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Silent Policy Feedback Through School Choice

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Abstract

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by

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JD, Capital University College of Law, 1997

BS, Denison University, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Increasing numbers of Florida parents are withdrawing their children from traditional

public schools in highly-rated school districts to enroll them in tuition-free, startup,

charter schools. Since not all parents have equal access or are as equally motivated to

elect school choice alternatives, the fiscal sustainability of the traditional public school

system is at risk. Using Schattschneider's policy feedback process as a model, the

purpose of this research was to gain an in depth understanding of the role policy

perception plays on the decision-making process by parents. Data for this qualitative

single-case study were collected through interviews with 8 charter school parents residing

in a single top-performing Florida public school district. All data were inductively coded

and then subjected to a thematic analysis procedure. Key findings indicated that

participants elected school choice based on perceptions that diminished curricular rigor

and diminished classroom safety are the direct result of the classroom compositions

found in a general education classroom in a traditional public school. The participants

opined that the inability of traditional public schools to adequately accommodate for the

diverse abilities of students placed in general education classrooms in accordance with

current policy results in higher-achieving students being disenfranchised. The social

change significance is showing how parental perception of existing policy impacts school

choice election, thus providing guidance to lawmakers about legislative reforms that

could limit the school choice migration and secure the viability of traditional public

schools for those children limited in school choice options.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated first and foremost to my family who have stood by me in this journey with unwavering support and encouragement and to whom I will be forever grateful. I also dedicate this study to all the parents nationwide who find themselves struggling with the question of how to best educate their child in a new world of choice and an old-world of party politics and vested interests. It is hopeful that this study will bring to the forefront a conversation not only about what parents want from their traditional public schools, but also how lawmakers can reform legislation to meet the needs of all students and not just those targeted by social justice reform initiatives.

Acknowledgments

It has only been through the love and support of my husband, my two sons, and my

parents that this study has been made possible. I'd like to recognize my family for their

patience and understanding and most of all for their relentless encouragement that gave

me the confidence and fortitude necessary to see this research to its successful

completion. The faculty at Walden University went to great lengths to guide and assist

me in this research process that has now afforded educators and policymakers the

information necessary to better understand the power and impact of policy perception in

the election of school choice. Specifically, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to

my committee members for their dedication to the success of my research.

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Chapter 1: Overview

Introduction to the Study

After nearly 60 years since the groundbreaking decision declaring school

segregation unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the issue

of racial segregation in American schools remains a persistent problem in society, in part

due to increased parental input in school selection afforded by school choice legislation

(Billingham & Hunt, 2016). As more families depart the public school system, the system

becomes depleted of politically active parents (Mettler & Soss, 2004) and those capable

of promoting positive change from within (Fleming, 2014). Because school choice is not

equally available to all students (Pearson, Wolgemuth, & Colomer, 2015), there exists

concern for those students left behind within the public school system that their needs

may not be able to be served by the system due to the loss of high-achieving students, and

funding decreases due to lower enrollments. This is especially true in that students

electing school choice will generally move to higher achieving schools (Sirer, Maroulis,

Guimera, Wilensky, & Amaral, 2015), thus increasing the percentage of low achieving

students retained in the traditional schools who are in need of additional costly resources

to address social and mental issues (see Pugach, Blanton, & Correa, 2011).

School choice opponents have long argued the social, economic, and legal

ramifications that choice within the public education system has on surrounding

traditional public school districts as well as the students retained therein (Goodwin &

Kemerer, 2002; Roda & Wells, 2013). Most research to date has studied what parents

value when selecting a school of choice (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Cucchiara & Horvat,

2013; Jacobs, 2013) or the impact of school choice selection on the affected traditional public schools (Goodwin & Kemerer, 2002; Ni & Arson, 2011; Roda & Wells, 2013). Although some studies have endeavored to understand why parents depart failing traditional public schools (Bowen & Trivitt, 2014; Condliffe, Boyd, & DeLuca, 2015), the research is silent on why parents assigned to top-performing traditional public schools opt for a school choice alternative.

Schattschneider's (1935) theory of policy feedback argued that policies result in human behavior that in turn impact politics and future policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). When public policies shape political participation, polices have the potential of profoundly impacting the ability of a democratic government to administer services effectively (Campbell, 2012). With the introduction of choice in the education system, the silent majority, as identified by President Nixon (Nixon, 1969), have been afforded the opportunity to provide silent feedback to education policies. By assessing the perceptions and dissatisfaction of parents who departed highly-rated, traditional public schools for school choice alternatives, lawmakers can now have insight into the impact of policy on school choice election.

Charter schools, a tuition-free school choice alternative and the most popular in the state of Florida (Florida Department of Education (FDOE), 2016), operate in over 46 of the state's 67 school districts with the number of charter school enrollments having risen at a rate of 193% from 2005 through 2016 (FDOE, 2016). The limiting of this case study to the impact of policy perception on the decision-making process to elect charter schooling by parents residing in a top-performing public school district affords

lawmakers the opportunity to better understand how policy perception can impact the provision of a public good. In turn, this research should help pave the way for lawmakers to address education reforms necessary to support student retention in traditional public schools and thus ensure the fiscal sustainability of the American education system. This study is significant to social change in that an increased traditional public school enrollment among the silent majority will ensure a viable future for public schools in a 21st century, competitive, free-market system.

Background of the Problem

The state of Florida has witnessed a 193% increase in charter elections statewide since 2005 (FDOE, 2016). Although 67% of students served in Florida's charter schools during the 2015-2016 school year were minorities and just under 50% were classified as economically needy based on enrollments in the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Program (FDOE, 2016), the diversity of students diminishes dramatically with startup charter schools in nonimpoverished districts in that conversion charters tend to exist in "minority-dense urban locations" as opposed to start-up charters (Loveless & Field, 2009, p. 108). The reason this increased school choice enrollment presents as a problem can be explained through the literature.

Villavicencio (2013) noted that not all parents have equal access to school choice information and thus the election of school choice by lower socioeconomic families is not a choice but rather the result of limited resources and economic variables outside the parents' control. Pearson et al. (2015) found that those parents who do actively seek out choice, where choice is not directly presented, are typically more motivated about their

child's education and thus place a higher value on academics. When parents do elect school choice, they tend to move to higher achieving schools, with students in the highest quartile of academic achievers moving to higher achieving schools at twice the rate of their lower achieving student counterparts (Sirer et al., 2015). The migration of high achieving students to school choice could ultimately deplete traditional public schools of high achieving students and the funding associated with their enrollment.

Increased classroom time is required of teachers with low-income students who do not spend equivalent time on studies at home as their higher-income counterparts (Raudenbusch & Willms, 1995). Pugach et al. (2011) concluded that schools with under-achieving students require more funding for social and mental issues. With the loss of higher achieving students, Florida's traditional public schools will be less likely to receive funding under the Florida School Recognition Program (n.d.) due to decreased overall standardized test scores, and will further lose full time enrolment dollars allocated through Florida Administrative Code, Rule *6A-1.0451* (Florida Administrative Code, 2016). School choice therefore results in the highest fiscal burden being placed on traditional public schools with increased high-risk enrollments as opposed to declining schools intended to improve academic performance in light of school choice (Ni & Arson, 2011). Parent participation in advocating for local school levies and political participation overall in the local education arena diminishes when parents depart traditional public school systems for alternative education (Buckley & Schneider, 2007; Fleming 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Smith & Ingram, 2002).

With the increase of school choice election by high achieving students, the impact of school choice on the traditional public school system is one that could promote racial segregation and revert public education to a state that existed before the civil rights era (Roda & Wells, 2013). Although many would like to consider the issue of school segregation a problem of the past, the increased parental input in school selection that exists within school choice legislation has resulted in concerns that racial segregation in the American school system remains a persistent problem (Billingham & Hunt, 2016).

The American public education system is no longer one of a monopoly, but rather it has entered into the free market system of the 21st century and as such parents now have a voice in the debate over desired academic outcomes (Condliffe et al., 2015). White, middle-income parents are seeking schools of choice that reflect their own self-identity (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013). Studies on the factors parents value in selecting schools of choice have found that race and classroom composition, the numeric make-up of students within a classroom based on academic, cognitive, or behavioral ability, among other nonacademic criteria, are significant in the decision-making process (Pugach et al., 2011; Jacobs, 2013; Schneider & Buckley, 2002).

Public support for local school boards and a fair playing ground independent of race and economics are necessary to advance positive education form (Garda, 2011). Moe (2012) further presented the many political obstacles and third party vested interests currently embedded in the public education system that hinder positive education reform. Garda (2011) found that positive reform can only come when political interests that run contrary to the academic outcomes desired by parents are resolved.

Schattschneider (1935) was the first to advance the policy feedback theory (PFT) in which he argued that policies result in human behavior that in turn impact politics and future policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Fleming (2014) used PFT to show how voucher parents become more involved as their child's education is wholly dependent on education policy and the parents' perception of the public system. Fleming further noted, however, that after enough time of being outside the local schools, school choice parents will turn away from advocating in favor of or fiscally supporting local school levies. Past research around political participation and policy feedback reflect that universally applied programs will spur political participation while means-tested policies, those that target to benefit a specified group of individuals, hereinafter referred to as 'means-tested policies', generally depress participation and political engagement (Fleming, 2014). The loss of high-achieving students and engaged families from the public school system not only impacts political participation in promoting public education, but can also have a significant impact on the students left behind within the public system.

Gottfried (2014) studied the impact of peer effects in urban elementary school children and found consistent evidence that classmates do affect in both positive and negative ways the academic outcomes of their peers across multiple areas of child attributes, both cognitive and noncognitive. Hattie (2002) found teachers of homogeneous classrooms of higher-level learners more able to devote time and energy to lesson planning, experience a higher level of job satisfaction, and engage in more challenging feedback and questioning with students and parents. As policymakers continue to pass legislative measures that are means-tested, meaning targeted to the benefit of specific

students to the exclusion of others, it is arguable that those disenfranchised will use school choice to enroll in alternative means of education.

Gormley and Balla (2013) laid out the components of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002) and the implications of the same on government accountability, with specific reference to the policy focus on low-achieving and English language learner students. Martin (2015) expressly demonstrated how the mandates of this federal legislation, and specifically the adequate yearly progress (AYP) mechanism that prioritizes student achievement based on race and economics, run counter to the innovation and alternative education perspectives advanced and promoted by charter schools.

Erikson and Stoker (2011) found that when the personal effects of public policy become evident, people will begin to act in a self-interested fashion and develop self-serving attitudes; and Schneider and Ingram (1993) previously noted that when governments deliberately institute policy that is designed to impact target groups, the message sent can be one that drives a negative perception of government by those excluded from the target or protected group. As public participation in a public service diminishes, so too does the ability of the government to effectuate the provision of that service (Campbell, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Increasing numbers of Florida parents are withdrawing their children from highly-rated traditional public schools to enroll them in tuition-free, startup, charter schools. According to the National Association of Charter Public Schools (2016), the charter

school migration in Florida exceeds both the national and state averages for charter

school election. Researchers have established the importance of citizen engagement in the

successful provision of a public good or service (Campbell, 2012), and how both good

and bad experiences with public institutions and polices can drive political beliefs and

behavior (Fleming, 2014). While past research supports the democratic impact of charter

school enrollment in the loss of politically active parents who advocate for fiscal support

of public schools and policy reform (Buckley & Schneider, 2007), it is not known if the

interpretive effects, which are the cognitive effects of policies that can shape one's beliefs

and motivations, (Fleming, 2014), of education policy are driving the decision-making

process to elect school choice.

An initial review of the literature revealed two things. First, the nature, if any, of

the relationship between parental perception of education policy and the decision-making

process to elect school choice is unknown. Second, it is unclear if the election of school

choice in top school districts is a form of policy feedback resulting in the potential failure

of traditional public schools to effectively implement current policy. Therefore, the

problem is that, while school choice research supports the premise that parents become

less democratically involved in education policy and politics after they depart the public

school system (Fleming, 2014), it is unknown if education policy and politics is the

reason for parental departures to school choice. If a link can be made between parental

perception of education policy and the decision to elect school choice, this research may

provide evidence of the existence of a new form of silent policy feedback that has the

potential of impacting not only future policy but also unilaterally undermining the government's ability to successfully implement existing policy.

Research Question

The following was the primary research question that I addressed in this study: To what extent, if any, does public policy perception play on a parent's decision-making process to elect charter education over a highly-rated traditional public school?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to gain an in depth look at the decision-making process to elect school choice by parents residing in a highly rated traditional public school district within the state of Florida. More specifically, I analyzed the decision-making process to determine the role, if any, that interpretive effects of education policy played in the school choice election process. Not all students have equal access to school choice (Billingham and Hunt, 2016), and those that typically do exercise school choice have parents who are more motivated and actively engaged in their student's education (Pearson et al., 2015). As such, this study can be significant in helping lawmakers better understand the impact of current policies on the migration to school choice that is leaving many traditional public schools diminished funding amidst a higher percentage of at-risk students.

Schattschneider (1935) was the first to advance the PFT in which he argued that policies result in human behavior that in turn impact politics and future policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Schattschneider's research has been expanded on in an array of fields including studies on the interpretive effects of policy on citizen perception. When

governments deliberately institute policy that is designed to impact target groups, the message sent can be one that drives a negative perception of government by those excluded from the target or protected parties (Smith and Ingram, 2002). Mass attitude, therefore, has the potential to drive politics and future policy (Smith and Ingram, 2002).

Through this research, I sought to understand the impact, if any, that parental perception of public education policies that are focused on target groups of students has on the decision-making process to elect school choice. Specifically, I focused on the perception of education policy by parents in a single, startup charter school, hereinafter referenced by the pseudonym Anywhere Charter. All participants had the option to otherwise enroll their children in traditional public schools located within a top performing school district.

Mettler and Soss (2004), through a detailed articulation of how public policy influences mass behavior and opinion, asserted the critical need for scholars to develop studies on policy feedback that are more "citizen-centered" (Mettler & Soss, 2004, p. 64). By gaining a deeper understanding of the interpretive effects of education policy on the decision-making process of school choice parents to depart a high-performing school district, this case study provides a citizen-centered understanding of how policy perception drives civic disengagement and the significant impact of the same on the government's ability to successfully implement existing policy.

Theoretical Framework

If parents are electing school choice based on a negative perception of public education policy, it is possible that school choice is being used as a silent form of policy

feedback designed to drive politics and policy through civic disengagement, rather than engagement. The theoretical base for this study was Schattschneider's (1935) PFT which he used to explain the connection between human behavior and political legislative action, and specifically the impact of mass civic engagement on policy reform (Mettler & Soss, 2004). This study, conversely, expanded on Schattschneider's (1935) theory to explain how civic withdrawal, as opposed to action, can equally impact policy reform.

This approach provides a foundation for the connection between public policy perception and human behavior, as well as the residual impact of that behavior on policy implementation. This dissertation shows how policy feedback can be expanded to not merely explain how human behavior effectuates future elections and legislation, but how the behavior of the polity, in a school choice environment, can work to negate the legislative intent and impact of existing policy without any need to earn the ear of political leaders or effectuate change through the ballot box.

Through the election of school choice, parents are removing themselves and their children, along with the funding associated with their children's' enrollments, from the public school system (Buckley & Schneider, 2007). By illuminating the impact of public policy perception in the school choice decision-making process, this research expands on Schattschneider's (1935) theory through empirical evidence that supports the existence of a silent form of policy feedback. This new silent form of policy feedback is capable of significantly impacting not only policy implementation but also working independent of long-standing democratic processes. Parents who feel their children have been

disenfranchised by the traditional public school system exercise silent policy feedback in reaction to negatively perceived implementation of means-tested policies. (see Figure 1).
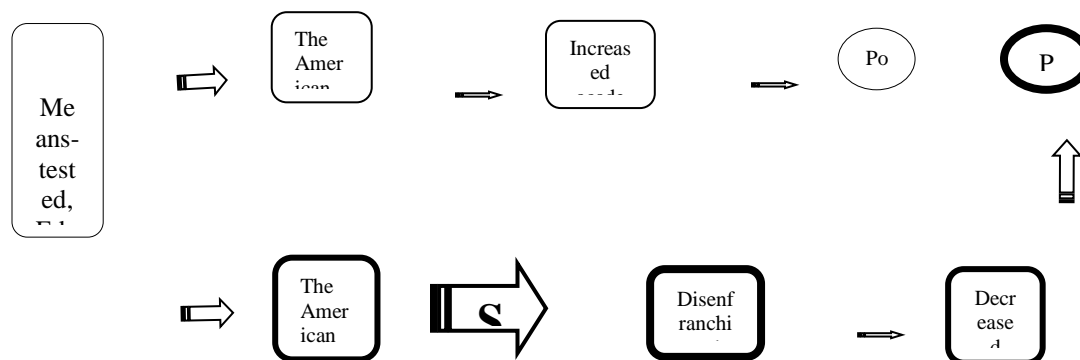
Figure 1. Silent policy feedback through school choice

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. I selected a case study methodology because I was analyzing a decision-making process for better understanding. Creswell (2013) explained how instrumental case studies are designed such that the researcher can ascertain rich, thick data on a decision-making process already experienced by the participants. A case study affords participants the ability to tell their stories and thus reveal to the researcher their perception of reality, which in turn sheds light on how and why the participant came to a particular decision (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Studies that seek to find the answer to a question of "why" or "how" are well suited for a case study research (Yin, 2014). I sought to analyze how policy impacts the school choice decision-making process amongst parents residing in a top-performing school district.

In this case study, I focused on parents residing in a top-rated school district who have elected to enroll their child or children in a start-up charter school as opposed to

enrolling their children in their zoned traditional public school. I used the constructivist lens to demonstrate the cognitive impact that education policy has played in the decision-making process. Although Yin (2014) explained that a single-case study can be the basis of significant generalization and therefore should not be discounted as without merit, generalizability is but one means of gaining knowledge and that which cannot be formally generalized does not for that reason alone negate the fact that science, the "gaining of knowledge", has not occurred (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 227).

The single-case design that I used in this study successfully elicited a rich, thick understanding of the parental decision-making process to depart a traditional public school for a start-up charter school. I collected data from participants through in-depth, face-to-face interviews and member-checking (Creswell, 2013). I created memos with conceptual titles, codes, and summaries that provided me with a series of "mental dialogues," as recommended by Maxwell (2013). Memos provide the researcher with reflection sources for goals, methods, and participant relations (Maxwell, 2013). The codes from the memos guided me in the mapping of trends and like-connections that I could then link to applicable education policies.

Operational Definitions

Charter School: a publicly funded independent school established by teachers, parents, or community groups under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority that operates the school through a board (Oxford Dictionaries, *n.d.*) and receives flexibility from certain state and local rules in exchange for a higher level of accountability.

Classroom Composition: refers to the numeric make-up of students within a classroom based on academic ability as well as those students with special cognitive and/or behavioral needs.

Education reform: the national or state legislative initiatives to improve the quality of education in the public school system through various measures including vouchers, privatization, or implementation of school choice options from homeschooling and virtual schooling to charter schools.

Florida Conversion Charter School: charter schools that were originally constructed and operated for at least two years as a traditional public school within a state school district and then on the request of parents, teachers, and/or a school district, the school converted to a charter school under Florida Law (Bondi, 2013).

Means-tested policies: policies that aim to target and apply only to a specific population to the exclusion of others, whether based on fiscal criterion for eligibility to assistance programs within the school system or on academic criterion to classify students in quartiles of learning that require additional resources and attention.

School Choice: referred to the educational option provided parents to select a school other than the traditional public school to which their residence is zoned.

Start-up Charter School: traditional public schools created from their inception as a charter school of choice, never having been under the operation of the traditional public school district.

Traditional Public School (TPS): public schools that are operated by the local school district and enrolled primarily through a zoning initiate that serves students within a geographic location.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

The assumptions I had at the onset of my research about the difficulty I might encounter with accessing charter school parent volunteers served to be a nonissue. Access to charter school parents was not difficult. Although there exists contention between traditional public schools and charter schools, charter parents from Anywhere Charter appeared eager to assist in this study. Therefore, my initial concerns about the willingness of parents to participate was not an issue or limitation on this study.

The results of this study are limited, however, to one charter school within Florida. Other states, with varying state legislation and student-body compositions, are not within the scope of this study, which limits the scope to Florida and specifically to charter school election. Furthermore, the results of this study should not be generalized statewide due to the unique student enrollment and diversity of populations within Florida and the wide latitude on policy implementation extended to individual school districts within the state. Further research is necessary to drill down not only into the impact of SPF on the effective implementation of existing policy but also into the possible impact of SPF on future policy.

Significance of the Study

Nearly 60 years since the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the issue of racial segregation remains a persistent problem in part due to

increased parental input in school selection (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). Although school

choice has been studied at length in the private sector of higher education (Siekpe &

Barksdale, 2013), and even at the K-12 academic level regarding declining, urban schools

(Bowen & Trivitt, 2014), the research to date has not included studies on the recent

phenomena of rising school choice elections by families in highly rated K-12 public

school districts. Not all charter schools are created equal. There are start-up charters

created as choice to existing schools and conversion charter schools that maintain the

enrollments previously held by a failing traditional public school. By confusing the

diverse types of charter schools and combining the data from start-up charters and

conversion charters, the true diversity and student populations served by different types

of charters can be overlooked (see Loveless & Field, 2009). Although more minorities

are enrolled in Florida charter schools state-wide (Florida Department of Education,

2016), such diversity is generally only true when viewing conversion charter schools

together with start-up charters (see Loveless & Field, 2009).

As published by the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools (2014), Florida

holds four of the top 10 school districts across the nation with the fastest growing charter

school enrolment, making the charter school migration highly pronounced in Florida.

Merely because school choice is on the rise and becoming more available to parents state-

wide, does not equate to the same being easily accessible by all parents, especially those

parents who are less motivated to learn about academic alternatives or without the fiscal

means to effectuate the same (see Billingham & Hunt, 2016). As more families depart the

public school system for charter schools, the system becomes depleted of politically

active and vocal parents who help to promote positive change for the students enrolled

(Fleming, 2014). The loss of politically active parents from public schools can translate

to catastrophic budget ramifications for the K-12 public school system through not only

the funding that is associated with the lost enrollments (Florida Funding & Financial

Reporting, n.d.) but also through decreased public support on ballot initiatives (Mettler

and Soss, 2004). Schools require more funding for additional resources capable of

meeting the social and mental issue needs of high-risk students (Pugach et al., 2011). As

best stated by President Thomas Jefferson in a letter to Charles Yancey, "if a nation

expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilisation [sic], it expects what never was

and never will be" (Jefferson, 1816, p. 4, para. 2). Therefore, the education of the high-

risk students left behind in the public school system is critical to the sustainability of this

nation's democracy.

This study is significant to social change in that the findings shed light on how

parental perception of existing education policy impacts school choice election, thus

providing guidance to lawmakers about potential reforms that could limit the school

choice migration and secure the viability of traditional public schools for those children

limited in school choice options.

Summary

While past research reflects the potential importance of maintaining civic

engagement in traditional public schools, it is unknown why motivated parents residing

in highly-rated, traditional public school districts are migrating to tuition-free, charter

schools. Although research has been conducted on what parents look for in selecting a

school of choice (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Jacobs, 2013; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013), the factors driving the decision-making process to opt-out of a traditional public school, especially schools rated highly by state educators, was unknown.

Moe (2012) and Garda (2011) believe the public-school system in the United States has long been controlled by politicians and vested interests who have created a web of policies that can stifle positive student-centered education reform. Charter schools challenge the age-old power-struggle between families and government by giving parents a tuition-free alternative. With charter school election increasing by 193% in the state of Florida from 2005 to 2016 (FDOE, 2016), the migration to charter schools has become a phenomenon deserving of attention. This is specifically supported through the inability of governments to effectively provide the public with a public service or public good when public participation in that service or good decreases (see Campbell, 2012). Moreover, school choice is erroneously represented as equally accessible to all parents, when in fact lower income families generally do not have adequate access to school choice information or ability to exercise the same (Laberee, 2000). The traditional public school system is on a trajectory in which its classroom compositions are likely to increase in high-risk students in need of additional funding and resources (Pugach et al., 2011), while receiving decreased funding due to lost enrollments and lower likelihood of meeting academic measures attached to state and federal education funding.

Researchers of school choice have documented the factors valued by parents in selecting a school of choice, many of which are nonacademic factors surrounding race and classroom composition (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). The

impact of school choice on the traditional public school system is one that could promote racial segregation and revert public education to its state before the civil rights era (Roda & Wells, 2013). This study supports the contention that instead of simply writing off school choice, research is necessary to understand why parents are seeking out schools based on nonacademic factors like race (Billingham & Hunt, 2016), and proximity (Jacobs, 2013).

Schattschneider (1935) was the first to advance the PFT in which he argued that policies result in human behavior that in turn impact politics and future policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). The outcome of this study further expands the PFT by demonstrating how human behavior through school choice can impact the enforcement of existing policy. This research has the potential to drive education reform through the recognition of a new form of silent policy feedback, one that works independent of the ballot box as it does not require public political participation. With the incorporation of choice into the American education system, parents can now silently depart the traditional public school system for choice alternatives. Parents are no longer held hostage to the policies and educational reforms mandated by lawmakers. Parents now have a choice.

Understanding the school choice decision-making process is critical in that the mass behavior of choice election impacts the students left behind in traditional public schools (Goodwin and Kemerer, 2002), as well as the government's ability to implement existing education policy (Campbell, 2012). In this case study, I investigated charter school parents eligible for attendance at traditional public schools within a top performing, public school district to learn why they elected charter schooling instead. By

assessing participant perceptions and dissatisfactions, I have learned the factors that can guide lawmakers in reforms that minimize school choice elections and have provided evidence of the impact of policy perception on the decision-making process of parents to elect school choice. This study is significant to social change in that an increased traditional public school enrollment amongst high achieving students from motivated families will ensure a viable future for public schools in a 21st century, competitive, free-market system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Before school choice, the American public education system enjoyed the benefits of a captured audience whereby lawmakers and school districts were free to pass reforms without fear of fiscal or political consequence. Most policy reforms in public education become embedded in a complex system of mandates that make repealing of said reforms almost impossible (Hill & Jochim, 2009). School choice advocates believe that the intent of federal education policy and the state policies implemented in response thereto run counter to the innovation sought by charter schools, leaving the possibility of discovering innovative solutions to old problems in education unlikely (Martin, 2015). The rise of school choice has a direct fiscal, political, and social impact on traditional public schools and specifically those marginalized populations without access to choice (Billingham & Hunt, 2016).

Understanding the interpretive effects of education policies, if any, on the decision-making process to elect school choice is deserving of research. Before the factors that weigh on the decision-making process to depart a traditional public school can be examined, it is important to first understand the history of the American education system, the charter school movement, and the education policies at play in the 21st century, free market K-12 education system. After analyzing the transition of the American public education system from a monopoly to a modern-day marketplace, I will cover the factors parents value in selecting a school of choice and the impact school choice election has had on the public education system to date. I will conclude with a

review of PFT and the role policy perception plays in mass behavior and ultimately political action in order to explain the policy feedback paradigm potentially being created through school choice.

Research Strategy

I conducted the literature review using online searches with Google Scholar, as well as the Walden University library. The Walden online library provided many of the articles used in this review through databases on education as well as political theory. I searched for general terms including *school choice* and *education*. With these terms, I used other words and phrases such as *policy feedback*, *voucher*, *charter schools*, and *Florida* to narrow the search. I often refined searches to identify more recent articles by authors of works that cited earlier, foundational studies. Although there are many studies on how a parent decides which school of choice is best for their child, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the decision-making process to leave a traditional public school for a school of choice. In this study, I sought to better understand the impact, if any, that policy perception plays on that decision-making process.

I begin this literature review with a chronological description of the history of the American education system, the charter school movement, and the means-tested, education polices initiated in Florida that may be impacting school choice election within the state. I then examine the school choice selection process and the political, social, and economic impact school choice has had on the public school system and the students retained therein. This review concludes with a review of the public policy paradigm as it correlates to school choice.

Review of the Literature

The decision to enroll one's child in a particular school is a difficult one, made even more complex with the incorporation of school choice. The following literature review includes information on the evolution of the American education system from one with a captured audience to a free market system. In this review, I highlight the studies on the charter school movement and Florida's education policies that may be impacting the decision of parents to depart top-rated, traditional public schools within the state. Although the factors that parents value when selecting a school of choice are well documented, there is a lack of research on the factors that cause parents to leave highly-effective public schools for a school of choice. In the following literature review, I demonstrate the gap in the literature involving the decision-making process to depart a K-12 traditional public school for a school of choice in a nondepressed school district, and the potential impact that means-tested, education policies in the state of Florida may have on the rise in school choice elections in top rated school districts.

The History of Public Education

Historically there has been little to no alternative to public education for families in the middle to low-income populations in the United States. Some parents merely select a school based on their zip code (Jacobs, 2013). Although parochial schools in the early and mid-19th century provided lower-income families with an alternative to public education, the same was all but put out of reach for many around 1876, when states began passing versions of the federally failed Blaine Amendment limiting all public funding of sectarian institutions, legislation that exists currently in the state of Florida (Fl. Const. Art

I, §3). With most if not all options outside of public schooling becoming cost-restrictive for families amidst newly enacted compulsory education laws, parents in the middle and low-income brackets were forced to elect traditional public education even if the same was not their first or desired choice.

Like all monopolies of captured audiences, public education administrators had little need to address the concerns of parents. Over the past century, observers have argued that the United States has had a public school system free to implement policy and drive education initiatives without concern for parental input or perspective (Hill & Jochim, 2009). School choice, and specifically charter schools, is arguably changing this dynamic in that charter schools drive competition within the school system (Betts, 2009). The impact of school choice has earned national attention based on claims that the same results in school segregation, as most recently charged by the NAACP in its vote for a moratorium on charter schools (Strauss, 2016).

There are many obstacles to effective education reform, but to really understand the progression or stagnancy of true reform, one must be willing to analyze the vested interests that may be creating a possible impediment to successful public education. Moe (2012) addressed the balance of power and the struggles that arise when teacher unions, one form of vested interest in the education system, are given unchecked discretion in dictating public education. Moe explained how the dismal graduation rates in the United States have dropped below the half-way marker in many of the nation's major cities, especially those with high percentages of minority, high-risk students. These lower-than-expected graduation rates occurred after lawmakers more than tripled the amount of tax

dollars allocated to said communities for education (Moe, 2012). Per Moe, vested

interests in education held by teacher unions and the politics associated therewith have

stifled real, true education reform in the United States. Through a review of the counter-

objectives between union goals and that of children wanting to be educated by highly

qualified teachers, Moe concluded that if the unions continue to exist and show economic

support for political candidates, the chance for real reform, including choice initiatives

and accountability measures, are less likely to occur.

Although Moe (2012) expanded the understanding of how vested interests limit

positive reform, his study did not address the impact of vested interests on parental

perception or mass behavior. Moe, however, noted that the power of the unions could

come to an end under a changing economic scene. Some educators and lawmakers argue,

however, that unions and third-parties' interests have not been the only impediment to a

thriving public school system in America. Garda (2011) compiled a historical review of

the many failed attempts at education reform in Louisiana to effectuate positive reform

including charter school introduction, school grading, and teacher accountability with

evaluations linked to student test scores. Garda outlined how Hurricane Katrina was the

turning point in the state of Louisiana's long-running attempt to legislatively reform

education in New Orleans due to the rampant fraud and corruption in the district that had

resulted in unsustainable debt, FBI indictments, and the complete lack of a student-

centered agenda. To provide guidance to other school districts regarding education

reform, and to answer the question of whether the state-run school control in New

Orleans should be returned to the local districts to operate, Garda explained that attention

must be given to the competing political interests that often run contrary to positive education reform being proposed and often desired by parents.

If public schools are to succeed under local control, Garda (2011) concluded that public support of the local school board will be needed, in addition to a fairer playing ground whereby race and economics do not appear as determinants on school admissions. Although Garda was addressing the unfair treatment of minority students within the system, his conclusions about policies that are not equally applied to all students can be arguably applicable to nonminority students as well, who may find themselves disenfranchised by means-tested policies that exclude them from the academic success plans of a school district. Garda's contention that public support of a local school board will be necessary is critical to the significance of this research in that as more families opt out of traditional public education, the ability of local governments to effectively administer education becomes more difficult (Campbell, 2012).

The Charter School Movement

Ray Budde was an organizational theorist who derived the concept of a charter school as a decentralized educational environment in the 1970s (Kolderie, 2005). It was not until the 1990s that ideas of accountability and local autonomy in education became accepted concepts in Florida, concepts that paved the way for state sanctioned charters in 1996 (Terzian & Boyd, 2006). Charter schools are a form of privatization of the public school system (Terzian & Boyd, 2006), and much like the voucher systems, they attempt to improve the outcomes of at-risk students by allowing access to alternative schools outside their neighborhoods (Condliffe et al., 2015). Many states, including Florida, have

enacted charter legislation allowing for the opening of charter schools that operate independently of the local school district (Fla. Stat. §1002, 2016). According to the Florida Department of Education (FDOE;2016), charter schools are very popular in Florida, accounting for the fastest growing school choice option within the state. There were 652 charter schools in Florida in 2015-16, offering tuition-free, innovative education to diverse groups of students (FDOE, 2016).

The desire of parents in failing schools to seek out alternative schooling is arguably easier to comprehend than that of parents residing in nondepressed school districts. This is reflected in lawmakers' attempts in recent years to provide school choice through voucher systems that allow families in failing schools to seek out otherwise cost-prohibitive academic alternatives. Bowen and Trivitt (2014) studied the use of the Florida voucher system to better understand whether the same created an incentive for traditional public schools to raise their service of education, a common claim asserted by school choice proponents (Condliffe et al., 2015). Bowen and Trivitt (2014) found that academic achievement was neither improved nor diminished in light of Florida's voucher system. The reason for the voucher system's failure to positively impact the provision of education in the affected public schools was not because choice options are incapable of creating such an impact, but rather more likely due to the limited use of vouchers by eligible families (Bowen & Trivitt, 2014). The Florida voucher system, as instituted, was applied only to failing schools and, for the most part, was not chosen by significant enough numbers of eligible families to raise concern by those teachers, principals, and district administrators who could have faced employment jeopardy had the program been

more successful (Bowen & Trivitt, 2014). School choice, without argument, provides

students in otherwise challenged school districts with an opportunity to seek out higher

quality schools. School choice will not "incentivize" traditional schools to raise the bar in

their provision of education to meet the new market demands for retained enrollment and

the dollars associated therewith if families most adversely impacted by public education

do not elect school choice (Condliffe et al., 2015).

Research has found that poor families in failing school districts, intended to

benefit most from school choice policies, have limited access to school choice

information and the resources necessary to take advantage of choice options (Condliffe et

al., 2015). Thus, the lack of school choice participation in failing school districts

removes any pressure on traditional public schools to modify their delivery of education

to meet marketplace pressures that school choice was designed to create (Condliffe et al.,

2015). Unlike the voucher system, however, Florida school choice is available to all

parents, in all districts. Although school choice advocates erroneously take for granted

that all parents have equal access to school choice and equal motivation to choose the

best schools for their children (Pearson et al., 2015), the factors driving charter school

election by parents residing in highly rated school districts may be equally applicable to

parents with limited access. When parents do have access to and use school choice to

select a school for their children, they will generally select a school that they deem in the

best interest of their children as based on both academic and nonacademic criteria

(Billingham & Hunt, 2016).

Enrollment trends over a 5-year period in Chicago public schools reflected that market pressures associated with school choice are present in that students selecting school choice generally move to higher achieving schools (Sirer et al., 2015). Sirer et al. (2015) found that students in the highest achieving quartiles moved to higher achieving schools at twice the rate of those in the lower achieving quartiles. If charter schools, and school choice generally, is viewed as a means by which parents can improve the educational experience of their children, then it must be better understood why parents in highly-rated schools districts are increasingly electing school choice over their top performing traditional public school.

The concept of charter schools was initiated as a means to better educational opportunities (Kolderie, 2005), a movement that has largely expanded its reach in Florida to suburban, nondepressed school districts viewed as top-performing by state lawmakers. Between the years 2005 and 2016, PK-12 charter school enrollment in the state of Florida went from 92,214 students to over 270,000 students (FDOE, 2016), an increase of 193% in just over one decade. Each of Florida's 67 counties accounts for one school district, creating a total of 67 public school districts within the state. According to the Florida School Accountability Reports (2016), only three of the 67 school districts earned an "A" rating grade pursuant to Florida Statutes 1008.34 in the 2015-2016 academic year, down from ten districts in 2014-2015. The three districts earning an "A" grade operated over 33 charter schools combined in the 2015-2016 academic year (FDOE, 2016). With charter schools being erected in most all school districts, including the highest rated districts, and the number of students enrolling in the same continuing to increase annually as the most

popular form of school choice in Florida (FDOE, 2016), the question at issue in this study

is of critical importance to the sustainability of the traditional public school.

Florida Education Policy

The magnitude of research offered on the intended and desired student outcomes

based on cognitive and emotional development of students have been articulated time and

again from the perspectives of psychologists, academics, educators, and lawmakers alike

(Gibbons, Machin & Silva, 2013). What appears limited in the lengthy education research

is the desired student outcomes deemed essential from the perspective of the one vested

interest that has the most vested, parents. Although academic outcomes are generally

ranked among the highest of parental concerns when evaluating a school based on

findings that most parents who elect school choice will opt for a higher performing

choice (Cucchiara & Hovat, 2013), there are nonacademic factors, including but not

limited to, location, safety, enrollment composition, and resource allocation that are also

considered (Gibbons et al., 2013). The legislative initiatives enacted and currently

controlling the school districts of Florida need to be better understood to assess their

applicability, if at all, to the school choice migration taking place statewide.

Florida, along with much of the nation, has witnessed the transition of its

educational system in the primary and secondary grade levels from what has been a

traditional monopoly by public education to a competitive market place. Florida families

are no longer limited to the two options of public education or cost-prohibitive private

schooling. In 2016, the Florida governor signed House Bill 7029: *Education* allowing for

school choice across county lines and thus introduced for the first time in the state's

history, inter-district school choice (House Bill 7029). Now families in every school district of Florida, failing or not, can elect a free alternative education for their children from homeschooling, to virtual schooling, to charter education, or to alternative zoned public schools anywhere statewide pursuant to Florida Statutes 1002 (2016). And with such choices available, increased numbers of Florida families are opting out of traditional public education each passing year (FDOE, 2016). This charter school migration in Florida exceeds both the national and state averages for charter school election (National Association of Charter Public Schools, 2016). According to the data derived by the Florida Department of Education (2016), the number of students enrolling in charter schools alone has more than doubled in just the past decade. This study sought to determine if the interpretative effects of education policies governing Florida schools was in part driving the charter school migration in highly-rated districts, wherein variables commonly associated with failing, urban school districts were not as apparent.

The NCLB (2002) forced states such as Florida to address through state reforms the achievement gap between various groups of students. In response thereto, Florida initiated the Florida School Recognition Program (n.d.), in which schools are graded in accordance with their progress and academic achievements. A Florida school identified with an "A" grade, pursuant to Florida Statutes 1008.34, are schools that are "making excellent progress." These "A" graded schools are financially rewarded up to One Hundred Dollars ($100) per Full Time Equivalent student under the Florida School Recognition Program. In 2014 alone, over one-hundred and twenty-four million dollars ($124m) was distributed to 1,553 schools throughout the state of Florida (Florida School

Recognition Program, n.d.), creating a clear fiscal motivation for schools to focus on the measures identified in the recognition program.

A school's success, or grade, is measured by the percentage of eligible students passing standardized tests in four core disciplines including math, English Language Arts, science, and social studies, as well as the learning gains of students in each of the four curriculums from the previous year (Fla. Stat. §1008.34, 2016). Thus, an individual student, regardless of ability or demographic, can earn their school up to 200 points in each curriculum referenced, if they pass the test and achieve a level grade higher than the preceding year. Although each of the categories thus far referenced are tallied at an equal value of 100 points each, additional categories for math and English language arts, also at an equal 100 points value each, are included for only those students in the "lowest 25 percent" as identified by prior year performance (Fla. Stat. §1008.34, 2016). Therefore, a high-risk student, one identified in the "lowest 25 percent" of academic achievers, has the potential of earning an additional 200 points for the school. Moreover, even if a school were to attain the necessary points to earn itself an "A" grade under the Florida School Recognition Program (n.d.), the adequate yearly progress (AYP) mechanism calling for math and reading progress among the "lowest performing students" could prevent that grade if it alone is not met (Florida School Recognition Program, n.d.).

The Florida School Recognition Program (n.d.) is an example of a state reform that incorporates NCLB's focus on statewide testing assessment measures and the mechanism of AYP which measures academic progress of students by demographic. Although lawmakers asserted that the AYP measure is not intended as a reform, but

rather a means to create reform within the states (The Education Trust, 2004, para. 5); the same has worked to mandate AYP inclusion in state reforms (Martin, 2015). AYP measures a school's progress across demographic subcategories of students, a measure that is then made public annually by the United States Department of Education (Martin, 2015). The grading of a school in the state of Florida determines not only that school's reputation and potential for future enrollment, but also that school's future funding through both state and federal funding sources limited by AYP (Florida School Recognition Program, n.d.).

Although the NCLB identified gaps in the academic achievement of students traditionally underserved and their peers, the difficulty and cost in implementing portions of the law resulted in the issuance of waivers to the same by the Obama administration in 2010. By 2015, the Obama administration passed bi-partisan legislation, Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). This new legislative action further focuses on equal opportunity amongst students in elementary and secondary schools across the nation and becomes effective in the 2017-18 academic year (Zinskie & Rea, 2016). Because this policy was not in effect at the time of the decision-making process of the participants that were studied in this case study, the same is not incorporated into the data findings but certainly is an area that invites future research.

The interpretive effects of these policies by parents leaving "A" schools are important in understanding if policies are impacting the charter school migration. School districts in Florida, as opposed to individual schools, are also graded, in part, based on "measures of the districts' progress in closing the achievement gap between higher-

performing student subgroups and lower-performing student subgroups" (Fla. Stat. §1008.34, 2016). This is an example of a means-tested policy that does not expressly state the district is to rise the lower-performing subgroup, but rather they are to "close the gap", an important distinction that may play a significant role in how policy potentially impacts parental perception of quality and equality in education. Districts are also graded, for the most part, on the achievement of students on state-mandated, standardized tests as referenced above. There are multiple vendors of such tests nationwide and through lobbying and successful political partnerships, certain companies are awarded the contracts to create and administer standardized tests to all public schools in Florida. These tests in turn create yet another third party vested interest in the dynamics of public education that was warned against by both Garda (2011) and Moe (2012) as distractors to positive education reform.

The funding for Florida's schools can be complicated and comes from various sources including, but not limited to, grants, lottery funds, local funds, and the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) (Florida Funding & Financial Reporting, n.d.). Individual school funding from the FEFP, more so than any other source, is directly impacted when students depart traditional public schools for charter education. According to Florida Administrative Code, Rule 6A-1.0451 (2016), Florida schools receive significant funding through the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Dollars allocated to schools based on the students held in enrollment on four specific dates throughout the year. Based on FTE General Instructions, the amount of funding per pupil is dependent on several factors, including but not limited to, additional funding for students

categorized by an exceptional learning disabilities or language barriers, among other qualifiers (Florida Funding & Financial Reporting, n.d.). The FTE process creates not only the potential for adverse interpretive effects that certain students are valued greater than others or that a fiscal motivation is present to maintain certain enrollments over others, but also can result in a fiscal loss to schools more impacted by school choice as enrollment decreases. Funding policies, however, are not the only education policies that may weigh on one's decision to depart a traditional public school. The issue of teacher retention and curriculum are also areas of education policy that may be driving the migration to school choice.

Florida's current teacher performance evaluation system, as outlined by the Florida School Recognition Program (n.d.), is one that differentiates teachers on four levels, from highly effective down to unsatisfactory. Teachers are categorized into one of the four levels based on an overall score with fifty percent (50%) of the score derived from student performance indicia and the other fifty percent (50%) from instructional practice evaluations, and professional responsibilities as noted in Florida Statutes 1012.34 (2016). Although teacher tenure was eliminated in Florida regarding new hires after July 1, 2011, those teachers with tenure prior thereto are afforded two consecutive years of being rated at the lowest "unsatisfactory" rating before continued employment can be denied (Education Commission, 2016), and teachers are permitted to transfer during the two years to afford them more opportunity to avoid dismissal or a subsequent "Unsatisfactory" rating (Fla. Stat. §1012.34, 2016). Policies, therefore, from academic quality, to funding and teacher evaluations were used to assess whether the perception of

education policy impacts the decision-making process of parents to opt-out of highly-rated traditional public schools for schools. When education policies mandate a distinct vision as to what academic measures should be valued, and subsequently administer consequences on schools that do not comply, it is less likely that innovation, experimentation, and multiple education visions will be realized (Martin, 2015).

Much of the language in the state education policies is taken from the guidance proffered in federal legislation. Over the past thirty years, there have been three education reform movements from the original A Nation at Risk, to No Child Left Behind, and most recently, the Common Core State Standards reform initiative (Steadman & Evans, 2013). The impact of the Common Core State Standards policy was to provide for a national standardization of how schools and teachers can serve the common-good of students (Steadman & Evans, 2013). Although Florida rejected the Common Core initiative, only after first accepting the same, the parental perception of Common Core and the impacts that could come from the same are important to the herein study.

The School Choice Selection Process

Studies have been conducted on the school choice selection factors that parents weigh when selecting their school of choice (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013; Jacobs, 2011). These past studies focus on the factors that a parent values in selecting a new school for their children. In this study, however, the focus is on the factors parents weighed in first deciding to leave their top-rated traditional public-school for a school of choice. Understanding the criteria sought in a school of choice can help shed light on a parent's original decision to depart the traditional school for which their

children are zoned. It should be noted, however, that studies on school choice selection are generally inclusive of all parents seeking school choice and thus not limited to parents who have had experience with alternate education from which they were dissatisfied. This research, unlike those of the past, is limited to parents who have left a traditional public school in a top-performing school district for a school of choice and limited to the decision-making process involved in leaving a traditional public school versus the selection of their new school. A key aspect to analyzing the factors that drive a parent to depart a top-rated school is understanding what a parent values in the schools they ultimately choose. Parents will innately select a school for their child that is based on their own self-interest and serves the best value for their family (Billingham & Hunt, 2016).

Researchers have found that often nonacademic criteria play into that decision-making process (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Jacobs, 2013). Two broad findings in selecting a school of choice warrant consideration. First, the identification of race and classroom composition as factors considered in the school choice selection process, without an understanding of why parents use such factors, can lead to an over-simplification and erroneously-based presumption about parental motivations. Education policies perceived by parents as disenfranchising their children in the name of focusing school resources and outcomes toward high-risk students may result in parents seeking out schools with limited high-risk students. These decisions can, on their face, appear racially motivated when in fact they may directly correlate to academic measures. Second, by limiting school choice selection studies to urban cities and depressed school

districts, the magnitude of the school choice movement taking rise nationwide is being under-represented and nonreflective of parental concerns with public education across all zip codes.

Schneider and Buckley (2002) conducted a study in which they compared the internet search behaviors of parents exploring school choice options in Washington, D.C. with survey research conducted on 1,000 Washington D.C. parents. The purpose of the study was to determine if the factors anonymously used by parents in seeking out a school of choice differed from the responses parents provided in less anonymous surveys (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). The authors concluded that "race and class strongly affect choice" both with minority and nonminority parents when deciding which school to enroll their children (Schneider & Buckley, 2002, p. 142), factors not as readily observed in the survey data. More specifically, the authors found that the demographics of the student bodies at a given school were searched more by parents, both minority and nonminority alike, than any other single search criteria (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). The significance of this research is three-fold. First, the findings by these authors was silent as to whether racial motivations were behind the increased searches involving demographics, or if perhaps there were fiscal and/or policy concerns connected to race that drove the online search results. Second, regardless of parental motivations, the findings were conclusive that a school choice system absent regulations and safeguards is ripe for the potential of a segregated school system in the future (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002), thus demonstrating the social significance of the herein study. And finally, and perhaps most important in supporting the case study methodology chosen for this study,

was Schneider and Buckley's (2002) admission regarding the fallible nature of survey data when attempting to understand the school-choice, decision-making process.

The DC school system was further studied by Jacobs (2013) when he advanced the proximity theory to school choice. Jacobs concluded that charter schools promote segregation not because parents are actively seeking out schools on racial grounds, but rather on the basis of neighborhood demographics and location of schools of choice to one's home. Parents seek out a school, as they seek out any other opportunity, with the intent to select one that best meets their needs and wants (see Jacobs, 2013). Thus it could be theoretically argued that the decision-making process to depart a traditional public school, even one identified as making excellent progress, stems from a parent's perception that the school is not meeting their family's needs. Billingham and Hunt (2016) further studied the factors that parents perceive as critical when selecting a school. Billingham and Hunt recognized the importance of anonymous survey research to obtain more truthful data. Billingham and Hunt set out to understand the impact, if any, that racial considerations play on a parent's school choice selection. Through the use of on-line survey data administered to 862 parents of at least one child, Billingham and Hunt concluded that the racial demographic of a school "matters a great deal in school selection" (Billingham & Hunt, 2016, p. 112).

Although the data in Billingham and Hunt's (2016) research were not randomly collected or representative of the U.S. population in that persons of higher wealth and education were overrepresented, the conclusions still support the fact that nonacademic criteria weigh heavily on the decision-making process of parents when selecting a school

for their children. Likewise, nonacademic measures may play a significant role in the decision-making process to depart a traditional pubic school, and appear even more significant with regard to the departure of families from highly-rated public schools in rural districts.

Past research has perhaps over-simplified the school choice selection process by limiting the research to initial findings of racial motivations or marginalizing education selection decisions by treating such a decision as equivalent to other consumer choices. School choice is not an everyday decision and the impact of such a decision can be life-long in its impact on the children effected. School choice has certainly turned K-12 public education into a commodity market in which parents' selection of a particular school is a form of consumption (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013). But this decision involves more than a mere selection of what is in the "best" interest of one's children (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013).

In a study of predominantly middle-income, Caucasian parents in a large city who were considering enrollment in a racially diverse school, Cucchiara and Horvat (2013) learned that the school choice selection process can be one in which parents seek to assert their own identity. Research on school choice has documented the rational choices middle-income families have considered in selecting a school of choice, including but not limited to, school safety, school location, academic rigor, and a shared value system (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013). Other factors, however, including race and class composition have also been noted to drive school choice for white, middle-income

parents who tend to be more educated, irrespective of objective rational considerations (Roda & Wells, 2013).

This study sought to better understand if factors such as race and class composition, among other nonacademic criteria, are aligned with how parents perceive the effects of education policy on the safety and academic rigor offered by a school. Studies limited to enrollment data as a measure regarding parental satisfaction or dissatisfaction fail to understand the myriad of factors involved in the school choice selectin process (Villavicencio, 2013). Villavicencio (2013) found through a comparative case study of two charter schools in New York that a parent's selection of a school is based on far more than merely selecting what is in one's best interest. Parents have varying availability of information about school options and are influenced by different people and motivations (Villavicencio, 2013). It is therefore ill advised to attempt to attach a parent's school choice selection to one factor or motivation, thus supporting the use of case study to seek out an in-depth understanding of the factors driving the complex decision-making process to elect school choice.

By attempting to connect what otherwise appear to be racially-motivated considerations on the part of parents seeking school choice to the interpretive effects of education policy instead, this study has the potential of expanding public perception of what is driving school choice. Research in the area of academic disparity has long recognized the increased classroom time required of teachers with low-income students who do not spend equivalent time on studies at home as their higher-income counterparts (Raudenbusch & Willms, 1995). It is also well established that increased resources are

required to address the academic and social issues faced by high-risk students (Pugach et

al., 2011). The use of a case study methodology in this study was well-suited in that it

allowed for rich, thick data regarding the deeper reasoning for factors driving the

decision-making process to depart one's traditional public school.

Pearson et al. (2015), unlike previous researchers, attempted to better understand

parental choice to stay enrolled in a dual-language traditional public school in Colorado,

a school of declining test scores and increasing minority enrollments. The case study was

done to better understand the factors that might motivate parent loyalty to stay enrolled at

a declining K-12 school that promoted means-tested policies such a dual-language

instruction (Pearson et al., 2015). Pearson, et al. found that most families, of all races,

who opted to stay in the dual-language school, despite its short-comings academically,

did so for "social justice" values (Pearson et al., 2015, p. 18). But those parents who

elected to leave the declining school due to failing test scores, increased resource

allocation to minority students and Spanish instruction, increased safety issues, and lack

of discipline came from parents who were generally better educated and more likely to

have access to school choice information and election (Pearson et al., 2015). Based on the

nonacademic criterion identified by departing parents of the dual language school in

Pearson's et al. study, it can be concluded that such parents seek out schools with less

Latino/a student populations; not necessarily based on racial preferences but rather on

grounds of seeking out advanced academic rigor, heightened safety and more equitable

distribution of resources to nonminority students.

The potential for increased Latino/a student segregation by way of school choice policy is present in the incorporation of school choice within the American education system (Pearson et al., 2015).   The social implications of a segregated public school system, as warned by Pearson, et al. (2015) cannot be ignored. Studies on the resultant effects of school choice, if left unregulated, have found significant negative impacts arising for high-risk students (Roda & Wells, 2013). When participation in a public service industry diminishes, the ability of government to continue the effective administration of that public service becomes hindered (Campbell, 2012).

The literature referenced thus far demonstrates the need for research in the field of school choice, and specifically in the understanding of why parents are departing traditional public schools, not merely how they go about selecting their school of choice, but why they are finding value in specific characteristics associated with their new school of choice. It is only through a rich, thick understanding of the motivations behind a parent's decision to depart a highly-rated traditional public school for a school of choice that lawmakers will have the data necessary to place the public school system back on a trajectory of sustainability.

At the onset of this study, I compiled potential factors and sub factors that might be driving school choice decision-making in a top-performing school district. I then linked the compilation of potential factors and sub factorsto applicable education policies in effect in the state of Florida. My compilation of the same was then drafted into a chart, reflecting how many applicable policies cross over and apply to multiple factors and sub factors (see Table 1).

Table 1

School Choice Factors Linked to Policies

Factors	Sub Factors	Policies
Equality	Instruction	NCLB/ESEA/ELL/IDEA
	Funding	FTE/ESE/ELL
	Resources	AYP/ESE/IDEA
Operations	Safety	FTE/Bullying/student retention
	Transportation	Logistics/geography/bussing
	Bureaucracies	Communications/overhead
Quality	Curriculum	Common Core
	Instruction	Teacher Tenure/Accountability
	Instructional support	Media/Extracurricular
	Vested interests	Testing/Politics/Unions
Personal	Location	
	Community	
	Student Body	

Note: ELL = English Language Learner. NCLB = No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. ESEA = Elementary and Secondary Education Act. AYP = Adequate Yearly Progress Mechanism. IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004. FTE = Full Time Enrollment Funding.

The Impact of School Choice

Ever since the advent of school choice nationwide, issues of diversity and equal protection have been raised due to concerns of our public school system returning to the segregationist era preceding *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*, when the concept "separate but equal", as held in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), was deemed acceptable. Godwin and Kemerer (2002) concluded that school choice "presents a fundamental change in the way we [the United States] educate children" and that providing such choice to parents without accountability can run contradictory to political tolerance and respect for diversity, two elements they asserted as being essential to a "liberal democratic society" (*preface*). Although the discriminatory segregation present in the public school system prior to 1954 was confined to the black population, that

discrimination today involves in large part concerns regarding the rising Latino/a

populations.

Florida's Hispanic/Latino population exceeds the national average at over 24%

(US Census, 2014) and thus any residual discriminations resulting from school choice on

this specific demographic will arguably be more pronounced in Florida than elsewhere.

There is a long history by the United States Supreme Court of placing immense value and

importance on the right of its citizen youth to acquire knowledge through education and

thus the necessity of equal access to quality education by all children (*Meyer v. Nebraska*,

1923). Justice Brennen best explained the Court's view of public education with the

Court's extension of a free public education to illegal immigrant children by holding that

"education provides the basic tools by which individuals might lead economically

productive lives to the benefit of us all" (*Plyer v. Doe* 1982, 457 U.S. 202). Even with the

right to a free K-12 public education, undocumented Latino/a students in the United

States face limited life outcomes in that their earned high school diploma does not negate

the immigration laws that limit the use of the same in future employment (Radoff, 2011).

If immigration policy can negatively impact the value of a high school degree

held by Latino/a students, education policies that promote the departure of high achieving

students from the public school system in which those diplomas are achieved could

likewise present a diminishing value of the same. Radoff's (2011) study highlights the

social significance of this research in that legislation has in the past negatively impacted

the value of a high school diploma, such as in the case of the failed Development, Relief,

and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2011 (Radoff, 2011) which proposed permanent

resident status for young undocumented immigrants (H.R.1842, 2011-12). Likewise, if it is found through this study that means-tested education policies are driving the school choice migration for high achieving students who otherwise feel disenfranchised by said policies, it can be empirically argued that such policies diminish the value of a high school diploma from a traditional public school.

The systemic effects of school choice were studied at length in the research conducted by Ni and Arson (2011). To better understand whether school choice results in a more competitive market-place and improved overall academics through the deprivation of funding associated with the departing school choice students, Ni and Arson implemented a series of fixed effects regressions. The authors concluded that the Michigan schools most financially impacted by inter-district, school choice were not those lacking in academic success as measured by standardized test scores, but rather those schools serving increased numbers of students eligible for free-reduced lunch (Ni & Arson, 2011).

The importance of this research is that low-income families and disengaged parents are often those confined to the public education system due to limited access to school choice resources and information (Villavicencio, 2013). Many of the issues present in inner-city, high-risk students are psychological with dysfunctional family units, poverty-driven home lives, and parental abuse (Pugach et al., 2011). As such, Pugach et al. (2011), concluded that increased funding is necessary in schools with high enrollments of at-risk students in that there exists a need for teachers to be properly trained in assessing and teaching students with disabilities, including mental-health disabilities, in a manner

likely to engage them and keep them in school through graduation. If school choice is most impactful on public schools serving increased economically-needy enrollments, the ability of those schools to serve the needs of their students will be jeopardized if funding decreases due to school choice.

Three quarters of Florida inmates have less than a high school level education even though eighty-five and eight-tenths percent (85.8%) of Florida's general population holds a high school degree or higher (FDOC, 2012). Black inmates in Florida prisons comprise almost half of the prison population and outnumber any other individual racial group while representing less than sixteen percent of the state's general population (C*ensus*, 2014). This data presents a concern that Florida's public school system is failing its high-risk, inner-city students who are deprived the opportunity to walk across the stage and earn a diploma. Once the reasons motivated parents with access to school choice information are departing top-rated traditional schools within the state are better understood, reforms can be enacted to improve the quality of education across all school districts. Ignoring the impact of school choice on the public school system only exasperates the decline in academic delivery in traditional public schools to the detriment of all students enrolled. Although education reform is neither easy nor simple and effective reform often has many political roadblocks (Garda, 2011; Moe, 2012), the lack of funding in the public school system that results in increased school choice enrollment demands lawmakers take note of the need for reform. This research is not about limiting school choice but rather learning if the interpretive effects of education policies are behind the school choice migration.

The Public Policy Feedback Paradigm

Schattschneider (1935) was the first to advance the policy feedback theory (PFT) in which he argued that policies result in human behavior that in turn impact politics and future policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). According to Sabatier and Weible (2014), PFT has opened doors to new research beyond mere policy analysis in that public policy shapes attitudes and behaviors and can guide future policy or even prevent necessary future policy. The outcome of this study could further expand the power of policy feedback to demonstrate how human behavior through school choice can work to negate the enforcement of existing policy.

The interpretive effects of policies on participants of government programs have been studied in areas, including but not limited to, welfare (Soss, 1999), veterans' rights (Mettler, 2002), senior benefits (Campbell, 2003), and even health care (Gusmano, Schlesinger & Thomas, 2002). These studies have demonstrated that policies can influence not only the participation of participants in a government provided program, but also participant views of citizenship and feelings toward government and politics (Fleming, 2014). Fleming (2014) used PFT in his study on civic participation by school choice voucher families in Wisconsin, narrowing his use of the theory on how participation in a public system impacts individual participants. Unlike resource effects of policy in which participants entitled to certain benefits under a government program may respond politically, the interpretive effects of policy are developed through experiences, good and bad, that participants link to their engagement with government programs (Fleming, 2014). This study, in contrast to past research on interpretive effects

of policy on government program participation, sought to study those excluded from the policies at issue as opposed to those targeted.

Through a review of earlier research, Fleming (2014) outlined how universally applied programs will spur participation while means-tested policies generally depress participation and political engagement (Fleming, 2014). Although Fleming's study was limited to voucher parents, his findings are significant to this research in that Fleming concluded that voucher parents, although willing to support public school funding, are less likely to do so compared to their public school counterparts. Voucher parents, beneficiaries of the government program studied, showed a diminished, albeit small, willingness to support public funding (Fleming, 2014). This study examined participants who were excluded from means-tested policies, not beneficiaries, thus resulting in potentially more pronounced lack of political support for the public school system than found with voucher parents.

It is already well established that high-risk students from lower socioeconomic households are limited in their school choice access (Billingham and Hunt, 2016); whereas those electing school choice are generally more engaged in their child's academics (Pearson et al., 2015) with high achieving students moving to more academically rigorous schools at twice the rate of lower achieving students (Sirer et al., 2015). With high-risk students requiring additional resources and increased funding (Pugach et al., 2011), the policy feedback paradigm suggests that the very policies implemented to support high-risk students may in fact be driving high achieving students

to school choice, in turn resulting in deficient funding for public schools to implement the existing means-tested policies.

Schattschneider (1935) explained the power of policy perception in a metaphor to a street fight wherein he asserted that the sentiment of the surrounding crowd will have as much of an impact on the fight outcome as the ability of the fighters involved (Hill & Jochim, 2009). This study sought to better understand if the interpretive effects of means-tested education policies are driving school choice elections in top performing school districts. If policies are behind the phenomenon of increased charter school election in the state of Florida, lawmakers can begin to understand how to reform education policy to better meet the student outcomes valued by highly motivated parents, resulting potentially in universal reforms for increased academic outcomes across all schools.

Parents seeking school choice are by large numbers electing schools that they believe to be higher achieving schools, and this is especially true of those students in the highest-achieving quartiles (Sirer et al., 2015). When public policies shape political participation, polices have the potential of profoundly impacting the ability of a democratic government to administer services effectively (Campbell, 2012). As participation in a public good diminishes, so too the ability of government to effectively administer that good (Campbell, 2012). School choice is no longer limited to inner-city, failing school districts as evidenced by the thirty-three charter schools in operation during the 2015-2016 school year in the top three "A" rated school districts in the state of Florida (FDOE, 2016).

President Richard Nixon was the first to bring the idea of the "silent majority" to the national conversation by publicly asserting that the United States will cease to exist as a free society when the "vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority" (Nixon, 1969, p. 9). The concept of the silent majority, as introduced by the late president, addressed the drowned-out silence of millions of Americans who supported the United States' continued presence in the Vietnam War by the more vocal, anti-war agitators (Nixon, 1969). As time passed, however, the call for a rising-up of the silent majority, even by President Nixon, evolved to a call for suburban, middle-class families to reject compulsory education busing policies enacted in the South to defeat school segregation (Lassiter, 2013). The ability of parents to reject education policies without injecting themselves into the turmoil of politics is new with the advent of school choice. If education policies are in fact impacting parents to leave highly-rated traditional public schools for charter schooling, the argument can logically be advanced that the silent majority is using school choice as a new form of silent policy feedback.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This research expands on the basic principles of Schattschneider's (1935) policy feedback theory (PFT). Through the compilation and analysis of rich, thick data derived from a purposeful sample of parents who have elected to depart a highly-rated traditional public school district, I determined the impact of policy perception on the school choice decision-making process. This study was qualitative in nature with a focus consistent with instrumental case studies designed to show in-depth understandings of a decision-making process (see Creswell, 2013).

Although purposeful sampling of an extreme population—an atypical group of participants unlikely to be linked to the phenomenon at study—can be generalizable (see Maxwell, 2013), generalization of the findings in this study to all parents or all districts was not my goal. Rather, I intended to shed light on the role that policy perception can play in the decision-making process to opt out of a public good or service. My goal was to provide information to lawmakers, who can begin to appreciate the unintended consequences associated with means-tested polices. My other goal was to provide a foundation for future mass behavior researcher on the topic of how the introduction of choice in public good industries can hinder the implementation of existing policy.

I collected data from multiple mediums as recommended by Yin (2014) and I instituted ethical safeguards to ensure no harm came to the participants or institutions involved. The validation of qualitative research is a "distinct strength of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2013, p. 205). My findings were validated through multiple

methods, including but not limited to member-checking (see Creswell, 2013), the creation

of daily memos that code the raw data and provide time-ordered researcher reflection

called memoing (Maxwell, 2013), and rich, thick description.

Research Methodology

Qualitative methodology was selected for this study because qualitative studies

are consistent with research seeking to ascertain an in-depth understanding of a decision-

making process (Creswell, 2013). In an attempt to find out the interpretive effects of

public policy on the decision-making process to elect school choice by parents residing in

a top-performing public school district, a deep and intimate understanding of that process

had to be obtained. This research combined deductive (theory-testing) and inductive

(theory-generating) elements in that it sought to understand not only the possible

presence of PFT (Schattschneider, 1935) in the decision-making process to elect school

choice, but also whether school-choice decisions are actually a new form of silent policy

feedback. The data collected were viewed through a constructivist lens in order to shed

light on the motivations driving school choice in top performing schools. In alignment

with a constructivist lens, participants' perceptions and beliefs, as derived from

assumptions and firsthand experiences even when not necessarily grounded in objective

perceptions of reality, were deeply examined (Maxwell, 2013).

In order to better understand the relative nature of a parent's public policy

perception on their decision-making process to elect charter schooling, the tools familiar

to a case study served most appropriate. This holistic case study involved two in-depth,

individual interviews with participants after I received informed consent from the

participants and approval from the Walden institutional review board (IRB) (IRB approval number: 02-20-17-0409354). The interviews attempted to shed light on the decision-making process to elect school choice and the impact, if any, that policy perception played in that decision process. In addition to interview data, public artifacts and documents from the participants, as well as archival documents and legislative documents, were requested for analysis.

Research Design

A case study affords participants the ability to tell their stories and thus reveal to the researcher their perception of reality, which in turn sheds light on how and why the participant came to a particular decision or came to act in a specific manner (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Studies that seek to find the answer to a question of "why" or "how" are well suited for a case study approach (Yin, 2014). This research sought to analyze how policy impacts the school choice decision-making process. This inquiry was accomplished by limiting the research to parents residing in a highly-effective school district to avoid unrelated variables commonly associated with impoverished districts. By using a constructivist lens, I was able to demonstrate the interpretive effects of education policy on the school choice decision-making process of the research participants.

According to Yin (2014), a single-case study can be the basis of significant generalization when a researcher seeks to demonstrate an explanatory function as opposed to limiting itself to a descriptive or exploratory function. Nonetheless, the purpose of this case study was not to provide its readers with a statement of generalizability, but rather to allow its audience to apply the findings to other like

districts or future studies on the impact of public policy perception on the provision of public goods and/or services. Generalizability is but one means of gaining knowledge and that which cannot be formally generalized does not for that reason alone negate the fact that science, the "gaining of knowledge", has not occurred (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 227). This single-case design was successful in eliciting a rich, think understanding of the parental decision-making process to elect school choice in a nonimpoverished school district so that lawmakers can be afforded data on how the perhaps unintended, negative consequences that may be associated with means-tested policies in a public service industry in which choice has been incorporated can impact public participation, as well as setting the groundwork for mass behavior researchers to commence studies on the use of choice as a silent form of policy feedback.

Participants of the Study

The primary participants of this study were eight parents zoned for enrollment in a single highly-rated school district in the state of Florida. All participants elected to enroll their child/children in a single-site, tuition-free, start-up charter school. Participants underwent two in-depth interviews, and one follow-up interview for the purpose of member-checking (see Creswell, 2013). The interviews provided rich, thick data on the decision-making process involved in the decision to depart traditional public schooling for a start-up charter. As a case study, I limited the focus of this research on the decision-making process of parents who resided in a highly-rated public school district. The participants were all selected from a single start-up charter school within a high-performing school district. The use of atypical cases is more likely to reveal rich

data otherwise not available in average cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006). By selecting parents who

had the option to attend a traditional public school in a top public school district within

the state created an atypical class, a population not typical to those expected to elect

school choice. By selecting an atypical participant group, a group to whom the very

policies in question should be best working in favor of, the findings should be better

generalizable (see Maxwell, 2013) to school districts at all levels of effectiveness as well

as other public good industries where choice is introduced. As a qualitative study on a

limited number of parents, it was not my intent to generalize the findings of this study to

the decision-making of all parents who opt out of top rated public schools.

This study included a purposeful selection of eight parent participants (see

Maxwell, 2013) in a single start-up charter school. At the time of data collection, not all

participants still had children enrolled in the charter school, but all participants had

undergone the same decision-making process of selecting the single site, charter school

over a traditional public school within their top performing school district. The use of a

single school to address a case study question on educational impacts has been used in

past research when examining educational impacts of particular programs (Crawford,

2016; Major, 2013). Using one district, or even one school, can afford an information-

rich environment (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013; Major, 2013).

Each participant underwent two in-depth interviews and a follow-up meeting for

the purpose of member-checking (see Creswell, 2013). This participant pool is smaller

than typically found in quantitative studies in that qualitative studies seek meaning and

over-sampling can be both impractical and unnecessary (Mason, 2010). The number of

participants used in this study was rationally selected based on multiple factors cited by

Mason (2010) and attributed to experts in the field of saturation in sampling. There is no

definitive number of participants that must be included in a qualitative study. There are

various schools of thought on the topic, and sample size using in-depth interviews can

range from five to 50 participants, depending on the theorist or article selected (Dworkin,

2012). With each participant in this study undergoing two in-depth interviews, the

number of such interviews in a case study exceeded that used by Major (2013) in the

study of a school district's decision-making process regarding an academic program, as

well as Ayden's (2013) study on the effectiveness of a Turkish education initiative. As a

case study involving a heterogeneous population, a lack of cross-discipline claims, and

my expertise as both an attorney and a certified educator, fewer participants were

necessary to meet saturation (see Mason, 2010).

The data in this study were derived from the personal experiences and perceptions

of a limited number of parents in order to illustrate how the introduction of choice within

a public service industry can function as a means of silent policy feedback when choice is

utilized. This study offers information on the power of policy perception and encourages

further research on how the incorporation of choice in a public service industry can work

to undermine the implementation of negatively perceived policies by the electorate. I

therefore encourage further studies in the field of political participation, mass behavior,

and school choice as policy feedback.

Measures

The purpose of this study was to better understand the impact, if any, that policy perception has on the decision-making process to elect school choice by parents residing in a traditional public school district identified by the state as highly performing. In this case study, I focused on the decision-making process to depart a traditional public school in a top performing school district for a start-up charter school. This study was limited to parents who have had at least one child enrolled in a traditional public school prior to making their school choice election. The questions used to better facilitate dialogue and understanding are listed in Appendices B and C.

Research Question

The following was the primary research question that I addressed in this study: To what extent, if any, does public policy perception play on a parent's decision-making process to elect charter education over a highly-rated traditional public school?

Ethical Protection

It was critical that no harm would come to the participants or the schools and district at issue herein. I therefore maintained the anonymity of the participants not only in the final publication of the study, but also in the stages of data collection and analysis. Participants were all over the age of consent. I obtained informed consent through a uniform disclosure and nonrelease form created and approved by the Walden University IRB. The consent form provided participants with detailed information on the purpose of the study and the participants' role in the study. Participants were informed about the demands of participating and the risks and inconveniences participants could encounter.

The informed consent form used in this study also set forth how participant data would be held confidential. Participants were furthermore informed of their right to withdrawal from the study at any time and their ability to review the findings on completion of the study. The school district was at all times referenced as "Anywhere District" and the schools involved, Anywhere Charter, as well as any traditional public schools connected to the participants, were likewise protected from identity by way of nondescript, numeric codes and pseudonyms. Participants were given alphabetic qualifiers known only to me, with the legend of the same maintained in only one location and under lock in my office.

Loveless and Field (2009) recognized the unrealistic expectation that research will solve the issues surrounding charter schools and market-based education, comparing the same to the unlikely expectation that charter schools, in and of themselves, can solve all the problems of the American education system (p. 112). I did not expect this research to provide a definitive answer as to why all parents migrate toward school choice, but rather to provide researchers with a better understanding of the impact that policies have the school choice decision-making process. In this study, I also expanded on PFT to demonstrate the power of policy perception in public good industries, specifically education, where choice is now readily available. Most importantly, however, this study may provide lawmakers with empirical data as to the policies in need of reform in order to maintain traditional public school enrolments and prevent the American public education system from continuing on a trajectory of decline and possible eradication.

Procedures

This study followed a qualitative design and therefore adhered to Creswell's (2013) suggestion to not focus on generalities, but rather to focus on the specifics embedded in the decision-making process at issue. This case study analyzed the decision-making process of parents to elect school choice through two in-depth interviews with eight charter school parents along with, if needed, several clarification conversations. Major (2013) studied an education-based decision-making process using a single case site and like Major, a participant-observer role to collect data will be used in that Yin (2009) explained the same as invaluable in "producing an accurate portrayal of case study phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, p. 112). Also like Major, a researcher can conduct a meaningful and valid study in a county in which the researcher has been employed and amongst participants known to the researcher in that a rapport is established in such a situation with the school and parents which may afford access to information otherwise unattainable to an outsider (Major, 2013). Having a personal connection to the case site and participants involved, it is possible for bias to set in (Patton, 2002) and thus I used journaling of personal experiences to compare myself to the themes identified during the mapping (see Maxwell, 2013) of the data to ensure objectivity. In order to recruit and inform participants, collect and analyze data, and validate findings, I used the following process.

The first step in my data collection research involved the dissemination of an invitation for participants to volunteer. This invitation was done in person and in some cases through email. I extended the invitation to parents who enrolled their child or

children at Anywhere Charter and ceased dissemination of my invitations once I reached a sample size of eight qualifying, participants. Request for assistance by Anywhere Charter with the dissemination of a flyer was not warranted as the sample size was reached through email and personal distribution of invitations in person. An IRB partnership agreement was not necessary in that the charter school was initially intended to only be used to disseminate an invitation to participate either by flyer or email, and that purpose was ultimately unnecessary.

On a show of interest by a participant, I verbally completed an approximately 20 minute screening process (see Appendix A) with potential participants, and for those that were not excluded during said screening, I obtained receipt of institutional review board approved consent and general inclusion criterion question responses from the same. The scheduling of an agreed date, time, and location was then set for the first in-depth interview.

I conducted the first in depth interview with the participants using open-ended and guided questioning (see Appendix B).. The first interview was scheduled to occur approximately one to two weeks following the screening process and was done in-person at a location agreeable to the participant. At the conclusion of the first interview, I scheduled a second in-depth interview with the participant.

The second in depth interview with participants occurred approximately two to three weeks after the first interview so to give participants opportunity to present public artifacts and discuss private artifacts that played on their decision-making process. The second interview included, but was not limited to, more open-ended questions found in

Appendix C and was this time specifically addressing policies that may have impacted

the participant's decision-making process.

Audiotapes were transcribed using the intelligent verbatim approach, in which

unnecessary speaking errors or redundancies were omitted for ease of reading, and then I

analyzed the same according to steps outlined at the end of this chapter. Specifically, I

used memoing (Maxwell, 2013) in which I created memos of the data collected on which

I included summaries of the data and inserted coding. I then analyzed the memos and

codes to find thematic categories and trends (see Perez-Huber, 2011) across the data that

could be linked to education policies currently enacted in Florida schools. After my

analysis was completed, I conducted a final meeting with participants, some face-to-face

and others through written communication, to perform member checking (see Creswell,

2013) of the data collected and analyzed.

Following the conclusion of the member-checking, taking note that some parents

participants opted-out of the member-checking process, I commenced with the final

analysis of the data by drafting chapters 4 and 5 of this study. Based on the data

collected, it did not become necessary to further contact participants for minor

clarifications.

Data Collection

Yin (2014) recommended six types of data collection for a case study, including

interviews, archival records, documents, direct and participant observations, and physical

artifacts. I collected data in this study from multiple sources. In addition to interviews,

participant references to artifacts, and archival documents on Florida's public schools, I

used legislative memorandums and documents for purpose of understanding and noting

legislative intent and content of applicable policies within the study.

Data were organized by creating memorandums of the transcribed interviews and

attaching to the same thematic categories (see Perez-Huber, 2011). The files and

recordings were kept under lock in my home office. Two more recognized strategies of

data collection storage and organization which were used in this study were memoing and

mapping (see Maxwell, 2013), both of which allowed me to stay focused and not get

pulled onto the path of irrelevant and nonproductive tangents (see Bryant and Charmaz,

2007). Due to my personal connection with Anywhere Charter as a former teacher and

parent of a current student as well as my past employment with the public school district

at study, I used journaling of my personal experiences (see Patton, 2002) as well as

member-checking (see Creswell, 2013) to keep my bias in check and maintain

objectivity. I began the analysis once the data were transcribed and organized, the

memoing process completed, and the mapping finalized.

Data Analysis

According to Patton (2002), qualitative design often starts with numerous field

notes ultimately narrowed down into several core themes. The type of questions that are

generally sought are more open-ended questions that require repeat interventions and

participant contact to synthesize and provide for more depth to the data retrieved (Patton,

2002). As such, the data analysis for this research involved the multiple tiers of synthesis.

First I viewed the data from the perspective of the legislative intent behind the

policies reflected in the research, with specific reference to the intent noted in the

legislative notes and the reality of the reforms' impact as perceived by the participants. Then, using results from the memoing and mapping (see Maxwell, 2013) process, I synthesized the data for comparative factors that aligned between the participants and thematic categories so to revise the coding scheme (see Perez-Huber, 2011) and deduce by priority the factors that drive school choice election in a top-performing school district and the impact policy plays on said factors. I obtained validation of the preliminary analysis through the member-checking (see Creswell, 2013) meetings had with participants.

Validation of Findings

The research findings of this study were validated through multiple means. Validation, as opposed to verification, is a "distinct strength of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2013, p. 250). In this study, I used member-checking, clarifying researcher bias, and rich, thick description for validation of the findings.

All researchers come to their research with some form of bias formed from experience, prejudices, and/or orientations that have shaped their views (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) noted that "many major contributions to our understanding of the world have come from scientists' personal experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 49). Being clear to the reader at the onset about these impactful factors on the researcher's perspective was imperative to the validation of the findings. Understanding researcher bias in this study was of critical importance in that I was a charter school parent, a former traditional public school and charter school teacher in the district at study, and a current virtual school teacher in the state of Florida. Having a work and personal connection to the schools and

parents at study in this research provided me greater resource to otherwise unattainable data (see Major, 2013). Regardless, however, I journaled personal experiences throughout the data collection process to verify the same against the data collected to maintain a check on objectivity (see Patton, 2002). I too am an attorney which I divulged openly to all participants prior to obtaining informed consent to proceed. Although I had a connection with the local education system, I appropriately side bared these connections accordingly.

During the final interview with the participants, member-checking (see Creswell, 2013) took place to afford the participants the opportunity to review the credibility of my findings and interpretations. Creswell (2013) defined member-checking as the process by which participants' views regarding the credibility of the findings and interpretations are solicited and taken into consideration by the researcher. Case studies, in particular, involve a deeper engagement of participants in validating not only the findings, but also in directing the study (Stake, 1995). Through proffering insight on the preliminary analysis surrounding the themes and trends noted in the data, validity of the findings can be had (see Creswell, 2013). The final form of validation was that of rich, thick description that is common with case study research and storytelling by participants (see Creswell, 2013). Through detailed information about the participants, one can transfer information obtained to other settings or parties. Stake (1995) noted that a description is rich "if it provides abundant, interconnected details" (Stake, 1995, p. 49).

The participants' stories about experiences had with traditional public schools and their beliefs about education and family proffered rich, thick description of the

underpinnings of their decision-making process to elect charter schooling. The evidencing of a link between policy perception and the exercise of choice in the use of a public good as demonstrated in this study has potential application to further research in the field of mass behavior, policy analysis, and public goods.

Summary

This qualitative single-site case study sought to understand the impact, if any, policy perception played in the decision-making process of charter school parents to depart a high performing traditional public school district. The participants were purposefully selected (see Maxwell, 2013) to include eight charter school parents who underwent two in-depth interviews and one member checking meeting (Creswell, 2013). By limiting this case study to parents residing in a traditional public school district identified by the state of Florida as highly performing and who opted for charter schooling instead, the participant sample is an extreme population, atypical to the phenomenon of school choice election, and thus the findings can be generalizable (see Maxwell, 2013).

The data collected from participant interviews underwent the process of memoing (see Maxwell, 2013) by which thematic categories were attached (see Perez-Huber, 2011) and a coding scheme devised. Then the strategy of mapping (see Maxwell, 2013) the codes in search of trends across data points was completed. Validation of the findings took place through member-checking (see Creswell, 2013) by the participants directly.

Based on past employment ties to both Anywhere Charter and the county, as well as my current role as a virtual teacher, I utilized journaling to ensure objectivity (see

Patton, 2002). Although such connections can open the door to bias, such connections also can open the door to information accessibility otherwise unattainable (see Major, 2013). Through my experience, professionally and personally with the school district, Anywhere Charter, and the participants interviewed, I had created a rapport that allowed for more open flow of rich, thick description that served to validate my findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Between the years 2005 and 2016, charter school enrollment in the state of Florida went from 92,214 students in prekindergarten through 12th grade to over 270,000 students (FDOE, 2016), an increase of 193% in just over 1 decade. School choice election has been studied at length in failing school districts and impoverished areas (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013; Jacobs, 2013). The question of why a parent chooses a charter school when residing in a high performing traditional public school district, however, was unknown until now. Therefore, I sought out parents residing in a top performing school district in the state of Florida to learn more about the factors that influenced their decision-making process to elect a charter school over traditional public schooling.

Setting

The setting of this research was a charter school in a top performing school district in the state of Florida. Anywhere Charter was used as a pseudonym to identify the charter school used in this case study to not only protect its identity but also because this study is not about the charter school, but rather the decision-making process of the parents threat to depart their traditional public schools for a charter school of choice. The school district studied has five charter schools in operation, with two additional start-up charter schools expected to commence operation by the start of the 2017-2018 academic year. According to a data release in January 2017, Anywhere Charter had a minority student composition of less than 31% with 13.32% of students identified as

eligible for free and reduced priced lunch due to economic need. The enrollment

composition at Anywhere Charter was in stark contrast to Florida's charter school

demographics statewide, regarding minority students served, home language, and those

identified as economically needy (see Table 2).

Table 2

Charter School Student Demographics

2015-2016	Total students	FRPL	White	Home language English
Florida aggregate of charter schools	270,301	133,112 49.1%	89,727 33.1%	25,236 9.3%
Anywhere Charter	781	104 13.32%	543 69.53%	647 82.84%

Note. Florida Charter Schools data derived from Florida Department of Education (2016). FRPL = Students classified as eligible for free and reduced priced lunch due to economic need.

Based on the demographic disparities referenced in Table 2, between that of

Anywhere Charter and the aggregate charter schools statewide, the participants selected

for this study were an extreme population. Maxwell (2013) explained an extreme

population is an atypical group of participants unlikely to be linked to the phenomenon

studied. I did not have any personal conditions that influenced the participants and there

were no special organizational conditions that influenced the participants or their

experiences at the time of data collection that could have otherwise impacted the

interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

In this case study, I examined a top performing school district and made the

purposeful selection of participants who were parents who opted to enroll their child or

children in a start-up charter school within a single top performing school district in the

state of Florida. The participants met inclusion criterion if they had at one time enrolled their child or children in a traditional public school within the selected top-performing school district and subsequently decided to elect attendance at Anywhere Charter. I provided each participant an alphabetic qualifier to protect their identity. Throughout this study, my reference to participants was done through individually assigned alphabetic identifiers.

With this study focused on a decision-making process, the only demographic I sought was a cross section of grade levels so that the participants provided a representative sample of impacted students from each of the three levels of education including elementary, middle, and high school grades. I accomplished this with the selection of eight participants, two men and six women, who represented a total of 18 students who attended Anywhere Charter after being enrolled in a traditional public school within the same school district.

Data Collection

I collected data from two in-depth interviews with each participant for a total of 16, in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted for approximately 1 hour and all interviews were conducted over a 2-month period. Additionally, a third meeting with each participant occurred for member checking purposes (see Creswell, 2013) and lasted anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes in length, or was done via email if preferred by the participant. All interviews, except for one based on participant preference, were recorded as originally planned on a 2017 Sony digital recording device and transferred for storage to my computer archive. I took diligent hand-written notes during each interview and

then modified my notes digitally to memos (see Maxwell, 2013) based on conceptual themes referenced therein and the subsequent codes and categories that emerged. There were no surprises or unusual circumstances encountered during the data collection portion of this study, other than one participant who wished for only hand-written notes as opposed to a recording.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data collected through a multi-tier analytical process including memoing and mapping (see Maxwell, 2013) to synthesize the raw data for not only comparative factors aligned between and amongst participants, but also for the emergence of thematic categories used to deduce a coding scheme (see Perez-Huber, 2011). After my analysis resulted in a conceptual title emerging from the inductive reasoning applied, and the factors derived from the raw data were properly classified into categories and subcategories, I linked the findings to current education policies through the analytic process of mapping (see Maxwell, 2013).

Prior to conducting the first round of interviews, I complied some general themes, including but not limited to curriculum, safety, and teachers, as possible factors weighing on the decision-making process to elect school choice in a top-performing school district. An example of the analytic process of both deductive and inductive reasoning used in this study is best demonstrated through the analysis surrounding the development of one of the first themes identified: c*urriculum*. Although I had expected the curricular theme to be one of the leading conceptual titles guiding the decision-making process to elect school choice in a top-performing school district, the memoing process (see Maxwell,

2013) resulted in that title being dependent on controlling factors. Curriculum, although expressly referenced as a factor weighing in the decision-making process to elect school choice by every participant, played differently among the participants in their decision-making process to elect school choice.

An example of the deductive development of the coded theme of curriculum into its subcategories can best be understood by the exchange with Participant O, a mother of two children at the elementary level and one at the middle school grade level. Participant O started her first interview by stating, "I was looking for something more rigorous…my children, they were just not being challenged." Then Participant O went on to share a more in-depth concern with curriculum pertaining to what she called "indoctrination," referencing concerns about instructional delivery, and learning materials that were, in her view, not only inappropriate but also "un-American" and "politically motivated." The coded theme of curriculum, which had already branched into separate sub-categories of *rigor* and *grading* from previous interviews, developed the additional sub-categories of *instructional strategy* and *content* because of the following exchange with Participant O:

I just kind of really wanted to get away from a lot of the indoctrination that I started seeing seeping into the schools and you know where we live, we are zoned for all the best schools that everyone tries to get into. And I was just even seeing it there. In second grade, my daughter came home with this booklet going on-and-on and saying did you know that people shoot drugs into their arms and I was just really horrified that my sweet little second grader had to be exposed to all of this…. I don't send my kids [to school] to be shocked or have their world turned

upside down. I send them there to learn math and the A-B-Cs and all that good stuff.

Following each interview, I created hand-written notes, and then read through and marked up those notes with codes to identify the existence of trends between the participant data. Next I used a memoing process to create a series of "mental dialogues" (see Maxwell, 2013). The memos provided me with reflection sources for goals, methods, and areas of participant follow-up for the second interview phase; but more importantly, the memoing stage of analysis allowed for the inductive and deductive analysis of the factors participants identified as weighing on their decision-making process to depart traditional public schooling.

The inductive and deductive analysis used in this research resulted in fluid classifications of categories and themes. The memos were assigned themes and categories in the caption area of each memo (see Figure 2).

_____

Conceptual Title: Classroom Composition   **Coded Theme(s): Administration**
Category: Curriculum   **Subcategory: Content**
Participant: __O__
Summary: Mom shared concern about students being taught content that in her opinion had no place in the academic environment of such young children, such as the teaching about heroin addiction and drugs in a second or third grade classroom. Child came home with information on illegal drug use and talking about how people inject themselves with drugs. Mom felt that teachers go beyond what they are there to teach, such as the A-B-Cs and math, to "shock" the children or make the lessons more exciting, but that is not what school is about in this mom's opinion. Mom feared also the indoctrination of children to believe certain political ideologies and being taught historic facts inaccurately to support a larger political narrative.
_____

Figure 2. Sample memo of raw data.

The fluid nature of categorizing the memo summaries allowed the ultimate emersion of a single conceptional title referred to herein as *classroom composition.*

Classroom composition, as used in this study, referred to the numeric make-up of students within a classroom based on academic ability as well as those students with special cognitive and/or behavioral needs. I found from the data that classroom composition was the controlling factor in the decision-making process to elect school choice in a top-performing school district. Although race is often linked to the concept of classroom composition, the results of this study did not find any direct connection between race and parental concerns driving school choice. Rather, participants unanimously expressed perceptions that the failure of their traditional public schools to address the needs of students with academic, cognitive, linguistic, and/or behavioral needs in the general education classrooms directly weighed on participants' decision-making process to elect school choice. More specifically, participants explained their perception that the lack of curricular rigor and safe learning environments at the traditional public schools was based on the failure of the traditional public schools to address the needs of diverse classroom compositions, as well as the lack of parent involvement and accountability associated with the same.

After I extensively reviewed and analyzed the memos from all 16, in-depth interviews, I complied the factors weighing on the decision-making process to elect charter schooling in a top performing school district into a single hierarchal diagram. The diagram I created reflected the weight by which each participant referenced a factor by identifying the number of participants who found a factor to weigh on their decision-making process. I then organized the factors in a hierarchal format to denote causation for each factor (see Figure 3).

CLASSROOM C

ADMINIS   PAREN

CURRIC   CLAS

Instruct   Gradin   Classro
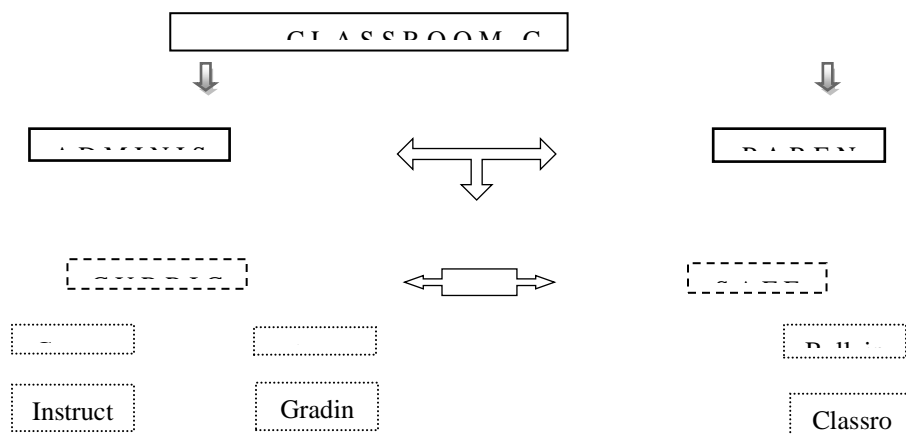
Note: The numbers indicate participants referencing the factor out of 8 possible.

Figure 3. Factors weighing on charter school election in top-performing school district.

The mapping process (Maxwell, 2013) of linking the remaining themes, codes, and categories to existing education policies began once the memoing process came to a completion. In this study, the mapping involved a linking process between the factors identified by the participants as weighing on their decision-making process to elect charter schooling for their children, as set forth in Figure 3, to existing state and federal education policies implemented within the state of Florida.

Many of the same means-tested policies that mandate public school focus on targeted student populations could be linked to both how a school administration implemented the policies, as well as the impact of parent involvement associated with classroom compositions. I show the results of the mapping phase of analysis into a chart that linked applicable policies to the factors identified as weighing on the decision-making process to elect school choice in a top-performing school district (see Table 3).

Table 3

Mapping of Parental Concerns to Policies

	Classroom Composition	
	Curriculum	Safety
School Administration	Rigor - *ELL/ESE/IDEA/NCLB/ESEA*	Bullying - *ELL/ESE/IDEA/FTE*
	Grading - *ELL/IDEA/NCLB*	
	Content - *ELL/IDEA/NCLB/ ESEA*	
Limited Parental Support	Instructional Strategies - *ELL/ESE/IDEA/NCLB*	Classroom Design - *ELL/ESE/IDEA/NCLB*

Note: ELL = English Language Learner. NCLB = No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. ESEA = Elementary and Secondary Education Act. AYP = Adequate Yearly Progress Mechanism. IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004. FTE = Full Time Enrollment Funding.

This analytic process of mapping required the accumulation of legislative records reflective of not only policy language, but also the legislative intent behind each policy initiative. I used the legislative intent language of the policies referenced in Table 3 to link the policies to associated participant concerns that weighed on their decision-making process to elect school choice. Discrepant cases whereby themes or categories were referenced by less than four participants were included in the first stage of data analysis, but removed from the mapping process. My removal of factors referenced by only a minority of the participants does not suggest that the same were not deserving of further research as the same may be more prevalent if studied in a larger context.

Of the eight participants, there were no discrepant cases in which a parent elected school choice for solely personal reasons that did not trend to other parents, or for reasons that were so personally motivated as to not involve any concern about the traditional public schooling previously enjoyed. Through the storytelling of firsthand experiences,

each participant explained in detail the reasons why they departed their highly-rated traditional public school system for Anywhere Charter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the herein research findings can be ascertained by how the study was implemented, the data collection methods instituted, and the added efforts made to minimize researcher bias. Validation, as opposed to verification, is a "distinct strength of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2013, p. 250). In this study, member-checking, clarifying researcher bias, and rich, thick description were used for validation of the findings. The credibility of the research was ensured through researcher journaling (see Patton, 2002). Transferability of the findings was grounded in the detailed insight of the data put forth in the study (see Creswell, 2013), and the dependability of the findings was linked to the consistent strategies of detailed memoing and mapping of raw data (see Maxwell, 2013). The use of member-checking (Creswell, 2013), and the connection of the participants' firsthand experiences to the literature review, led to the credibility of the findings.

All researchers come to their research with some form of bias formed from experience, prejudices, and/or orientations that have shaped their views (Patton, 2002). I found it critically important in this study to understand researcher bias in that I was a charter school parent, and a former traditional public and charter school teacher in the district studied. These previous roles of mine, however, were not impediments to the credibility of this research but rather became imperative to my ability to obtain the rich, thick description necessary for this study that otherwise may not have been afforded (see

Major, 2013). My having a work and personal connection to the schools and parents at study in this research provided greater access to otherwise unattainable data, a necessary access component noted by Major (2013). As recommended by Patton (2002), my frequent journaling of firsthand experiences throughout the data collection process helped to verify the removal of any bias I may have held and maintain a check on objectivity.

The collection of rich, thick descriptions of the factors that weighed on the participants' decision-making processes to elect school choice was attainable through the participants' openness in story-telling due to a demonstrated understanding reflective in the questioning. Through proffering insight on the preliminary analysis surrounding the themes and trends noted in the data, validity of the findings was had (see Creswell, 2013). Rich, thick description is common with storytelling by participants in case study research and a means by which credibility of findings can be established (Creswell, 2013). Through detailed information about the participants, the information can be transferred to other settings or parties (Stake, 1995).

The participants' firsthand experiences with traditional public schools and their beliefs about education and family proffered rich, thick description of the underpinnings of their decision-making process to elect charter schooling. According to Yin (2014), a single-case study can be the basis of significant generalization when it seeks to demonstrate an explanatory function as opposed to limiting itself to a descriptive or exploratory function. Generalizability is but one means of gaining knowledge and that which cannot be formally generalized does not for that reason alone negate the fact that science, the "gaining of knowledge", has not occurred (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 227).

Case studies generally involve smaller participant samples, unlike other forms of research that rely on large numeric samples by way of survey and other mass data collection tools. The number of participants in a study can raise speculation involving the generalizability of a study's results. Nonetheless, I selected the number of participants used in this study based on multiple factors cited by Mason (2010) and attributed to experts in the field of saturation in sampling. Based on my expertise as a certified educator and as an attorney with over two decades of policy experience along with the heterogeneity of the parent population and lack of cross-discipline claims, fewer participants were necessary (see Mason, 2010). Regardless, however, more individual in-depth interviews were conducted in this study than other similar studies on educational decision-making processes (see Major, 2013); and because parents are the only persons from whom perceptions were needed in this case study, the eight participants doubled that of the parent participants interviewed in Aydin's (2013) study on the effectiveness of a Turkish education initiative. Five to 50 in-depth interviews have been argued as acceptable for saturation purposes in various qualitative studies (Dworkin, 2012), making the 16 in-depth interviews conducted in this study supported by saturation experts in the field of qualitative research.

I maintained the dependability of the data in the data collection and organization strategies, and specifically the consistency by which the same were adhered. I organized data by creating memorandums of the transcribed interviews and attaching to the same coded themes and appropriate categories and sub-categories when applicable. This more intensive review of the data supported the dependability of the data findings.

Following the final interview with each participant, I conducted member-checking (Creswell, 2013) to afford participants the opportunity to review the credibility of my findings and interpretations as related to their individual raw data. Creswell (2013) defined member-checking as the process by which participants' views regarding the credibility of the findings and interpretations are solicited and taken into consideration by the researcher. This research took note of and adhered to the premise that case studies should involve a deeper engagement of the participants in not only validating the findings but also in directing the study (see Stake, 1995).

The member-checking process became a more detailed participant meeting than I had originally anticipated in that each participant demonstrated more interest in their own data results and how the same were viewed in the larger memoing connections with themes and categories. Although no strategies for the member-checking were altered from my original plan, the intensity and insight of the participants during our member-checking meetings presented more fruitful than I had originally expected. An example of the advantage of member-checking that allowed for clarification of the raw data collected can be better understood through the following exchange with Participant J:

Maybe I misstated the problem my son had with not being taught the fundamentals to a spelling concept as being a problem at the public school. It was actually at the charter school that we found that problem…. Sorry if I made that mistake in our interview. (Participant J).

A case study affords participants the ability to tell their stories and reveal to the researcher their perception of reality, which in turn sheds light on how and why the

participant came to a particular decision (Baxter and Jack, 2008). It was not necessary to confirm the parental perceptions studied herein with that of school administrators and/or teachers in that the parental perceptions shared by the participants resulted in their actual migration to school choice. Whether the shared participant perceptions are grounded in fact does not change the reality that the same resulted in their departure from the traditional public school system. Nevertheless, the similarity in stories shared by participants lends confirmation to the truth of the events, or at a minimum to the reasonableness of their perceptions. Confirmability of the findings was had by all participants sharing stories rooted in what each perceived to be problems emanating from the mainstreaming of children in classrooms regardless of academic ability. Additionally, the literature on school choice and education policy supports the participants' perceptions learned in this study.

It was critical to the herein research that the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings be ascertained. The use of member-checking and researcher journaling, in addition to the solicitation of rich, descriptive story-telling by the participants in a series of two, in-depth interviews per participant made the ascertaining of credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable findings possible.

Results

This study surrounded one research question that asked to what extent, if any, does public policy impact a parent's decision-making process to elect school choice in a highly-rated traditional public school district. To answer this question, it was first

necessary for me to find the factors that led parents in a top-performing school district to school choice and then attempt to link those factors to current education policy. The results of this study empirically show that policy, or more specifically the perceived failed implementation of the same, impacted the parental decision-making process to elect school choice in a top performing school district. Participants elected school choice based on perceptions that diminished curricular rigor and diminished classroom safety are the direct result of the classroom compositions found in a general education classroom in a traditional public school. Participants unanimously agreed that the inability on the part of traditional public schools to adequately accommodate for the diverse academic, cognitive, behavioral, and linguistic abilities of students placed in a general education classroom results in higher-achieving students being disenfranchised.

Both academic and nonacademic concerns weigh on the decision-making process to elect school choice (Cucchiara and Horvat, 2013). The data in this study, however, explained how parental perceptions surrounding academic and nonacademic factors are influenced by the classroom composition of general education classrooms within traditional public schools. I collected data from eight parent participants, all of whom underwent the decision-making process to remove their child or children from the traditional public school system in a highly-rated school district in Florida to enroll their children in the same start-up charter school, hereinafter referred to as Anywhere Charter. Each participant provided detailed, rich description of their decision-making process over the course of two in-depth, face-to-face interviews. From the 16 in-depth interviews

conducted, the value placed on advanced academics at Anywhere Charter was a critical factor in the participants' school choice election.

The search by parents for stronger academics is not a new concept in school choice research (see Sirer et al., 2015). The perception of the herein participants regarding classroom composition as the reason for diminished curricular rigor and unsafe learning environments within traditional public schools, however, is new. *Classroom composition*, for purposes of this study, meant the number of children with cognitive, academic, behavioral, and/or linguist disabilities within a classroom. Participants explained their perceived failure of traditional public schools to accommodate the needs of diverse classroom compositions as the primary reason for less rigorous academics in the traditional public school system and thus their primary reason for considering school choice.

The following participant statements reflect the value they placed on finding a school wherein their children would no longer be "bored" or where their children could be "challenged":

> I think what spurred us to look into charter schools was a more advanced curriculum…. What was happening [at the traditional public school], the children were being taught a lesson and they would grasp the lesson…. They would want to go ahead and keep moving, learn something new or fresh or just elaborate on what they were being taught, but they were getting slowed down by those that could not grasp the original lesson. The teachers then had to be consumed with keeping the other children up to speed with the rest of the class. (Participant J)

He [participant's son] was bored. He was sitting around waiting to do things. Even like in first grade, they would send him to the library to do extra special reports to just keep him busy with something to do…. I really felt there was nothing there [at the traditional public school] that was challenging him. It was kind of a waste of time. (Participant D)

I was looking for something more rigorous, because my children were just not being challenged in the public schools…. She [participant's daughter] was doing really well and all the testing showed her reading level was several grades above the average for her grade. I really wanted her to keep being challenged with vocabulary and they [public school administrators and teachers] would say no problem because they wouldn't bump her up a grade, didn't matter if she was a genius. They had different reading levels and she was in the highest level, but for math and different things like that, they didn't have that so she was stuck doing math with everyone else. I thought she was stagnating with that. With the reading, she was in the highest reading level and could choose the higher-level books in the library but when she got to the fifth grade, the highest grade at that school, there were no higher levels in the school library to read, and when I asked if I could bring in middle-school books, the school said no. (Participant O)

In addition to participants sharing concerns about curriculum; they too were sharing concerns about the sub-category of curriculum identified as *rigor* and more importantly, the larger conceptual title of *classroom composition.* As I placed into

memmoing format the raw data from the interviews, concepts and themes emerged. Why were the children referenced in the above summaries not being challenged? Each participant noted their individual perceptions that the answer was rooted in the school's need to hold back instructional rigor and advancement to meet the needs of less academically capable students.

This parental perceptions surrounding the impact of classroom composition on the curriculum in a school were summarized with absolute clarity by Participant B who believed lessons in the traditional public school classroom moved at the pace of the "slowest child", as opposed to Anywhere Charter where higher academic standards were set in each class regardless of classroom composition and wherein the responsibility of meeting those standards was that of the students and their parents, regardless of abilities and challenges. Participant F confirmed the advanced rigor at Anywhere Charter by explaining that the expectations in a general classroom at Anywhere Charter were even "vastly different than honors classes in the traditional public schools." This shared desire by participants to see higher expectations within the classroom environment was explained by Participant D with her belief in the adage "a rising tide lifts all boats"; a belief she felt was not shared by the traditional public school system based on its continued misfocus of learning standards based on the lowest-achieving quartile of students.

Parental perceptions surrounding classroom composition as the blame for lack of rigor in the traditional public school classrooms became a recurring theme in the data. This is best demonstrated in the related experiences of three parents zoned for different

elementary schools within the district. Each parent had children routinely placed in the role of teacher during class time so to help other children with either language barriers or learning disabilities:

> In one of my son's schooling experiences…I can't remember if it was first or second grade, he was responsible for trying to help the child next to him…understand what was happening. I believe that child didn't have English as his first language. And of course, my son had no problem with that. My concern, however, was that my son was spending time teaching what he already knew and understood to another child as opposed to my child actually learning more, going beyond what he knew. (Participant Q)

> There are children [in the traditional public school classroom] who can't speak English very well, can't write, the teachers have to stop and help them and it's good that they do that but if English is the second language for them, that is going to be a barrier for them to learning. My sons and daughter would tell me that they would have to slow down for understanding. My son had a girl [in his class] who was Creole…and he sat next to her and would help her all the time…the teacher would actually say he was a big help in helping those that needed help to understand. On one side, I am glad he had a good heart and was patient and wanted to teach…on the other hand, there are just so many examples of wasted time in the school that he could have learned so much more education and that's what we are there for. I really don't want to rate humanitarian efforts over

education but that is what we are there for, to learn, and that took away from [him learning]. (Participant B)

My daughter was a very high-performing student and she had had some challenges where she was being asked to help students with learning issues throughout her classes. She would often complete her work quickly and was very proud of herself. She was coming home telling me that her teachers would ask her often to help students with their math assignments or with their language assignments during classes or over in a quiet space to help tutor….And while it is a really nice thing and she was learning empathy, and leaning many wonderful skills, she would say that her teacher was too busy dealing with discipline issues ….The teacher would be so distracted so often during lessons dealing with students with ADD or learning challenges that the teacher could not finish the lessons. (Participant F)

Not only were higher-achieving students being asked to spend their educational time helping high-risk students learn, but participants also shared how they perceived the lessons themselves to lack rigor due to a misplaced focus on the lowest-achieving students:

I think because the curriculum in a public school is at the pace of your slowest or lowest intelligent child, that's the pace that's set for the class and the ones that need to be challenged intellectually are left on the sidelines just waiting for the slowest child to catch-up. (Participant B)

Imagine an art class with all students being told they could only use water-color

because that is the most that can be handled by the novice artists in the classroom.

When this idea of holding back students to the level of the student with least

knowledge or experience is applied to core classes like math and science, just

imagine how limited and bored the students at the top of their classes must feel.

(Participant Q)

According to Participant O, the rigor of the lessons was not the only curricular

issue disrupted by mainstreaming students of varying abilities in a traditional public

classroom. Participant O shared the perception that student interruptions in the

traditional public classroom were so frequent that lessons were rarely taught to their

expected completion; leaving her high-achieving daughter feeling frustrated. All

participants shared in their perceptions that even well-planned lessons by teachers,

lessons that had rigor built in, became useless when the teacher was not able to get

through the same due to continued disruptions in the classroom by children with special

needs or the inability to conform to classroom disciplinary rules.

The disruptions in the traditional public school classroom were explained by

participants as more than mere lapses in academic instruction; but rather as frequent

occurrences. Participants shared stories of disruptions that were continual and in some

instances dangerous to the other students because classrooms were devoid of teacher

aides and trained adults in special needs. Participant F shared what she called a

"dangerous situation" experienced by her daughter who was placed in a classroom with a

student who would routinely "throw desks when in a tantrum or episode." And

Participant Q shared how her son was in a classroom with two children who were not

able to sit through a day without either "throwing a tantrum, breaking down in tears, or

being openly defiant to the teacher"; all disruptions that Participant Q perceived as

interruptions to her son's ability to learn. Participant O explained how her children would

come home from school telling her about "out-of-control" children, and it was but one

reason she wanted to find "a place with a calmer environment." Participant A also

expressed a desire to "find an atmosphere conducive to learning and not disruptive."

Participants also shared their concerns about the lack of parental support in

assisting children with homework as a factor negatively impacting classroom curricular

rigor and advancement of lesson plans. Several participants remarked on increased

parental accountability at Anywhere Charter as a reason for their selection of the school.

Participant F specifically remarked on how impressed she was to have had to sign a 25-

page parent contract with the charter school agreeing to the academic and disciplinary

expectations of the school. This parent contract was also referenced by Participant J who

noted how the charter rules called for more parental accountability; something he opined

was missing in the traditional public school system.

The results of this study establish a link between classroom composition and

parental perceptions about child rearing and parental accountability. As perceived by

participants, a classroom comprised of students with limited parental supervision and/or

moral guidance promotes an unsafe learning environment. According to Participant A,

much of the lack of child discipline in the traditional public schools stem from what she

called a "decay of society" wherein there are no longer guiding principles for children because of the "removal of religion and values from the public school curriculum." Participant A explained how she had heard the stories about "sex in the bathroom" and "drugs" at the middle school that, even if she did not know were factual or not, were enough to concern her greatly as she had a daughter about to enter the middle school and feared that if even one of the stories was accurate, it would be an environment "inappropriate for her child or any young girl." Participant A also shared her understanding of what happened to a friend's daughter who ended up having a urinary tract infection because of her fear of going to the restroom in the middle school as the bathroom was a place of bullying, scaring the little girl to the point of holding her restroom needs all day.

Participant Q shared her firsthand experience of a third-grade child who verbally threatened to stab her son in the eye with a pencil if her son didn't stop telling him to be quiet so to hear the teacher. According to Participant Q, the school administration shared with her that the threatening child, who was not even properly zoned for the school, had made similar violent threats to other children and had been previously disciplined for using another child's phone on the school bus to search pornography. Even with this information, the school informed Participant Q that the child was not going to be expelled and was not removed until Participant Q threatened the school with a federal restraining order against the child.

Bullying was also addressed by several participants as a persistent problem, along with the failure of the traditional public schools to address the same. According to

Participant O, her daughter's lunch would routinely be taken from her backpack, which was to be left hanging in the homeroom classroom. When Participant O's daughter addressed this problem with the homeroom teacher who was present in the classroom throughout the day, the teacher informed Participant O's daughter that it was not the teacher's responsibility to watch over students' bags. Participant D shared about her son being physically "punched" in second grade while on the playground and how the understaffing of adult supervision resulted in no adult witnesses and thus no remedy. These bullying instances were blamed by the participants not only on the failure of school administration to appropriately address the same, but on the lack of parental accountability in the lives of the children enrolled. Participant D shared her belief that Anywhere Charter's "higher expectations draw increased parental support and in turn decreased behavioral issues."

Participant P noted a disciplinary rule at the charter school that mandated parental accountability and assisted in limiting classroom disruptions from his perspective. According to Participant P, Anywhere Charter had a discipline measure whereby a student who earned a certain number of demerits or disciplinary actions must have a parent come into school for the day and go through the child's classes together. This was viewed by Participant P as a great means of parent accountability, something that many parents may not want to do or would do in the traditional public school system. This parental requirement to spend a day at school with one's child, if the child reaches a certain number of demerits, was also referenced by Participant O who suggested that perhaps the increased parental accountability required at Anywhere Charter is the reason

for some families leaving the school in that not all parents are "willing to be held

accountable."

Grading also appeared in many memos as a subcategory of curriculum, and was

also linked back to the overall conceptual title of classroom composition based on

parental perceptions of reasoning behind the implementation of a numeric system of

grading. As described by participants, the grading within the traditional public

elementary schools moved from an A-F scale to a numeric system whereby a student

earning a "1" was not meeting grade-level expectations and a "3", or a "4" as later

changed to meet the four-levels of the traditional A-F scale, demonstrated mastery of the

content. Some parents, like Participant A, speculated that the numeric grading system

was one intended to "water-down" the grades of those students exceeding grade level

expectations. According to Participant A, "with everyone earning a '2', there was no way

to know if your child was closer to a '1' or a '3', there was no meaning in the grade."

And Participant D suggested that because the traditional public school did not want to

show such a large discrepancy between low and high-achieving students, the numeric

system was instituted with "strict rules for teachers to follow"; rules that "tied teachers'

hands" to being able to really assess students.

An example of the strict rules referenced by Participant D were confirmed by

Participant P who was informed by his child's school that his child could not earn the

highest number possible in the first quarter of school because the goal is to show the

students progressing in their learning throughout the year. A teacher at the traditional

public school told Participant P directly that she was not permitted to grade a student as

showing mastery of a concept so early in the year. Participant A confirmed she too was told this same information. Participant Q confirmed what Participant P and A explained when she shared her perception that all the grades "appeared to be predetermined" in that her children's school also informed her that "children should be getting only a 2 or 3 in beginning of year as they can't master things at the beginning but would then be put to 3 or 4 toward final quarters."

When Participant J's son scored a 100% on a spelling test in third grade and was scored a '3', the equivalent of a 'B', Participant J questioned this with the school and was directed to the district administrative offices. After an hour talk with a district administrator, it could not be sufficiently explained to Participant J as to how a student can go beyond what a teacher wants on a 10-word spelling test to earn a '4', the equivalent of an 'A'. Participant J felt the school, for some reason, needed to have his child look like a 'B' student and not an 'A' student and guessed it had something to do with "evening the playing ground."

According to Participant A, the numeric grading system was unclear and showed an intent on the part of the school to keep her child down in her grades for a reason she could not explain but believed to be related to showing other children as doing better. The parental perceptions shared about the numeric grading system suggest that the traditional public school system instituted a grading system specifically designed to average out the overall grades earned by the overall student body to not reflect a large gap between low and high achieving students. Reference to arbitrary calculations or focused attention to targeted groups of students based on policy was noted with specificity by Participant D

who shared her perception that the traditional public schools are "consumed by the need to improve the lowest learners in order to meet the learning gain requirements tied to A+ money and school grades" (Participant D).

Based on the raw data and the standardized testing scores of Anywhere Charter in comparison to its county and state counterparts (see Table 4), the herein participants shared perceptions that a classroom composition of high-achieving students from motivated families is supportive of a rigorous academic environment in which students can reach academic achievement are validated.

Table 4

Passage Rates for State Standardized Testing in 2015-2016

2015-2016	*FSA English (3rd Grade)*	*FSA Math (3rd Grade)*	*Civics EOC (7th Grade)*	*Algebra I EOC (High school)*
Anywhere Charter	81%	73%	92%	79%
County School District	52%	59%	68%	60%
State of Florida	54%	61%	67%	55%

Note: Data retrieved from Florida Department of Education (2016). FSA = Florida Standardized Assessment. EOC = End-of-Course Exam.

But what deserves attention are the remarks from Participant B, a mother of a child with impulse control issues. Unlike the other participants interviewed who for the most part had high-achieving children or students working at grade-level without academic concern, Participant B had a child who was having discipline issues within the traditional public school. According to Participant B, a more rigorous classroom eliminates the "dead time" or "wasted time" she believed was the root of her son's discipline issues at the traditional public school:

I just don't think the education challenged him enough intellectually and I

think he got bored quickly and there was a lot of wasted time, and I saw that with

my other two children in public school too but they had personalities where they

had self-control over that empty time and could kind of behave, where my

younger son being more active just started doing creative things to keep himself

busy which was distracting or took the attention away from the teacher lessons for

others who were slower and still working on whatever they had to work on.

(Participant B)

The "dead time" noted by Participant B was explained in part by Participant F

who complimented the instructional style at the charter school by saying the charter

teacher was the "sage on the stage." Instructional strategies and curriculum design at the

charter school were noted by most participants as being more traditional and preferred.

The raw data reflected a shared preference by participants for desks facing the teacher as

opposed to collaborative learning tables and the use of cluster learning stations, that

according to Participant A are failed attempts at differentiating learning in that most

students are simply left to self-teach. The use of lectures with Socratic dialogues to

promote more a controlled and engaging learning environment was also more preferred

by Participants Q, A, O, D, J, and B. Primary sources, meaning original texts and works

of literature as opposed to secondary sources in which a writer references an original text,

was also referenced by most participants as something that attracted them to Anywhere

Charter.

The history textbooks were directly referenced by Participant O who found them to be "un-American" and biased in their teaching of theologies with additional time given to the teaching of Islam over other religions: "I found my kids were taught three weeks on Islam with pictures promoting peace, but other religions only had a few days and there was no peace mentions in the other religions. The crusades were the focus of the Catholic studies if I recall" (Participant O). Participant F found there was no depth in the readings offered his daughter and opined that the American history textbooks were more political than factual. Participant J explained how Anywhere Charter attracted his attention with the use of primary sources in place of textbooks:

There was an informational meeting on the charter school and the principal, I believe, was speaking about the text book used in the traditional public high schools for English class or literature class. He was explaining how there is a subsection of the textbook that references the author of *Frankenstein*, along with a few solitary quotes from *Frankenstein*. There were questions about belonging and questions that students are asked to answer about what it would be like to be different. I'm sure there are other questions, but the real difference the principal was pointing out was that a text book guides students in understanding literary texts from the perspective of whoever wrote the textbook. At [Anywhere Charter], there are no text books for literature class, rather there are actual literary works. The students actually read *Frankenstein* from cover-to-cover, along with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The idea that my sons could read the original texts and decide

for themselves the meaning of the books just sounded more like what school

should be about. (Participant J)

The data collected in this study provide evidence of academic and nonacademic

factors weighing on a parent's decision-making process to elect school choice in a top-

performing school district. All the factors derived from the data collected, whether

academic or not, were related in some manner back to education policies that promote

heterogenous classrooms whereby students are placed together regardless of academic

ability or safety concerns. Parental perceptions as to the challenges traditional public

schools face in the areas of instruction, classroom management, safety, and curricular

rigor were all able to be linked to the parental perception of failed means-tested policy

implementation in the traditional public school system.

Summary

Cucchiara and Horvat (2013) first noted the challenges surrounding the long

standing 'rational choice' model of school selection that had been advocated since Moe

(1990). The rational choice model argued that people select a course of action that aligns

with their personal preferences (Amadae, 2016). School choice, however, is a "social

process heavily weighted with meanings for its participants and frequently characterized

by tensions" (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013, p. 486). Perhaps Cucchiara and Horvat's

assertion that school choice involves a process of "negotiations between competing goals,

academic and otherwise" is less complex than originally believed. This study reflects that

the altruist model of acting in a manner that serves the good of others first and foremost

is secondary when the education of one's child is at stake. This study presents the

possibility that the academic and nonacademic factors weighing on school choice election are not so adversarial, but rather linked to a common concern surrounding classroom composition.

  This study affords educators and legislators a deeper understanding of the relationship between parental perception of education policy and the decision-making process to elect school choice. It is now known that the election of school choice in a highly-rated school district is a form of silent policy feedback as best expressed by Participant D who said, "I voted with my feet" when explaining her decision-making process to elect school choice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In today's free market system of public education whereby parents have school choice, lawmakers need to be more cognizant of the consequences, unintended or not, of their actions. Whether negative parental perceptions stem from direct knowledge of policies themselves, or mere witness of perceived failed implementation of policies, the fact remains that means-tested policies in education can and—per parental perceptions studied in this research—have resulted in departures from the traditional public school system. This study supports the conclusions that policy not only impacts the decision-making process to elect school choice in a top-performing school district but also results in silent policy feedback through school choice.

Interpretation of the Findings

Since the Civil Rights Era, a primary and critically important focus of educational policy has been the eradication of segregation and discrimination from the public education system. This focus has resulted in numerous policies designed to mainstream at-risk and special needs children into general education classrooms regardless of academic, cognitive, behavioral, or linguist challenges (ESEA, 2010; ESSA, 2015; IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2002; *Plyer v. Doe*, 1990). These education policies promote not only children of all abilities being grouped together in general education classrooms, but also will often attach funding and esteemed recognition on schools when the procurement of learning gains among specifically high-risk students are achieved. This study sets forth that the primary factor behind school choice election by parents in a top-performing

school district is the failure of traditional public schools to effectively accommodate for the special needs of children with academic, cognitive, behavioral, or linguistic disabilities placed in general education classrooms.

The 21st century witnessed many legislative initiatives geared toward promoting equality within the public education system. One such policy was the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, a federal law that ensured educational services to children with disabilities. Although IDEA does not mandate that children with disabilities be included within the general classroom environment, it does require that children meeting IDEA eligibility be educated in the "least restrictive environment appropriate" to meet their "unique needs" (IDEA, 2004).

The school choice parents in this study perceived that students with learning challenges in the general education classroom distracted teachers and disrupted the learning environment when appropriate resources, such as teaching aids, were not provided. The data in this study did not reflect, however, an opposition by participants to having children with special needs in the general education classroom. Rather, participants expressed their commonly-shared perceptions that the curricular rigor and safety of a classroom was put at risk when the provision of supportive resources provided general education classroom teachers were inadequate. The data collected further reflected a trend of negative participant perception when schools were unwilling or unable to remove a child that continuously interrupted the lessons and/or demonstrated a real and clear safety risk to other children, whether due to disability or lack of parental involvement.

In addition to the lack of resources provided to accommodate special needs children, this study found that the lack of resources provided for children who do not speak the English language to be of great concern for two reasons. First, participants noted the inability of a student to understand the teacher's language as logically resulting in the repeated slowing or stopping of a lesson plan for the purposes of interpretation. And second, several participants shared stories of how their children were being routinely directed by teachers to assist in the teaching of their foreign speaking classmates, as opposed to expanding on their own knowledge and academic needs. Participants noted that the linguist needs of foreign speaking students should be met by either a bi-lingual teacher or a teacher aide. This study demonstrated a parental perception that mainstreaming children who cannot understand the teacher due to language barriers, in conjunction with the failure to provide necessary accommodations, undermines the quality of education in the classroom.

Participants did not disagree with Justice Brennen who held that "education provides the basic tools by which individuals might lead economically productive lives to the benefit of us all" (*Plyer v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202). The issue participants expressed was instead with the traditional public schools' failure to recognize the importance of education for nonrisk students as well. The failure of traditional public schools, as perceived by the participants, to accommodate the needs of foreign speaking students in turn resulted in lesson interruptions and diminished curricular rigor for the other students in the classroom. It should be noted again and stressed as significant that none of the participants suggested that children with special needs, language or otherwise, should be

excluded from school. The concerns expressed by participants that weighed on their decision-making process to elect school choice stemmed not from the presence of at-risk students in the general education classroom, but rather the inability of schools to accommodate for the same without risking curricular rigor and the safety of others. The results of this study show that the interpretive effects of means-tested policies that promote mainstreaming of students regardless of ability, without adequate provision of resources necessary, can and have impacted the election of school choice by parents of high-achieving and nonrisk students.

When general education classrooms are devoid of teacher aides and resources to accommodate at-risk students, the mandates of policies designed to focus on the learning gains of the lowest achieving children create a negative perception by parents of high-achieving students. The NCLB Act (2002) required states to address through reforms the achievement gap between low and high achieving students (NCLB, 2002). In response thereto, Florida initiated the Florida School Recognition Program, in which schools are graded in accordance with their progress and academic achievements to include a portion of said grade to account for the closing of the achievement gap noted in NCLB (Florida School Recognition Program, n.d.). The funding associated with these measures is substantial, with over 124 million dollars being allocated to Florida schools in 2014 alone (Florida School Recognition Program, n.d.).

Funding under the Florida School Recognition Program (n.d.) is based on the number of students enrolled full-time within the school, and the grades earned by students on state-adopted standardized tests in core curricular subjects. Therefore, the

more students in enrollment at a given school, the more money the school will receive.

Money that can be allocated directly to teachers and administrators as bonuses, or

otherwise allocated as per teacher vote and advisory board approval (Florida School

Recognition Program, n.d.). This means of funding allocation supports the data in this

study, which is reflective of participants' concerns that students with discipline issues are

not being suspended, expelled, or otherwise removed from general education classrooms

based on fiscal drivers. This perception is also supported by the increased monies paid to

a school for learning gains and standardized testing scores specific to "at-risk students"

(Fla. Stat. §1008.34, 2016).

This funding mechanism, referred to as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), could

arguably support participants' perceptions that traditional public schools are focusing

more on the lowest achieving students to the detriment of their nonrisk student

counterparts. As expressly stated by Participant D, learning gains on which school

funding is attached are "far more difficult to accomplish in high-achieving students" than

that of their at-risk student counterparts.

In this case study, I examined a top performing school district, one that was

measured by the state of Florida as highly achieving for the past decade. With the grading

of the school district linked in large part to the AYP mechanism, the grading of a school

as highly performing under state policy may apply more to a school's success with at-risk

students than it does to the provision of education to nonrisk and high-achieving students.

School choice election by nonrisk students deprives traditional public schools of not only

the much-needed funding required by at-risk students for social and mental issues (see

Pugach et al., 2011), but it also removes from the classroom the presence of high-achieving role models for at-risk students. Gottfried (2014) studied the impact of peer effects in urban elementary school children and found consistent evidence that classmates do affect the academic outcomes of their peers across multiple areas of child attributes, both cognitive and noncognitive. As a result, school choice election can negate the legislative intent of means-tested policies that are focused on benefiting at-risk students through loss of both funding and positive peer effects.

Because school choice is not equally accessible to all students, especially those students with less-motivated parents (Pearson et al., 2015) or limited by fiscal means (Villavicencio, 2013), it is likely the continued growth in school choice will result in increased percentages of at-risk student enrollments in the traditional public schools with limited funding to adequately provide for the same. With increased school choice comes decreased involvement of motivated parents in the traditional public school system (see Pearson et al., 2015) and thus the diminished ability of the government to effectively provide the free public service of education (see Campbell, 2012).

Policies have consequences, unintended or not, and the data herein evidences the power of negatively perceived means-tested policies that place the focus of education on a targeted group of children in the classroom. The education policies referenced herein were passed based on legislative recognition that the needs of at-risk students were not being met in the traditional public school system. According to the legislative intents behind IDEA (2004) and NCLB (2002), lawmakers sought to protect the rights of a targeted population of students and meet their individual needs by ensuring access to

education and the opportunity to learn. The data in this study demonstrates, however, negative interpretive effects of such polices by parents of students excluded from the policies. The data collected align with the research of Schneider and Ingram (1993) who found that when governments deliberately institute policy that is designed to impact target groups, the message sent can be one that drives a negative perception of government by those excluded from the target or protected group.

The parental perceptions shared in this study evidence a connection between school choice election and the perceived impact of means-tested policies that disenfranchise those excluded from the same. Erikson and Stoker (2011) found that when the personal effects of public policy become evident, people will begin to act in a self-interested fashion and develop self-serving attitudes. This study evidences that the self-serving attitudes developed from negative interpretative effects of education policy implementation result in a migration to school choice.

With the increase of school choice election by high achieving students, the impact of school choice on the traditional public school system is one that could promote racial segregation and revert public education to a state that resembles that of the pre-civil rights era (see Roda & Wells, 2013). In an address to a joint session of Congress, President Donald J. Trump (2017) stated that "education is the civil rights issue of our times." The impact of increased school choice leading to potentially a segregated traditional public school system is a symptom of what is happening in the traditional public schools to drive parents to school choice. Traditional public schools have become burdened with regulations perceived by school choice parents as detrimental to the

academic rigor and safety of the classroom. This study should inform lawmakers that legislation promoting targeted agendas to the exclusion of certain groups with funding attached, can and has led motivated parents of high-achieving students to school choice.

The data in this study reflect a shared perception amongst school choice parents in a top performing school district that mainstreamed classrooms—those in which students are placed together regardless of academic, language, and/or behavioral ability—can only provide for the academic needs of all students when in-classroom resources, including but not limited to teaching aides, are provided and parents are held accountable for their children's academic and behavioral success. The perceptions found in the data are grounded not only in firsthand experiences shared and confirmed between and amongst those participating, but also in the literature.

Past research supports the findings in this study that parents innately select a school for their child that is based on their own self-interest and serves the best value for their family (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). Researchers have already found that often nonacademic criteria play into that decision-making process (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Jacobs, 2013). The results of this study, however, go the next step in explaining why nonacademic criteria such as classroom composition matter in the selection of a school of choice by parents seeking out alternative education and how that selection is a silent form of policy feedback.

Based on the findings of this study, school choice parents are seeking out certain classroom compositions in school choice as a means to an end. School choice parents are not intentionally seeking out a school with students of a certain race or economic status in

that they oppose diversity. Rather, the data herein support a finding that parents seek out

a choice alternative wherein their children are challenged in the classroom and

surrounded by other students similarly motivated to learn; students with shared academic

and behavioral standards. To find such a school, the participants sought a classroom

composition of students that were not disruptive to the learning environment, students

deriving from households with adults capable of and willing to provide their children the

time necessary in the evenings to supplement education to meet academic expectations,

and a school willing to set higher expectations than those typically set for the lowest-

ability learner.

Increased classroom time is required of teachers with low-income students who

do not spend equivalent time on studies at home as their higher-income counterparts

(Raudenbusch & Willms, 1995); and teachers of homogeneous classrooms of higher-

level learners are able to devote more time and energy to lesson planning, report a higher

level of job satisfaction, and engage in more challenging feedback and questioning with

students and parents (Hattie, 2002). The results of this study also lend support to the

findings of Gormley and Balla (2013) regarding the negative implications of policy focus

on low-achieving and English-language learners addressed in NCLB (2002), and the

conclusions of Martin (2015) that the AYP mechanism, which prioritizes student

achievement based on race and economics, runs counter to that promoted by charter

schools.

Although the AYP measure was not directly referenced by all participants, the

intent behind the same was indirectly referenced in the firsthand experiences of all

participants who felt their children were not a priority in the traditional public school classroom either through the grading system instituted or the creation of student-led conferences in place of parent-teacher conferences. Participants perceived the numeric grading system at the traditional public schools to be a dysfunctional and inadequate grading system. The data evidence a parental perception that the numeric grading system was an attempt to artificially close the gap between the lowest and highest achieving students. With parents being told by school teachers and administrators that their children could not earn the highest number at the onset of the school year as they are to show growth to mastery over time was perceived by participants to be an arbitrary form of grading and not one that is accurately reflective of student ability. Moreover, six of the eight participants felt their children's needs were not a priority of the traditional public school system as reflected in the student-led conferences that replaced traditional parent-teacher conferences and effectively removed communication between teachers and parents.

According to participants' perceptions, a classroom comprised of students from various academic, cognitive, behavioral, or linguistic ability not only limits the teacher's ability to differentiate learning and meet the needs of all students, but it also presents a risk to the safety of the classroom environment. Safety of students ranked as one of the two top-tier factors noted by participants in the decision-making process to elect charter schooling. Stories of bullying were reported by each participant, some having had their own child victimized and others sharing stories of others whom they knew. Several participants questioned why such behaviors seemed to meet with continued classroom

presence as opposed to suspensions and expulsions; again, raising the issue of full time enrollment dollars and the fiscal need of schools to maintain students in the desks. Participants also expressed shared concerns with the apparent double standard surrounding behavioral expectations when "at-risk" students are permitted to remain in a classroom without consequence for misbehavior; a result not afforded nonrisk students who fail to conform to classroom rules.

In addition to bullying, concerns were voiced by participants about disruptive students in the classroom, resulting in the interruption of lessons on a regular basis. Concerns were expressed by participants that regardless of the continuous disruptions presented by a child, the child remained in the classroom throughout the year to the academic detriment of and risk of safety to others. Participant F questioned whether it is the duty of schools to "legislate kindness" and shared her perception that mainstreaming children with special needs can be a "disservice to special needs children" and create a "cruel learning experience" for those in need of additional resources not being afforded when nonrisk students begin to see and resent a double-standard of treatment.

This study does not support a parental perception that policies promoting access to academics by children with special needs, language or otherwise, should be limited or repealed. Rather, this study supports the existence of a genuine parental concern that the ability to academically challenge nonrisk students in traditional public schools is limited when students with needs are not provided the necessary resources to acclimate in a general education classroom. All participants agreed that the mainstreaming of children with different academic abilities into one classroom, without additional resources

provided, presents an unsurmountable burden on a single classroom teacher and in turn negatively impacts the quality of education.

And lastly, the data support a finding that in addition to the need for traditional public schools to adequately address the challenges presented by the mainstreaming of diverse students, there too must exist parental accountability. The absence of parental accountability in the conduct and academic achievement of one's child was perceived by all participants as incremental in not only the diminishing academics afforded in the traditional public school system but also the lack of appropriate classroom decorum and safety. Participants were unanimous with their perception that requiring higher academic expectations for all students, and the requiring of parental support for specific academic and disciplinary expectations, promotes a safe environment where learning can occur. As stated by Participant P, disruptions to the classroom learning environment at Anywhere Charter would "simply not be tolerated."

The parents electing school choice in this study did so with the desire to find a school that would engage their children in the classroom, whereby the classrooms would be free from distractions and safety risks, wherein their children would be challenged and not bored. Moreover, participants were seeking out a school whereby not only their children would be surrounded by like-students driven to learn, but that they as parents would be surrounded by other motivated parents who value education and rear their children to adhere to basic expectations of appropriate conduct while at school. All the factors referenced by participants as impacting their decision-making process to elect school choice can be linked directly to classroom compositions of diverse learners as

mandated by federal and state policy; and specifically, how schools choose to address the same.

Schattschneider (1935) recognized that people impact politics through their behavior, behavior that at one time required political engagement and advocacy. Schattschneider used PFT to argue that policies result in human behavior that in turn impact politics and future policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Today Americans are witnessing a new form of policy feedback that is silent in nature. With the introduction of choice in the education system, the silent majority, as originally identified by President Nixon (1969), have been afforded the opportunity to silently provide feedback to education policies by merely opting out of the traditional public school system through school choice election. The data collected in this study expand on PFT by demonstrating the existence of silent policy feedback (SPF) through school choice, a form of feedback not only independent of political advocacy but also capable of impacting the implementation of existing policy as well as the adoption of future policy.

SPF through school choice has the potential of impacting not only future policy, but also the successful implementation of existing means-tested policies. With the loss of high-achieving students from the traditional public school system, so too is lost the funding associated with their enrollments and test scores; funding that is needed to implement means-tested policies (see Pearson et al, 2015). Additionally, the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 may be the first evidence of future policy impacted by SPF through school choice.

Over the past decade in Florida alone, charter school elections have risen 193% (FDOE, 2016). This behavior of electing school choice has been a silent act independent of political action or ballot box initiatives. Nonetheless, if this mass behavior of school choice was the precipice of the Obama Administrations' passage of ESSA (2015), SPF has already worked to impact future policy.

ESSA took effect in the 2016-2017 academic year and thus its impact is yet to be learned. ESSA was introduced by Republican Senator Alexander Lamar of Tennessee and could quite possibly resolve participants' concerns about not only the lack of resources for special student populations in traditional public schools but also the need for higher standards for all students to achieve. The ESSA modified substantial portions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965) and repealed NCLB (2002). Two specific modifications of the ESEA included in the ESSA can be directly linked to the data results in this study.

First, and most significantly, the ESSA (2015) modified the formula for the percentage of funding allotted to schools based on the number of families within a school that are below the poverty level; increasing that funding from sixty-five percent (65%) in 2017 to eighty percent (80%) in 2020 and beyond (National Council of State Legislators, 2016). This increased funding for schools in need of supplemental resources for special needs children will hopefully provide teachers in general education classrooms with the resources noted as deficient by the participants in this study. And second, the ESSA calls for a minimum of three academic levels of achievement to be identified by states; a requirement that includes a focus on higher standards specifically geared for high-

achieving and nonrisk students. Even high-achieving students will now be required to meet learning gains and more "challenging academic content standards" (National Council of State Legislators, 2016). The ESSA may not only evidence the impact of SPF through school choice on future policy, but it also may be the first step forward in attempting to resolve the factors that parents in a top-performing school district identified in this study as weighing on their decision-making process to elect school choice.

Limitations of the Study

At the onset of this research study, several potential limitations were addressed that could impede the research. Those limitations included concerns about access to participants as well as their willingness to be forthcoming with sensitive, personal information. The issues of generalizability involving the limitations of a single case site were also referenced, in addition to the likely need for future research to remedy the overall problem regarding decreased traditional public school enrollment. Each of these concerns, although limitations, were addressed throughout the data collection process and analysis to mitigate the same as best possible.

The access to participants resulted in a far-less difficult endeavor than originally conceived in that many of the participants at Anywhere Charter, as well as those who had previously enrolled their children in charter schooling, volunteered with enthusiasm. On more than one occasion, it was made known to me by various participants that their participation was perceived as a way to help better the education system in the United States.

This study was limited to parents who sought out a top-performing charter school in a high-performing school district, and therefore the findings as to what motivated such a migration to school choice are limited to similarly situated parents. Conversely, however, the findings of this study that classroom composition directly impacts both curriculum and safety concerns can arguably be generalized beyond Anywhere Charter in that the perceptions of the herein participants are grounded in the literature. The findings of this study set froth that classroom composition is a factor in school choice but only in so far as the needs of at-risk students mainstreamed into general education classrooms are not met, or are met but at the cost of nonrisk students.

This study is not intended to limit school choice in that limiting the same is not the answer to the concerns and policy issues set forth herein. This study has afforded legislators and educators alike the opportunity to better understand the short-comings of the traditional public school system that are resulting in school choice elections. Hopefully the data collected and presented herein will guide future policymakers in either eliminating means-tested policies that fiscally incentivize schools to limit their focus to only targeted groups of students; or in the alternative, make available to schools the necessary funding to support means-tested policies so high-achieving and nonrisk students can academically excel together.

Recommendations

This study is only the beginning of more extensive research on how silent policy feedback (SPF) through school choice impacts the successful administration of existing policies by traditional public schools. Additionally, further research is welcomed in the

area of SPF regarding disciplines other than education, wherein choice has been inserted as an option with regard to the provision of a public good or service. In addition to further research in the fields of mass behavior and political action, education researchers should be inspired to begin a deeper consideration of how education policies designed to mainstream students into general education classrooms impact the overall academic outcome of all students in the public system following the passage of the ESSA (2015).

Regardless of the school choice migration studied herein and its impact on the traditional public education system, a serious review of the quality of academics for nonrisk and high-achieving students within a mainstreamed classroom is deserving of further research. This study supports a finding that classroom composition, as a factor in electing a school of choice, is not an end sought by school choice parents but rather a means to an end involving safer classroom environments wherein more rigorous instruction is provided.

Implications

By identifying a new form of feedback that is silent in nature, this study has expanded on Schattschneider's (1935) theory of policy feedback which explained that policies result in human behavior that in turn impact politics and future policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Unlike the policy feedback explained by Schattschneider, SPF through school choice does not require political advocacy. Rather, SPF takes place when a parent elects school choice alternatives based on negative interpretive effects of education policy.

SPF has the potential of not only impacting current policy but also future policy. This research has opened the door to further research surrounding the impact of choice in the administration of a public good or service, and specifically further research on SPF through school choice. The implications of this study are that there now exists empirical evidence that policy perception is directly linked to school choice elections. The findings in this study have the power to impact social change by informing education leaders and policymakers of how policy reform and implementation can be addressed to retain high-achieving students in the traditional public education system. Even in top-performing school districts, parents are seeking out alternative education for reasons that can be directly linked to the perceived failed implementation of education policies.

Conclusion

As more families depart the traditional public school system, the system becomes depleted of politically active parents (Mettler & Soss, 2004) and those capable of promoting positive change from within (Fleming, 2014). Because school choice is not equally available to all students (Pearson et al., 2015), those students left behind within the public school system risk being left in a system incapable of financially providing an effective education. This study shows lawmakers that the migration to school choice can be limited. This study proves that the interpretive effects of the implementation of means-tested, education policies by parents in a top-performing school district do result in the departure of high-achieving students from the traditional public school system.

Researchers have already established the importance of citizen engagement in the successful provision of a public good or service (Campbell, 2012), and how both good

and bad experiences with public institutions and polices can drive political beliefs and behavior (Fleming, 2014). This study further concludes that the negative experiences had with traditional public schools, even in a top-performing school district, can drive behavior to elect and support school choice by parents of nonrisk students. While it is known through past research that the democratic impact of charter school enrollment results in the loss of politically active parents who advocate for public schools and policy reform (Buckley & Schneider, 2007), it is now known that the interpretive effects of education policy, which are the cognitive effects of policies that can shape one's beliefs and motivations (see Fleming, 2014), are driving the decision-making process to elect school choice in a top-performing school district.

This study concludes that there does exist a relationship between parental perception of education policy and the decision-making process to elect school choice. And, second, it is now clear that school choice election in a high-performing school district is SPF, an expansion of the policy feedback theory first introduced by Schattschneider (1935). What still requires further study and is encouraged is research on whether the election of charter schooling in a top-performing school district results in the potential failure of traditional public schools to effectively implement current means-tested policies. Such a study would require research from the perspective of teachers and administrators and an in-depth review of fiscal implications over an extended time.

The results of this study link parental perception of education policy and the decision to elect school choice and in so doing, this study provides empirical evidence of the existence of silent policy feedback through school choice. SPF has the potential of

impacting not only future policy but also may be capable of unilaterally undermining the government's ability to successfully implement existing policy absent the ballot-box or political activism.

This study is significant to social change in that it provides information on how parental perception of existing education policy impacts school choice election, thus providing guidance to educational leaders on necessary implementation reforms, and to lawmakers on potential policy initiatives that could limit the school choice migration and secure the viability of traditional public schools for those children limited in school choice options. Classroom composition is at the center of the decision-making process to elect school choice in a top performing school district; not because homogeneous classrooms are preferred, but rather because parents perceive a failed attempt on the part of traditional public schools to adequately provide for the needs of at-risk learners in the general education classroom absent harm to nonrisk students. Time will tell if the latest education policy, ESSA (2015), will remedy the parental concerns studied herein about today's traditional public school classroom and prove the power of SPF in influencing future policy.

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Appendix A: Screening Questions for Inclusion Criterion

Means: Telephone or in person on potential participant's acknowledgement of interest in participation.

Purpose: To screen potential participants for inclusion criterion. To obtain informed consent from those not excluded.

Introduction: *At this point in the research study, I am working toward making sure that all potential participants meet the inclusion criteria to be a participant in that this is a specific study involving a very defined decision-making process.*

Like any study which involves the recollection of past experiences, some of which may not be happy memories, it is imperative that participants understand they can withdrawal from the study at any time and it is especially recommended they withdrawal if they do experience any stress for any reason.

To make sure you meet the inclusion criterion for this study, I will ask you three questions. The use of the name "Anywhere Charter" is being used in all written data, but the name of the specific school will be inserted verbally during questioning.

Inclusion Criterion Questions *(An answer of Yes is required on all questions to meet inclusion criterion):*

Inclusion Question 1 – *Are you a parent/legal guardian of a student currently enrolled or previously enrolled at "Anywhere Charter"?*

Inclusion Question 2 – *Prior to your child or children's enrollment at "Anywhere Charter", were they enrolled in a traditional public school within the school district for "Anywhere Charter"?*

Inclusion Question 3 – *Were you the decision-maker or co-decision-maker within your household regarding the dis-enrollment of your child/children from their previous traditional public school(s) and enrollment of your child/children at "Anywhere Charter"?*

****

I have just two more questions to ask to obtain a representative sample for this study:

1. *What is your gender?*
2. *In what school grades (for example fourth grade, ninth grade, and the like) was or were your child/children at the time you made the decision to depart their traditional public school and only include those children who did leave traditional school to enroll at "Anywhere Charter"?*

Appendix B: Interview One Sample Questions

List of interview questions and their connection to the study.

Introduction: *I would like you to start by thanking you for your time in participating in this study and talking with me about why you decided to leave the traditional public school(s) that your child/ren were once enrolled.*
Purpose: to see if there were any specific events/considerations/tightly-held beliefs that played into the decision –making process to elect school choice.

Q1: *Let's start with what attracted you most to "Anywhere Charter" where your child/children are or were enrolled following the departure from traditional schooling?*
Clarifying Questions: (Obtain public artifacts, if available, such as notices from the prior school based on policy that might support policy perception as potential factor in decision-making process).
Q1.1 – *Why was that attribute important to you?*
Q1.2 - *How did you come to learn that about the charter school?*
Q1.3 – *Was that attribute not also available at the public school of choice?*
Q1.4 – *What else caused you think the charter school was the right choice?*
Q1.5 – *Do you plan to continue with charter schooling through 12th grade? Why?*

Q2: *Can you tell me the two most significant differences in your opinion between your current charter school and your child's/children's past public school?*
Clarifying Questions:
Q2.1 – *What made you select each of those differences as the most significant?*
Q2.2 – *Would you say that (insert the factors referenced) weighed more on your school choice decision than any other individual reasons?*

Q3*: Without providing specific names of people, can you tell me about any negative experiences had at your child's/children's prior school, and if there were none, perhaps you can tell me what caused you to withdrawal?*
Clarifying Questions if a negative experience occurred:
Q3.1 – *When, Where, Who: regarding logistics of any experience.*
Q3.2 – *Can you tell me what you did when you learned of this event?*
Q3.3 – *What did you expect or want to have happen following the event?*
Q3.4 - *Do you believe your actions remedied the situation to obtain your desired outcome?*
Q2.5 – *How did the event impact your view on the school, school district, and public schooling? Each to be answered separately.*

Q2.6 – *Was this the only negative event you experienced with your child's/children's prior school?*
Clarifying Questions if no specific experience:
Q2.7 – *Tell me how you felt and what happened when you informed the public school of your withdrawal.*
Q2.8 - *Would you be willing to return to your previous school? If yes, under what circumstances might such a return occur? If no, why?*

Q4: *Again without given specific names, were you aware of any negative events that happened at your prior school of enrolment to other students or were there concerns you had that you thought might materialize if you stayed enrolled there? If yes, what caused your concerns?*
Clarifying Questions if response is no:
Q4.1 – *Were not concerned at all about bullying?*
Q4.2 – *Do you believe your child was treated equal to all other students and received the same benefits and resource allocation as all other students equally?*

Q5: *Let's end with you telling me about process you went through in making the decision to move your child/children to the charter school you are now enrolled. Walk me through the factors you considered, the conversation you had with others, and the overall thoughts you had during this time.*
Clarifying Questions if response is no:
Q5.1 – *Did you use any tools to make the decision, such as creating lists of pros/cons? Would you still have those lists that you could provide me or any other documents that might have weighed on your decision?*
Q5.2 – *Did you have to address opinions of others around you who disagreed with your final decision and if so, how did you handle those conversations?*
Q5.3 - *To what extent did the opinions of others weigh in your decision?*
Frequently asked questions throughout the interview.
QF.1 – *Can you elaborate/explain?*
QF.2 – *Why do you think you were drawn to that conclusion?*
QF.3 – *Can you tell me what you did then?*
QF.4 – *Can you tell me why you felt that way?*
QF.5 – *Can you tell me why that was important?*
QF.6 – *Can you tell me what you would have preferred to occur?*

Appendix C: Interview Two Sample Questions

List of interview questions and their connection to the study.

Introduction: *I would like you to start by thanking you again for your time in participating in this study and talking with me about why you decided to leave the traditional public school(s) that your child/ren were once enrolled.*

Purpose: *Today's interview is more for me to clarify any data collection from our first interview as well as to guide some questions on areas that we did not address in our first interview, but may have been present in your decision-making process to depart traditional public schooling. If at any time you need to leave or end the interview, please feel free to tell me so and we can always reschedule. Also, if I say any words or terms that appear unclear or that you prefer clarification, please do not hesitate to inform me as I want you to be as comfortable as possible answering these questions. Do you have any questions before we proceed?*

Questioning may not be exact but rather refined to meet the data already collected by the participant or expanded on based on nonverbal reaction to questions.

Stage 1 – Review areas of concern that the participant initiated in the first interview for clarification. The areas could include any one or more of the following: (Researcher – circle areas that were touched on or addressed that need clarification from Figure 3 and look to the Clarification Questions below each applicable category that require response).

Stage 2 – Guide questions about areas set forth in the following Figure that were not discussed in Interview 1 and need answered. (Researcher – highlight these areas on Figure 3 and look to the Guided Questions below each applicable category and include the Clarification Questions if applicable).

Frequently asked questions throughout the interview.
QF1: Did you report your concerns or the event to the TPS?
QF2: How did the TPS address your concern/event?
QF3: Was your concern/event resolved to your satisfaction?
QF4: If not, how would you prefer to have had your concern/event resolved?
QF5: Did you find or have you found this similar concern/even to be an issue at Anywhere Charter?

Q1: **Equality** GQ: *Did you ever feel that your child was not being treated equally to other students while in attendance at the TPS? If yes, can you explain perhaps an event that happened that caused you to feel this way?*

        1:1 **Instruction** CQ1:1 – *You mention(ed) a concern about unequal instruction at the TPS, can you expand on that with either an example or more detail?*

            a. Mainstreaming

            CQ1:1a1 – What are your beliefs about mainstreaming, the placement of students, regardless of academic ability or physical/mental abilities being placed in one classroom?

            CQ1:1a2 – Did you ever have a situation at the TPS where you felt your child's education or safety was being limited or put at risk due to another student in the classroom or school? If so, without giving name, could you explain the event and how it made you feel?

            b. School Recognition/Grading

            CQ1:1b1 – Are you familiar with how Florida public schools are graded by the state based on, among other aspects, the grades students earn on standardized tests with the learning gains made, especially by those students in the lowest 25% of academic learners? (If yes – move to CQ1:1b2)

            CQ1:1b2 – Do you have any reason to believe that other students were given priority in the classroom over your child based on the school's need to get those students achieve success on the standardized tests? If so, can you tell me what happened to cause this belief?

        1:2 Funding

            a. FTE/AYP/Learning Gains Funding

            CQ1:2a1 – Are you familiar with how Florida public schools are funded and that each student in enrollment accounts for certain funding, with certain students who face academic or mental/physical ailments or language barriers being worth more to the school due to the added resources needed? (If yes – move to CQ1:1b2; if no, go to CQ2:1b1)

        1:3 Resources - ESOL/ESE/ADA/IDEA

        CQ1:3a – Did your child/children have any students in their classroom that you felt required more of the teacher time or took from classroom instruction

to the detriment, no matter how small, from your child and if so, can you explain the situation without giving names?

> *CQ1:3b – Can you tell me if you informed the school of your concerns and if so the school's response?*
>
> *CQ1:3c – Was the situation resolved to your satisfaction and if not, why?*

Q2: **Operations –** *GQ: Did you ever experience a negative situation at your TPS with an issue of bullying, transportation, bussing, administration from the school district?*

> 2:1 **Safety**
>
> > a. **Bullying** *GQ2:1a: Did you child/ren ever experience bullying in any form at their TPS and if so, can you explain what happened without any names, including your child's name – do not say names – just tell me what happened? GC2:1b: Did you inform the school and if so, do you believe the school handled the situation to your satisfaction? GC2:1c: Why do you think the school dealt with the matter in the way they did and how would you prefer they have handled it?*
> >
> > b. **Student Retention/FTE impact**
> > *CQ2:1b1: Do you believe that students who may be disorderly in the classroom are not dealt with in that suspension or removal of the student could result in loss of funding to the school?*
>
> 2:2 **Transportation – Logistics/Bussing –**
> *CQ2:2a – Did you ever have a negative experience with bussing or transportation of your child to/from his/her TPS and can you explain what happened without giving names?*
>
> 2:3 **Bureaucracies – Communication/Overhead**
> *CQ2:3a – Did you ever have a negative experience with the TPS main office for registration, complaints, volunteering, or anything that would require you to deal with the district as opposed to your school and if so, can you explain what happened without names and how it made you feel?*
> *CQ2:3b Were you ever told from your TPS administrators or teachers that there was nothing they could do to help you with a matter because the rules of the district set forth what must happen – or a like situation and can you explain?*

Q3: Quality *GC3a – Can you explain your opinion of the quality of education your child had at his/her TPS? GC3b - Can you tell me about any specific events that transpired that made you doubt the quality of education being given to your child at the TPS?*

> **3:1 Curriculum & Instruction**
>
> *CQ3:1a Did you have any concerns about the curriculum from common core, to how your child's work was graded, to homework?*
>
> *CQ3:1b Did you have any concerns about the teacher assigned to your child or generally how teachers are hired, trained, or fired?*
>
> *CQ3:1c: Can you tell me about any negative experience with the instructional methods or teaching within the classroom whether due to students in the classroom, or how time was used in the classroom for instruction.*
>
> **3:3 Instructional Support**
>
> *CQ3:3a: Do you believe your child had adequate access to media and library resources, extracurricular activities from sports to clubs to before/after school care at the TPS? CQ3:3b: If not, please explain. CQ3:3c: Please explain if this weighed on your decision to leave the TPS and how?*
>
> **3:4 Vested Interests**
>
> *CQ3:4a: Have you had any negative experience or do you hold a negative feeling about any of the following – Standardized testing, union, or politicians who pass education policies and laws…CQ3:4ab – Can you explain your feelings to me?*

Q4: **Personal** (*GC4:1 – Were there any personal reasons that caused you to leave your TPS for charter schooling that you have not mentioned to me already such as location of the school, the community of parents and organization and PTA, or the classroom composition.*

Appendix D: Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in a research study on school choice in the state of Florida.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named **Catherine Little Hunt**, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as a local attorney, teacher, or perhaps as a parent to students at your child's current or past school(s). This study is separate from those roles.

The **purpose of this study** is to better understand a parent's decision-making process to choose a charter school instead of a traditional public school in a high performing school district. Current attendance at any specific charter school is not required for participation.

This is not a study on charter schools, but rather on the factors that weigh in the decision to leave a traditional public school for a charter school.

If you are interested in learning more or in participating, please email, text, or call Catherine:
****@waldenu.edu
--****

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Sign a consent form prior to participation;
- Sit for two interviews – for about one hour each in a private meeting room at the public library;
- Meet with the researcher a third time for approximately 20 minutes to review the data collected to check that it is accurate to what you intended to relay in the interviews; and
- Consent to possible future contact for clarification only purposes via telephone or email.

Once research commences, the entire process involving your participation should likely be less than 4 weeks from the first interview to the final clarification contact.