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Stakeholders' Perceptions of Charter Schools in a Large School District in Georgia

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Tawanda L. Hardaway

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2018

Abstract

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MEd, Walden University, 2010

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Recent charter school enrollment trends suggest that many parents are choosing to enroll students in charter schools instead of traditional public schools, even though data indicate public school achievement is equal to or above charter schools. Guided by Rogers and Maslow's humanistic theory, the purpose of the study was to examine reasons why parents exercised their right to educational choice and chose charter schools instead of traditional public schools for their children. The study focused on two charter schools, the Learning Academy and the School of Excellence (both pseudonyms), which are located in a large urban and suburban school district in Georgia. In this qualitative case study, data collection occurred through focus groups and individual interviews. The information was then coded, and themes were identified. This resulted in rich descriptions of the beliefs and perceptions of 13 classroom teachers, 2 administrators, and 21 parents from the 2 schools studied. Parents interviewed considered student achievement, school climate, and parent involvement opportunities when choosing the charter school. The analyzed data led me to develop a policy recommendation highlighting professional development for teachers and administrators as well as suggestions for increased parental involvement in public schools. This study has the potential to bring about positive social change by providing insights regarding why charter schools are becoming a better choice for parents through the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators. School leaders have the option to implement policy recommendations in a way that promotes student learning, positive school climate, and parental engagement, benefiting students within the district.

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Dedication

I dedicate my research work to my family. To my husband, Jairius, a special feeling of gratitude is extended to you for taking full responsibility for our children each time I closed the office doors and continued my research and writing. To my children, Ashton and Jacey, Mommy worked hard and persevered and achieved her goal to show you that anything is possible. Follow your dreams and never give up in life. To my parents and siblings, thank you for always giving me the encouragement, pushing me, and telling me that I can do it. All of you have uplifted me and kept my spirits high during the most intense and rigorous time in my life. Thank you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Barbara Calabro. She has been a true motivator in this process. When I felt like giving up and ending my journey, she provided words of encouragement to keep me focused. When an issue was obscure, Dr. Calabro helped me understand what was expected of me and was always there to lend her knowledge and expertise. I also would like to acknowledge Dr. Georgene Risko for assisting in organizing my methodology so that I could move forward. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Montgomery. You kept me on track by being very transparent and honest throughout this entire process. I am truly grateful to have had such strong guidance during this rigorous process. I also would like to acknowledge the Walden University Library. The librarians always solved my issues quickly and efficiently. Without these things, I would not have accomplished my goals.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

This study was conducted to explore school choice, the pros and cons of school choice, and why it has become so popular with suburban parents. The study focused on two charter schools: the Learning Academy (pseudonym) and the School of Excellence (pseudonym), which are located in a large urban and suburban school district in Georgia. Both charter schools have a student enrollment of approximately 800 students each and an active waiting list.

This case study consisted of parent focus groups as well as teacher and administration in-depth interviews. The collected data provided reasons for the switch from public to charter schools in one school district. The information may be valuable to county stakeholders in improving schools to meet the needs of parents and students.

A plethora of charter school research is readily available to all potential audiences. Yet, little research has focused on the study school district, an area that is increasing charter school enrollment (Georgia Department of Education [GADOE], 2015). As a result, the reasons why parents are switching from public to charter schools need to be identified by focusing on two top-performing charter schools within the district.

The problem within the school district is that many parents are withdrawing students from public schools and opting for charter schools (GADOE, 2015). Parents are deciding that the traditional public school does not adequately educate their child. These parents are exercising their right to school choice and opting for a charter school instead.

Several elementary schools located in this school district have low Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) scores. As stated by the GADOE (2017a), the CRCT was created as a way to measure the skills and knowledge that students have acquired in reading, English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The CRCT information can be used to analyze student strengths and weaknesses as related to the instruction of the state standards in the education system in Georgia.

Based on the county's data, the district did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) from 2003–2011, as determined by the CRCT scores. The Georgia Milestones Assessment replaced the CRCT during the 2014-2015 school year. The Georgia Milestones is a standardized assessment that is used to gauge student achievement in reading, English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies as defined by the state of Georgia (GADOE, 2017b). In 2017, 24 of the district's 84 elementary schools met or exceeded the state average by scoring as having proficient or distinguished learners. This number decreased from 29 schools in 2016. AYP is a vital component of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2015) and annually measures student achievement using assessments given by the state.

Charter schools are public schools that provide a choice for parents. "Charter schools are privately managed, taxpayer-funded schools exempted from some rules applicable to all other taxpayer-funded schools" (National Education Association, 2018, para. 2). Charter schools must provide transparency and accountability, however (National Education Association, 2018). Students in the Learning Academy and the School of Excellence are responsible for taking state-mandated assessments such at the

CRCT and the Georgia Milestones, just as students in other schools in the district. However, in order to help its students reach their full potential, the Learning Academy has an additional curriculum focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Charter schools have developed a powerful and prominent role in education by producing more favorable results than comparable public schools with similar demographics. Test scores are a major contributing factor for parents when making the decision to enroll their child in school; as shown in Figures 1–4, students at the Learning Academy score higher than state and district peers in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.
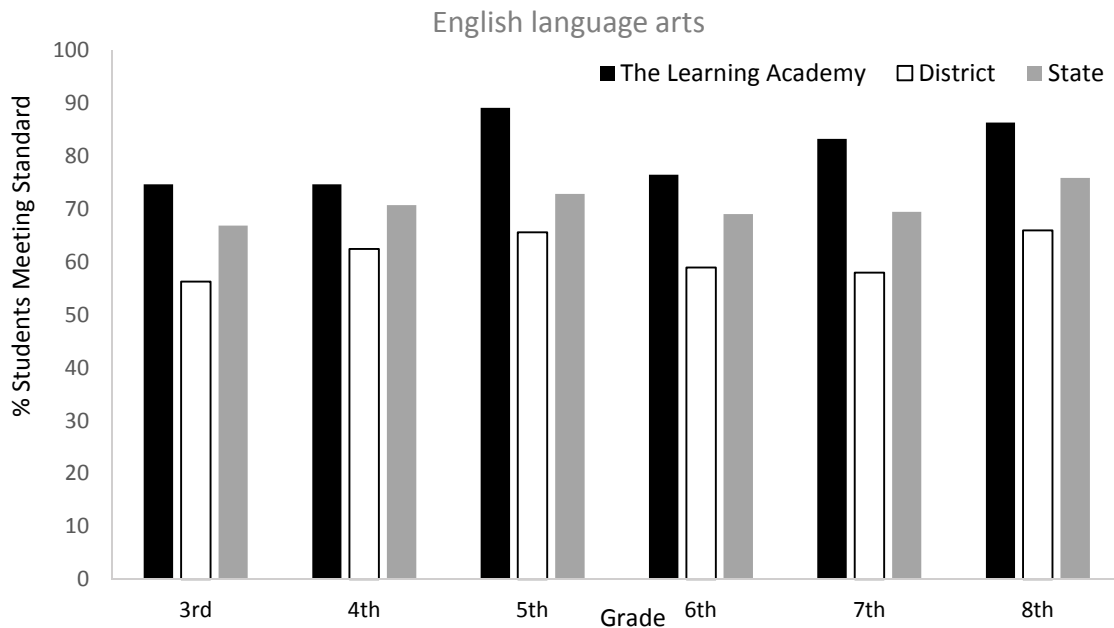
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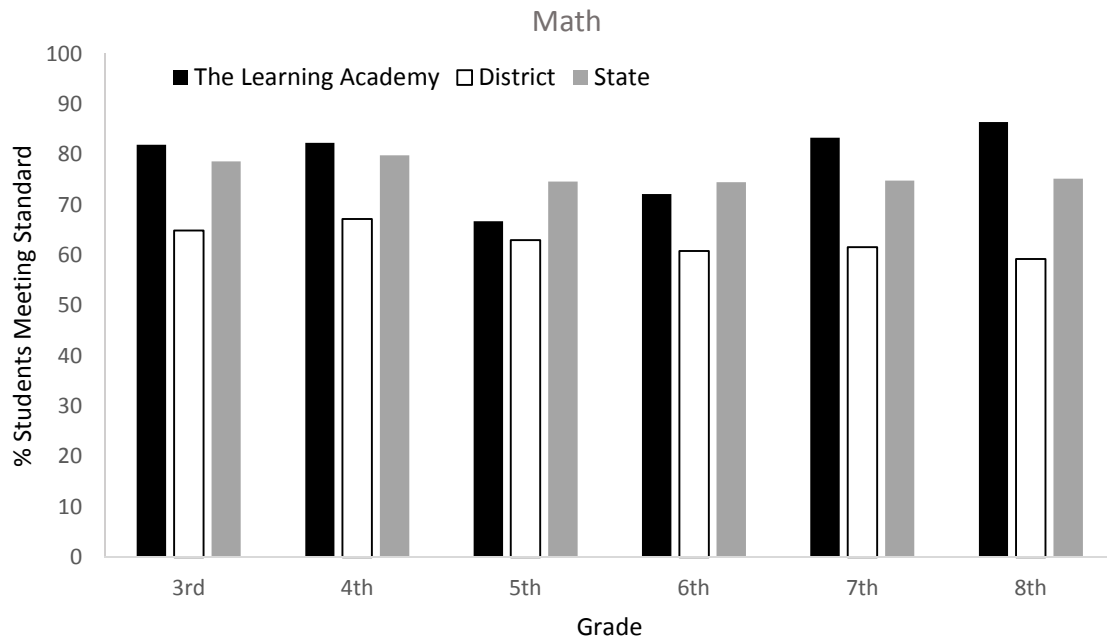
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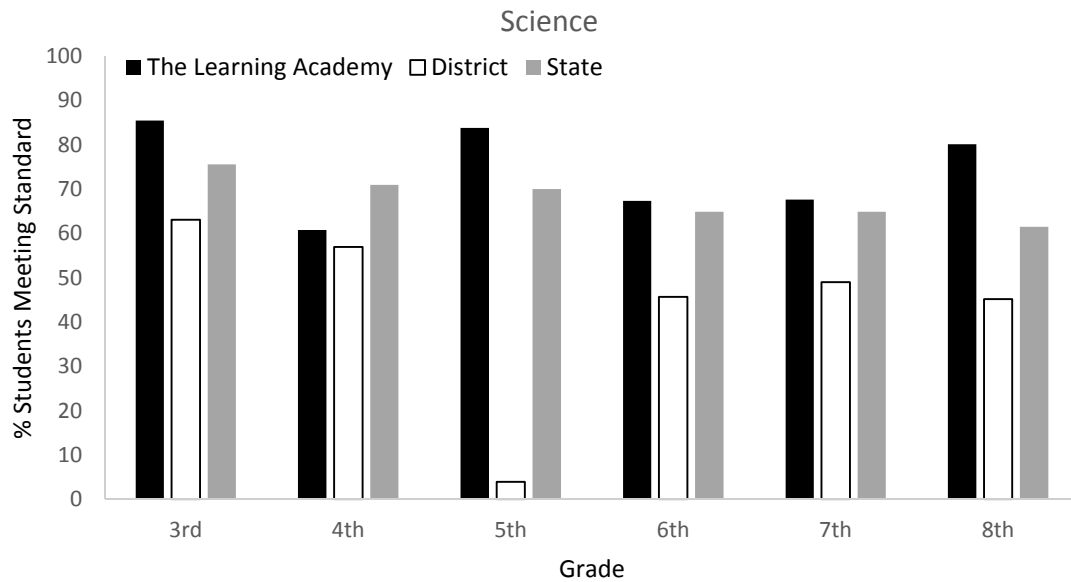
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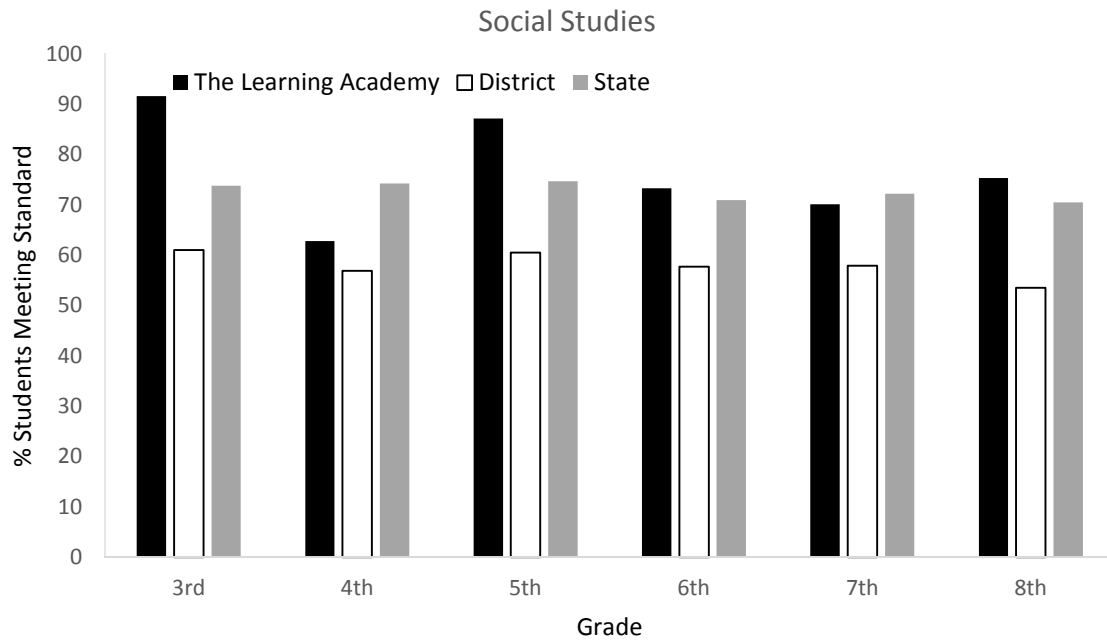
Figure 4. Percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards in social studies at the Learning Academy, the district, and the state, Grades 3–8, 2015.

In 2015, the Learning Academy reported 74.7% of third graders, 74.7% of fourth graders, 89.2% of fifth graders, and 86.4% of eighth graders met or exceeded English language arts standards (Figure 1). Georgia Milestones math scores were similar (Figure 2), as 81.9% of third graders, 82.3% of fourth graders, 66.7% of fifth graders, and 86.4% of eighth graders met or exceeded state math standards (GADOE, 2017b). Science scores (Figure 3) show that the Learning Academy outperformed the district in all grade levels and the state in all except fourth grade. When the same Georgia Milestones scores are analyzed and compared with schools within the district and across the state, data show the Learning Academy outperforming both in most cases.

Two years earlier, in 2013, the Learning Academy reported 100% of third graders, 89% of fourth graders, and 97% of fifth graders met or exceeded reading

standards (GADOE, 2017a). CRCT scores from a comparable school within 5 miles of the Learning Academy indicated that 80% of third graders, 87% of fourth graders, and 88% of fifth graders met or exceeded state reading standards (GADOE, 2017a). CRCT math score comparisons were similar. At the Learning Academy, 90% of third graders, 89% of fourth graders, and 91% of fifth graders met or exceeded state math standards (GADOE, 2017a). In comparison, at the nearby comparable school, only 61% of third graders and 62% of fourth graders met or exceeded state math standards (GADOE, 2017a). However, 90% of the comparable school's fifth graders met state math standards (see Figure 5).
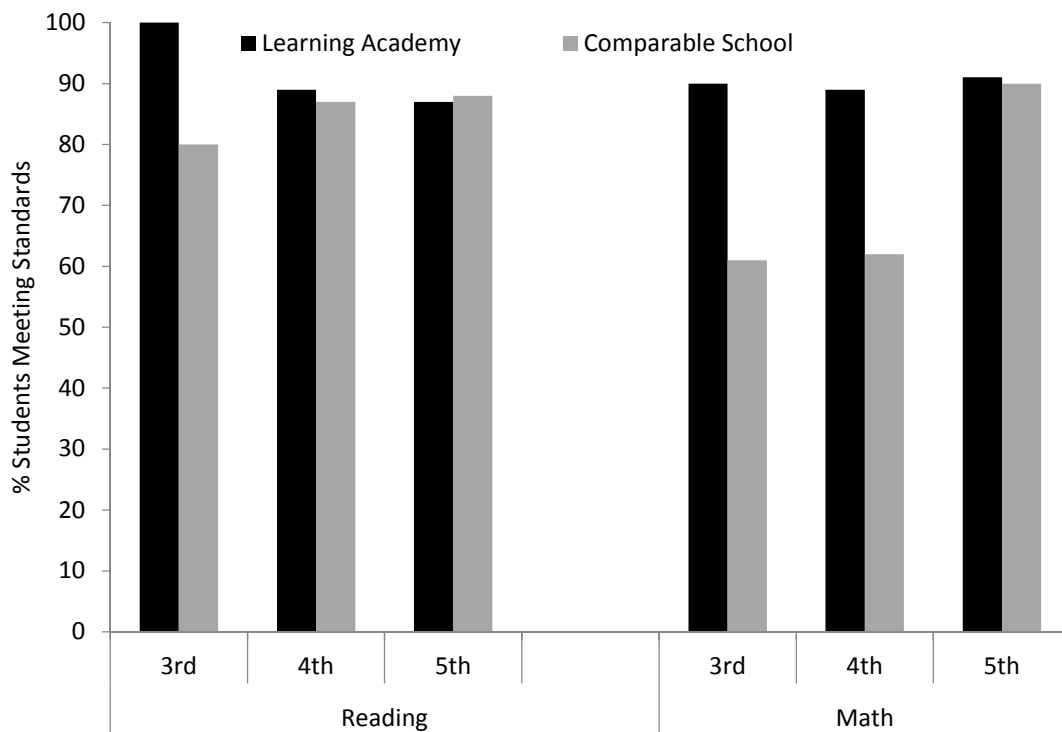
Figure 5. Percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and math at the Learning Academy and a nearby comparable school, Grades 3–5, 2013.

Charter schools have developed a powerful and prominent role in education by producing more favorable results than comparable public schools with similar demographics. Test scores are a major contributing factor for parents when making the decision to enroll their child in school. As noted, students in the Learning Academy are responsible for taking the CRCT and other state-mandated tests just like student in other schools in the district. However, the Learning Academy has an additional curriculum composed of leadership indicators that students also must meet. Students and classroom teachers assess the leadership indicators through the use of student portfolios.

Top-performing charter schools have developed a reputation for high test scores. Most parents, regardless of socioeconomic status or race, agree that academics is at the top of their priority list when evaluating a school and making an enrollment decision (Stein, 2009). According to many parents, children are sent to school to learn, and learning is often measured by state testing. As a result, schools with high test scores are often more desirable to parents when they are choosing a school for their child.

Large classroom sizes (defined as more than 25 students) are prevalent in traditional public schools located in this school district. Over the years, parents have expressed concern over the increasing classroom sizes. The numbers are steadily on the rise. This is not the case with most charter schools, as parents are fully aware. Many charter schools are small, based on student enrollment (Prothero, 2017). As a result, they are very successful at keeping the teacher–student ratio low, year after year. During the 2015-2016 school year, the Learning Academy had approximately 20 students in each classroom.

Additionally, charter schools operate under a charter that highlights its differences when compared to traditional schools (GADOE, 2015). Most traditional public schools have a generalized curriculum that parents can find on the Internet. However, charter schools have a specialization in addition to the generalized curriculum (Prothero, 2017). In order to be approved and operate, charter schools have to do something different than what is already being done in the local public school system. Charter schools have to implement innovative or unique programs in order to provide educational options to parents and students that are not typically available in the traditional public schools (GADOE, 2015).

The Learning Academy operates under a charter that contains two academic and five organizational goals for the school. The first academic goal is for the school to make AYP as defined by the GADOE requirements and ESSA (2015). The second goal is that academic achievement, as it pertains to national norm-referenced tests, will increase each year. According to an administrator at the Learning Academy, the organizational goals aim for encouraging students' commitment to learning, minimizing student attrition and sustaining enrollment, satisfying parents, having faculty commited to professional growth, and providing economic sustainability (personal communication, February 20, 2014). The Learning Academy has to achieve these goals to prevent school closing and becoming another failed charter school. Subsequently, the school leaders take proactive measures by making goals and expectations available for public knowledge. From the beginning, all educational stakeholders understand the vision of the school and can work together to achieve academic success.

Furthermore, charter schools foster and sometimes require parental involvement. The Learning Academy has a requirement of 20 volunteer hours per school year for parents. The hours can be obtained by assisting in the classroom or cafeteria, being a chaperone on field trips, or participating in other common opportunities schools typically provide. The Learning Academy staff understand that many parents are working outside of the home, and therefore volunteer hours can be met by donating classroom materials, attending parent-teacher conferences, and allowing other relatives such as grandparents to be involved as well. Parental involvement is a vital part of a child's education (Stein, 2009). When students see parents involved in school, they want to stay involved.

Parents wishing to enroll their child in the Learning Academy or the School of Excellence can gain information by visiting the district's website or attending an open house on site. The doors are open to all wishing to attend. If there are fewer slots than interested families, a lottery system is used, and those not chosen are placed on a waiting list.

No tuition is associated with attending the Learning Academy or the School of Excellence; both are entirely free to attend. However, students are required to wear a uniform 5 days a week. Therefore, parents would have to purchase uniforms before their child can attend. Also, county transportation is not provided to and from school. It is the parents' responsibility to ensure students make it to school on time and are picked up on time each day. Many options are available for working families. Many before- and after-school programs are available that can assist with transportation. Many parents also use the carpooling system as an option.

Lastly, charter schools tend to have a more positive climate. Charter schools cannot discriminate against students during the admissions process (Georgia Charter Schools Association, 2018). Often parents are removing students from their home schools and enrolling in charter schools to minimize the exposure to unwanted behaviors and maximize learning, according to an administrator (personal communication, August 4, 2017).

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

In 2015, ESSA was enacted. The purpose of this law was to increase the quality of education by closing achievement gaps, ensuring educational equality, and improving the quality of instruction. The school district began moving forward with the idea of ensuring student success, leading to higher education, work, and lifelong learning for all students. However, many parents have not been convinced that all schools within the district are meeting expectations (M. Whitmore, personal communication, May 30, 2017).

Based on the Georgia Milestones test scores from 2016-2017, students within the district are not meeting the expectations in English language arts, math, science, and social studies set by the state (GADOE, 2017b). At one school in particular, the writing achievement scores dropped significantly for fifth grade. Although teachers in every grade level are supposed to use the same writing method and follow the same pacing chart, scores continue to decline (GADOE, 2017b). The decline in writing achievement scores can be indicator of a more serious problem such as lack of teacher performance, lack of student motivation, or lack of parental involvement (Clark, Gleason, Tuttle, &

Silverberg, 2015). Conversely, charter schools within the district are excelling and surpassing the state's average scores in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (GADOE, 2017b). When students are not achieving academically at one school, parents may choose to send them elsewhere (Huitt, 2009).

Currently, students in third through fifth grades are required to take Georgia Milestones, an end-of-year assessment, to determine if they are a beginning, developing, proficient, or distinguished learner in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (GADOE, 2017b). All students within the state of Georgia should be performing at the proficient or distinguished learner level. According to the GADOE (2017b), proficient learners demonstrate they have the basic understanding, knowledge, and skills necessary at this grade level or the end of a course, as determined by Georgia's standards. Students receiving a score as a proficient learner are prepared to move on to the next grade level or course. Distinguished learners, according to the GADOE (2017b), demonstrate advanced understanding of the knowledge and skills required at this grade level or course, as determined by Georgia's standards. The students are advanced and thoroughly prepared for the next grade level or course.

Many traditional public schools within the district are not adequately meeting this goal (GADOE, 2017b). However, charter schools, even with the same demographics of the traditional public school, are meeting or exceeding this goal. For example, in 2017, 42.3% of third graders at the Learning Academy received a proficient or distinguished score on the English language arts Milestones assessment, compared to 11.8% of students at a nearby traditional public school. Similarly, 52.8% of third graders at the School of

Excellence scored as proficient or distinguished, compared to 17.5% of students at a comparable traditional public school.

Evidence of the Problem From Professional Literature

Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, many school districts have been working to reform schools and increase student achievement (Croft, Roberts & Stenhouse, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2006). School reform has existed for some time, but not without controversy. Presently, school reform promotes changes within education by allowing any state to be exempt from provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, updated as the No Child Left Behind Act, if efforts are being made to close achievement gaps, uphold educational stakeholder accountability, and make sure all students are college and career ready (GADOE, 2014). With education reform comes the notion of school choice (Sulentic Dowell & Bickmore, 2015).

There are various types of school choice, including government-issued educational vouchers, homeschooling, magnet schools, and charter schools (Ford & Merrifield, 2013). The idea of school choice has supporters as well as critics. Those in favor of school choice have asserted that giving parents the choice to remove their children from low-performing schools to better performing ones encourages all schools to increase their academic goals and accomplishments (Montaño, 2015; Ni & Arsen, 2011). Conversely, opponents have stated school choice decreases the amount of per-pupil funding traditional public schools normally receive. As a result, this decrease in funding could cause the school to fail even more. Those against school choice also argue that charter schools often have a higher percentage of disadvantaged students when compared

to traditional public schools (Finch, Lapsley, & Baker-Boudissa, 2009), and they further

perpetuate racial segregation (Ni & Arsen, 2011) because many charter schools tend to

serve ethnic-minority and low-income students (Zimmer & Buddin, 2007). Promoting

school choice can have a favorable outcome for those students who attend the higher

achieving school, but little or no change has been occurring in the lower performing

schools (Montaño, 2015).

Rationale

Parents are withdrawing students from traditional public schools and enrolling

them in charter schools within the district, as evidenced by the increase in charter school

enrollments (GADOE, 2015). Throughout this project study, my focus was on

understanding the views and perceptions parents had of charter schools within the

district. I also wanted to understand why charter schools are a favorable choice as

opposed to traditional public schools.

Charter schools have developed a good reputation and are a favorable choice

among parents in the study school district. Within the school district are five conversion

charter schools—existing public schools that have converted to charter status—and eight

start-up charter schools that are new schools created by private individuals, private

organizations, or state or public entities (GADOE, 2015).

Many parents are removing students from public schools and opting for charter

schools (Ash, 2013). The research included two charter schools in the school district. The

Learning Academy and the School of Excellence are both start-up charter schools

founded by an individual with the assistance of active board members. Both schools have

gone through an enrollment expansion over the last few years, and the waiting list keeps increasing. The purpose of this study was to discover and gain a deeper understanding of why parents choose to send their children to charter schools. This research focused on the perceptions that parents have about the charter school they chose and the reasons behind the increasing enrollment at each of the charter schools. Students are leaving their traditional public school within their zoned district, and this study focused on reasons for the exodus of students from public school to charter schools in one district.

Definition of Terms

Charter school: Charter schools are publicly funded elementary or secondary schools that have been freed from some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools, in exchange for some type of accountability for producing certain results that are set forth in each charter school's charter (National Education Association, 2018).

Conversion charter school: This term describes existing public schools that have converted to charter status (GADOE, 2015).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015: This legislation aimed to close the achievement gap that parallels race and socioeconomic status by requiring students to be taught at a higher level to prepare students for college and careers. Yearly assessments provided educators, students, and parents with indicators of student growth (ESSA, 2015).

Per-pupil funding: This refers to the amount of money a school receives for each student (GADOE, 2015).

School choice: This reform movement is focused on affording parents the right to choose the school their child attends (Gulosino & Lubienski, 2011)

Start-up charter school: New schools created by private individuals, private organizations, or state or public entities are termed start-up charter schools (GADOE, 2015).

Significance of the Study

It is important for students to have the opportunity to access a good education, regardless of their economic status or race (Ni & Arsen, 2011; Steiner, 2014). This study is significant because it may help educational stakeholders understand the reasoning and motivation spurring parents' decisions to make the transition from traditional public school to charter school. A wide range of research has been conducted on charter schools. However, the results from the research can be confusing. Some data show charter schools as thriving, whereas other data show no significant improvement with student achievement as it relates to individuals attending charter schools. Since little research has been conducted on the rapid growth of charter schools in the study school district, this study was needed to better understand the reasons behind this growth. The findings from this study also can help traditional public school leaders improve and increase enrollment and student retention. When educational stakeholders understand how to effectively reform education, necessary steps can be taken towards improving all schools so every child can have a fair chance at success.

Research Questions

Based on previous research, a number of reasons may lead parents to choose to enroll their students in charter schools. Parents are given a choice to enroll students at various schools based on the focus of the school and the student's interests or strengths. If parents decide that a school is not adequately educating their child, they have the right to make a switch. Charter schools are one alternative that parents can choose. A study was needed to give parents a voice by letting them share their perceptions on the charter school experience and reasons for placing their children in the charter school (Sime & Sheridan, 2014).

This study provided data on reasons for the switch from public to charter schools in one school district and how parents viewed and perceived the benefits of charter school. The findings from this study helped to answer the overall research question of why parents enroll their children in charter schools in the study school district. Two additional research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are charter school parents' perceptions about school choice?

RQ2: What are the determining factors that affect parent choice to enroll a student in a local charter school instead of the traditional public school the student would otherwise attend?

Review of the Literature

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a collection of interrelated concepts, similar to a theory. A theoretical framework guides one's research, determining what will be

measured and what relationships will be explored. This research was guided by the humanistic theory of Rogers (1951, 1959) and Maslow (1968). The humanistic theory highlights the notions of choice, creativity, values, and self-realization. This literature review provides a timeline and historical overview of the education system in America. Topics include educational foundations, education reform, school choice, and the start of charter schools. The American educational system has evolved significantly over the years, and school choice, specifically charter schools, has had a big impact on public school education. However, there are pros and cons surrounding charter schools. Supporters of charter schools have presented much data to show how charters are surpassing traditional public schools.

A Brief History of Public Schools in the United States

The first public school was opened in 1635 (Brackemyre, 2015; Public Broadcasting Service [PBS], 2014). Early schools only accepted White students and did not charge tuition. Instead, they were funded by property taxes within the community. The schools were run by a school committee with very limited influence and regulations from the state.

In 1840, New York public schools were free of charge but were tailored to Protestants instead of Catholics, even though many New York residents were Catholic (Stacy, 2010). However, many Catholics were poor and could not afford to pay for schooling. Therefore, the public schools were the only choice for education.

Things began to change following a protest initiated by Bishop John Hughes, also known as Dagger John. At the time, Hughes was a 43-year-old Catholic Irish immigrant

(W. Stern, 1997). Hughes was convinced that Catholic children needed a school tailored to their religion and insisted on the city using public funds to create Catholic schools. Bishop Hughes helped create Catholic schools that were privately funded (PBS, 2014). This became the first alternative school system of choice in the United States.

After the end of the Civil War in 1865, many African Americans became free. At this time, according to Walker (2013), they had the freedom and right to attend public schools, and many decided to take advantage of the situation. Subsequently, in addition to economic disadvantages and religion, racial factors became an issue with the American education system (Walker, 2013).

By the end of the 19th century, there was a major paradigm shift from males being the prominent educators to females (Franzosa, 2015). It was once believed that women were designed, by God, to be educators for children (McDaniel, Yenzer, & Jenkins, 2012; PBS, 2014). Founding colleges for women played a major part in expanding the roles of classroom teachers from simply teaching to showing more compassion for students (McDaniel et al., 2012).

Enrollment in public schools began to increase by the end of the 19th century. Enrollment increased from 7.6 in 1870 to 12.7 million in 1890, and the cost to educate students in public schools increased from $69 to $147 million (Leiding, 2009). Due to school reform, more children were receiving an education in public schools in the United States than in any other country. However, schools were still segregated. Native Americans had to attend alternative government schools, but they were not allowed to continue their customs, speak their native languages, or dress as they chose.

Additionally, African Americans were prohibited from attending public schools. In 1896, segregated schools were deemed as being constitutional, as long as they were equal. However, organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People made efforts to prove that separate facilities will never be truly equal. According to Morice and Hunt (2007), many schools were founded by African Americans in hopes of their children receiving an education as well. Still, the educational experiences for African Americans were considerably different when compared to those of their European American counterparts (Hunter, 2015). The facilities were old, overcrowded, and dilapidated, and students were often taught a restricted curriculum by teachers who were not qualified to do their job (Morice & Hunt, 2007).

By the 20th century, the United States became the home of 22 million immigrants, 3 million of whom were children. These immigrants saw the United States as a place for opportunity, and education was the way to obtain that. Schools became so overcrowded that some students could only attend part time. However, even with masses of students flooding the schools, only 50% of children in the United States were enrolled in school; the other half had already joined the workforce (PBS, 2014). Out of the 50% who attended, the average schooling career was only about 5 years for students until they joined the workforce (PBS, 2014).

After the increase in the U.S. immigrant population, a series of vocational programs was created for students. Many important leaders in education believe that public schools should provide an equal opportunity to all students regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, or disability so they

will obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed as productive citizens in a rapidly changing, global society (National School Boards Association, 2014). However, some community leaders began to notice problems, such as lack of financial resources, inadequate food, and lack of parental support within homes in the nation and decided to create a progressive education curriculum as a cure-all solution to preserve American homes and traditions (PBS, 2014). This progressive education included a curriculum for life skills, industrial education, customer service, and home economics for all students, including immigrants. Progressive education proponents believed socializing of children in school would solve many issues in the country (Geller, Zuckerman, & Seidel, 2016).

Prior to World War I, bilingual education took place in most parts of the United States due to the huge immigrant population. Germans living in the United States called for their language to be taught in school. Many children learned German, and they also learned about the triumphs and successes of Germany. Yet, by 1917, the United States was at war. Former president Theodore Roosevelt was among those leading the call for an English-only curriculum (Bichrest, 2013).

In 1950, after years of protests, research, and preparation, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People brought *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* to the Supreme Court. After arguments were made in court, a verdict was reached on May 17, 1954. The announcement of the verdict was read by Chief Justice Earl Warren, who stated that the court arrived at a unanimous decision that separate educational facilities are cannot be equal (Buras, 2015; Gulosino & d'Entremont, 2011). According to R. Holmes (2011), as a result of the ruling of *Brown v.*

Board of Education, parents gained the freedom to choose what school their children will attend in their communities. Yet, the school of choice must offer students a quality education. When schools are not achieving, parents have the right to choose another option to educate their children. One popular alternative in school choice is a charter school.

On April 9, 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed. This act was a crucial component of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided federal funds to help low-income students. This act helped create various educational programs such as Title I and bilingual education.

In 1974, school choice in East Harlem flourished and became favorable among parents (Ash, 2013). Many choices, created in hopes of increasing student motivation, were available for parents and their children. Several smaller schools were created within the same building where the tradition public school was housed. Each school had its own focus, such as math and science, maritime, sports, writing, and performing arts (Ash, 2013). However, all schools had the same goal, to increase academic achievement among the student population. Around 1980, students were required to choose their school instead of having one automatically assigned (Martin, 2015). Moreover, failing schools were closed down and not allowed to operate. The plan was working. In 1987, East Harlem was academically performing better than half of the other schools in the district. Citizens were assured that the improvement was due to the schools, which provided a smaller, individualized alternative for education.

Development of Charter Schools

One way parents can exercise school choice is by enrolling a child into a charter school (Rooks & Muñoz, 2015). A charter school is a public school that operates under a written charter, or contract, that has been approved by a local board of education and the state Board of Education (GADOE, 2015). A charter school's charter is reviewed regularly, about every 5 years, by the organization that granted its charter, and the charter can be terminated if the set guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or if the established standards are not met according to the charter (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In theory, many school charters are based on having greater autonomy and increasing accountability (Corbett, 2015; Finnigan, 2007). The theory of the benefits of autonomy guides many concepts prevalent in charter schools. Charter schools operate under a charter or contract issued by a public entity such as a local school board, public university, or state board of education. However, they are schools of choice that have the autonomy to make many decisions on how the school operates (Bulkley & Fisler, 2002). This allows schools to become self-governing by eliminating the power currently being held by management (Wohlsetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995).

Many argued that charter schools and the laws concerning autonomy that govern them would be responsible for the improvement or reinvention of existing public schools or private schools (Bulkley & Fisler, 2002). However, autonomy within the charter schools can have an adverse effect by causing a charter school to fail due to the lack of rigid rules (Bulkley & Fisler, 2002). The concept of charter was to give schools more autonomy while still holding them accountable for performance (Osborne, 2012). This

concept was created to improve student achievement. Furthermore, charter schools would not be allowed to fail students year after year, as traditional public schools are often permitted to do. If students were not learning state standards, the schools would close (Osborne, 2012). The federal No Child Left Behind Act (2002) enabled students of low-performing schools to exercise public school choice, exemplifying a widespread belief that competing for students will spur public schools to higher achievement (Croft et al., 2015; G. Holmes, DeSimone, & Rupp, 2003). The growth of charter schools within the country has contributed to social protest and demand for better educating facilities (R. Holmes, 2011).

Parents are taking advantage of the opportunity to exercise school choice. This has led to countless charter schools opening to better serve students. As a result, schools were expected to improve due to competition. Promoting increased school choice and competition by comparison were seen as means of stimulating greater allocative, productive, and dynamic efficiency in the schooling system (Adnett & Davies, 2005).

Since the first charter school law passed in Minnesota in 1991, charter school research has been as varied as the laws that govern charters (Smith, Wohlstetter, Farrell, & Nayfack, 2011). School choice policies are designed to offer students who are attending schools performing below average the option of transferring to a school with better results (Ni & Arsen, 2011). Parents are taking full advantage of the opportunities by enrolling their children into charter schools.

Charter schools have become popular with parents who want to see their child succeed academically, and enrollment is constantly increasing. According to R. Holmes

(2011), more than 1.5 million students attended charter schools across the nation in 2011.

Based on research data obtained from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools,

charter school performance was largely positive from 2010 through 2013; the research

determined that in all but one charter school, students outperformed their regular public

school peers (Ash, 2013).

According to the Center for Education Reform (as cited in Osborne, 2012), about

6,700 charter schools have opened since the first in 1992. Out the 6,700 charter schools,

1,036 have closed (Osborne, 2012). Moreover, 131 more charter schools are being

carefully monitored by charter school associations and state education departments for

academic and financial struggles (Osborne, 2012). If failing schools do not show

improvement within 2 years, they could be closed (Osborne, 2012).

Some have argued that charter schools are not developed to reform education but

simply as a business venture. According to Tienken (2011), individuals are opening

charter schools with no solid plans of improving academic achievement. This practice is

taking financial and other resources away from the traditional public schools, leading to

the destruction of public schools, according to Tienken. Alternatively, many theoretical

arguments include the idea of school choice policies providing options mainly for

students who otherwise may not have access to quality education (Villavicencio, 2013).

When parents are given a choice in education, it creates a sense of urgency for all schools

to improve and maintain or increase enrollment (Villavicencio, 2013).

Each charter school functions under its own model (Pelz, 2015). As defined by

the National Education Association (2018), charter schools may not operate unless the

education offered is different from the traditional education currently offered in public schools in the area. Some charter school models have proven to be more effective than others (Villavicencio, 2013). According to the GADOE (2015), one charter school foundation, the Knowledge Is Power Program, is having success with student achievement. The program's foundation of longer school hours and tougher demands on teachers, students, and parents is one model that is highlighted as a way to success for charter schools.

While some charter schools are prevailing, others are still failing in comparison to their traditional counterparts (Villavicencio, 2013). There are many potential reasons for failure. Charter schools are viewed as being segregated (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Montaño, 2015). Compared to regular public schools, both charter and magnet programs enrolled a larger share of Black and Latino students (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2012). Low-income and ethnic-minority children have received many improved learning opportunities through the use of charter school reform (Buras, 2015; Sulentic Dowell & Bickmore, 2015). However, this practice has the potential to promote racial and economic segregation (Frankenberg et al., 2011; Gulosino & d'Entremont, 2011). Charter schools have served increasing numbers of low-income students over the last few years (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2012).

Although evidence has shown successful charter schools (M. Stern, Clonan, Jaffee, & Lee, 2015; Tuttle et al., 2013), based on national research, many charter schools are underperforming or performing at similar levels to public schools (Clark et al., 2015; Villavicencio, 2013). Therefore, some individual charter schools are, indeed, succeeding.

However, as a whole, charter schools do not necessarily provide a better quality education (Villavicencio, 2013) when compared to traditional public schools.

In 2011, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (as cited in Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2012) presented findings that students enrolled in charter schools were lagging academically when compared to similar students attending traditional public schools. However, according to a study by CREDO (2012), about 25% of charter schools showed more growth in student achievement than comparable traditional public schools.

CREDO (2009) conducted a study of charter schools and reported that students in charter schools performed worse in student achievement than students in public schools, regardless of age or race. However, research disputed those claims. According to Hoxby (2009), the CREDO 2009 study was statistically incorrect. Hoxby reviewed the research and concluded that the CREDO study not only had a statistical mistake but also was biased against the effectiveness of charter schools. The problems associated with systematic measurement error, the cause of the bias, are familiar (Hoxby, 2009).

Charter schools are held accountable for meeting the goals outlined in the charter (Gawlik, 2015). If goals are not met, the organizers run the risk of termination of the school's charter and school closure (GADOE, 2015). However, many charter school administrators and staff have not obtained any special education or training to aid in the accountability factor (Gawlik, 2011). Wei, Patel, and Young (2014) stated that only a limited number of studies examined the differences in school leadership between charter and traditional public schools. The studies available found mixed results, with some

studies showing little difference between leaders of traditional public and charter schools and the rest showing more noticeable differences (Wei et al., 2014).

Booker, Zimmer, and Buddin (2005) noted opponents of charter schools have argued that success achieved by charter schools happens only because the schools are recruiting the best students from traditional public schools. Therefore, the collected data may be skewed.

Typically, charter schools are smaller than traditional public schools. As a result, classroom sizes are smaller (Prothero, 2017). This could be an underlying cause of the decreasing enrollment in traditional public schools and the increasing enrollment in charter schools.

President Barack Obama is in favor of charter schools and deemed them necessary in promoting his education reform program (R. Holmes, 2011; Rich & Jennings, 2015). R. Holmes (2011) also stated that Obama increased funding to help aid in the success of charter schools and closure of low-performing charter schools with the use of competitive grants, such as the Race to the Top. However, some argue that charter schools lessen the positive effects of educational reform (Martin, 2015).

Resources are available to aid in the education of students in the United States, yet schools in America are not graduating students who are ready to compete successfully in a challenging and global market (Holmes, 2011; Robertson, 2015). American students are perceived as being inferior to European, German, and Japanese students upon graduation (Holmes, 2011). As a result, parents are choosing to be proactive and

enrolling their children in charter schools perceived as providing a better education

(Holmes, 2011).

Implications

Many elementary schools in the study district had not made AYP consistently for

the previous 5–10 years (GADOE, 2015). Data indicated the charter schools at the focus

of the research outperformed the local schools. This research provided data on reasons

parents chose to switch from a public to a charter school in the school district. The

information, when shared with the county, may be valuable in improving schools to meet

parent and student needs.

The findings from this study identified reasons for the charter schools' academic

success as well as reasons why parents choose to enroll their students in the charter

schools instead of the traditional public schools in the area. The research findings

provided valuable data on parent perceptions of both the public and charter schools in this

area. Once data were collected and analyzed, findings could inform improvements to

traditional public schools in the district. The data gained from focus groups and in-depth

individual interviews can be used to design professional development learning activities

for teachers that contain important features that parents look for in a school. The plans for

a policy recommendation will be shared with leaders of traditional public schools. The

policy recommendation focuses on parents' criteria for selecting a school for their child.

The recommendation can serve as a guide for traditional public schools and assist the

traditional public schools in making the necessary changes to increase academic

achievement, improve school climate, and promote parental engagement within the district.

Summary

Education has undergone many changes since the first public school opened in 1635 or and schools proliferated in the 1800s. The demographics of the teachers and students have changed. Facilities where learning takes place and the conditions of those places have changed as well. Moreover, the types of curricula and the amount of time that students spend in school have changed. Nevertheless, the reason for attending school has not changed. The purpose for schooling is to educate and prepare students to become productive members in society. While academic achievement has always been the goal, controversy frequently surrounds the means of reaching this goal.

All schools are not created equal when it comes to student achievement and producing academic scholars. Choices have been created for parents who simply want the best academic opportunity for their children. When parents are faced with the decision of terminating enrollment at one school and enrolling their child in another, they are exercising school choice. Among the many forms of school choice, charter schools are popular, with nearly 2 million students attending each day.

This qualitative case study provided data on why parents have switched from public to charter schools in one school district. Teachers and administrators provided data through the use of in-depth interviews, and parents were at the center of the focus groups. Section 2 further explains the methodology used in this study to help understand why charter schools have become so successful.

Section 2: The Methodology

This section includes a description of the methodology employed in administering this study. The research design, participants, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, findings, and conclusions are discussed. The section concludes with an explanation of assumptions, scope, study limitations, and delimitations.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the feelings and perceptions of parents who decided to enroll their children in charter schools and to explore the reasons they made their enrollment choices in one school district. The study includes two charter schools within the district. District records indicated that approximately 1,800 students from the district had left traditional public schools for the charter schools. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are charter school parents' perceptions about school choice?

RQ2: What are the determining factors that affect parent choice to enroll a student in a local charter school instead of the traditional public school the student would otherwise attend?

The results of the study could be used by educational stakeholders in the school district to better understand parent perceptions of traditional and charter schools. Recommended policies could be implemented based on improved understanding from the research (see description of the project in Appendix A). This can help traditional public schools be more competitive with charter schools and a more favorable choice with parents when faced with the decision regarding where they enroll their children.

Research Design

The problem in the school district is that, instead of enrolling students in traditional public schools, many parents have chosen to send children to charter schools. Parents have decided that traditional public schools are not adequately educating their child and have exercised their right to school choice and opted for charter schools. A study was needed to identify the reasons why parents are choosing charter schools instead of traditional public schools. Thus, I needed first to understand the feelings and perceptions that parents have about charter schools. According to Creswell (2017), a case study is a good method to study certain phenomena and understand the feelings of a particular group of people because it focuses on the case by collecting detailed, descriptive data. By collecting data from parents, teachers, and administrators, the study findings answered the guiding research question: Why do parents enroll children in charter schools?

During the research, I used an exploratory case study. The goal of this research was to understand the feelings and opinions of parents and why they choose to send their children to charter schools, as well as to collect detailed, descriptive data to answer the research questions (Baker & Edwards, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research consists of "collecting data with general, emerging questions" from "a small number of individuals or sites" (p. 205). I then used in-depth interviews and focus groups to explore the topic of charter schools versus traditional public schools.

Quantitative research would not help me understand why parents are exercising their right to school choice and enrolling into charter schools versus traditional public

schools because it would not give me detailed, rich descriptive data on parents' feelings and perspectives. Qualitative research yields rich, descriptive data that can be useful when answering the research question (Creswell, 2017). This exploratory case study used a qualitative research design with various data collection and analysis methods.

Before deciding on a qualitative research design, I examined many designs to answer the research questions. Ethnography is the study of naturalistic human behavior (Creswell, 2017). Typically, scientists who want to understand other cultures use this type of research (Creswell, 2017). Ethnography was not selected because the research questions were not centered on the habits or customs of a group. Grounded theory research would not be a good fit to answer the research questions. Grounded theory is designed to understand social or psychological patterns of a specific group of people through the use of comparison (Creswell, 2017). Phenomenological research tries to "capture the essence of human experience" (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010, p. 16). A case study is designed to help understand an individual or a small group of individuals (Creswell, 2017). This research focused on two charter schools and the group of individuals associated with them. As a result, the research questions were best answered using a case study approach because it allowed me to examine two charter schools within the district and understand the feelings and perceptions of parents regarding student enrollment.

This research was designed to understand why parents choose to send their children to charter schools instead of traditional public schools. The research questions were answered by conducting a case study so I could gain an understanding of parents'

feelings and perceptions of this phenomenon. This research consisted of a case study examining two charter schools located within a single school system through the use of multiple data collection methods such as focus groups and individual interviews.

Case studies are a form of qualitative descriptive research that takes a close look at individuals or a small or large group of participants or a place (Creswell, 2012). Researchers typically conduct a case study when an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a subject is desired (Creswell, 2012). In this research, I wanted to closely examine the Learning Academy and the School of Excellence and obtain an in-depth understanding about their increasing enrollment. An exploratory case study design was used in this research. Researchers use an exploratory design when there are few or no earlier studies to refer to or rely upon to predict an outcome. There is not much research readily available on charter schools within this particular school district. According to Creswell (2012), researchers use a case study research method to understand a specific phenomenon by collecting different forms of data, such as interviews and focus groups. I wanted to understand the reasons for the increasing enrollment in charter schools. A case study worked well for this particular research because I was able to obtain in-depth knowledge about the views and perceptions of educational stakeholders in the form of personal interviews and focus groups. This information was collected in order to understand why parents are choosing to leave traditional public schools and opt for a charter school.

According to Yin (2014), a case study design should be considered when (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions and (b) one cannot

manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study. In this research, understanding why parents are choosing charter over traditional public schools was the main focus. Also, changing the behavior of the parents or teachers was not possible for this type of research. As a result, a case study was the best option. The case study enabled me to answer research questions regarding why parents are choosing to not send their children to a traditional public school and better understand the increased enrollments in two charter schools in a school district. The viewpoints of the stakeholders were better interpreted with the use of focus groups, audio recordings, and transcribed interviews as opposed to questionnaires, polls, or surveys (Burgess, 2012).

In order for me to answer the research questions, I collected data through focus groups and individual interviews. The focus groups and individual interviews included a representative sample of parents, teachers, and principals in the study school district. The focus group protocol (see Appendix B) and individual interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used to collect data. A three-column chart in Microsoft Word was used to analyze the data collected and determine reoccurring themes that emerged from the research. The themes that emerged from this project study are described in this section. The nature of the design, justification for this approach, and the application to the local setting are explained. The distinguishing characteristics of the local setting are portrayed. The initial steps in this process were first to identify the views and perceptions of charter schools expressed by parents within the district and then to determine the reason why they choose to enroll their children into charter schools versus traditional public schools. Two focus groups were conducted. The first session contained 12 parents, and the second

contained nine parents. Additionally, 15 individual interviews were conducted with 13 teachers and two administrators. The data collected revealed reasons why parents choose charter over traditional public schools, which helped to create a policy recommendation that targeted a specific plan of action.

Participants

Qualitative research requires a researcher to choose research participants or sites based on purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2017). Individuals or locations are chosen to help the researcher understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Certain criteria must be met for participants to be selected. For this research study using two charter schools in the district, only individuals affiliated with the schools were considered for participation in the research because they provided data needed to understand why parents are making the decision to enroll their children in charter schools instead of a traditional public school. Each individual who participated, for the purpose of the research, had some type of relationship with either of the charter schools and helped "facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 73) of the research.

Criteria for Selection

The population of the research participants included about 1,500 parents who chose to enroll their students in the charter school, 72 charter school classroom teachers, and 11 charter school administrators. In order to be selected, a study participant must be a teacher, administrator, or parent affiliated with one of the two charter schools. Out of the total population, a sample was selected consisting of 21 parents, 13 classroom teachers,

and two administrators. The research used "sample forming strategies [that] are highly related with the purpose and research questions that guide the study" (Demir, 2011, p. 1740). The research method was an analytic induction, and the selection of participants from the population was based on purposeful, simple random sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), as every member of the population had an equal chance of being chosen.

Justification of the Number of Participants

The research included a total of 21 parents affiliated with the charter schools, 13 charter school teachers, and two charter school administrators. The number of participants is justified because typically the fewer research participants, the more detail rich the data will be (Suter, 2012). "Purposive sample sizes are often determined on the basis of theoretical saturation, the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights to the research questions" (Jawale, 2012, p. 188).

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Procedure for Gaining Access

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When conducting this research, I had to consider how to gain access to the research site and participants. In order to gain access, I had to prove to the targeted group that the research would be useful and would have benefits if conducted at the site (Creswell, 2012). I am a current teacher within the district, and the two charter schools at the forefront of this research were accessed due to the preestablishing rapport that exists with the county. During my initial phase of data collection, I first had to gain access to participants by submitting an application to the district. While I waited for permission from the district, I worked on my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application. I received permission to conduct research in the district a few months before my IRB

application was approved (IRB approval number 03-23-17-0163453).

Once IRB approved my application, I contacted the site administrators of the first school via e-mail. I provided background information about me and gave a brief overview of the research and what the participants would be asked to do once consent was given. The e-mail stated that the research participant could refuse to participate at any time during the research without repercussions of any kind and everyone would respect their decision of whether or not they chose to be in the study. Also, the initial contact explained that if permission were granted, I wanted to obtain a list of staff members' e-mail addresses, send flyers home to parents, and place flyers in the front office to solicit participation in the study. I also used the school's website and located individual e-mail addresses. A preliminary survey (Appendix D) and a consent form were distributed via e-mail to 35–40 available staff members and seven administrators who were potential research participants. The e-mail introduced me as a researcher and gave a brief explanation about the purpose of the research, the criteria for participating in the research, and their role in the research once consent was given. This process allowed the participants to make a knowledgeable decision to participate in the research study or not.

Parents at each research site received an interest flyer (Appendix E) from an envelope that was placed at each location. The flyer provided a brief introduction of me and an explanation of the research, the criteria for participating in the research, and what I would ask them to do once consent was given. This allowed the participants to make a knowledgeable decision to participate in the research study or not. I explained to all possible research participants that if they later changed their mind, they could stop

participation at any time. If parents were interested, they were asked to complete the survey and submit it to the e-mail address provided. When I received the interest e-mail, I replied with the informed consent form. Research participants e-mailed a signed consent form back to me. Before any data were collected, I received signed informed consent forms from all research participants via e-mail.

I received a response from 12 parents, seven teachers, and one administrator from the first research site. I received a response from nine parents, six teachers, and one administrator from the second research site. All of the research participants who sent a response agreed to participate in the research. All selected participants were notified of their acceptance of becoming a participant in the research study via e-mail within 48 hours.

Establishing a Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

I established a researcher–participant working relationship by building trust. I am currently a teacher within the district and am familiar with some of the teachers at one research site. However, I have not supervised any of the teachers. I was not familiar with any research participant from the second research site. I did not know any of the parents at either location. A researcher's relationship with the participants is important for the research, and this relationship should be established at the beginning of the research (Algeo, 2012). A researcher–participant relationship also must be upheld and fostered throughout the course of the research to ensure honest, good-quality results (Algeo, 2012; Bloomber & Volpe, 2012). During this research, clear, honest communication occurred between me and the research participants regularly. Identification of appropriate

informants and securing their agreement to be part of the research project was one of the first steps in establishing a working relationship. Trust was established by using documented consent forms, keeping participants' information confidential throughout the research project, and valuing their time by keeping dates and starting and concluding interviews and focus groups sessions on time.

Protection of Participants' Rights

Researchers must be aware of anonymity and confidentiality for research participants. Confidentiality means that only the researcher and the individuals in the research team can identify individual responses from the research participants (Creswell, 2017). The information remains confidential to the rest of the world. Anonymity means personal information is not collected during the research and the data cannot be linked to individual research participants to reveal an identity (Algeo, 2012). Typically, information that exposes the identity of a participant is not collected unless it is vital to the study. During this research, all participants' information was kept confidential by assigning aliases to each participant. All information on participants' identities and all collected data were kept in a locked file at my home. All digital data are stored on a personal password-protected computer. I did not link collected data to any research participant, and the collected data were only used for the research.

Informed Consent

In this research, participants gave informed consent before any data were collected. Informed consent in research can be defined as giving permission with full knowledge of the possible consequences, risks, and benefits of the study (Creswell,

2017). Research participants received a brief explanation of the research along with the informed consent during the recruitment phase. Individuals were given the opportunity to ask additional questions if necessary before making a decision. Participants were informed that they had the option to withdraw from the study without repercussions.

Protection From Harm

When using human participants, ethical practices in educational research are a serious legal requirement. Researchers must work with integrity (Lategan, 2012). Johnson (2009) stated, "The research you carry out must be honest, accurate and ethical" (p. 18). Researchers with human participants must adhere to many ethical codes and standards (Lategan, 2012). The research must be harmless to human participants (Lategan, 2012). Although *harmless* may be hard to define, the researcher must not subject the participants to any words or actions that may be physically or psychologically harmful. While conducting research at the Learning Academy and the School of Excellence, I remained honest with research participants and thoroughly explained all steps of the research process that were experienced by participants. Some research strategies require researchers to withhold certain information for the sake of the research. In this research, I did not disclose to parents that the research involved two schools. However, these research strategies did not have any negative effects on the research participants.

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Data Collection

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Data collection is a crucial component to research. Before any data were collected, I determined the collection tools were credible and conducive to the research

(Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). This research utilized two data collection methods for each research site: (a) a parent focus group and (b) teacher and administrator in-depth, individual interviews. This process provided data to answer my main research question: Why do parents choose to enroll their children in charter schools? The analysis of the results, when shared with the county, may be valuable in improving schools to meet parent and student needs. Both research data collection methods worked together to develop a strong, deeper understanding of parents and reasons for the choice to attend a charter school.

Description and Justification of the Data for Collection

Data were collected in two different ways to insure the credibility of the findings. I collected data from parents through the use of a focus group. Focus groups are useful to gather beliefs and opinions, allowing discussion about a topic (Rio-Roberts, 2011). Prior to conducting the focus group, I asked parents the number of children they had attending the school and the current grade level of each student. During the focus groups, I asked seven open-ended questions about the decisions made to enroll students at the respective school, how parents felt about the school, and reasons for the feelings. These questions can be found in Appendix B. The information that parents shared was used to create a policy recommendation for educational stakeholders to aid in advancing traditional public schools.

The data collection phase consisted of two techniques: focus groups and individual interviews. First, I conducted two focus groups. The first focus group included 12 parents from the first research site. The second focus group included nine parents from

the second research site. Then, I conducted 15 individual interviews. At the first research site, I interviewed seven teachers and one administrator. At the second research site, I interviewed six teachers and one administrator. The data collected from the parent focus groups and individual interviews helped to answer the main research question: Why do parents enroll their children in charter schools?

Source of Each Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instruments were researcher produced. The focus groups and individual interviews were conducted using open-ended questions. I created the data collection instruments specifically to answer the research questions and to understand the phenomenon of why parents choose charter schools over traditional public schools.

Justification for the Sufficiency of Data

The data collection process in qualitative research generates large amounts of data (Creswell, 2017). Two forms of data collection were used during the research: focus groups and individual interviews. The focus group protocol consisted of seven open-ended questions that aided in the understanding of parents' school choice. The individual interview protocol also consisted of seven open-ended questions that helped teachers and administrators share their views and perceptions as to why charter schools are a favorable choice among parents within the study school district.

After I collected data, research participants took part in member checking. Member checking is a process used by researchers to help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of a study (Creswell, 2012). During this process, I presented data transcripts to the research participants for questions, concerns, or

comment. This sharing of research is designed to increase the credibility of data analysis and help to minimize researcher bias. Member checking was conducted at two stages of the research study (Algeo, 2012). First, I summarized the collected data after each question during the focus groups and individual interview. This process allowed me to accurately understand and record what was said by each participant (Yin, 2014). Also, member checking took place after all data collection was complete. I invited four research participants to help me review the final data analysis. Member checking allowed me to validate the data to ensure accuracy.

Processes for Data Collection

    Focus groups. Focus groups were the first form of data collection. Focus groups are useful when a researcher wants detailed information about a group's feelings, perceptions, and opinions, and they offer the opportunity for the researcher to seek clarification on the data collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2017). At the first research site, data were collected from a focus group of 12 parents who had chosen to enroll their children in the charter school. The focus group at the second research site consisted of nine parents whose children attended the charter school. Please refer to the Appendix B for the focus group questions.

    Focus groups can also help in data collection because one participant's response may trigger another to reveal information that would not have been revealed otherwise. At the very beginning of the focus group sessions, I provided a brief introduction about myself and explained the purpose of the research. I explained why the focus group session would be recorded. Before the sessions began, all participants were assigned a

number to be used during the discussion. I ensured that every participant had the opportunity to speak on each question, randomly, by assigning and pulling numbers. This process allowed the research participants to share how they really felt, as opposed to simply agreeing with others the entire time. The participants were also given time to manually record their responses. Before moving on to the next question, I summarized what was said, back to the group. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes, and both of the focus group sessions were audio recorded. During the focus groups, all research participants were able to speak openly and candidly about their experiences with charter schools and traditional public schools. Research participants were able to skip certain questions or withdraw from the study at any time during the sessions. No participant decided to refrain from answering a question or withdraw from the study.

The data collected are justified because I wanted to understand why parents are withdrawing students from traditional public schools and enrolling into charter schools. Conducting parent focus groups allowed me to ask specific questions to find out the underlying reasons for the switch. During the focus groups, rich data were collected because parents were able to speak their opinions and listen to other parents' comments as well. After the focus group sessions ended, I thanked all of the participants for their time and cooperation and informed them they would receive a copy of the session report as soon as it was available.

Interviews. The second data collection method was individual interviews. One effective qualitative research technique is in-depth interviewing (Creswell, 2012). The individual interviews consisted of teachers and administrators who worked at either of the

charter schools identified in this research. The individual interview questions were designed to obtain an understanding of why teachers and administrators think parents choose charter schools instead of traditional public schools. Please refer to Appendix C for the individual interview questions asked of teachers and administrators.

I interviewed teachers and administrators from both sites individually. Due to the nature of this type of data collection, teachers were encouraged to feel comfortable enough to open up and gave their true feelings or opinions as to why charter schools are becoming so desirable in the district.

I interviewed 15 participants: seven teachers and one administrator from the first research site and six teachers and one administrator from the second research site. Conducting intensive, individual interviews, typically with a small number of respondents, allows the researcher to investigate their knowledge or perspectives on a particular program, strategy, idea, or situation (Creswell, 2012). The interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions. Before the interviews, I introduced myself as a researcher, gave a brief overview of the research, and stated that the interview would be audio recorded. I also informed research participants that they could withdraw from the research or refrain from answering a question at any time during the interview. No research participant withdrew from the research or omitted a response. During the interviews, I was able to probe for further understanding of the participants' responses. Time was also provided for the individuals to add any other information beneficial to the research study. I limited the number of questions to seven so the research participants had

enough time to expand on each question during the interview. Each conducted interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The main advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide greater amounts or detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys (Creswell, 2012). Also, interviews provide a more relaxed atmosphere when collecting information. The participants felt comfortable having a conversation with the researcher. During the interview, I asked open-ended questions addressing views on charter schools and public schools. Open-ended questions prevented simple yes or no responses and gave the participants more flexibility in their responses (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). Listening to other educators and administrators during an in-depth interview gave great insight into parents as well because they were able to give their views and perceptions on why they choose charter schools.

During the interviews, teachers and administrators were able to answer questions based on the experiences, conversations, and interactions they have had with parents of students at the charter school. The responses were audio recorded. After the interviews were conducted, I listened to the recorded interviews and transcribed the data, all while grouping the data and making connections. Interviews are an effective and useful way to collect data during the qualitative research process. Answers to the interview questions helped me understand the culture and climate of the two charter schools and how that may play a role in parents' decisions to enroll. As a result, the detailed-rich data collected can aid in improving traditional public schools in the school district that are steadily decreasing in enrollment due to better performing charter schools in the district.

Time line. In this case study, data collection lasted for approximately two weeks. Focus groups were conducted once a day for 2 consecutive days for 55–60 minutes in order to get a full understanding of the views and perceptions of parents by receiving a response to all focus-group questions by all research participants. During this time, the focus groups were audio recorded. Data were documented and transcribed within 2 days of data collection. Individual interviews were conducted three times a day, every other day. The data collected from the individual interviews were documented and transcribed the day following the interview. This process took about 10 days to complete.

Record-keeping system. I used a three-column chart in Microsoft Word to keep a record of data collected. The raw data collected were input into the first column. Expressions, words, and phrases that were repeatedly used were input into the second column. Generated emerging themes were input into the third column. Once this was complete, I created a chart to show themes, subthemes, and narrative examples that helped me arrive at the conclusions.

Gaining Access

Gaining access to a research site can be a challenge for a researcher (Creswell, 2012). As a researcher, I had to complete several tasks before I gained access to the research sites. First, I completed an application with the school district to gain district approval. Next, I completed an IRB application. Once the application was approved, I reached out to school administrators. Finally, I was able to communicate with teachers and parents to solicit research participants.

Role of the Researcher

I am currently a teacher within the district and am a previous employee at one of

the charter schools at the center of this project study. Out of the 20 research participants

from this site, I was only familiar with one administrator and four teachers; I knew none

of the parents. At the beginning of the research, I established boundaries by explaining

that my role was one of a researcher and not of a teacher or colleague. I was careful to

eliminate researcher bias by only recording what was said and not what I thought the

participant meant or wanted to say, based on my prior experiences with the individual. I

did not veer from the data collection protocol. This allowed me to stay on task during the

data collection phase. I had no prior affiliation with the second charter school. Therefore,

I was not familiar with the parents, teachers, and administrator who participated in the

study.

Data Analysis Results

The research was guided by one overarching research question: Why do parents

choose charter schools over traditional public schools? I interviewed 15 teachers and two

administrators and conducted focus groups with 21 parents. See Appendix F for the

characteristics of participants. Only six parents had children who had not attended

traditional public school; three of those had children in kindergarten. Participating parents

had children spanning kindergarten through Grade 7. Teachers taught various grade

levels in kindergarten through Grade 8. Four teachers had never taught in a traditional

public school. Teachers and administrators ranged in total experience from 1 to 32 years

in education, with a median of 9 years of experience. On average, teachers and

administrators had 7.9 years experience in traditional public schools (a median of 6) and 3.9 years in the charter school (median of 4).

After collecting data through focus groups and individual interviews, I analyzed the data. I used a three-column chart in Microsoft Word to record and organize the data. In the first column I recorded the research participants' exact words. In the second column I recorded key words and phrases extracted from the research participants' exact words. In the third column, I utilized the most frequent words and phrases from the second column and created commonalities and themes.

Emerging Themes

Three themes emerged from the data. The first theme was that parents want their child to receive a good education. The second theme was that school culture and climate are important. The third theme was that parents want to be involved in their child's education. The main research question asked why parents choose charter schools versus traditional public schools. Table 1 provides the specific questions that were asked during the research as well as sample responses from parents that led to the emerging themes. Table 2 shows the three themes as well as subthemes and representative statements from parents, teachers, and administrators.

Table 1

Focus-Group Questions and Emerging Themes

Question	Selected response from parent	Emergent theme
How do you feel when you visit this charter school? Describe the culture here.	"I feel welcomed when I come here. Everyone is nice and friendly. Teachers are always smiling and greet my children by name each morning."	The culture and climate of a school can be a determining factor when parents are making school choices for their children.
Describe your experiences with your child's education in the past and present. How do they differ?	"In the past, my child hated school. His grades were low. He also passed the Georgia Milestones test. I was really concerned that he wouldn't pass this year. So leaning must be taking place."	Academic achievement is important to parents and highly influences their school choice.
What qualities led you to make the decision to enroll your child in this charter school? How did they influence your decision?	"I think that it is wonderful to have to complete 20 hours of volunteer services. It keeps me involved and helps out the teachers."	Parents want to be involved in their children's education
Now that you are a part of this charter school, what elements of the charter school give you the confidence to know that your child is being prepared for the next academic year?	"I like this school because of the high test scores. Students have many hands-on projects to complete, and teachers take learning outside of the basic classroom."	Academic achievement is important to parents and highly influences their school choice.
In your opinion, what makes this charter school different from the traditional public schools in this area?	"Here, parents are so involved that students have no choice but to excel and succeed. When children see that their parents care, they tend to care as well."	Parents want to be involved in their children's education.

Table 2

Themes, Subthemes, and Narrative Examples

Theme	Subtheme	Narrative Examples
Academic achievement is important to parents and highly influences their school choice.	Standardized testing School/homework understanding Student can verbally communicate what was learned	"Test scores are important. If scores are low, it can't be a good school." (Parent) "Students should be able to verbally communicate what was learned well enough to teach it to others." (Administrator)
The culture and climate of a school can be a determining factor when parents are making school choices for their children.	Friendliness of staff Student's attitude towards school Tone of school	"My child enjoys school now. Everyone is friendly and speaks to him every morning." (Parent) "The tone of a school matters. If the school is calm and nurturing, a lot of learning can take place." (Teacher)
Parents want to be involved in their children's education.	Volunteer hours Classroom parent Fun community events	"It is nice to have the volunteer hour requirement. It makes me stay involved, and that makes my daughter more interested in her education." (Parent) "I like this charter school because there are always fun, educational activities planned that keep students and parents engaged." (Parent)

Theme 1: Student Achievement

The first and by far the most repeated theme that quickly emerged was the idea of student achievement. Overwhelmingly, when posed with the question of why a charter school was chosen for their child into a charter school, all focus group and interview participants stated that it was mainly because parents wanted their child to receive a better education. Mom 1 stated, "My child was not learning at his previous school. I

would ask him about his day, and there was never any real response. Now we have full discussions about his daily activities." Similarly, Mom 2 insisted, "My daughter has drastically improved over the last 3 years since we first enrolled here. She is also active in her learning by setting her own personal goals." Mom 3 added, "This is true. My daughter is able to communicate her Lexile and RIT scores. She knows that she must be at a certain point midyear."

All parent participants whose children had attended a traditional public school described a negative experience or view about the child's academic achievement there. Dad 1 was adamant, "When my son attending a regular traditional elementary school, he barely passed his classes. His teachers would always state that he was reading below grade level but never offered any solutions on how to increase his scores." Mom 4 chimed in, "My main focus was to help my child learn. The test scores at his previous school were horrible. I decided to make a change because test scores were higher here." Additionally, Teacher 1 stated, "The school's test scores were a huge determining factor in me seeking employment here, so I know it has a major impact of parents seeking enrollment for their child here."

Theme 2: School Culture and Climate

The second theme that emerged from the collected data was the idea of school culture and climate. School climate affects the way students, parents, and other education stakeholders feel when they walk into and around the school building (Pelz, 2015). School culture refers to the idea of educational stakeholders working together to establish and reinforce a specific set of shared beliefs and values. Research has suggested that a

positive school climate and culture can promote students' ability to learn (Pelz, 2015).

During one interview, Teacher 2 explained, "I have taught in a few different schools, but this school feels like home to me." Teacher 3 also made a comparison to her previous place of employment, a traditional public school. She said, "The kids did not follow rules. Teachers did not establish high expectations. The school felt like a zoo. This school is calm and refreshing to walk into each and every morning. I love it here." Dad 2 gave a detailed, description of an event that took place at his daughter's previous school, a traditional public school as well. "My daughter went there from kindergarten through second grade. She cried every morning and didn't want to go. She stated that the teachers were mean, the kids teased her, and no adult would ever intervene." Mom 5 could relate to the situation and added, "My daughter was the same. But as soon as she got here to this school, like magic, she was in love with school and looks forward to it." Mom 6 responded,

> I don't know what it is, but the teachers have a way of making a child excited about learning. They greet students every morning, and I have never heard one of them yell, and my son has been here 4 years.

Theme 3: Parental Involvement

The third theme that evolved from the research was the notion of parental involvement. The research determined that parents want to be involved in their child's education, but many parents stated that traditional public school do not encourage healthy parental involvement. Mom 4 said,

Last year, I volunteered to assist in the classroom and was never allowed. When

my child misbehaved, the teacher wanted me to come visit the classroom. I

wanted to be involved positively but was only invited because of something

negative.

In the district, all charter schools have a set number of volunteer hours that parents have

to meet in order for their child to return the following school year. The parents were

excited about the volunteer-hours requirement. Mom 2 stated, "My daughter's old school

would say that they had an open-door policy, but it did not feel that way. The teachers

and administrators acted as if they did not want you there." Dad 1 said, "I enjoy being

involved in my son's education." Mom 3 added, "Parents have to stay involved and

intervene quickly if there is a problem. If your child sees that you don't care about their

education, they won't care either."

A theoretical framework is a collection of interrelated concepts, similar to a

theory, and it guides one's research, determining what will be measured and what

relationships will be explored. This research was guided by the humanistic theory of

Rogers (1951, 1959) and Maslow (1968), including the ideas of choice, deregulation, and

accountability (Gawlik, 2011). Charter schools are a school of choice. When parents

enroll their child into a charter school, instead of a traditional public school, they are

making a choice. Typically, a parent deems this choice to be the best one to fit the child.

When analyzing the research, the data overwhelmingly showed that parents were

choosing to send their children to charter schools so the children could get a good

education. Based on the research, parents were impressed with charter schools because of

their high achievement rates, the school's culture and climate, and the school's

requirement for parental involvement (see Figure 6).
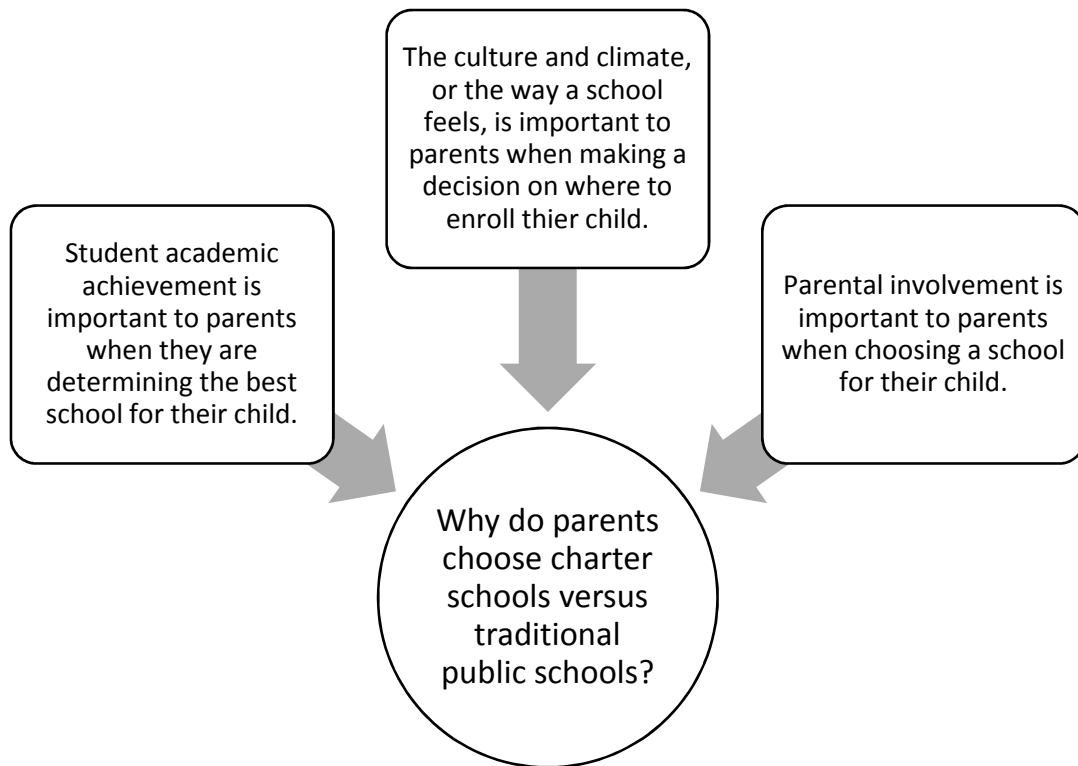
Figure 6. Data concept map showing the three themes answering the main research question.

Triangulation

By using Rogers's (1951, 1959) and Maslow's (1968) humanistic theory to guide

my study, I was able to collect and analyze the data and determine what reasons parents

choose to enroll their children into charter schools as opposed to traditional public

schools, in relation to the framework. In order to ensure that credibility was obtained

from the collected data sources, I used triangulation. An inductive, ground-up, analysis approach was used to aid in the connection of data (Yin, 2014). Triangulation of the focus groups and individual interview data helped to establish credibility and trustworthiness in this study.

Member Checking

Member checking is an important technique that qualitative researchers use to establish credibility (Creswell, 2017). A researcher uses this technique to share interpretations and conclusions from the data with the participants. This process allows research participants to explain what their intentions were, correct errors, and provide additional information to the data collection process if necessary (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2014). In this research, member checking was completed after each focus group was conducted and at the end of each individual interview.

Credibility

In order to show evidence of quality data and assure accuracy and credibility, I triangulated the data by collecting the data through both focus groups and individual interviews. Also, at the end of each focus group, I used member debriefing to summarize and ensure accuracy of the data collected. These processes minimized bias and human error (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2017). No real discrepancies were reported in the data collected. All educational stakeholders shared common beliefs as to why parents were choosing to enroll their children into charter schools, as opposed to traditional public schools. Once data were collected, I entered the transcribed data from the parental focus groups and individual interviews onto a Microsoft Word chart. The chart allowed

me to transcribe, organize, group, and code words and phrases. From those coded words and phrases, I was able to develop themes based on the collected data. The analysis of the words and phrases from the data led to three main themes pertaining to student achievement, school culture and climate, and parental involvement.

Summary

The qualitative case study addressed a major gap in current research. Although there is research focusing on charter schools, limited research is available on charter schools in the school district of this study. Primarily, research has focused on the different types of charter school and their history (Villavicencio, 2013). This research was conducted on two different sites in a large, urban and suburban school district in Georgia. The research included parents, teachers, and administrators who were affiliated with one of the two charter schools. The research addressed parents and their reasons for enrolling their children into charter schools. Three major themes emerged from the research:

1. Academic achievement is important to parents and highly influenced their school choice.

2. School culture and climate can be a determining factor when parents are making school choices for their children. Parents want their children to have a positive learning experience at school.

3. Parents want to be involved in their children's education. Parents want to feel welcomed and invited into the schools.

As a result of the research, I created a policy recommendation. A policy recommendation was selected as the project genre in order to assist in filling the gap between education stakeholders within the district and parents. Parents are required to enroll their children in school, but according to federal law, they are granted choices in where they send their child. Many parents feel that traditional public schools do not adequately educate students. The policy recommendation can be utilized by educational stakeholders in order to improve the district as a whole.

Section 3: The Project

In an effort to improve schools and provide an adequate education to students in Georgia, lawmakers decided parents should have a choice in their child's education. Georgia House Bill 251 provided public school choices within the local school systems (GADOE, 2009). Parents can choose where their child is educated. With this law, parents may choose to send students to a charter, theme, magnet, Montessori, International Baccalaureate, or traditional public school (GADOE, 2009, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to examine education stakeholders' feelings and perceptions of traditional public schools versus charter schools within a school district. Parent perceptions, as well as those of teachers and administrators, were examined to identify the reasons parents chose to enroll their child in a charter school instead of a traditional public school. To understand education stakeholders' perceptions regarding increasing charter school enrollment, parents were asked to participate in a focus group, and teachers and administrators were asked to participate in in-depth individual interviews. During the focus groups and individual interviews, research participants were able to share and expand on their experiences with and opinions about traditional public schools and charter schools. After conducting these focus groups and individual interviews, the data indicated that educational stakeholders share similar perceptions about their visions for what constitutes a good school.

The project that stemmed from the research is a policy recommendation. The policy recommendation includes (a) professional development for teachers that addresses the needs of students and parents and (b) parental engagement activities and education

sessions. The goal of the project is to provide the district with a policy recommendation addressing the concerns shared by parents, teachers, and principals. By creating policy to address these issues, district stakeholders will be knowledgeable and equipped to make the right decisions sooner and provide parents with viable options for adequate schooling facilities.

Description of Project and Goals

The project is a policy recommendation presented as a white paper to the district to address the negative feelings parents have towards traditional public schools and the positive feelings they have towards charter schools in the district. The objective of the project is to present the school district with an action plan to tackle specific needs and desires of parental stakeholders resulting from the perceptions identified through this study. When Georgia lawmakers implemented school choice, parents began to withdraw students from failing schools, schools that did not make AYP, and schools that did not meet the standards set by parents. With all of the research and information readily available to parents, they have knowledge about and high expectations of what to look for in a school so their child can have a favorable, successful outcome.

The recommendation will be made available for all schools in the study school district. The ideas of student achievement, school climate and culture, and parental involvement are addressed and can help develop better relationships between district employees and parents for the betterment of all students within the district. The recommendation has the following goals:

1. The policy recommendation can increase student achievement by providing professional development to teachers.

2. The policy recommendation can promote a positive school culture and climate by creating activities that allow parents to be involved.

3. The policy recommendation can increase parental engagement by providing Parent University sessions that will give parents tips on how to help their child be successful in school. These can include, but are not limited to, reading and math strategies, test-taking skills, and time management.

A policy recommendation can provide advice in both the development and execution of strategies that are necessary to improve an organization (Széger, 2012). Implementing effective policy recommendations is critical to the success of all teachers and students. Based on the collected data from the research, I determined that a policy recommendation for teachers would benefit the district as a whole. Teachers could participate in professional development activities providing useful tips and strategies to increase student achievement, promote a positive culture and climate within the classroom, and increase parental involvement by making them feel welcomed. Parents could participate in informational meetings offering ways to stay involved in their children's school and education.

Theme 1: Student Achievement

The policy recommendation addresses three themes. The first theme is student achievement. I addressed student achievement in the plan by highlighting the district's current data measuring Georgia Milestones scores for students in Grades 3–5; setting

specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound goals; and providing

research-based, effective strategies to address the concerns of parents that I discovered

while conducting research. Further, I presented a time line to implement the strategies

and information on how to analyze the effectiveness of strategy implementation

(Montaño, 2015). For example, some schools have low Georgia Milestones math test

scores. As stated by one parent, "The kids were not learning there [traditional public

school]. Test scores were low, and they did not show growth at all during the 2 years my

daughter was there." Therefore, a goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant

and time bound can be the following: Fifth-grade teachers will increase achievement

among 25% of their beginning learners to developing learners on the Georgia Milestones.

The goal is specifically stated and can be measured by comparing Georgia Milestones

test scores. It is also time bound and must be reevaluated at the end of the school year.

During the professional development sessions, teachers will have the opportunity to

explore various instructional strategies to target areas of academic concern that are

specific to their school site, as deemed by the Advisory Committee.

Theme 2: School Culture and Climate

The second theme is school culture and climate. I addressed these issues by

suggesting professional development that addresses a school-wide, manageable, positive-

behavior system for students. I also provided classroom-management strategies for

teachers. Based on the research, parents would rather walk into a calm environment than

a chaotic one. During the focus group, a parent shared,

I cannot express my feelings of confusion. These schools [prior traditional public school and current charter school] are so different. All I heard was screaming and doors slamming at his old school [traditional public school]. Now I walk into a peaceful environment every morning I walk him to class.

My professional development plan focuses on teacher professional development that can improve relationships between parents and school staff.

Theme 3: Parental Involvement

The third theme is parental involvement. While conducting research, I heard parents say that traditional public schools made them feel as if parents should not be present. One parent said of the charter school,

I like the required 20 hours of volunteer service. Even when I don't feel like it, I am still motivated to get up and do something for the school. Even if I make copies for the teacher, I know that simple gesture allows the teacher to focus on the student more.

The policy recommendation that I created addresses the issue of making schools inviting to parents. Many parents do not want to be alienated by their child's school, but many of have felt this way at some point in their child's former school, an issue supported by the literature (Sime & Sheridan, 2014). As a result, the policy recommendation focuses on getting and keeping parents involved.

Goals

This policy recommendation addresses some of the issues presented by parents, teachers, and administrators during the study. The project suggests the district establish

programs to increase student achievement through implementation of a professional

development program for teachers addressing areas of weaknesses at each school site.

The program will promote parental engagement by hosting school-wide events and

learning sessions designed to keep parents involved. The program also may improve

school climate by implementing professional development for teachers and

administrators that is designed to improve the quality and character of school life.

Goal 1: Increase student achievement. Student achievement will be measured

by students showing growth on the Georgia Milestones assessment in areas of deficits as

determined by the Advisory Committee at each individual school. For instance, one

school may want to focus on improving science scores while another school has a severe

deficit in math. As a result, the professional development sessions for teachers will be

tailored to each individual school site.

Goal 2: Promote a positive school climate and culture. The second goal is to

promote a positive school climate and culture as determined by College & Career Ready

Performance Index (CCRPI) scores. CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement,

accountability, and communication platform that is designed for all education

stakeholders (GADOE, 2017a). The goal is to promote college and career readiness for

all Georgia public school students. CCRPI is composed of many factors, including a

school climate star rating (GADOE, 2017a). The project focuses on providing

professional development for teachers that will aid in increasing CCRPI scores. Parents

are able to provide feedback, and scores are generated annually. CCRPI scores after

implementation of the policy recommendation will be compared to scores prior to the policy recommendation.

  Goal 3: Encourage parental involvement. The third goal is to encourage parental involvement. Each individual school site will have the opportunity to be creative in how they will address the issue of parental involvement. This will be done through the use of Parent University sessions to help parents become more engaged in their child's education and also through entertaining community events for parents and their children. Parental engagement throughout the district will be monitored and analyzed by a survey that will be administered at the beginning and end of the first year of implementation of the policy recommendation.

  In brief, the project recommended for the district has three goals. The goals can be achieved through professional development sessions for teachers, parental engagement activities, and information sessions for parents. If the policy recommendations are followed, the district could reach a new level of academic success and a higher approval rating from parents.

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Rationale

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  A policy recommendation was selected as the project genre to assist in filling the gap between district stakeholders' intentions and parents' perceptions. As district officials create policies that school building administrators are expected to carry out with the aid of staff members, little thought goes into fully and effectively implementing the policy. Although all educational stakeholders may have good intentions, often realistic goals are not set or teachers or administrators are not provided with the tools needed for

success. As a result, schools may not perform well academically, establish a positive learning culture and climate, or promote parental involvement. Unfortunately, these are what parents look for when choosing a school for their child.

Analysis of the data from this study evidenced that the stakeholders agree schools must be held to a certain standard, and parents have nonnegotiables related to choosing a school for their child. Parents expressed concerns about academic achievement. One parent stated, "His last school was on the failing list. I don't want my child to fail." By creating a policy recommendation, some of their concerns about academic achievement, school culture and climate, and parental involvement can be addressed by putting plans in place to alleviate some of the anxieties that parents have regarding school choice.

The study indicated that parents, teachers, and administrators shared common beliefs about why parents are choosing to enroll their child into charter schools as opposed to traditional public schools. The problems revealed through the study are addressed through the policy recommendation provided to district leaders and the Board of Education. The plan communicates educational stakeholders' concerns in a logical and organized manner and provides an outline for interventions and recommended practices for all education stakeholders across the district. The policy recommendation could help teachers and administrators to bridge the gap between school and home by opening up the door of communication and encouraging school staff to listen to parents more effectively (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). Furthermore, the plan provides suggestions on how to improve student achievement, how to establish a positive school culture and climate for learning, and how to promote parental involvement.

Review of Literature

In order to develop and execute a change in the existing policy concerning the relationships among stakeholders in the district, a policy recommendation will be made to the local Board of Education. A policy recommendation is written policy advice prepared for those in a group with the authority to make decisions for that group (Cummings, 2007). Policy recommendations are the primary instruments used to create a change in policy. A policy recommendation identifies specific findings (Creswell, 2012) and determines a plan of action for improving problematic issues. When the need for change has been established, selecting a format for change, implementation planning, and maintenance and evaluation are areas that should be addressed (Cresswell, Bates, & Sheikh, 2013).

Despite mixed beliefs on the effectiveness of charter schools, enrollment is continuously increasing throughout the study district. In this study, perceptions of stakeholders were identified to gain an understanding of why parents choose charter over traditional public schools. Ultimately, the district's goal is for all students to learn and succeed. Student success should occur not only within charter schools, but also in traditional public schools. So, instead of only preparing charter schools with the necessary tools for student success, district officials should focus on examining ways to proactively address the needs of all students within the district (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the genre of project, a policy recommendation, is appropriate to address the problem and bring about favorable results for the district.

The basic assumptions of humanism are that humans have free will, not all behavior is determined, and all individuals are unique and are motivated to achieve their potential (Huitt, 2009). Humanism emphasizes the study of the whole person, motivation, acceptance, and belonging within the learning community as necessary for students to meet personal goals (Rogers, 1951). According to Maslow (1968) and Ediger (2012), one of the most important factors for student achievement and academic success in school is the need to belong to a family of learners.

Based on the results of the research findings, I created a policy recommendation that outlines a plan to improve parents' perceptions of all schools within the county, by addressing the challenges and problems parents face when choosing a school for their child within the district. This policy recommendation, in the form of a white paper, provides a summary of the study's results and gives a detailed plan of action in an easy-to-read format. The plan will allow district leaders to fully and easily implement the recommendation across the district. The research findings showed that when making school choice, parents value student achievement, positive school culture and climate, and encouragement of parental involvement. The proposed policy recommendation provides suggestions for the district to meet parents' expectations. Using educational databases including ERIC and SAGE, key words and phrases such as *charter school*, *traditional public school*, *student achievement, parent involvement, poverty, parent-teacher communication, school climate, school culture,* and *professional development* were used to find research that aligned with the project recommendations.

Professional Development

Professional development is vital when making changes in the educational system and empowering teachers to make a difference in the lives of all learners. Education research has shown teaching quality and school leadership to be the most important factors in student achievement (Hunter, 2015; Mizell, 2010). School districts and individual school sites must provide teachers with effective and appropriate training to help them succeed in their profession (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Mizell, 2010). Teachers should be lifelong learners and receive challenging, worthwhile professional development that will stimulate and increase their own growth while providing them the most up-to-date, research-based information about effective practices (Taylor, 2017).

Quality professional development takes many factors of education into consideration. It highlights teacher and student differences and includes a plethora of strategies, such as whole-group and small-group instruction, one-on-one interaction, online sessions, and classroom coaching, all designed to meet teachers' varied learning styles (Silva & Herdeiro, 2014). According to Yuen (2012), professional development should be an ongoing process that focuses on real classroom issues, occurs within the context of the teacher's practice, and is integrated into teachers' daily work to impact their professional practice. It should not be delivered in isolation, but as a continued model for growth. Teachers should gain not only the skills to become an effective teacher, but also numerous opportunities to experiment with them in class, observe others successfully using the techniques, and collaborate with team members to discuss the success and failure of the skill implementation.

Moreover, research has shown that often teachers have not been thoroughly prepared to work effectively with parents and provide parents with strategies to help their children at home. Professional development can help form a school–home partnership (Silva & Herdeiro, 2014). Teachers need professional development providing them with skills on how to relate to and interact with parents so that positive interactions are encouraged among educational stakeholders.

Academic Achievement

Many factors can affect academic achievement (Gulosino & Lubienski, 2011). Society is forever changing, and teachers must prepare and equip themselves with skills and strategies to meet the needs and challenges of students served (Silva & Herdeiro, 2014). The quality of teaching, teacher–student relationships, as well as classroom organization in schools can impact a student's ability to learn (Clark et al., 2015).

School administrators can affect academic achievement as they are direct leaders of a school building. Research has shown a strong correlation between school leadership and student achievement (Adams, 2013). School leaders have some flexibility in their authority and autonomy to implement and change policies as they see fit to meet the needs of the teachers and students they serve; leaders should utilize this autonomy to work towards increasing students' academic achievement (Clifford, Menon, Gangi, Condon, & Hornung, 2012). As leaders in the education profession, their task and responsibility are to be as prepared as possible and to provide both academic and emotional support to students and families (Burgess, 2012).

Circumstances outside of school should be considered when measuring academic achievement (Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012). Home life can affect academic achievement (Gulosino & Lubienski, 2011). If a student does not have a stable environment, achieving academic success can be challenging. Studies have suggested a relationship between mobility and academic achievement, as highly mobile students tend to perform at a level below that of their stable counterparts (Klein et al., 2012). Health issues also can negatively affect academic achievement (Singh, Uijtdewilligen, Twisk, van Mechelen, & Chinapaw, 2012).

School Climate and Culture

The way a parent feels when entering the child's school is important. School climate is based on people's experiences of school life and highlights typical behaviors, objectives, ethics, principles, beliefs, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and how an organization is regulated (Clifford et al., 2012). Current research has shown that school climate has a profound impact on students, both mentally and physically (Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012). School climate affects students' self-esteem (Shirley & Cornell, 2012) and can alleviate the negative outcomes of stressful situations (Klein et al., 2012). Also, researchers have found a positive association between school climate and student academic achievement (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

A school is only as strong as its leader. School administrators set the tone for their school building. Consequently, a school's leader has the ability to affect the school's culture and climate (Adams, 2013). Effective school leaders act as role models for

students and teachers and work collaboratively to establish tolerance, respect for one another, and high expectations for all (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

Parent Communication and Involvement

Parental involvement and effective communication are elements that teachers deemed necessary; teachers are always working to find ways to improve and increase parental involvement. Parental participation in a child's education provides value to a student's success (Sime & Sheridan, 2014). Research has shown that a higher amount of parental involvement throughout elementary school leads to higher reading achievement level, increased intrinsic motivation, and higher standardized test scores (Steiner, 2014).

Unfortunately, parents from a low socioeconomic background are not as likely to participate in school-wide activities as their more affluent counterparts, due to work schedules or other life situations (Ellis, Thompson, McNicholl, & Thomson, 2016). Also, parents' educational background can prevent them from being involved in their child's education, because they may lack the knowledge to help students with homework assignments (Steiner, 2014). Moreover, to encourage parental involvement, school leaders first must focus on strengthening parents and providing tools to help them help their children (Steiner, 2014).

Most individuals think that parental involvement leads to high academic achievement for students (Sime & Sheridan, 2014). It is also often viewed as an effective way to assist students who are struggling academically (Sime & Sheridan, 2014). However, parental involvement changes as a student progresses through grade levels. Parental involvement typically decreases as students enter high school. Further,

inconsistent views of the phrase "parental involvement" can create problems surrounding the topic (Sime & Sheridan, 2014).

Policy Implementation

The district should consider implementing a policy that focuses on views and perceptions of parents within the district. The policy includes an action plan that focuses on the problems and concerns revealed by the stakeholders and would provide educational sessions supported by current research. The policy recommendation will be implemented within 2 years. Year 1 is reserved for selecting candidates and training individuals on their roles during the full-implementation year. In Year 2 the policy will be implemented. The plan includes monthly teacher professional development sessions, Parent University sessions, and parental engagement activities. The Advisory Committee will meet quarterly.

Regional Superintendent

The district has five regional superintendents. They will oversee the project to ensure that it is being implemented within the school located in their particular region.

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee will be comprised of parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches. They will oversee the monthly activities and make recommendations and changes as needed. The Advisory Committee should meet quarterly or more frequently as needed. The academic data coach will direct the meetings and the projects of the committee, making proposals to the regional superintendent and Board of Education as needed.

Parent University

During Parent University sessions, parents will receive valuable information that will strengthen the relationships between teacher and parent, parent and child, and teacher and student. These programs will be scheduled at times most convenient for the demographics served, and transportation will be provided by the district, if necessary.

Professional Development

During professional development sessions, teachers will gain skills necessary to be effective in the classroom when teaching students as well as effectively communicating with parents and promoting parental involvement. The collaboration among teachers and committee members will strengthen the mindset and abilities of teachers and allow them to use best practices in the class to promote academic success.

Parental Engagement Events

During parental engagement events, school sites should concentrate on building trust, opening the lines of communication, and collaborating with parents to best meet the needs of all students in the district. The policy stems from the research indicating parents do not feel welcomed or encouraged to visit schools. The proposed parental engagement events will promote interaction between parents and district stakeholders.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

Several individuals employed by the school district can serve as a support specialist during the implementation of the policy recommendations. By using parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, academic data coaches, and federal funds, some existing support can assist schools when implementing the policy

recommendations. These school leaders, along with school administration, could be the determining factor in the successful implementation of Parent University and professional development for teachers as well. As these leaders do not have a classroom to operate daily, they can facilitate professional development both during and after school. Moreover, these school leaders can collaborate with teachers to establish guidelines and locate useful materials and supplies to facilitate Parent University.

Potential Barriers

Money, time, and resistance to change can be potential barriers for implementing the Parent University at schools within the district. Currently, parent centers are located in some schools, but not all. Even those with parent centers are not fully accomplishing the tasks of raising student achievement, promoting positive school climate and culture, or promoting parental involvement. To fully implement Parent University, the district will have to provide funds for facilitators, transportation, and supplies to conduct training seminars. The district also will have to provide funds for the professional development for teachers. Time will be an additional potential barrier. The policy recommended for parents, teachers, and administrators will take place both during the school day or after school hours. Consequently, arrangements will have to be made prior to the date so that participants' schedules allow them to attend Parent University or the professional development. Despite the policy recommendation, all educational stakeholders may not buy in to the idea of change.

Although data collected did yield various aspects where schools need improvement, the policy recommendation does come with limitations. There are time

constraints. It may be difficult for schools and classroom teachers to fully implement the policy recommendations based on the time allowed. Budget issues are also a concern. The district will have to create a budget that will allocate funds to implement the policy recommendation. Finally, some individuals are resistant to change. District leaders will have to create a sense of urgency and provide research to show how the policy recommendation will improve the livelihood of all education stakeholders within the school district.

Proposal for Implementation of Time Line

The proposed time line for implementation will vary depending on the funding allocated. In a perfect situation, all recommendations made within the project would be implemented within one school year to ensure that parents' issues and concerns are addressed in timely fashion. However, due to budget and time constraints, this may not be possible. Throughout the year, parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches would meet with regional superintendents to provide feedback and suggest further recommendations as they plan for implementation the following year (see Table 3).

Table 3

Implementation of Policy Recommendation

Time line	Recommendations
	Year 1
August–May	• Recruit parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists and academic data coaches to participate in Parent University and teacher professional development. • Leaders will determine the priorities and specific details that should be addressed at their particular school. • Leaders will create a school-wide calendar of including the full schedule of Parent University and professional development activities.
	Year 2
August	• Open the school year with a back-to-school kickoff celebration. All parents within the community will be invited. The specifics of the kickoff will be determined by the committee at each school site. All schools should provide adequate notice, fun, family-oriented activities, food, music, and a learning seminar to help parents prepare for the school year. • Professional development for teachers and administration: "Helping Parents Help Their Children."
September	• Conduct parent engagement events at each building in conjunction with parent teacher conferences • Professional development for teachers and administration: "Communicating With Parents."
October	• Conduct parental engagement events at each building in conjunction with Curriculum Night (Fall Festival). • Provide professional development for teachers and administration: "What Do our Students Lack Socially and Emotionally?" • Advisory Committee (parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches) meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.
November	• Thanksgiving luncheon & Parent University session: "Working Collaboratively With my Child's Teacher" • Professional development for teachers and administration: "What Do Students Lack Economically, and how Can We Close the Gap to Ensure Academic Success?"

(table continues)

Time line	Recommendations
December	• Parent University session, make-and-take literacy night • Professional development for teachers and administration: "What Skills Do Students Lack Academically?
January	• Parent University session: "Reading at Home Can Make a Difference" • Professional development on interventions/remediation/strategies to increase student achievement (based on the needs at each individual school, identified by teachers and/or the committee) • Advisory Committee meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.
February	• Father/daughter and mother/son sweetheart dance in conjunction with an "I Love Math/Science Night." The subject can vary based on the needs of each particular school site. • Professional development: "Understanding and Communicating With the Next Generation." (This session will include how to incorporate technology and social media into the classroom.)
March	• Conduct parent engagement Spring Fling at each building in conjunction with parent-teacher conferences. • Parent University session: "Testing and Test-Taking Tips" • Professional development: "How to Motivate Students During Testing"
April	• Conduct parent engagement events at each building on helping children manage anger, stress, and frustration • Professional development: "Creating a Welcoming Classroom" • Advisory Committee meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.
May	• Conduct parent engagement "Splashing Into Summer" at each building in conjunction with the completion of parental surveys, highlighting the glows, grows, and concerns of the school year. • Professional development: "Teacher Reflection"
June	• Provide summer Parent University sessions (topics for discussion chosen based on the needs of each school site).
July	• Advisory Committee meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.

Roles and Responsibilities

In order to fully implement this policy recommendation and concentrate on the

needs of parents and students within the district, numerous stakeholders must be

involved. The district has five regions. The regional superintendent could manage the

implementation and progress monitoring of the recommended policies. Teachers and

administrators would be responsible for serving on the Advisory Committee to make

recommendations to parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and

academic data coaches as needed. The parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support

specialists, and academic data coaches would be responsible for conducting the

professional development for classroom teachers and for training staff members on

conducting parental involvement activities to bridge the gap between home and school.

Principals and teachers within the elementary schools would be responsible for

scheduling and conducting the parental engagement sessions, using the recommended

checklists, and participating in professional development. The parent liaisons, counselors,

instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches would work with the teachers

to identify strategies and activities that should be ongoing and those that should be

altered, based on the feedback from parents. As the researcher, I would be available for

conferencing with the involved stakeholders and could provide recommendations if

requested.

Project Evaluation Plan

The goal of the evaluation plan is to determine if the proposed project, the policy

recommendation, is beneficial to the district. Evaluative data will be analyzed while

stakeholders continue to implement the proposed policies. Education stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators, will be asked to complete a survey before the policy recommendation is implemented and again after Year 1 of implementation. By surveying the district's stakeholders about the project, I will be able to examine if the policy recommendation was implemented; if it led to change in current educational practice; and if the change was positive, negative, or neutral. If requested, these results will be shared with the district leaders. The policy recommendation was designed to meet the following goals:

1. Increase student achievement by providing professional development to teachers.

2. Promote positive school culture and climate by creating activities that allow parents to be involved.

3. Increase parental engagement by providing Parent University sessions.

As the implementation of project components is evaluated, I will be able further to identify if the project has positive, negative, or neutral effects on the concerns identified and addressed in this study. Goal 1 will be evaluated by analyzing Georgia Milestone test scores of select schools in the district to determine if academic gains are met within the district as a whole. The project evaluation will include formative evaluations through surveys and questionnaires distributed by the Advisory Committee. The surveys and questionnaires will be provided to participants throughout the year after events such as professional development and parent engagement events to gauge to effectiveness of each program. Parents' views and perceptions of the school will be

evaluated throughout the year as well, to check for improvement. An inclusive survey will be given to parents, teachers, and administrators at the end of Year 1 of implementation to determine the overall effectiveness of the project and to determine if Goals 2 and 3 have been met. Further evaluation will occur through yearly comparisons of school enrollment and CCRPI scores. Although results may not be fully evident for a few years, if the project is successful, a summative evaluation may show that fewer parents are withdrawing students from traditional public schools due to low student achievement, negative school culture and climate, or lack of the ability to be involved in their child's education. Finally, if the policy recommendation is implemented within the district, I will invite education stakeholders to participate in focus groups and interviews at the end of the 2-year implementation phase to determine if the project has indeed changed the views and perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators related to why charter school enrollment is increasing.

Justification

This type of evaluation is justified because the district's current realities will be compared to the end results after project implementation. The ability to compare and contrast perceptions of educational stakeholders, student achievement scores, and school climate both before and after the project will provide an overall evaluation of the implemented project. This will aid in assessing if the project has been beneficial for the school district.

Project Implications

Many challenges were revealed through the research conducted. The findings may lead to district-wide improvements. Research has indicated that negative schools can have negative results for students (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Unfortunately, schools are still operating that have failed to make state-mandated academic progress. By implementing this project and focusing on academic achievements, school culture and climate, and parental involvement, social change may occur within the community where trust has been lost. Within the district, students could benefit from the implementation of a strategic plan to improve schools, if the plan is executed with fidelity. Parents will have the reassurance that the district has made great efforts to make sure their children are receiving a good education, possibly resulting in fewer parents feeling the need to abandon traditional public schools. With the implementation of this project, teachers will receive support by establishing and developing their skills through professional development. Moreover, the policy recommendation will take some of the pressure off classroom teachers as they see district and building leaders stepping up more to support and increase academic achievement, school culture and climate, and parental involvement. On a local scale, the district will be able to promote positive practices within the state and provide artifacts demonstrating how they created change and established trust by bridging the gap between school and home.

On a larger scale, this project has the potential to benefit students in other districts within Georgia as well. As a result of ESSA (2015), all students in the country have the right to achieve academic success (GADOE, 2017a). If district leaders fully implement

the recommended policy, findings could be transferable and beneficial to students across the state.

Conclusion

The state of Georgia has determined that all schools are not adequately performing in regards to academic achievement. Many educational stakeholders within the district are in agreement that action needs to take place, and utilizing school choice is a viable option. However, parents, teachers, and administrators all agreed that all students within the district deserve a good education, not just the ones exercising their right to school choice. Therefore, all schools within the district have to reevaluate their practices. Considering their concerns and current research on effective practices for schools with great deficiencies, this policy recommendation was created to address specific areas of need. The policy recommendation addresses the views and perceptions of studied parents, teachers, and administrators and how they feel about traditional public schools versus charter schools in the district. The policy recommendation was created to potentially improve all schools within the district. This can be done by fully implementing the policy recommendation that focuses on student academic achievement, positive school culture and climate, and promotion of parental engagement.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

This research provided descriptive, detail-rich data to aid in understanding parents' views and perceptions on charter schools. The focus groups allowed for parents to speak openly about their experiences with charter schools and traditional public schools. As a result, I was able to group data into emerging themes. The individual interviews allowed me to understand the phenomena from the teachers' and administrators' points of view. The two forms of data collection worked together to answer the research question: Why do parents enroll their children in charter schools? Best practices were researched and included in the policy recommendation to fully address parents' concerns.

The project has strengths and can benefit the district. The project will allow teachers and administrators receive professional development not only in terms of weaknesses determined by parents during the study, but also on issues decided on by the in-house Advisory Committee. This will allow for professional development to be tailored to each school site.

The project has the potential to resolve issues regarding why parents are withdrawing students from traditional public schools and enrolling them into charter schools. However, the research only focused on two charter schools in the district. If time permitted, I could have collected data from more than two schools. This would have allowed me to gain more insight on the district, and not just two schools with similar demographics. I also could have collected data from participants at the beginning,

middle, and end of the school year, instead of relying solely on a snapshot of data. Time constraints were a limiting factor as well. Budget concerns also limited the project. Many schools within the district do not have funds allocated for parental engagement activities or profession development that is not predetermined by the district or administrators at each school. Parental engagement activities and informational sessions could be more detailed and elaborate if funds were readily available in all schools for these types of activities.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The research problem was that within an urban and suburban, large school district in Georgia, many parents have been removing students from public schools and opting for charter schools. Parents are deciding that the traditional public school does not adequately educate their child. These parents are exercising their right to school choice and opting for a charter school instead.

The question was why parents choose charter schools over traditional public schools. The problem could have been addressed differently by focusing on several charter schools with different demographics. This would have allowed me to gain different point of views. Also, it would have been interesting to include stakeholders affiliated with traditional public schools to understand their perception and feelings about charter schools and traditional public schools.

Scholarship, Project Development, Leadership, and Change

By collecting qualitative data through the use of focus groups and individual interviews, I was able to obtain a full understanding and view of the perceptions of

parents related to their decision to enroll their child in charter schools. As a result of the research, I am now aware that many parents made the decision to enroll their children into charter schools because of academic concerns, school climate, and parental involvement. Understanding the reasons for a parent's decision can help education stakeholders improve the climate of all schools in the district.

As a project developer, I learned that change takes time, patience, and trial and error. Change within the district also should be specific to each school site. For success within the district to become a reality, three goals must be met. First, schools must increase student achievement. Next, schools must establish a positive school culture and climate. Finally, schools must actively seek out parental involvement and be accommodating to parents. All three of these goals can be achieved by thoroughly preparing classroom teachers through professional development, helping parents stay informed by providing informational sessions with Parent University, and allowing parents to stay through the planning of parental engagement activities.

My experience in the Doctorate of Education program has allowed me to grow socially, academically, and professionally by helping me gain a better understanding of the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators from the role of a researcher. Although I am a classroom teacher, I was able to avoid researcher bias and conduct focus groups and individual interviews from a professional standpoint by only writing down what was said and not add my opinions into the data. I did know a few of the participants due to working with them years before the study. I have personal experience with the research topic because I work in a charter school. Due to these experiences, I have some

understanding of why many parents are choosing charter schools versus traditional public schools.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

As a researcher using a qualitative case study, my experience with research has been educational. While going through this experience, I have become more aware of research biases and preconceived notions regarding the research topic. I quickly realized that being aware of these biases throughout the research process made me a better researcher. I did not want my own personal thoughts and experiences to influence the research participants' responses, so I had to keep my biases at bay while I was collecting data. I discovered that triangulation of the collected data, as well as audio recording, debriefing members, and using a chart for data analysis, helped to keep my personal biases away from the research. After completing this research, my goal would be for schools within the district to improve through the use of the policy recommended for teacher professional development, parent informational sessions, and parental involvement activities. In order for this goal to be reached, all education stakeholders must work together to improve schools within the district for the betterment of students.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project has the potential to have a big impact on social change. On the individual level, it has the potential to strengthen teachers' effectiveness in the classroom by providing professional development opportunities for growth. The project provides parental engagement activities that can create and foster stronger bonds within the family. Also, the project focuses on improving one school district by supporting parents,

teachers, and administrators during the implementation of the professional development for teachers, parent informational sessions, and parental involvement activities. Finally, this project promotes social change by creating a policy recommendation that can be transferrable to all districts within the State of Georgia that need to focus on student achievement, school climate, and parental engagement. This, in turn, will create well-rounded citizens throughout the state who are able to compete in a global market. These implications for social change do not exceed the study boundaries and are easily manageable based on the policy recommendation for professional development, parent informational sessions, and parental involvement activities.

This qualitative case study had two main limitations: the location of the research sites and the number of research participants used for study. Future research could include other schools in different regions within the district. Because both sites were in similar regions within the district, relating the research findings in this study to different school sites in different regions of the district may be difficult. Also, future research could include a larger sample size.

The two sources of data collection for this study included focus groups with parents and individual interviews with teachers and administrators. The use of multiple sources of data within the research helped contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of why parents are choosing to enroll their children in charter schools instead of traditional public schools (Denzin, 2012). The two sources of data collection did allow for triangulation to occur. However, additional sources such as school-wide documents, parent–teacher documents, and district documents could have been used to

add to the research findings. Future researchers also may focus on specific reasons why parents left the traditional public school instead of why they chose to enroll their child in a charter school.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis of this qualitative case study, the district faces challenges. A breakdown has occurred in communication and transparency between school and home. As a result, trust between the two groups has been lost. Parents are no longer comfortable with traditional public schools and are seeking alternatives. Research has shown parents are finding charter schools to be a favorable solution. Parents are their children's biggest advocate. Although the idea of making sure the child gets a good education developed as a theme in this research, what that actually meant to research participants varied. To parents, a good education means their children make As and Bs and can independently complete their homework. To teachers and administrators, a good education means showing academic growth related to universal screeners, standardized test scores, social growth, and a love for school. When deciding on the culture of a school and how it is viewed by parents, education stakeholders can consider ways to bridge the gap between school and home so that children are indeed receiving the best education.

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Appendix A: The Project

Executive Summary

Georgia provides parents with school choice, giving them options for selecting a school for their child. The idea of school choice is a reform movement focused on affording parents the right to choose what school their child attends (Gulosino & Lubienski, 2011). Parents therefore have the option to withdraw their child from an underperforming school, as well as to not enroll their child in a school designated as low achieving. This choice is good for parents but generally does not fix the problem that exists within the lower performing school.

This policy recommendation was created, as a suggestion, for the administrative leaders and Board of Education of the school district based on the analysis of data from a qualitative case study conducted to examine education stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of charter schools within the district. Thirty-seven participants, including 21 parents, 13 teachers, and two administrators, took part in individual interviews and focus groups to share their perceptions on charter schools within the district. The goal of this policy recommendation is to provide the district with the overall results of the study, including perceptions of education stakeholders' view on charter schools and to suggest an action plan to address the needs identified in the study. The plan of action will help the district by focusing on addressing some of the issues parents were concerned about in the study: to increase academic achievement, to create a positive learning environment for children and teachers, and to foster parental involvement.

The policy recommendation provides a detailed outline of a plan to address the needs of parents, teachers, and students within the district and includes the components of an Advisory Committee, parental engagement events and learning sessions, and professional development for teachers. A proposed timeline for implementation is outlined, as well as a method of evaluation for the recommended proposal.

Improving All Schools: A Policy Recommendation

In present-day society, most people have opinions about the educational system in the United States. It does not matter if an individual is an insider within the profession, or an outsider with no experience in the field, chances are, the person will have opinions about today's state of education. In an effort to find ways to help struggling students, the United States has progressed from the No Child Left Behind legislation passed in early 2002 to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). Decision makers in the state of Georgia decided that school choice would be a feasible solution for failing schools. However, it does not help the students who continue to attend the failing school.

This legislation led to a qualitative case study conducted with parents, teachers, and administrators from two charter schools within the district. The results of this study provided data used to create a policy recommendation. The policy recommendation was designed to address the needs of students, parents, and teachers within the district. The goal of this project was to present the findings of the study, including stakeholders' perceptions, and offer a practical plan to strategically address student needs.

During the qualitative case study, parental focus groups and individual interviews with teachers and administrators were conducted to better understand why parents are

choosing charter schools versus traditional public schools. The study explored the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators in regard to the views and perceptions they have about charter schools within the district. By comparing the perceptions about charter schools within the district, leaders can understand many of the reasons parents are withdrawing students from traditional public schools and opting for charter schools instead.

Current Research on Charter Schools

Charter schools have become popular with parents who want to see their child succeed academically, and charter school enrollment is constantly increasing. According to recent data, over 1.5 million students attend charter schools across the nation (Holmes, 2011). Based on research data obtained from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, charter school performance between 2010 and 2013 was largely positive (Ash, 2013). "The report examined 14 different studies from 2010 to 2013—11 regional studies and three national studies—and found that all but one showed charter school students outperforming their regular public school peers" (Ash, 2013, p. #). See Figure A1.

Charter schools are held accountable for meeting the goals outlined in their charter (Gawlik, 2015). If goals are not met, the organizers run the risk of the charter being terminated and the school being forced to close (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). However, many charter schools' administration team and staff members do not obtain any special education or training to aid in its accountability factor (Gawlik, 2011). Wei, Patel, and Young (2014) stated that few studies have examined the differences in school leadership between charter and traditional public schools. The studies available

found mixed results, with some studies showing little difference between leaders of

traditional public and charter schools and the rest showing more noticeable differences

(Wei et al., 2014).
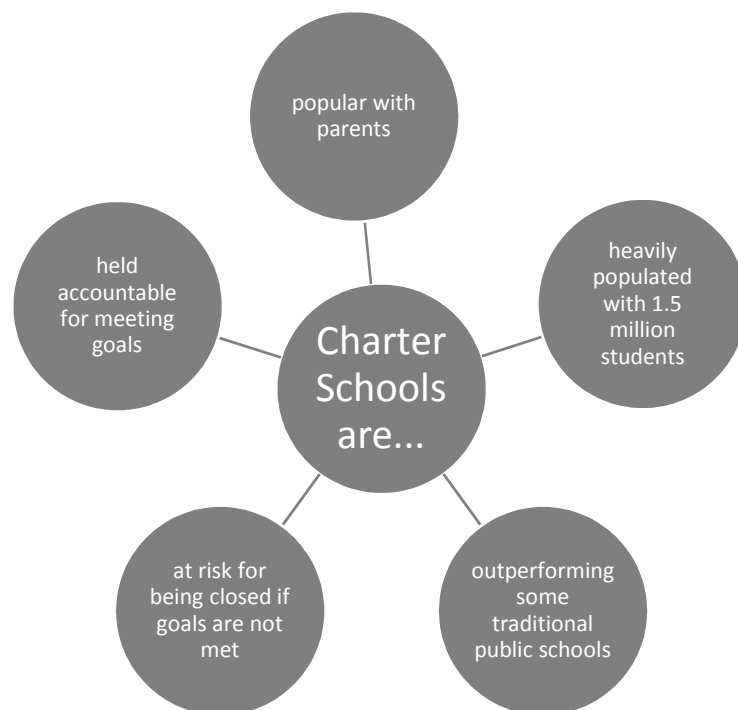
Figure A1. Summary of research on charter schools.

Local Stakeholders' Perceptions of Charter Schools

The sample for the study included 21 parents, 13 teachers, and two administrators

from two charter schools with a large number of students enrolled. The two schools were

identified through district data and chosen based on standardized test scores and student

enrollment. After comparing the number of students enrolled and factoring in test scores

and growth, the two charter schools were asked to participate in the study.

After the focus groups and interviews were conducted, the responses were coded and sorted into reoccurring themes that provided insight on stakeholders' perceptions, answering the research questions of the study. The participants' responses offer an understanding of why parents choose charter schools over traditional public schools (see Table A1).

Table A1

Emerging Themes

Questions	Themes emerging from focus groups & interviews
How do you feel when you visit this charter school? Describe the culture here.	Academic achievement is an important factor when parents are making school choice.
	The culture and climate of a school are determining factors when parents are choosing a school.
Describe your experiences with your child's education in the past and present. How do they differ?	The culture and climate of a school is a determining factor when parents are deciding on a school for children
	Academic achievement is an important factor when parents are making school choice.
What qualities led you to make the decision to enroll your child in this charter school? How did they influence your decision?	Parents want to be involved in their children's education and school-wide activities.
Now that you are a part of this charter school, what elements of the charter school give you the confidence to know that your child/children are being prepared for the next academic year?	Academic achievement is an important factor when parents are making school choice.
In your opinion, what makes this charter school different from the traditional public schools in this area?	The culture and climate of a school are determining factors when parents are choosing a school.

The themes created were derived from the recurring beliefs and statements that were presented repeatedly from multiple participants throughout the study, emerging from the coded data. Three themes emerged:

- Academic achievement is an important factor when parents are making school choice.

- The culture and climate of a school are determining factors when parents are choosing a school.

- Parents want to be involved in their children's education and school-wide activities.

The first and by far the most repeated theme that quickly emerged was the idea of student achievement. Overwhelmingly, when posed with the question of why a charter school was chosen for their child into a charter school, all focus-group and interview participants stated that it was mainly because parents wanted their child to receive a better education. Mom 1 stated, "My child was not learning at his previous school. I would ask him about his day, and there was never any real response. Now we have full discussions about his daily activities." Similarly, Mom 2 insisted, "My daughter has drastically improved over the last 3 years since we first enrolled here. She is also active in her learning by setting her own personal goals." Mom 3 added, "This is true. My daughter is able to communicate her Lexile and RIT scores. She knows that she must be at a certain point midyear."

Parents had a negative experience, view, or comment about their child's academic achievement when they attended a traditional public school. Dad 1 was adamant, "When

my son attended a regular traditional elementary school, he barely passed his classes. His teachers would always state that he was reading below grade level, but never offered any solutions on how to increase his scores." Mom 4 chimed in, "My main focus was to help my child learn. The test scores at his previous school were horrible. I decided to make a change because test scores were higher here [at the charter school]." Teacher 1 stated, "The school's test scores were a huge determining factor in me seeking employment."

The second theme that emerged from the collected data was the importance of school culture and climate. School climate affects how students and parents and other education stakeholders feel when they walk into and around the school building (Pelz, 2015). School culture refers to the idea of education stakeholders working together to establish and reinforce a specific set of shared beliefs and values. Research has suggested that positive school climate and school culture can promote students' ability to learn (Pelz, 2015). During one interview, Teacher 2 added, "I have taught in a few different schools, but this school feels like home to me." Teacher 3 also made a comparison to her previous place of employment, a traditional public school. She said, "The kids did not follow rules. Teachers did not establish high expectations. The school felt like a zoo. This school is calm and refreshing to walk into each and every morning. I love it here." Dad 2 gave a detailed, description of an event that took place at his daughter's previous traditional public school. "My daughter went there from kindergarten through second grade. She cried every morning and didn't want to go. She stated that the teachers were mean, the kids teased her and no adult would ever intervene." Mom 5 could relate to the situation and added, "My daughter was the same. But as soon as she got here to this

school, like magic, she was in love with school and looks forward to it." Mom 6 responded,

> I don't know what it is, but the teachers have a way of making a child excited about learning. They greet students every morning and I have never heard one of them yell, and my son has been here 4 years.

The third theme that evolved from the research was the view of parental involvement. The findings indicated that parents want to be involved in their child's education, but many parents stated that traditional public school do not encourage healthy parental involvement. Mom 4 said,

> Last year, I volunteered to assist in the classroom and was never allowed. When my child misbehaved, the teacher wanted me to come visit the classroom. I wanted to be involved positively, but was only invited because of something negative.

In the district, all charter schools have a set number of volunteer hours that parents have to meet for their child to return the following school year. The volunteer hours are well received by parents, who were excited that the charter school has the requirement. Mom 2 explained, "My daughter's old school would say that they had an open-door policy, but it did not feel that way. The teachers and administrators acted as if they did not want you there." "I enjoy being involved in my son's education," said Dad 1. Mom 3 added, "Parents have to stay involved and intervene quickly if there is a problem. If your child sees that you don't care about their education, they won't care either."

Local Stakeholders' Perceptions of Charter Schools

All participants expressed positive feelings about the charter school within the district. Participants repeatedly expressed their perceptions of charter schools proving more adequate services to students.

- "I think charter schools are a good alternative to regular public schools, especially if a student needs more time and attention." (Administrator)

- "Some principals in traditional public schools do not have the flexibility like we do to make their school great." (Administrator)

- "I enjoy teaching here. The school is so calm, and the kids really want to learn" (Teacher)

- "This place is great. The kids are great. The parents are great. The principal is great." (Teacher)

- "My kids love their school. The teachers are so friendly and teach in a way that makes it fun and challenging but also makes sure they understand the concept." (Parent)

- "This is a good school. I love being involved. I get to volunteer at least once a week." (Parent)

Constantly, parents, teachers, and administrators restated that charter schools were a great option in the district. This may suggest that traditional public schools are ineffective with educating students and an intervention is necessary (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) to provide support to all students and parents within the district.

Perceived Long-Term Effects That May Result From Charter School Enrollment

With the community's support, charter schools have gained popularity within the district. A district teacher said, "Since I have been here [teaching at charter school], I have seen the enrollment increase from about 300 to over 800 students." Another teacher said, "It gets better every year. We are lucky enough to get good students and supportive parents." When discussing her daughter, a parent said,

> I don't know what I would do if it wasn't for this school. I even considered quitting my job and homeschooling my child. He was being bullied and harassed, and nothing was being done fast enough in my opinion. Once he came to this school, all the negative things magically ended. He is happy and learning more and more each day.

One administrator indicated that children who attend charter schools will be able to "go out into the world and compete with many different types of people because they are being exposed to other cultures, STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math], and real-world life experiences on a daily basis." The goal of charter schools is to improve student learning and increase success while offering an alternative to parents. However, concern remains over how to improve all schools within the district.

The findings reported from the themes indicate that stakeholders are more focused on of the benefits of charter school and are in agreement that they better educate students in the district (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Unfortunately, this is a huge concern for traditional public schools within the district.

Perceived Benefits of Charter Schools

The perceived benefit of charter schools was the idea of students receiving a better education. A parent stated, "My child has learned so much since he first started this school." Participants indicated that some students just need a calmer environment to achieve academic success, and charter schools were one option to achieve this goal. One administrator said, "Traditional public schools can be rowdy; we don't tolerate that here," thus helping the child remain focused on learning. A teacher stated, "I try to make my classroom peaceful. We have fun, but it is quite tranquil most of the time." A parent explained, "I get to be involved in my child's school, and I think that keeps her focused."

Perceived Challenges of Traditional Public Schools

The challenges that were identified for students and teachers in traditional public schools were lack of student achievement, a negative environment, and lack of parental involvement. Parents stated that they like to visit their child's school regularly. One parent shared how distraught she felt after trying to visit her child's classroom:

> I wish all schools had an open-door policy. I tried to visit my child's classroom at his old school [traditional public school] one morning, and the teacher stood in the doorway, said she had to go in for morning announcements, and shut the door in my face. I couldn't even tell my child to have a good day.

Others gave examples of how traditional public schools have low test scores:

> I don't understand why there is such a huge discrepancy in test scores. Her old school [traditional public school] had 18% of students proficient in math! Here

[charter school], 89% of students are proficient [in math]. Same type of kids, same neighborhoods, big difference. It must be the schools [making a difference]. Stakeholders' main issues with traditional public schools were low academic achievement, negative school climate and culture, and lack of parental engagement. Consequently, all stakeholders agreed that the charter school had surpassed their expectations on how schools should be operated. While academic achievement in all schools within the district is the ultimate, desired outcome, the process to get there has become a challenge. These concerns must be addressed with systematic techniques to involve all stakeholders within the district and help all students reach academic success.

Policy Recommendation for Implementation

The proposed project is a policy recommendation to address feelings and perceptions expressed by education stakeholders. Increasingly, parents are viewing traditional public schools as being inadequate and not providing students with the tools necessary for success. With the option of school choice, parents are fully aware of the choice they can make in deciding where to send their child for an education. As a result, charter school enrollment is increasing, and traditional public school enrollment is decreasing.

Many stakeholders, if not all, are in agreement that something needed to be done to help schools that were less desirable to parents. This policy recommendation focuses on raising student achievement, promoting positive school culture and climate, and encouraging parental involvement. It is recommended that district leaders consider implementing a policy that focuses on professional development for teachers and

administrators and parental engagement and informational activities to minimize the

negative feelings some parents have towards traditional public schools. Monthly

activities will address student achievement, school climate and culture, and parental

involvement. Some autonomy is reserved for each school site to ensure that each region

focuses on specific areas for improvement. The policy includes actions such as the

following to address the concerns demonstrated by the stakeholders and provide

programs supported by current research.

- Regional superintendent: Five regional superintendents are located within the

  district. They will oversee the project to ensure that it is being implemented

  within the school located in their particular region.

- Advisory Committee: This committee will be comprised of parent liaisons,

  counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches. They

  will oversee the monthly activities and make recommendations and changes as

  needed. The Advisory Committee should meet quarterly or more frequently as

  needed. The academic data coach may direct the meetings and the projects of

  the committee, making proposals to the regional superintendent and Board of

  Education as needed.

- Parent University: During these sessions, parents will receive valuable

  information that will strengthen the relationships between teacher and parent,

  parent and child, and teacher and student. These programs will be scheduled at

  times most convenient for the demographics served, and transportation will be

  provided by the district, if necessary.

- Professional development: During these sessions, teachers will be given skills

  necessary to be effective in the classroom when teaching students as well as

  effectively communicating with parents and promoting parental involvement.

  The collaboration among teachers and committee members will strengthen the

  mindset and abilities of teachers and allow them to use best practices in the

  class to promote academic success.

- Parental engagement events: During these events, school sites should

  concentrate on building trust, opening the lines of communication, and

  collaborating with parents to best meet the needs of all students in the district.

  The policy stems from the research showing parents do not feel welcomed or

  encouraged to visit schools. The parental engagement events will promote

  interaction among parents and district stakeholders.

The policy recommendation will be implemented in a 2-year time frame. During

Year 1 of implementation, key personnel will be recruited. These district leaders will

include parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data

coaches. The leaders will determine the priorities and the specific details that should be

addressed at their particular school, and they will create a school-wide calendar of events

that will include the full schedule of Parent University, parental engagement activities,

and professional development sessions. During Year 2 of implementation, teachers will

participate in professional development sessions, and parents will participate in parental

informational and engagement activities on a monthly basis. The Advisory Committee

will meet quarterly to determine the success, failures, and suggested revisions for the

plan. Throughout the year, parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches will meet with regional superintendents to provide feedback and suggest further recommendations as they plan for implementation the following year. Regional superintendents will oversee the project to ensure that the policy recommendation is being fully implemented.

Proposal for Implementation of Time Line

In a perfect situation, all recommendations made within the project would be implemented within one school year to ensure that parents' issues and concerns were being addressed in timely fashion. However, due to budget and time constraints, this may not be possible. Throughout the year, the Advisory Committee of parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches will meet with regional superintendents to provide feedback and suggest further recommendations as they plan for implementation the following year (see Table A2).

Table A2

Implementation Time Line

Time line	Recommendations
	Year 1
August–May	• Recruit parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches to participate in Parent University and teacher professional development. • Leaders will determine the priorities and specific details that should be addressed at their particular school. • Leaders will create a school-wide calendar of including the full schedule of Parent University and professional development activities.
	Year 2
August	• Open the school year with a back-to-school kickoff celebration. All parents within the community will be invited. The specifics of the kickoff will be determined by the committee at each school site. All schools should provide adequate notice, fun, family-oriented activities, food, music, and a learning seminar to help parents prepare for the school year. • Professional development for teachers and administration: "Helping Parents Help Their Children."
September	• Conduct parent engagement events at each building in conjunction with parent teacher conferences • Professional development for teachers and administration: "Communicating With Parents."
October	• Conduct parental engagement events at each building in conjunction with Curriculum Night (Fall Festival). • Provide professional development for teachers and administration: "What Do our Students Lack Socially and Emotionally?" • Advisory Committee (parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches) meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.
November	• Thanksgiving luncheon & Parent University session: "Working Collaboratively With my Child's Teacher" • Professional development for teachers and administration: "What Do Students Lack Economically, and how Can We Close the Gap to Ensure Academic Success?"

(table continues)

December	• Parent University session, make-and-take literacy night • Professional development for teachers and administration: "What Skills Do Students Lack Academically?"

Time line	Recommendations
January	• Parent University session: "Reading at Home Can Make a Difference" • Professional development on interventions/remediation/strategies to increase student achievement (based on the needs at each individual school, identified by teachers and/or the committee) • Advisory Committee meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.
February	• Father/daughter and mother/son sweetheart dance in conjunction with an "I Love Math/Science Night." The subject can vary based on the needs of each particular school site. • Professional development: "Understanding and Communicating With the Next Generation." (This session will include how to incorporate technology and social media into the classroom.)
March	• Conduct parent engagement Spring Fling at each building in conjunction with parent-teacher conferences. • Parent University session: "Testing and Test-Taking Tips" • Professional development: "How to Motivate Students During Testing."
April	• Conduct parent engagement events at each building on helping children manage anger, stress, and frustration. • Professional development: "Creating a Welcoming Classroom" • Advisory Committee meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.
May	• Conduct parent engagement "Splashing Into Summer" at each building in conjunction with the completion of parental surveys, highlighting the glows, grows, and concerns of the school year. • Professional development: "Teacher Reflection."
June	• Provide summer Parent University sessions (topics for discussion chosen based on the needs of each school site).
July	• Advisory Committee (parent liaisons, counselors, instructional support specialists, and academic data coaches) meets to conduct a quarterly review of the progression of the project, making recommendations for modifications when needed.

Conclusion

The State of Georgia allows parents to make a choice when deciding on a school for their child to attend. This is beneficial for parents who are not pleased with the traditional public school in their region. Many parents who have negative experiences with traditional public school in the district have chosen charter schools as a more favorable alternative. District stakeholders studied agree that this is a good idea, but something else needs to be done to make the traditional public schools more appealing to parents. Considering their concerns and current research on effective practices for schools with high achievement rates, positive school climate and culture, and great parental involvement, this policy recommendation was created to address specific areas of concern. There are always going to be schools that will fall short of parents' requirements. However, it is the district's responsibility to create and administer a plan in attempt to address the needs of all students and parents within the district.

Appendix B: Focus-Group Protocol

Doctoral Study: Stakeholders' Perceptions of Charter Schools

Focus Group Participant: _____

Date: _____

Time of Focus Group Session: _____

Place: _____

Researcher: Tawanda Hardaway

Greeting/Introduction: Thank you for your participation in this research study. The focus group session will take approximately 60-75 minutes to complete. The session will be digitally recorded and transcribed afterwards to ensure the accuracy of your responses.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons parents are making the switch from public to charter schools.

Ethics/Confidentiality: Thank you for reviewing and signing the consent form. Participation in the focus group is voluntary and you may choose to take a break or end your participation in the session at any time. If at any you choose to end your participation, you can do so without any negative consequences. All collected data will be kept confidential by being storing in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer.

Member Checking: As a way to make certain that my research is free of personal biases, you will be asked to participate as a member checker. This process will review the collected data that I transcribed and will take roughly 20 minutes to complete.

Permission: At this time, we have both signed and dated the research consent form acknowledging your participation in this focus group session. I have also given you a signed copy if you need to reference the form in the future. Before we start the session, does anyone have any questions, comments, or concerns? Do I have your permission to start the focus-group session?

1. How do you feel when you visit this charter school? Describe the culture here.

2. Describe your experiences with your child's education in the past and present. How do they differ?

3. In your opinion, what makes this charter school different from the traditional public schools in this area?

4. What qualities led you to make the decision to enroll your child in this charter school? How did they influence your decision?

5. Now that you are a part of this charter school, what elements of the charter school give you the confidence to know that your child/children are being prepared for the next academic year?

6. What elements about the school do you view as needing improvement?

7. Think about the conversations you have with family and friends in the community about the charter school, what type of information are you communicating to them about the charter school?

Conclusion: This is the end of the focus-group session. Does anyone have any questions, comments or concerns now that this session is completed? Thank you again for your time and participation in this study.

Appendix C: Individual Interview Protocol

Doctoral Study: Stakeholders' Perceptions of Charter Schools

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: Tawanda Hardaway

Greeting/Introduction: Thank you for your participation in this research study. The interview will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed afterwards to ensure the accuracy of your responses.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons parents are making the switch from public to charter schools.

Ethics/Confidentiality: Thank you for reviewing and signing the consent form. Participation in the interview is voluntary and you may choose to take a break or end the interview at any time. If at any you choose to end your participation, you can do so without any negative consequences. All collected data will be kept confidential by being storing in a locked file cabinet and password protected computer.

Member Checking: As a way to make certain that my research is free of personal biases, you will be asked to participate as a member checker. This process will review the collected data that I transcribed and will take roughly 20 minutes to complete.

Permission: At this time, we have both signed and dated the interview consent form acknowledging your participation in this interview. I have also given you a signed copy if you need to reference the form in the future. Before we start the interview, do you have any questions, comments or concerns? Do I have your permission to start the interview?

1. What factors led you work at this charter school?

2. Describe the culture here at this charter school?

3. Tell me about the experiences you have with teaching/leading at a traditional public school. How are they different from those you presently have in the charter school?

4. Describe a typical day teaching/leading at this charter school.

5. Think about interactions that you have had with parents at this school. In your opinion, why do you think enrollment is steadily increasing?

6. What effect does the required parental involvement have on parents and students? How does this requirement affect student achievement?

7. What qualities do you think parents are looking for when they enroll their children into a school? Why do you think these qualities are important to parents?

Conclusion: This is the end of the interview. Do you have any questions, comments or concerns now that this interview is completed? Thank you again for your time and participation in this study.

Appendix D: Interest Flyer

Let your voice be heard!

My name is Tawanda Hardaway, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting research on charter schools, and your input is needed. Research participants will be required to participate in a 60-75 minute focus group session. If interested, please fill in the information below and return the completed form to the school's secretary within 72 hours. Even if selected, you have the option of withdrawing from the research at any time, with no negative consequences. Selected participants will be notified via email.

Name:

Email Address:

Grade Level(s) of child(ren):

Have your child(ren) ever attended a traditional public school?

Appendix E: Interest E-mail

My name is Tawanda Hardaway, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting research on charter schools and your input is needed. Research participants will be required to participate in a 30-45minute individual interview with the researcher. If interested, please reply to this email within 72 hours. Even if selected, you have the option of withdrawing from the research at any time, with no negative consequences. Selected participants will be notified via email.

Please answer the following questions in your response:

Name:

Grade level/subject you teach or title if you are an administrator:

Have you ever worked at a traditional public school?

How many years of experience do you have as a teacher/administrator?

Email address:

Appendix F: Participant Characteristics

Table F1

Characteristics of Parent Participants

Parent participant	Child(ren)'s grade level	Has child ever attended traditional public school?
1	Grade 6	Yes
2	Kindergarten, Grades 5, 6	Yes
3	Grade 3	Yes
4	Grade 8	Yes
5	Grades 7, 8	Yes
6	Grade 4	Yes
7	Grades 1, 2	Yes
8	Grade 3	Yes
9	Kindergarten	No
10	Grade 2	No
11	Grade 6	Yes
12	Kindergarten	No
13	Grade 1	No
14	Grade 2	Yes
15	Kindergarten	No
16	Grade 1	Yes
17	Grades 5, 7	Yes
18	Grade 5	Yes
19	Grades 4, 5	Yes
20	Grade 5	Yes
21	Grade 1	No

Table F2

Characteristics of Administrator Participants

Administrator participant	Previous years of experience			Total years of experience
	With traditional public schools	Teaching in charter school	As administrator	
1	8	5	3	16
2	6	1	2	9

Table F3

Characteristics of Teacher Participants

Teacher participant	Current grade level taught	Previous years of experience		Total years of experience
		With traditional public schools	In charter school	
3	Grade 2	0	1	1
4	Grade 4	2	2	4
5	Grade 1	1	1	2
6	Kindergarten	0	4	4
7	Grade 8	0	2	2
8	Grade 6	0	8	8
9	Grade 5	6	2	8
10	Grade 5	12	7	19
11	Kindergarten	4	8	12
12	Grade 1	11	3	14
13	Grade 2	28	4	32
14	Grade 6	25	4	29
15	Grade 8	15	6	21