to families and finding out what worked for them and what did not work for them with respect to transportation. The administrators discussed how they used that information to best meet the needs of families and their school. Ann mentioned that the school PTA worked with families to arrange carpools when afterschool transportation was a hindrance. She had also heard from families about the long pick-up lines after school that take a lot of time out of a parent's day and they have worked to make that go more smoothly. One way that Ann accommodated families in the morning was allowing parents to be dropped-off 30 minutes before school. Additionally, she had school staff ride the shuttle and included staff presence at the satellite schools to accommodate parent safety concerns.

Bill listened to families the decision was first made to offer busing to school. He heard that families were in more need of after school transportation so as not to have to take leave from work, furthering the possibility of their children being able to attend the

charter school. Like Ann, Bill opened the door 30 minutes early for student drop-off each morning.

Bill stated:

I heard from a lot of working parents about the difficulty of managing after school care and after school transportation. Even if they are picking up their kid and going back to work, some kids are not conducive to going back to work.

In the last few years, Bill had heard from some families that the transportation arrangement was not working for them. However, he did state that he knew that the transportation arrangement did not work for all families, particularly because of having to be at work in the morning or not having a vehicle to bring a child to school.

Charles, when discussing the needs of the families, stated:

The steering committee was made up of people from the local Native Association and Native educators in the district. I just think they understood the range of Native Families in the community. Transportation would generally be a necessity, whether it was because the parents were working or not. We have a large number of families who come to parent-teacher conferences in cabs. They don't have a car at home.

As part of Diane's school charter, one of the pillars of the school was involved parents and families and there were mandatory volunteer hours. According to Diane, parents who chose this charter school wanted to be involved so there was no transportation provided. Speaking of the transportation arrangement, Diane stated, "They wanted parents present in the school, and we were afraid we would lose that contact and

communication with families if we did not see them. We don't see them every day but at least a few times a week.”

Diane and Bill both discussed some afterschool options that were available for their students several days a week to help parents who were not able to pick students up right away. Many students participated in these after school options, which provide parents some needed options to help after school several days a week.

School Hours and Instructional Time

The three administrators who provided transportation all discussed the decision making process that they believed must be undertaken regarding school start and end times to be able to provide transportation for families. Additionally, all three mentioned how this impacted instructional time. Ann stated:

We built our starting times around bus shuttle times. We wanted to accommodate our closest elementary school so that dictated our school end time. And then our start time because we wanted to cover the greatest amount of area base, so we base that off of the start time of the middle school.

The purpose of creating this greatest area of transportation was to get students to school. Ann also discussed that the district had proposed new start times for elementary and middle schools next year. Ann stated, “Because of our commitment to offering transportation, we don't have to change our start times but if we want to have buses we might have to do it.”

Bill discussed the school was only able to transport one way. Thus, the school leadership believed it was important for families to get students to school and then used

busing through shuttles to the local middle schools based upon their end times at the end of the day, which had caused a slight impact on instructional hours to provide busing. By busing one way only, the school administration sought to have less impact on instructional times than it would had busing had been provided both ways. Initially, the school at which Bill was principal at did not have transportation until the House Bill discussed above required districts that offered transportation to provide some type of access for charter schools. According to Bill, the first offer from the school district was turned down because the busing times that were offered cut instructional time by 45 minutes a day. The second offer did not diminish school time, so he agreed to the offer of afternoon shuttle transportation to local middle schools and one elementary school from which students who lived in those neighborhoods could take a bus home.

Charles stated that his school hours and instructional times were all based upon district bus routes already in place. The district middle schools were the last to start the day and the last to go home, so students took satellite buses to these schools. However, each day, students were getting the minimum number of instructional hours as allowed by the state to allow for full transportation. Charles stated this is not ideal, but it allows students from anywhere in the county to attend this school and the school does their best to maximize the impact of instruction during the school day.

Budget Expense

While a state mandate required districts to either adopt a policy regarding transportation or allocate the money that would have been used to the school, only three of the four administrators mentioned that they provided some type of transportation and

one did not provide any transportation. All administrators explicitly noted the large expense of providing transportation. State law requires that districts provide charter schools with a set amount of money to offset transportation and it is up to the principals to decide how this money is used. Ann, as noted above, used shuttle buses and satellite schools in here school's transportation plan, with full morning transportation availability if the student lived in the town and limited transportation availability in the afternoon. As these buses were driving past the school on the way to the bus barn, she was able to use them as shuttles to provide free transportation without tapping into any of this funding because of the way she arranged the transportation.

Bill and Charles both noted the expense of transportation. Bill was able to use some of this money to provide satellite buses in the afternoon and Charles used the funding to provide full transportation, which completely covered all transportation costs. Diane did not provide any transportation and used this funding in other ways to minimize class size and impact student instruction.

Discrepant Cases

Two situations arose in the interviews in which interviewees contradicted themselves. Both of these situations were with parents who had children who attended charter schools. These parents noted that they transported their children to school and did not want them to take a bus. Both of these participants said that they would have considered a charter school but the only way that they could was if they had consistent busing.

Alyssa discussed the safety concerns of her child on the bus including bus fumes bothering one child and the children standing on the road to catch the bus. Alyssa said, “Cars are zooming by. Kids are not monitored by anyone. They are playing on big snow piles on the side of the road and could slide right into the road. Some kids have flashlights and are flashing cars.” To get some clarification with Alyssa, I asked her if a bus were available to a charter school and what the difference was. She said since the neighborhood schools were nearby, she took her children to school, but if they were further away and she could not take them she would let her children take the bus.

Similar to Alyssa, Beth stated concerns about busing and currently drives her daughter to school each day. Beth stated that she would like her child to attend a charter school, but she and her family live too far away without busing. She continued to say that she would still not let her daughter take the bus. When asked to clarify, she noted that the distant charter schools right now were not an option and that she would only want her child to attend a charter school that was close enough nearby for her to transport.

Summary

In Chapter 4 I discussed the setting of the study, data collection and analysis procedures. During the analysis of the data, I identified five themes. These themes were Theme 1: Transportation Affects Access, Theme 2: Parent Needs, Theme 3: Diversity, and Theme 4: Socio-economic Impact, and Theme 5: Administrative Decision-making Regarding Transportation. All themes were aligned explicitly to the two research questions regarding parent or administrator perspectives with respect to transportation availability and equity in access to charter schools or directly related to the conceptual

framework used for this study, the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968). Finally, the chapter concluded with discrepant cases from the interview responses.

The first research question was:

RQ1: What are administrator perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

From the data analysis, it was evident that administrators expressed that a school's ability to provide transportation affects equal access in charter schools. Not all families are able to transport their children to public schools and this limits their access if busing is not available. Asking families to transport can be a burden. Several of the principals knew early on that being able to provide at least some form of transportation was going to be essential to allow some families to enroll their children in the school and expressed that a lack of transportation was a barrier in access to charter schools. Some principals who had added transportation saw positive changes in the diversity in the school. Each administrator expressed the importance of listening to families to hear their needs and what works for them. The principals considered this information in their decisions about transportation. Key components that administrators knew needed to be considered when making transportation decisions were: (a) family concerns including the struggle for working parents to transport, (b) ways to maximize instructional time while providing some levels of transportation, and (c) consideration of budget constraints.

The second research question was:

RQ2: What are parents' perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

Some parents, who were already transporting their children to school stated that consistent school-provided transportation would have been more convenient, but this factor did not make a big difference in their choice to attend the school. Parents with flexible jobs felt they had an easier time making family provided transportation work than parents who did not have flexible jobs. Parents who were using transportation expressed that they were glad that some transportation was available as this option helped and allowed their child to attend the charter. For families who indicated that they would consider charter schools but were currently enrolled in neighborhood schools, most of them noted the need for some type of transportation for their children to be able to attend. With respect to equity in access, parents did not believe that all families had equal access. Parents specifically noted that working families that did not have flexibility in jobs, families with limited income, families who did not have a car at home, or families who did not live near a charter school would not have equal access without transportation.

In Chapter 5, I will analyze and interpret the findings of this study. I also address limitations to trustworthiness. Additionally, I present future recommendations for research and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This basic qualitative study sought to understand administrators' and parents' perspectives on transportation with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools. Key findings from this study emerged from semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 participants, four parents of charter school students, four parents of students enrolled in neighborhood schools, and four charter school principals. I used the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968) as the framework for and data I analyzed using coding through content analysis aligned with key constructs of the theory of school choice.

The two research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What are administrator perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

RQ 2: What are parents' perspectives about transportation availability with respect to equal access as it affects the ability to enroll in charter schools in the Northwestern United States?

From this study, five themes emerged. These themes were: Theme 1: Transportation Affects Access, Theme 2: Parent Needs, Theme 3: Diversity, and Theme 4: Socio-economic Impact, and Theme 5: Administrative Decision-making Regarding Transportation. The first and last four themes were present with respect to research

question one and the first four of these themes were present with respect to research question two.

The first theme, Transportation Affects Access, pertained to RQ1 and RQ2. Subthemes from the parent perspective included The Ability of Families to Provide Transportation and Consistent Busing. This theme emerged from one of the key constructs of the theory of school choice, that enrollment and access to a school are dependent upon parental satisfaction with a school's founding principles and the ability of these principles to meet a family's needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968). From the administrator perspective, subthemes included the Ability of Families to Provide Transportation and the Known Need for Busing. The key findings from this theme were that parents needed transportation to be able to get their children to charter schools and that when forced to provide transportation to charter schools it was a real struggle for some families. If full, consistent transportation was not provided, access to charter schools was only equitable for those families who could transport. Key findings among administrators showed the known need for consistent transportation to charter schools to allow equitable access for all families.

The second theme that emerged from this study, Parent and Family Needs, was solely tied to RQ2 but was also guided by the theory of school choice constructs that enrollment and access to a school was dependent upon parental satisfaction with a school's founding principles and the ability of these principles to meet a family's needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968). Subthemes present were Flexible Jobs and Time Commitment. Key findings showed that flexibility in the parent workplace was necessary

to allow families to transport children to and from school and that the time commitment to daily transport to and from school was often inconvenient and challenging for the families.

Theme 3, Diversity, emerged from both the parent and administrator perspectives, relating to both RQ1 and RQ2. Subthemes included Neighborhood Schools and Charter Schools. An additional subtheme present from the administrator perspective was District Administration Concerns. The first key finding for Theme 3 was that the charter schools had minimal diversity, particularly when compared to neighborhood schools. An additional key finding from administrators was that the local school district administration was aware of limited diversity in charter schools and expressed concern about this issue.

The fourth theme to emerge from this study, Socio-economic Impact, was related to RQ1 and RQ2. Subthemes present were from the parent perspective, Struggles for Low Socioeconomic Families and from the administrator perspective Free and Reduced Lunch Availability. Key findings from parents and administrators included that the responsibility for daily transportation resting on families is expensive and families must have the means to transport their children. An additional key finding from the administrator perspective was that charter schools are often not able to provide free and reduced lunch, which limits the number of lower SES families who might attend.

The fifth, and final theme present, Administrative Decision-making Regarding Transportation, was aligned only to RQ1. This theme also emerged from the first construct of the theory of school choice that deregulation through school choice allows

administrative decisions to create structures to provide varying options for families, in this case, availability of transportation (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1968).

Subthemes present included Recognition of Parent and Family Needs, School Hours and Instructional Time, and Budget Expense. The key finding for Theme 5 was that intentional administrative decision-making concerning school hours, instructional times, and creativity in planning for potential transportation possibilities extends access to charter schools to more families.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study were based upon data from 12 interviews, four with parents of students enrolled in neighborhood schools, four with parents of students enrolled in charter schools, and four interviews with charter school administrators. I used the theory of school choice (Friedman, 1968) and the current literature, outlined in Chapter 2, in the analysis of the data. The findings are summarized below, according to each theme.

Transportation Affects Access

Although charter school enrollment has tripled in the last 20 years, 70% of the students in the United States attend their neighborhood school (Berends, 2015; Lareau & Goyette, 2014). Typically charter schools do not provide transportation; only 16 of 50 states in the United States have laws that mandate some type of transportation to charter schools (Education Commission of the States, 2018; Jochim et al., 2014). Hamlin (2018) expressed that the lack of transportation to charter schools is a barrier to equal access for families. For some families, the distance from school alone creates a barrier when

transportation must be provided by families (Liu et al., 2018). Goldring and Hausman (1999) found that that 17% of families did not have their children attend a school that they would like to have them attend because transportation was an issue. For many families, the inconvenience of transporting their children to school impacts their ability to attend the school (Meyer & Kucerova, 2017).

The key findings from Theme 1 of this research study were that parents needed transportation to be able to get their children to charter schools and that when forced to provide transportation to charter schools, these families often struggled to be able to provide the transportation. If full, consistent transportation is not provided, access to charter schools is only equitable for those families who can transport. Three of the four parents with children who attended neighborhood schools noted the closest charter schools were between 15 and 25 miles away. Parents with children at charter schools expressed limitations and challenges associated with transporting their children to school each day. Of the schools in this study, some of the charter schools offered limited transportation of some type. Three of the four charter school parents expressed that even though the transportation offerings were limited, if this limited transportation were not available their child would not be able to attend the charter school. Three of the four neighborhood school parents expressed that consistent busing would be needed for their children to attend a charter school, presenting that transportation was a barrier for access for them. From the administrator perspective the key finding was that a known need exists for consistent transportation to charter schools to allow equitable access for all families. One administrator expressed the evidence for transportation and supported the

need stating that when busing arrangements that are in place are not available for whatever reason, student attendance drops to 50%. Two administrators clearly expressed that if families could not transport if families did not have access to charter schools.

These findings aligned with other research findings regarding the ability of families to transport their children to charter schools and the need for consistent transportation to allow access for all families. This study also expanded on previous research in that several schools in the study provided some form of transportation, typically one way to school for some families living in certain areas. These families expressed that even though transportation was limited, it was very valuable to them. Three charter school families expressed that for them this one-way transportation made the difference in their child being able to attend the charter school because they would not be able to transport both ways.

Parent Needs

For many families, transporting their children to charter schools involves a large time commitment and certain criteria must to be met to allow them to transport their children to school. Roda (2018) and Hamlin (2018) found that the work schedule for many parents kept them from being able to transport their child to a charter school that they would like them to attend. Krings et al. (2018) and Senar et al. (2018) both found in their research that transportation to schools presented challenges for many families and certain circumstances did not allow families to transport.

Key findings from Theme 2 in this study were that flexibility in the parents' workplace was necessary to allow families to transport their children to and from school

and that the time commitment to transport them daily to and from school was often inconvenient and challenging for the families. Participants in this study noted that if student transportation were not provided to charter schools, certain family needs would have to be met in order for their children to attend the charter school. All four of the charter school parents noted that their employers offered flexibility in their workday which was essential to allow them to go to work late or leave early and/or take a flexible lunch to go to school and pick up their children from school. Three of the four parents from neighborhood schools noted that flexibility in their work schedule would be necessary for them to transport their child to school if transportation were not available.

The findings from this study were consistent with current research findings concerning parent needs, particularly that an employer's flexibility with their workday greatly impacts their ability to transport their children to school. An additional finding from this study that was not present in the research and that extends knowledge in this area is the challenges and time commitments that are associated with families transporting children to a charter school when transportation is not available. All four charter school families discussed the time commitment for their families and the daily inconveniences that occur because they are transporting their children to school. Two families who use the shuttle system in the afternoon expressed the amount of time their child spends on a bus and then waits outside at the other school, unsupervised for 30 minutes every afternoon. One parent added that although this is an inconvenience for the family it is also a convenience because if the parent had to pick the child up from school,

attendance at the charter school would not be possible. Instead, the student can take the shuttle to a school, wait 30 minutes, and then take a school bus to their home.

Diversity

Heilig et al. (2016), Kotok et al. (2017), Lee and McCandless (2016), and Logan and Burdick-Will (2016) found through separate research that minority populations and special education populations are underrepresented in charter schools and that higher numbers of Caucasian families attend charter schools than neighborhood schools. The location of the charter school alone was an important factor in charter schools with more diverse populations, as some families chose not to send their children to a school because it was located in higher crime or lower socio-economic areas (Phillippo & Griffin, 2016).

In this study, all four parents with children enrolled in neighborhood schools believed the neighborhood schools that their children attended were diverse. All four charter school parents and all four charter school administrators, while acknowledging some diversity in the charter schools, noted it was minimal compared to the diversity in most neighborhood schools in the district. This result led to the first key finding for Theme 3, that the charter schools had minimal diversity, particularly when compared to neighborhood schools. The fact that these schools were not located in high crime or lower socio-economic areas contradicts what Phillippo and Griffin (2016) stated about why families tend to not choose to attend charter schools and lends itself to other reasons as to why the diversity in these schools is minimal.

Gawlik (2018a) emphasized the importance of a good charter school administrator who puts forth great effort to advocate for and promote cultural diversity. An additional

key finding from Theme 3, from the administrator perspective, was that the local school district administration and school board were aware of limited diversity in charter schools and have expressed concerns over this issue. Three of the four administrators expressed that transportation is the key to changing the diversity of charter schools. Two administrators mentioned concerns that district administrators and school board members have addressed regarding the limited diversity in charter schools, expressing their views that families having access to transportation represented the key to changing the diversity of the school. From these two administrators, it was obvious that there is a clear understanding and concern, both at the school and local level, of the limited diversity in the charter schools. Some busing arrangements were made by these schools in an attempt to change the levels of diversity. Even with these busing options, administrators expressed that while over the last few years there have been slight changes in demographics, diversity has changed little.

Socio-economic Impact

The expense for families who must transport their children to school each day can be a potential burden for some families (Brown & Makris, 2018). Liu et al. (2018) found a direct correlation between family income and the use of a car for transportation to school. Families who do not have a vehicle to transport or have limited income for vehicle-related expenses could be impacted in situations where they were required to transport their children and not be able to enroll their children in a charter school. According to Carlson and Cowen (2015), economically disadvantaged families tend to

withdraw from charter schools, noting transportation availability as one of the key reasons for withdrawing their children.

In this study, parents and administrators alike shared concerns over the impact that parent provided transportation has socio-economically on families. Key findings present for Theme 4 included that the responsibility for daily transportation resting on families is expensive and families must have the means to provide the necessary transportation. All eight parents expressed concerns related to socioeconomic factors impacting attendance at charter schools including: lower incomes for single-parent families, difficulties for families only able to afford one vehicle or no vehicle to transport, or the expense of purchasing gasoline becomes prohibitively expensive, thus making it impossible to transport their children to a charter school. All four of the families noted that while they could afford the added expense there was no doubt transportation to school adds additional expenses for their families. These findings align with the research on the socio-economic impact on families and transportation to charter schools.

An additional key finding for Theme 4, from the administrator perspective, was that charter schools are often not able to provide free and reduced lunch, which limits the number of lower socioeconomic families who might attend. While there was no research to support these findings and this finding may be limited to this study, it is an interesting consideration when looking at diversity in charter schools.

Administrative Decision-Making Regarding Transportation

Charter school administrators must consider many criteria when making decisions to best meet the needs of the families of students in their school. Some of these decisions are financially driven and some are instructionally driven. Sirard et al. (2015) emphasized that the expensive cost of transportation puts constraints on charter schools. Sattin-Bajaj (2018) noted that while these are difficult decisions and can be a burden on the school budget, decisions to provide transportation can provide equitable access for families. One recommendation by both Sener et al. and Siegel-Stechler (2017) is to collaborate with the local schools and community to be creative with busing issues.

In this study, the key finding for Theme 5 was that intentional administrative decision-making must sound when it comes to school hours, instructional times, and creativity in planning for potential transportation possibilities to extend access to charter schools to more families. Administrators expressed that when full transportation to and from school was not available to families, administrators needed to be flexible to best meet the needs of families including considering school hours and maximizing the use of any transportation they can provide to families. All administrators discussed ways that they catered to families through early drop-off times or after school options so families could pick their children up later or drop them off earlier to better meet family needs. Of the four administrators three discussed the extensive decision-making process that goes into planning their school day to provide options for some families for busing one way. This included altering their school days to match the start times of other schools in the district to become creative in providing transportation. One administrator specifically

stated that potential start time changes were happening around the district and that their charter school would change their start times accordingly to ensure that they could continue to use shuttle buses to meet the transportation needs of families. While these administrators said that the use of shuttles to local neighborhood schools sometimes led to a shortened school day and shortened instructional times for charter schools, three administrators noted that it was essential to make these changes to their instructional day to be able to provide some form of transportation for families.

All four administrators commented on the large cost of busing and how providing full busing would greatly impact their school budgets. One administrator noted that they could not make changes and provide busing. Instead, they use these funds to add instructional support personnel to the classroom. This administrator said that they believed if families could not transport their children to school, they would not want their children to attend this specific charter school because of the heavy focus on parent involvement. The other three of the four administrators interviewed explained how they were creative and utilized a shuttle system taking advantage of current bus routes to public schools to lessen the financial impact on their school budget. One school used morning and afternoon shuttles to different neighborhood schools one day a week. The neighborhood school that was used as satellite bus transfer location changed depending upon the day of the week. This shuttling helped provide families with transportation to or from school a few days a week, depending upon where students lived. Another administrator used two shuttles to two different neighborhood schools in the afternoon. This administrator arranged for students to be bused home after catching a bus at the

neighborhood schools. One administrator implemented busing both ways but in order to do so, they had to have students take a bus to a neighborhood school on the district's bus route and then shuttle to the charter school. At the end of the day this process was reversed.

In each of these situations there was no financial impact on the charter schools because the buses passed by the charter schools on their way to the bus barn. Two of the administrators were able to adjust their school start and end times to align with these other schools and their bus schedules without impacting instructional time. However, at the school in which full transportation was available to most students the school day was shortened by 42 minutes every day, with a loss of 210 minutes of instruction each week.

All four administrators in this study said that transportation availability for families was important and recognized the challenges that inconsistent or non-existent transportation provides for families' access to charter schools. Of these administrators, three were able to become creative in working with the school district and community, as recommended by Siegel-Stechler (2017) and Sattin-Bajaj (2018) and provide varying transportation options for families. These options ranged from transportation a few days a week to or from school to afternoon transportation for families who lived in certain areas to full transportation availability each day, but with a loss of 210 instructional minutes a week. Each of these administrators weighed the needs of the school, the students, the families, instructional time, and budgeting concerns when they made these decisions.

Limitations of the Study

As with any study, potential limitations exist. The first limitation of this study was that it was limited to interviewing parents and administrators from one school district. Because of the demographics and uniqueness of the community, the results of this study may not easily be generalized to other charter schools and districts. Without conducting additional case studies in similar settings, this research may not be generalizable. Therefore, this study may be limited to analytical induction only.

The second limitation of this study was potentially the number of participants in the study. Only four parents from charter schools, four parents from neighborhood schools, and four charter school administrators were interviewed. The same themes continued to emerge and responses that were provided started to show few additional insights. However, saturation in the data may not have been reached if the experiences of those involved were similar.

Two additional limitations existed regarding the participants. First, parents and administrators may not have been as open to discussing their thoughts regarding the schools in the district because I was a teacher in the district. Additionally, parent input may have varied depending upon their familiarity with charter schools, whether their child is enrolled or not enrolled in a charter school, or by parent reasons for enrolling their children in a charter school. When asking questions about charter schools or locations of charter schools, I found that not all parents were as familiar with charter schools and the location of nearby charter schools. I read a blanket statement concerning charter schools at the beginning of each interview to help ensure that all parent

interviewees understood what a charter school was. Familiarity with these schools may still have been a limitation.

The final limitation of this study was potential research bias. As I was a teacher in the district and had taught previously at a charter school, I might have brought potential bias to this study. To ensure that my biases did not interfere in the study I did not interview administrators or parents that I had previously worked with in a school setting. When interviewing I was sure to keep my questions to those on the interview list or to questions that resulted from statements provided by participants. I also minimized my comments to interviewee responses, focusing instead of questions.

Recommendations

The perspectives presented by the parents and administrators in this study adds to the current research on transportation availability to charter schools and equity in access. Based upon views parents and administrators voiced regarding transportation and equity in access to charter schools and current literature on the topic, I propose the following recommendations. The first recommendation is that administrators consider creative and flexible busing options to help more families be able to access charter schools. This recommendation may include collaboration with other schools or community resources. The second recommendation is that administrators listen to the needs of families when planning start times and end times to be able to extend access to more families. The third recommendation centers on whether full transportation is an outcome that can be achieved, administrators consider family needs and try to provide consistent one-way transportation. A final recommendation is for administrators to intentionally reach out to

more diverse populations in their community and help these community members navigate attendance at charter schools, listening to their needs. To reach more families from lower socio-economic backgrounds consider ways to support these students at school with free or reduced lunch offerings.

Based upon these findings, I recommend that future research include quantitative research that examines the correlation between the demographics of charter schools and the busing availability. I also recommend a quantitative study on the financial impact of families transporting their children to charter schools. A final recommendation for future research is a study on equity in transportation to all students in grades K-12.

Implications

With the gaps evident in both knowledge and practice about how transportation affects enrollment and families who attend charter schools, the significance of this study was to add parent and administrator perspectives regarding transportation to charter schools and equity in access to the pool of literature. In this his study, I presented parent and administrator perspectives regarding transportation to charter schools and equity in access and parents and administrators. This study may be beneficial to administrators in charter schools, school leaders in districts that have charter schools, or administrators who are in the formative stages of implementing a charter school. The parent and administrator perspectives shared regarding the challenges for parents transporting their children to school, equity in access, and innovative ways that administrators were able to provide some levels of transportation may be useful as schools plan for transportation, make changes to existing transportation plans, or choose locations of charter schools.

Additionally, the information gained from this research could help administrators at charter schools be more aware of those affected by transportation or lack of transportation to charter schools and how transportation availability affects potential enrollment in charter schools. Administrators may use this information to best serve their families, minimize barriers for families to allow their children to attend charter schools, and allow greater equity in access for all families. Schools providing increased equity and access to charter schools will help promote social change.

Conclusion

For some families, many obstacles prevent their children from attending charter schools. These obstacles can create a lack of equity in access for families (Wao et al., 2017). Wao et al. and Brown and Makris (2018) attribute much of the inequity in access to lack of ability of transportation. When transportation is not provided to charter schools, parents face many obstacles that can hinder access for children. With more families considering enrolling their children in charter schools, charter schools must more thoughtfully consider how transportation policies are influencing access and enrollment for all families (Dustan & Ngo, 2018; Jochim et al., 2014). This research study examined parent and administrator perspectives with respect to equal access to charter schools and how transportation affects parental capability or willingness to enroll their children in charter schools.

The results of this research study indicate that a school's ability to provide transportation affects equal access in charter schools. Not all families are able to transport their families to public schools and there is inequity in access if transportation is not

available. Parents and administrators from this study expressed the view that that parents transporting their children to charter schools can be a burden for families and for some families this burden may be so great that it does not allow them to enroll their children in a charter school. Concern over parent work schedules, transportation costs, personal transportation available for transport, and the inconveniences on the family were expressed by participants in this study as barriers in access to charter schools. Parents who had more flexible work schedules or attend a school where transportation is provided consistently one way noted that these situations helped their family situations work to attend a charter school. Principals also noted that they recognize that being able to provide at least some form of transportation for families is essential to equity in access to charter schools for all families.

One of the key findings of this study was that if full, consistent transportation is not provided, access to charter schools is only equitable for those families who can transport. The charter schools in this study varied greatly in the transportation that was offered. Some of the charter schools in this study offered transportation on certain days of the week but not necessarily consistent transportation for families because the ability to transport their children varied in the families the school served or the location of the pick-up or drop-off. One school offered full transportation to families but doing so created extended commute times and a shorter instructional time for students. Finally, one school did not offer any transportation for families. Further research is needed to examine equity in access to charter schools in which full, consistent access in transportation services is

provided compared to when some transportation service is provided, but not necessarily a consistent level of transportation service.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Interview questions: For parent who has a child that attends a charter school

1. How far from your home is the charter school your child attends?
2. Is school provided transportation available at the charter school your child attends?
3. How does your child get to and from school on a daily basis?
4. What role, if any, did transportation play in attending the charter school you chose for your child to attend?
5. What limitations, if any, are present because of transportation available to the school your child attends?
6. What are the benefits, if any, to the transportation situation?
7. Do you believe that all families have equal access to the charter school or other charter schools?
8. How would you describe the diversity of the charter school your child attends?

Interview questions: For parents who has a child who attends a conventional neighborhood school

1. How far from your home is the school your child attends?
2. Is school provided transportation available to the school your child attends?
3. How does your child get to and from school on a daily basis?
4. What limitations, if any, are present because of transportation available to the school your child attends?
5. How would you describe the diversity of the charter school your child attends?
6. Are you familiar with any of the charter schools in the school district?
7. How far are these charter schools from your home?
8. Have you ever or would you ever consider your child attending one of these charter schools?
9. What role, if any, would transportation availability play in your child attending a charter school?
10. Do you believe that all families have equal access to district charter schools?

Interview questions: Administrators of Charter Schools

1. What is the transportation arrangement for students who attend your charter school?
2. What decisions went into deciding what transportation would or would not be provided to families?
3. How would you describe the socioeconomic, cultural, and academic diversity of your school?
4. Do you believe that transportation or lack of transportation affects diversity at the school? Please elaborate why you answered the way you did.
5. Have you had any families come to you who have struggled to provide transportation but would like to attend your school?
6. What after-school options exist for families, if any?