


2006

# The Impact of Parent Satisfaction on Charter School Improvement

Patricia G. Booth  
*Seton Hall University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations>

 Part of the [Other Education Commons](#), and the [Other Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Booth, Patricia G., "The Impact of Parent Satisfaction on Charter School Improvement" (2006). *Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs)*. 1596.  
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/1596>

**THE IMPACT OF PARENT SATISFACTION ON  
CHARTER SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

**BY**

**PATRICIA G. BOOTH**

**Dissertation Committee**

**Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D., Mentor  
Charles P. Mitchel, Ed. D.  
Donna D. Lenaghan, Ed. D.  
Jan Furman, Ed. D.**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Education  
Seton Hall University  
2006**

## ABSTRACT

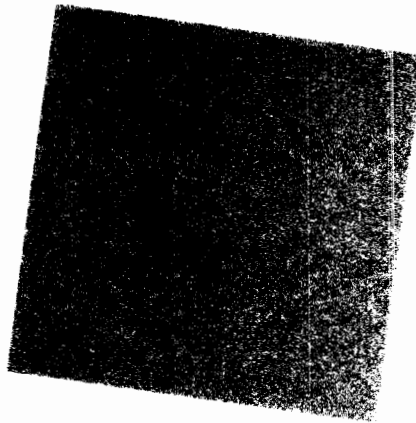
### The Impact of Parent Satisfaction on Charter School Improvement

This study is relevant to all educators interested in better serving their educational community. This descriptive study investigated how parent results from a school climate survey influenced charter administrators when updating school improvement plans. The study's charter school-parent satisfaction phenomena examined (a) the differences in satisfaction between parents from charter and traditional public schools, as measured by a school climate survey over a 2 year period of time; and (b) the influence of parent satisfaction on strategic planning or improvement in a charter school setting. Three quantitative research questions were analyzed using independent and one-sample *t* tests. Four survey factors were examined for significance: (a) safety; (b) good education; (c) climate; and, (d) school grade. Interviews of charter administrators provided additional data. Quantitative results found that parents of students attending charter schools were more satisfied than parents of students attending traditional schools; however, according to charter school administrators, parent satisfaction did not significantly impact charter school improvement.

THE IMPACT OF PARENT SATISFACTION ON  
CHARTER SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

BY

PATRICIA G. BOOTH



Dissertation Committee

Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D., Mentor  
Charles P. Mitchel, Ed. D.  
Donna D. Lenaghan, Ed. D.  
Jan Furman, Ed. D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Education  
Seton Hall University  
2006

## ABSTRACT

### The Impact of Parent Satisfaction on Charter School Improvement

This study is relevant to all educators interested in better serving their educational community. This descriptive study investigated how parent results from a school climate survey influenced charter administrators when updating school improvement plans. The study's charter school-parent satisfaction phenomena examined (a) the differences in satisfaction between parents from charter and traditional public schools, as measured by a school climate survey over a 2 year period of time; and (b) the influence of parent satisfaction on strategic planning or improvement in a charter school setting. Three quantitative research questions were analyzed using independent and one-sample *t* tests. Four survey factors were examined for significance: (a) safety; (b) good education; (c) climate; and, (d) school grade. Interviews of charter administrators provided additional data. Quantitative results found that parents of students attending charter schools were more satisfied than parents of students attending traditional schools; however, according to charter school administrators, parent satisfaction did not significantly impact charter school improvement.

© Copyright by Patricia G. Booth, 2006  
All Rights Reserved

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This three year journey has come to an end. I am deeply indebted and grateful to those who gave me the inspiration to begin, to those who gave me direction, and to those who walked with me every step of the way. In this spirit, and with heartfelt appreciation, I wish to acknowledge those individuals:

- ~ To *Dr. James Caulfield*, for giving me the opportunity to participate in his crafted SHU cohort program;
- ~ To *Dr. Dan Gutmore*, my mentor, who refused to accept less than my best;
- ~ To *Dr. Charles Mitchel*, my reader, for his amazing insight and support throughout the process;
- ~ To *Dr. John Collins*, for his calming influence, patience, assistance, and encouragement;
- ~ To *Dr. Jan Furman*, for agreeing to be my outside reader, and who went beyond the call of duty to meet her commitment;
- ~ To *Dr. Donna Lenaghan*, my former colleague, friend, and outside reader, whose energy and enthusiasm carried me through to the end;
- ~ To *Dr. Evelyn Evans*, who first urged me to consider this undertaking;
- ~ To *Dr. Jane Manner*, for her belief in me;
- ~ To *Dr. Ed Forsthoffer III*, whose vigilance kept me on track and mindful of the prize;
- ~ To the *Magnificent VII Cohort* for memories beyond measure.
- ~ To *Dr. George Kafkoulis*, for his acceptance of, and participation in, my work;

- ~ To *Mr. Don Morris*, Miami-Dade County Public Schools Research Analyst, for his technical assistance with accessing research files;
- ~ To the *six charming ladies serving as Charter School Principals*, who graciously agreed to participate in the study;
- ~ To *Ms. Christina Vizcaino*, an assistant principal extraordinaire, for keeping our School intact in my absence;
- ~ To my *Relatives* who were more than surprised to find out I was pursuing this degree, and who are now relieved to know that they no longer have to ask: “Are you finished yet?”
- ~ And, to an incredible *Extended Family of Friends* who understood and never complained when they wouldn’t hear from me for weeks, and who have waited patiently for my return.



DEDICATION

*In Memoriam . . .*

*~ To my Father and Mother  
John and Joan Gianaris*

For instilling in me the importance of an Education,  
And a Spirit of Determination.

*~To my husband Frank, for his perseverance and support.*

*~To my daughter Joanna, who, like me, believes in dreams coming true.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
DEDICATION.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Overview.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	9
Research Questions.....	11
Hypotheses.....	12
Significance of the Problem.....	12
Theoretical Framework: Nature of the Study .....	14
Limitations .....	14
Delimitations.....	16
Definition of Terms.....	17
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	21
Introduction.....	21
Overview and Background: School Choice.....	21
Charter Schools as Schools of Choice .....	26
Educational Reform and School Choice.....	30
Parents and Charter School Choice.....	32
Parent Involvement.....	36
Climate Surveys.....	38
School Climate, Effective Schools, and Leadership.....	42
Charter Schools and Student Achievement.....	44
Parent Satisfaction: Making the Grade .....	46
Charter Schools: The Other Side .....	49
Trends and Insights .....	55

Summary .....	60
Background: School Choice .....	60
Charter Schools as Schools of Choice .....	60
Educational Reform and School Choice .....	61
Parents and Charter School Choice.....	61
Parent Involvement .....	62
Climate Surveys .....	63
School Climate, Effective Schools, and Leadership.....	63
Charter Schools and Student Achievement.....	63
Parent Satisfaction: Making the Grade .....	64
Charter Schools: The Other Side .....	64
Trends and Insights .....	64
III. METHODOLOGY .....	66
Introduction.....	66
Overview: Research Design.....	66
Population and Sample .....	68
Quantitative Design .....	68
Qualitative Design .....	69
Instrument .....	70
Quantitative Research Procedure .....	72
Data Collection .....	72
Data Analysis .....	74
Effect Size.....	76
Qualitative Research Procedure.....	77
Data Collection .....	77
Summary .....	80
IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA .....	81
Introduction.....	81
Presentation of the Quantitative Research .....	82
Survey .....	82
Population and Sample .....	83
Quantitative Analysis of Research Questions.....	90
Research Question 1 .....	90
Research Question 2 .....	93
Research Question 3a.....	104
Research Question 3b .....	106
Research Question 3c.....	108
Research Question 3d .....	110

Presentation of the Qualitative Data Results .....	112
Interviews with Charter School Principals .....	112
Qualitative Analysis.....	114
Category I: Traditional Schools vs. Charter School Settings .....	115
Category II: How the School Climate Survey Impacts School Improvement Planning.....	117
Category III: The Relationship between School Climate Survey and parent Satisfaction.....	122
Summary .....	127
Quantitative Research .....	128
Qualitative Research .....	130
Category I: Traditional Schools vs. Charter School Settings .....	131
Category II: How the School Climate Survey Impacts School Improvement Planning.....	131
Category III: The Relationship between School Climate Surveys and Parent Satisfaction.....	133
 V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	135
Introduction .....	135
Synopsis of Research Study.....	135
Quantitative Research Findings and Summary .....	137
Research Question 1 .....	137
Research Question 2 .....	138
Research Question 3 .....	139
Qualitative Research Findings and Summary.....	141
Category I. Traditional Schools vs. Charter School Settings.....	142
Small Class Size.....	142
Safety .....	143
Good Education .....	143
School Climate.....	144
Category II. How the School Climate Survey Impacts School Improvement Planning.....	145
Climate Survey.....	145
Making the Grade .....	146
School Improvement.....	147
Category III. The Relationship between School Climate Surveys and Parent Satisfaction .....	148
Leadership.....	148
State and Parent Grading of Schools .....	149
Parent Satisfaction .....	150
Conclusions.....	151

Recommendations.....	154
Practice.....	154
Policy Implications .....	154
Findings and Implications.....	156
Future Research .....	158
Recommendations for Future Research .....	159
Closing Statement .....	159
References.....	161
Appendix A: Interview with Charter School Principals .....	178
Appendix B: Categorical Presentation of Charter Principal Responses to Interview Questions .....	184
Appendix C: MDCPS School Climate Survey: Parent Form .....	198

## LIST OF TABLES

1.	Charter School Climate Survey Return Rates: Parent Form.....	84
2.	Traditional Public Schools Climate Survey Return Rates: Parent Form .....	85
3.	Charter Schools Ethnic Group Representation: Parent Survey Returns .....	87
4.	Traditional Public Schools Ethnic Group Representation: Parent Survey Return .....	88
5.	A Comparison of Means between Charter School Parents and Traditional School Parents on Item 34 (Overall School Climate).....	92
6.	Cohen’s Guidelines for Effect Size.....	93
7.	Case Processing Summary and Reliability Statistics.....	94
8.	Frequency Table to Establish Means .....	95
9.	Frequency Table: Item 1 (Safety) .....	96
10.	Frequency Table: Item 33 (Good Education) .....	97
11.	Frequency Table: Item 34 (Overall School Climate).....	98
12.	One Sample <i>t</i> - Test (Safety: preset value) .....	99
13.	One Sample <i>t</i> - test (Good Education: preset value).....	101
14.	One Sample <i>t</i> - test (Overall School Climate: preset value).....	103
15.	Independent Samples <i>t</i> - Test Comparing School Grade of Charter Schools for Year 1 and Year 2.....	105
16.	Independent Samples <i>t</i> - Test Comparing School Grade of Traditional Schools for Year 1 and Year 2 .....	107
17.	Independent Samples <i>t</i> - Test Comparing School Grade between Charter Schools and Traditional Schools in Year 1 .....	109

18.	Independent Samples <i>t</i> - Test Comparing School Grade between Charter Schools and Traditional Schools in Year 2.....	111
19.	Demographics of Charter Administrators.....	113
20.	Principal Priorities for Items in School Climate Survey.....	121
21.	Grades Issued to the Charter Schools .....	126

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

The education profession has had close to 50 years of examination, and schools today continue to be the focus of national concern. Solutions to earlier challenges have not yet produced the improvements expected, and many still remain as dreams. It has been a time of appraisal and reappraisal, changes and shifts of curriculum and instruction reform, teacher readiness, and parental choice. Change and school reform, although worthy, may be implemented prior to sufficient consideration of existing school conditions. In the meantime, parents have become the national fulcrum, balancing educational options before them as never before.

The expansion of school choice remains as one of the most contentious policy areas in the U.S. The school choice debate continues to emphasize the parental component, questioning parent preferences and the effects of their preferences on schooling today. With the numbers of students leaving traditional public schools to participate in charter schools, school administrators must not only deliver a strong academic program, but also must understand their base of constituents. Schools, driven by strategic planning and grounded empirical research, must strengthen their camps to better serve its clientele: the students, the parents, and the larger community.



## Background of the Problem

“Up to now, the notion has been that we would—and could—get the schools we need just by changing the schools we have” (Kolderie, 2003, p. 30). The late Albert Shanker, former President of the American Federation of Teachers, stated that “Time is running out on public education . . . The dissatisfaction that people feel is very basic” as cited in Finn, Manno, & Vanourek (2000), p. 248. Of the efforts to reform public schools, all school choice plans share a common principle, and that is giving parents an option to select a school, and to direct the education, for their child or children.

Kolderie (2003, p. 40) quoted Al Shanker, as saying that public education “takes its customers for granted.” The business of education finds itself looking to attract customers to at least four prominent school choices: (a) magnet schools, (b) public / private vouchers, (c) home schooling and, (d) charter schools. Marketing is at an all-time high, with districts presenting conferences and fairs, and a dearth of publicity crowding the education scene to attract those shopping the circuit for a school of choice. Rising on the education business index are charter schools, and they are marketing a product that continues to gain customer satisfaction.

Within the last 10 years, the charter school is, and remains, a highly valued commodity (Wolfe, 2003). Seizing a prominent role in education today, these schools of choice are at the center of a growing movement, challenging public education, and attracting educators willing to try out new approaches to the more traditional school setting (Paige, 2004). It has been said that the ripple effect did not occur and that charter schools have not, cannot, and do not change traditional public schools or district schools

(Kolderie, 2003). However, while current data and trends indicate that growth in choice continues, the charter school attraction remains somewhat of a mystery.

Operated independently, yet underwritten with public funds, many of the charter schools offer a family-oriented setting to raise the level of student learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). In exchange for increased accountability, charter schools are given flexibility in selecting requirements with respect to statutes and regulations. As a public school, charter schools receive federal financial assistance and must operate consistent with civil rights laws.

The term *charter* comes from the contracts given to European explorers, specifying the expectations and responsibilities of both the explorer and the sponsor (Nathan, 1999a). Charter school sponsors and administrators have the authority to make decisions most often left to a central bureau: those of curriculum selection, personnel selection, and financial budgeting. With tax dollars following students, charter schools must attract students in order to survive, and “those schools offering the best education will prosper; those that do not will close” (Smith & Meier 1995, p. 312).

In 1990, there was not one charter school in the nation. Six years later, there were almost 300 in operation, with the state of Minnesota passing charter school legislation in 1991. To date, charter legislation has passed in 40 states, including the District of Columbia. An estimated 42% of charter schools are concentrated in three states: Arizona, California, and Florida (Vanourek, 2005). In January 2004, there were 2,996 charter schools operating in the United States, with approximately 750,000 students participating in this form of public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a).

Support for the creation of charter schools is provided by federal legislation as a means of promoting choice and innovation in the public school systems. In his 1996 State of the Union address, President Clinton asked states to allow the formation of new schools, as charters, as long as they were academically accountable (Nathan, 1999a). In 1997, President Clinton again promoted the school choice concept by supporting the creation of 3,000. This number was nearly seven times the number of charter schools existing in the country to date (Clinton, 1997).

Fourteen years since its first appearance, the charter school movement has grown from infancy to adolescence, establishing itself as an educational opportunity for America's children (Finn & Osberg, 2005). The basic tenet of charter schools couples innovation and accountability, with parents deciding if the school's results are best for their child. Expanding school choice and accountability is reasonable, and assumes there will be a concern for quality, not just the quantity of choice schools. Within the school choice movement accountability is written into the charter and in place before the school opens. Hill and Lake (2002) stated:

Though there is nothing about state charter school laws that should exempt charter schools from civil rights laws, government agencies need to adapt to the differences between independent public schools held accountable for performance and dependent public schools operated by public bureaucracies. (p. 94)

Because charter or choice schools usually lack bureaucratic protectors, they endure harsher scrutiny than most public schools (Hill & Lake).

The harshest critics of charter schools may be the parents who choose them. Maintaining customer satisfaction is a challenge to charter schools, and to traditional

public schools, as well. One method used by school districts to determine parental satisfaction is to survey the parents annually on a school climate instrument, such as a survey.

Climate surveys provide a snapshot of school organization and individuality. According to Bulach and Malone (1994), the expressed purpose of climate surveys is to manage and improve change, and facilitate effective school reform. Hoy and Tarter (1992) stated that a healthy organizational climate is crucial for a good school. Also, the utility of a school climate survey may explain student outcomes (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). If parents who complete school climate surveys are able to indicate their level of satisfaction with the school, including satisfaction with student performance outcomes, are school administrators prepared to respond to the results? Are student outcomes tied to parent satisfaction? Can satisfaction be identified? Are there specific areas in which parents are more satisfied than others? These are a few of the questions which prompted an investigation into this study.

#### Statement of the Problem

Seizing a prominent role in education today, charter schools are at the center of the school choice movement challenging public education and school reform. With school options always available, school administrators must deliver a sound educational program to not only retain its newly found customers, but to also maintain the attraction of its store-front operation.

Considered public schools, charter schools are under a contract, or charter, between a local educational agency and a group (parents, teachers, community leaders, or others) who want to create alternatives and choice within the public school system. As a

result, it is said that charter schools spur healthy competition to improve public education (Charter School Accountability Center, 2003).

Charter schools also encourage innovation and provide opportunities for parents to play powerful roles in shaping their children's education. When parents are given choices, they become more actively involved and are more satisfied with their child's education (Vanourek, Manno, Finn, & Bierlein, 1997). Results of a 1997 *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup* poll supported the belief of the importance of parents' involvement in their child's education. Greater opportunities for parental involvement were also among the reasons given by parents for selecting charter schools for their child (Vanourek et al., p. 13). School districts, as well, are acknowledging that, when given a choice, parents will be more satisfied with the school.

It is the parents who drive the growth of the charter school phenomena, and, in Florida, the growth has been steadily increasing for over 10 years. Since opening its first charter school in Miami-Dade County in 1996, the number of charter schools in Florida has grown from 5 to 333 schools in 2005-2006, with a charter school student enrollment of 92,158 students (Florida Department of Education, 2005). Of the 333 schools, 56 had opened in 2005-2006. The demographics of the students indicate 44% as White, Non-Hispanic; 24% Black, Non-Hispanic; 25% Hispanic; 1% Asian/Pacific Islander; 0 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native; 2% Multiracial; and, 4% Unknown. The socioeconomic level based upon the number of students participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program is 37%.

Among the fastest growing of school choice options in Florida, charter school students are held as accountable on state-wide assessment tests as the traditional public

school students in the state. However, unlike traditional public schools, failure of charter schools to meet the requirements for student achievement, as stated in the charter, may result in termination or non-renewal (Florida Charter Schools, 2004). As of 2002, twenty-two charters in Florida had been revoked. Parents from these schools either sought to enroll their children in another charter or school of choice, or returned to a traditional public school.

The State of Florida requires its students to show adequate yearly progress (AYP), or 1 year's academic growth in 1 year's time. Student outcomes and assessment, based upon the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Tests (FCAT), result in grades issued by the state to all schools, charter and traditional. Only those charter schools in their first year of operation, or charter schools with fewer than 30 students in one grade or class were not issued a state grade.

In 2004 – 2005, 60% of all charter schools (181 schools) in Florida were graded. Thirty-seven percent of the charter schools were graded as *A*, 15 % *B*, 22% *C*, 14% *D* and, 12% *F*. One hundred, or 32%, of operating schools made Adequate Yearly Progress, per the expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002).

Grading of schools by the state of Florida is just one way schools are assessed as doing a good job. Another way comes from the parents' assessment of their child's school. Climate surveys are used by various industries, including school districts, to provide insight into the operation and climate of the organization. One way the Miami-Dade County Public School (M-DCPS) district seeks information from parents is by soliciting their response to a school climate survey. Annually, Miami-Dade County Public Schools issues a School Climate Survey to a randomly selected group of parents in

each public school, including charter schools. In this school survey, parents indicate their level of satisfaction with different areas of a school's operation. At the end of the survey, parents issue a report card grade for their child's school (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2004b).

While the procedures and process for administration of the survey are detailed and specific, the post-survey process falls short. The M-DCPS district urges school administrators to use the survey results to update their School Improvement Plans (SIP); however, there is no feedback mechanism to verify if or to substantiate how, the survey results are used for the specific purpose of revising the annual SIP. This misstep is problematic, as questions regarding school strategic planning and school improvement remain unanswered.

Parent satisfaction and its impact on school improvement planning in charter schools will add significance to charter school research. Of particular value to this study will be a better understanding of what drives charter school reform and sound improvement in a school operation. Climate survey analysis will provide insight into understanding parental expectations for a school's success, indicate the parents' level of satisfaction with selected areas within their choice school, and may provide insight on how parents' satisfaction affects charter schools over a 2 year period of time.

"Educators desire to effect change, but they must also be open to being affected by change" (Fashola, 2004, p. 538). Information and data related to the school survey were the targeted topics during an interview session with charter school administrators. An expectation from the interviews is to learn how administrators utilize the survey results to better serve their clientele.

The question is no longer whether or not parents will select charter schools, but whether or not they will be satisfied with what they see once they are there. With choices readily available, do parents choose to stay or do they only stay as long as they are satisfied? With the numbers of students leaving traditional public schools to participate in charter schools, traditional public school educators would do well to review the results of this study. A more careful review of the parent results from their surveys may better serve their educational setting and community, as well.

#### Purpose of the Study

Interests in schools of choice may stem from parents seeking new, better or the best ways to educate their child or children. As schools of choice, charter schools provide parents the opportunity to play powerful roles in shaping and supporting the education of children. The purpose of this study is to examine how parent satisfaction impacts change or reform within a charter school setting. This research study will provide insight into parent expectations and satisfaction, affording charter administrators with the opportunity to better understand how to attract and retain a growing school population.

The study will focus on those topics of the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey which include the parent responses in the following areas: (a) safety, (b) good education, (c) overall school climate and, (d) school grade. Selection of these areas is based upon reading charter research, and is captured in this quote from Finn and Kanstoroom (2002): “Parents mainly want to know whether their children will be safe in these schools, and will learn to read, write, and cipher” (p. 60).



As the fourth largest school district of the nation, Miami-Dade County operates charter schools within the district boundaries located as far north as the Broward County line (Ft. Lauderdale, FL), and as far south as Monroe County (Key West, FL). There is no rural charter school located within this geographical region. The 2005 – 2006 school year opened with 50 charter schools operating within the Miami-Dade County district. For the purpose of this study, data from seven elementary charter schools, and 25 traditional public schools, Grades Kindergarten through Grade 5, will be examined from two consecutive school years (2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005).

Participating in interviews for the study will be the charter school administrators operating the seven selected K - 5 charter schools in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. The charter schools will be selected according to the following criteria: (a) charter schools must have a minimum of 3 years of school operation and, (b) charter schools must have parent results for the 2 consecutive school years of the study. The 25 traditional elementary public schools will be randomly selected from the Miami-Dade County School climate survey data base for the same 2 consecutive school years (2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005).

Understanding the factors which may motivate parents to leave traditional schools for charter schools may also be the same factors that score in the *Strongly Agree* range of the School Climate Survey. These factors will be analyzed to determine the significance of parental satisfaction with choice over a 2 year period of time, the extent of parent satisfaction with the safety, good education, and climate of their charter school choice, and how charter school administrators respond to these results. Findings of this study

will have importance for parents considering choice and for the school leaders vying for student enrollment and funding dollars.

### Research Questions

Nathan (1996b) stated, “The charter school movement is young. And, it faces a number of important, unanswered questions” (p. 22). Through this research study, the following three research questions will guide the study’s quantitative data collection and analysis:

1. What differences, if any, exist between charter school parents and parents of traditional public schools on how they view their school on the School Climate Survey?
2. In which of the three areas of the Parent Form on the School Climate Survey are charter school parents most satisfied: a) safety, b) good education, or c) overall school climate?
3. In a given 2 year period, what differences, if any, are there in the charter school grades issued by parents?

In addition, qualitative research will triangulate the study with interviews of charter school administrators. Three qualitative questions will guide the interview sessions, with subsidiary questions for each guide question. A listing of the interview questions, including the subsidiary questions, can be found in Appendix A.

Category I Guide Question: Based upon your conversations with and feedback from parents, what do parents offer as explanations or reasons for why they are leaving traditional public schools for charter schools?

**Category II Guide Question:** In what way(s) have the results from the School Climate Survey impacted the strategic planning sessions and annual revisions of the School Improvement Plan?

**Category III Guide Question:** In what way(s) do you, as a charter school administrator, account for the similarities or differences in results of the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey between the 2 years considered for this study?

### Hypotheses

An impassioned topic and controversial issue, school choice generates questions of effectiveness, methodologies, and motives. The debate and questions raised over school choice continue to emphasize the parental component. Parents interested in schools of choice seek new, better, or the best ways to educate their child or children.

The following null hypotheses will guide the quantitative research study:

**Hypothesis 1:** There are no significant differences between charter school parents and parents of traditional public schools on how they view their school on the School Climate Survey.

**Hypothesis 2:** There are no significant differences in parent satisfaction among the three areas of the annual School Climate Survey: (a) safety, (b) good education, (c) school climate, as indicated by parent response.

**Hypothesis 3:** There are no significant differences in the charter school grades issued by charter school parents for 2 consecutive years.

### Significance of the Problem

There continues to be an unmet demand for public and private school choice, as evidenced by waiting lists associated with charter school programs, vouchers, and private

scholarships. According to Wolfe (2003), most of the demand comes from parents who are motivated to find more desirable educational outcomes for their children. Once found, however, does the parental search for a panacea of education end? How is parent satisfaction measured? To what degree is the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their choice heard? Are parents more satisfied in charter schools than in traditional public schools?

Charter schools create choice for parents, students, and teachers within the public school system by providing a system of accountability for student achievement. In exchange for increased accountability, charter schools are given flexibility in establishing contractual regulations, school policy and requirements, budgeting with start-up funds, and complying with state statutes. Support for the creation of charter schools is provided by federal legislation as a means of promoting choice and innovation within the public school systems.

Choice creates reciprocal accountability, and it is the parent-charter school relationship that is, perhaps, one of the charter school movement's greatest contributions to public education. Based upon available evidence, most charter schools maintain their base of constituents by delivering high quality instruction with a strong emphasis on academics. Charter schools can be strengthened by creating trusting relationships with parents and keeping the focus on motivating and educating their students (Hill & Lake, 2002).

The significance of this study contributes to the literature by examining areas of parent satisfaction within charter school settings and exploring how parental satisfaction impacts charter school reform, improvement, and change. Data indicating which area(s)

of the School Climate Survey best represents parent satisfaction will facilitate the re-examination of those school climate issues by school leaders. Understanding which factors on climate surveys indicate high parent satisfaction may influence charter and traditional school principals to expand parental involvement in school-related reform, such as strategic planning committees.

With the numbers of students leaving traditional public schools to participate in charter schools, the significance of this study extends beyond this type of public school choice. This study's research will become relevant to educators in traditional public schools, as well as private schools, who may also choose to examine the results from their climate surveys to better serve their own educational community.

#### Theoretical Framework: Nature of the Study

Necessary to understanding the nature of this study will be to build upon the theoretical framework of previous research. Beginning with a historical perspective to current trends in the field, the literature will inductively link the research from the following areas to the purpose and significance of this study:

1. Historical perspective of schools of choice;
2. Influence of parent satisfaction in charter versus traditional schools
3. Parent satisfaction and student achievement
4. Use of climate surveys for parent satisfaction
5. Leadership and school improvement

#### Limitations

The first elementary charter school in Florida opened in Miami-Dade County, Florida in 1996. To date, the total number of charter schools in Miami-Dade County is

50, with 16 elementary schools (K – 5), 13 middle schools (Grades 6 – 8), two middle/senior high schools (Grades 6 – 12), and, 9 high schools (Grades 9 – 12). This study will be limited to the parental climate survey results for elementary charter schools. An additional limitation is the lack of data available for consecutive years of operation. Most of the 50 M-DCPS charter schools opened as recently as 2001 or 2002; a few have not used the district's climate survey, and in rare instances, a few charter schools have opted to use a different climate survey altogether.

A second limitation is the attendance factor. The length of time a family has been at a charter school or if the parent withdraws his or her child from the charter school after the climate survey is completed, will not be known. Because the surveys are confidential, there is no way to determine how long the parent has had his or her child or children in the charter school or the number of years the parent has completed the survey for the same charter school. For those parents new to a school of choice, a honeymoon effect may occur, whereby parents feel satisfied just to be in a school they chose. The charter school's first year climate survey results will not be used for this study; therefore, this effect may not be as limiting as anticipated.

Third, charter school enrollment varies from year to year, as in other public, private, and home-schooled settings. With each year in operation, it is expected that enrollment will show an increase, thus providing an opportunity for a greater yield of results. However, not all parents take the time to complete or return surveys. The district-wide response rate for Miami-Dade County is based on sample sizes of several thousand.

A fourth possible limitation is the wording, question order, inadequate weighting of the data, and the refusal of sample members to respond to the survey items or the survey as a whole (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2004a). While difficult to quantify the errors resulting from these influences, the response rates for this survey are generally considered to be more than minimally adequate for providing meaningful data and exceedingly reliable (Romanik & Froman, 1992).

There is a specific calendar survey period in which surveys must be sent out with expected due dates of return. The district dates of return extend beyond the survey period, allowing for a higher rate of return. The response rate for the survey to be used is considered by the field to be more than minimally adequate for providing meaningful data (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2004a).

#### Delimitations

A delimitation of the study is the network with charter school administrators, which has been established. However, prior to interviews, charter school administrators may need to secure the permission from the Educational Management Operations (EMOs) or from their charter Board of Directors. With proper documentation of the research provided, permission was secured.

A second delimitation is access to the School Climate Surveys. Surveys are a part of the public domain, directly accessible through the Internet and district and/or state websites, and/or directly from the School Board Administration Building of Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms in this study are listed for clarity and to avoid confusion of definitions:

*Charter schools:* The U.S. Department of Education (1998) defines charter schools as public schools that come into existence through a contract with either a state agency or a local school board. This contract establishes the framework within which the school operates and provides public support for the school for a specified period of time. Autonomy is given over its operation and frees the school from regulations that other public schools must follow. The schools are held accountable for achieving the goals set forth in the charter, including student performance. Miami-Dade County Public Schools' School Choice and Parental Options office defines the charter schools in Florida as fully recognized public schools, financed by the same per-pupil funds that traditional public schools receive. Additional funding may be obtained through grants and private donations.

*Charter School Building Administrator:* Per Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the person whose building function is that of a principal, but is not qualified or certified as a principal is designated as the school building administrator. Charter schools decide if they need someone to coordinate and supervise what the school is doing by creating administrative teams or a team leader (Nathan, 1996a).

*Educational Management Organizations (EMOs):* EMOs serve as the financial agents, and chief operating officers, as well as operate other segments or areas of the charter school operations. EMOs are joining efforts to form their own national council (Archer, 2004).



*The Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC):* The EESAC is the sole body at the school responsible for final decision-making relating to the implementation of school improvement and accountability, defined by the strategic planning office of M-DCPS.

*The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests (FCAT):* The FCATs report achievement in reading, mathematics, writing, and science for selected school grades. Schools receive their performance grades based on the results of these tests (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

*Good education:* As delineated by the M-DCPS School Climate Survey, a good education is defined by how parents view or perceive their child's teachers (items 9 – 15), and how they view effective teaching of students (items 16 – 23). Not limited to this perception are their child's grades and assessment performance (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2004c).

*Magnet schools:* A specific type of alternative school that is intended to attract a variety of students of different racial and ethnic groups from throughout a district (McGree, 1995).

*Market-driven schools:* A school characterized by a tight connection between organizational performance and the continuing flow of resources. Competition ensures efficiency and quality (Richmond, 1999).

*The Miami-Dade County Public School system (M-DCPS):* The nation's fourth largest school system ([www.dadeschools.net](http://www.dadeschools.net)).

*The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB):* Reauthorizes the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)*. Proposed by President George W. Bush,

NCLB incorporates accountability for States, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility for States and local educational agencies (LEAs) in the use of Federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for our youngest children. States are required to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students. These systems must be based on challenging State standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results and State progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind. School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals will be, over time, subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures (U. S. Department of Education, 2002).

*Parental involvement:* The extent to which parents participate and/or actively seek participation in a school culture.

*Privatization:* The turning over of government functions to private companies. Stimulated by competition and profit, private companies will make services better and at less cost. Privatizing involves contracting with private firms to provide public services (Henig, 1994).

*Safety:* A safe orderly environment (atmosphere conducive to learning) is a critical aspect of effective schooling (Marzano, 2003).

*School choice:* School Choice is the term which refers to choices about schools and programs made by parents, giving them the opportunity to choose public schools outside their district of residence (Wolfe, 2003).

*School climate:* School climate is the enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perception of behavior in schools (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991).

*School Climate Survey:* This survey is used in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. It is designed to allow parents to voice their opinions and perceptions about their child's school (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2004a).

*The School Improvement Plan (SIP):* This annual report is required by the Miami-Dade County Public School system and the state of Florida. All public schools state specific goals and objectives in instructional disciplines and school operations for the purpose of achieving adequate yearly progress (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2005b).

*School reform:* Encompasses various efforts taking place to improve schools (Richmond, 1999).

*School vouchers:* Parents are given public funds as vouchers to be used to send their child or children to a school of choice participating in a voucher program. The voucher funds are used to defray some of the tuition cost at a private (independent versus public) or parochial school (Goldhaber, 1997).

*Traditional public school:* Traditional public schools are those schools which are not private, parochial, or fall under the category of a school of choice, or offering alternative programs, e.g., international baccalaureate, home schooling, magnet.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Early research has provided limited information about why charter schools appeal to parents. Whether charter schools are performing to par with traditional public schools continues the national debate. Research studies show that students whose parents are involved in the school do better academically. Yet, the deliberation continues as to whether charter schools, touting parent satisfaction as its poster child, are up to par with the traditional public schools. How parents view the schools, how they grade their schools, and how the students actually perform in charter schools are just a few of the areas reviewed in the literature of this study.

#### Overview and Background: School Choice

With the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Educational Excellence, the current school reform movement began. The political response to the publication was overwhelming. Included in the priorities set by governors and state departments of education across the country calling for educational change was to initiate “some kind of school choice within the public sector” (Uchitelle, 1993, p. 219). Permitting decentralization, providing for a more market-driven educational system, offering new professional opportunities are all elements within a public setting that made charter schools an attractive reform initiative for policymakers,

educators, and parents alike (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1995). Thus, a marketplace theory of schooling became elevated to a policy issue at the national level.

An advocate of public schooling, Horace Mann believed that schools must play a role in forming a common national culture, which he viewed as essential with the continuous influx of immigrants to the United States (Curti, 1968). By the mid-1950s, schools which had once introduced the children of immigrants to the American culture were witness to the gradual Black migration to the northern cities, and white flight to suburbs, exposing the problems confronting the urban schools (Noguera, 1994).

The persistence of high drop out rates, crime, delinquency, and academic underachievement, as evidenced in lower socioeconomic communities, has contributed to the perception that workable solutions cannot be found within the traditional public school setting, and that opportunities for choosing schools may better meet the needs of students. This opportunity has been marketed as privatization. According to Noguera (1994), given the tremendous frustration over the quality of public education in these various communities, the privatization advertisement has proven effective.

In 1955, Nobel-Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman argued for publicly financed education to private schools. Friedman's argument was that the public schools held a monopoly over the delivery of instructional services, thus leading to inefficiency and a lack of innovation (Good & Braden, 2000b).

Friedman's call for privatization occurred at a time when more demands were being placed upon public schools to address social problems. As a result of the Civil Rights Movement, the 1960s introduced to the public schools federally financed programs such as compensatory education, Project Head Start, targeting disadvantaged

students. The Coleman report study (Coleman, 1966), requested by Congress under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, concluded that family background differences were overwhelmingly more important than school characteristics in explaining student achievement differences (Levin & Belfield, 2002). Despite a significant increase in the expenditure of public funds on education, critics of these programs argued that there was little statistical evidence to prove that these programs had positive effects on educational achievement and attainment. Though many of the reform programs had only been in place for a relatively short period of time, the statistical evidence was quickly brought to the open by those calling for privatization and cuts in state and federal spending (Levin & Belfield).

According to Henig (1994), Friedman's historical ideas were easily rejected by Americans at that time, as they highly viewed the government's consistency and ability to solve current problems (e.g., the New Deal, victory in World War II). In contrast, by the 1980s and 1990s, "the philosophical rationale for keeping educational decision making firmly anchored in public institutions was being forgotten" (Henig, p. 96). America's commitment to the public good was dissipating.

During the early debates over the creation of public schools, several critics charged that education, like child rearing, was a private matter, and not an activity over which the government should assume responsibility (Cremin, 1975). Historically, the proposal to use government funds to pay for the cost of education was put forward by Adam Smith in his 1776 publication, *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith called for the government to give money directly to parents for the purchase of educational services in

order to prevent the development a monopoly over the provision of these educational services.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a system of public education for children was firmly in place, with public education opponents establishing private and/or parochial schools suited to their needs and values. In the 1925 U.S. Supreme Court case *Pierce versus Society of Sisters* (268 U.S. 510), the court unanimously ruled that the Oregon statute requiring all children to attend public schools “violated the property rights of private school operators and interfered with the rights of parents to control their children’s upbringing” (Kemerer, 2000). The state of Oregon did, however, have the right to impose *reasonable regulations* on private schools (Kemerer). Minnow (2003) stated that the Court “elevated the liberties of the parents to choose not to accept the instruction provided by the public schools” (p. 219).

The 1990s experienced the school choice issue resurfacing from an idea that was too extreme to imagine, to a movement that has gained considerable public attention and support. With Milton Friedman's privatization market solution to improve public education as the backdrop, and the government’s shift of power from federal to state and local control, the political community was primed to accept choice as an experiment (Good & Braden, 2000b).

In response to declining student achievement, test scores, and a fear of being labeled a failing school, school districts began contracting with private companies. Citing the hope of overcoming financial obstacles and producing needed change in academic gains, the entire school operation was placed in the hands of such companies as Edison Schools, Inc. (Brimley & Garfield, 2002). Levin, quoted by Cook (2001), stated

that “Part of the attraction is getting difficult schools off the hands of school districts” (p. 11). Private providers realized that (a) there is no easy way to save on administrative costs, (b) there are additional costs in marketing and community-building, and (c) competitive efforts do not demonstrate superior pedagogy or results over existing public schools.

With profits low and losses gaining, private providers are moving away from the operation of schools and towards service areas where growth can be seen, such as tutoring, summer school, music, and sports. According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2004) these support services were the areas in which private contractors had been around the longest, and where contracting out was the most widely practiced, and successful. However, the NEA continues to express its concern that education will become an industry composed of private companies that will take over the administrative operations and teaching functions for entire schools, and/or districts (NEA).

With opportunities to sell textbooks, and standardized tests, as well as assume school management and operations, the movement to privatize education has greatly expanded. As a result, such business opportunities to privatize education have greatly expanded and are not overlooked by companies and corporations (Kohn, 2002). From assisting failing schools to reliance on a private governance model, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation invites services such as tutoring and private management. Additionally, the demands for a set of nationally reviewed standards and tests have brought the private sector into the picture as never before. For example, it is common today to find national testing companies producing sets of criterion-referenced tests in



reading and mathematics, tied to state standards in preparation for state-wide standardized testing in Grades 3 – 8 (Good & Braden, 2002b).

Private management will continue to grow as long as the difficulties for meeting achievement standards exist. Contributing to the impetus for privatization growth is a society that demands additional governmental services. However, as the society and public school systems change through reform, school administrators are encouraged to keep a watchful eye on how revenue distributions from private companies impact their school's finances and budgets (Brimley & Garfield, 2002).

#### Charter Schools as Schools of Choice

The current call for choice is now the most prominent and far reaching of the proposals for privatization. Interpreted as nothing more than a ploy for reducing the financial burden on families that send their children to private schools, the critics have failed again to consider the movement as a serious strategy for educational reform (Buchen, 2004).

“The cure for the problems of a socialized monopoly is a good dose of competition” (Gross & Gross, 1985, p. 352). Generally, when there are more choices, there is more competition, and it becomes possible to gauge the extent of competitive pressures (Belfield & Levin, 2002). Charter schools encourage innovation and provide opportunities for parents to play powerful roles in shaping and supporting the education of their children. As a result, many feel that charter schools spur healthy competition to improve public education (Charter School Accountability Center, 2003).

The decades between 1960 and 1970 reflected the frustration many parents and educators experienced with the public school system. Schools were created to answer the

call by undoing the one-size-fits-all model. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, parents and innovative public school educators were joining together to design educational options or choices. Congress allocated funds to create magnet schools, and the late 1970s and 1980s created alternative schools to address the needs of disruptive and unsuccessful students. Nathan (1996a) believes that this is where the charter school story begins.

Vying for federal and state dollars, public schools were in need of breathing life into a system that was struggling to sustain itself at the forefront of education, rather than as an alternative. In 1995, Federal support for charter schools began with the authorization of the (former) Public Charter Schools Program (PCSP) administered by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE). Funds from Charter Schools Program (CSP), the current funding agency's title, support charter research, state grant programs, demonstration programs, and underwrite national charter school conferences (U.S. DOE, 2004b).

Charter schools, however, are as different from traditional public schools as they are from each other. Charter schools are public schools under a contract, or charter, between a local educational agency and a group (parents, teachers, community leaders, or others) who want to create alternatives and choice within the public school system. The nature of each charter proposal emphasizes an academic focus, (e.g., back to basics or highly individualized program); the population it will serve (inner-city, at-risk, bi-lingual); and the options for its own school year calendar and hours (Gratz, 2004).

Given the potential of charter schools to reform education and the considerable amount of public monies being invested, it seems important that charter schools be as accountable, if not more, to their immediate sponsors and, more broadly, to citizens

(Good & Braden, 2000b). The Office of Educational Research and Improvement reported that roughly 50% of charter schools had submitted or intended to submit to their chartering agency their annual report. Fewer than 50% expressed those same intentions to the state department of education. Opponents to the success and staying power of charter schools have responded by keeping the schools on tighter purse strings, rationing the financial support due other public schools (Finn & Osberg, 2005).

Expanding school choice and accountability is reasonable and assumes there will be a concern for quality, not just the quantity of choice schools. With the federal government sitting in a position to control educational systems locally, fiscal and accountability policy may foster school accountability and choice. Accountability for performance and fiscal management are tied to taxes flowing to schools. It is believed that facilities receiving federal dollars should meet the same standards as other public schools, and, therefore, are accountable to their clients and to the public served. States must set minimum standards for all schools which accept public funds, be it a public, private, or parochial school. "Those which do not meet standards should lose their funding" (Viteritti, 2003, p. 28). Often, charter schools seek additional funding through grants and private donations.

Charter schools in Florida are fully recognized non-profit public schools, funded in part by the Florida Department of Education in the same manner as all other public schools in the state. The Florida charter schools are held accountable as the public schools that they are. Accountability is written into the charter and in place virtually before the school opens. In Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), students participate in state-wide testing and are assessed through quarterly monitoring from a

Schools of Choice district office. Consistent monitoring and accountability are important and must be mandated. Public charter schools are held to a monitoring and assessment standard that keeps their doors open; however, other types of public schools are not held to the same standard. According to Smith and Meier (1995), “Schools that offer the best education will prosper; those that do not will close” (pp. 315-316).

In 1996, the Florida Legislature amended the 2001 Florida Statutes to authorize the creation of charter schools through the enactment of Section 228.056, F.S., Charter Schools. Florida’s constitution mandates the establishment of a high quality system of free public schools for the purpose of giving all students a *high quality education*. The constitution describes the education of children as a fundamental value of the people of the State of Florida (The Florida Statutes, 2001). The stated purposes of the amended statutes was directed primarily at improvement of student learning by creating choice and learning opportunities for all students, “with special emphasis on those students identified as academically low achieving.” The law also encouraged *innovative learning methods*, and *innovative measurement tools*. Such innovations should “provide rigorous competition . . . to stimulate continual improvement in all public schools” (The Florida Statutes, 2001).

Within the context of public education, the amendment framed the establishment and purpose of the Florida charter schools in the following ways:

1. To be fully recognized as public schools, with the local school districts/Boards as the sponsoring agency.

2. To improve student learning, with special emphasis on those students identified as academically low achieving, creating the measurement for success of charter schools would be how well their students performed.

3. To encourage the use of innovative and different teaching methods for the purpose of increasing choice opportunities for parents and students, placing greater emphasis on learning outcomes and school improvement.

4. To serve the Districts by expanding the capacity of the school system to provide for the increased overcrowding and numbers of students.

5. To provide, by waiver, an opportunity for a District to expand the cap of the number of charter school requests and applications allowed by the State Board of Education. Hence, counties in Florida are charged with maintaining a system of public education that affords all students the opportunity to obtain a quality education.

#### Educational Reform and School Choice

Leaving a mark on school reform today are the parents who are not only advocating for their own child, but for others, as well. One of the more critical issues is whether or not charter school administrators will recognize parental partnerships as an option available to them and/or to their school. From his study on effective schools, Marzano (2003) found that implicit in factors such as parental involvement, school climate, and leadership was the notion that the school is the proper focus for reform.

Maintaining parents as educational allies may depend on how or to what degree educators accept this new potential advocacy role (Buchen, 2004). Within the school choice movement, charter schools have emerged on the scene as not only an option for

parents seeking choice, but as a viable competitive movement within the current school reform effort.

Ten years earlier, the research of Ogawa and Dutton (1994) produced five assumptions about choice as a reform strategy. One implication from their assumptions questioned the motives of parents to exercise their right of school choice. This assumption stated that when given the opportunity, parents would make informed choices in selecting schools for their children, based on the assessment of the child's interests and educational needs and capacity of the school to engage their child and meet his/her needs. A second assumption stated that schools would respond to parents' preferences. Thirdly, students, teachers, and parents—the major participants in the educational enterprise—would be more highly motivated. The fourth and fifth assumptions stated that parent choice would improve student achievement outcomes, thus improving parent satisfaction with the school, and that the costs of providing educational services would be reduced.

Kearney and Arnold (1994) reported that Kolderie recounted two specific examples of the impact of charter schools on the broader educational system. The first example involved a group of parents who, upon adoption of the charter school legislation, moved quickly to apply and establish an alternative Montessori school. The district responded just as quickly, although not under the same legislation. In the second claim, Kolderie argued that once the Minnesota legislature adopted its postsecondary choice program, many more secondary schools became more responsive to increasing the number and quality of advanced placement courses.

Traditional schools may convert to charter school status. Reasons cited by California schools seeking charter school status included freedom from confining rules

and regulations, control of curriculum and instruction, encouraging change, form new community relationships, autonomy, finances, and, parental involvement (Dianda & Corwin, 1994).

Denessen, Slegers, and Smit (2001) stated that “current education reforms encompass increasing freedom of parental choice” (p.1). Parental choice is seen as a stimulus for school improvement and quality control of schools. Denessen et.al., continued to state that “Giving parents more say in the choice of a school for their child is said to empower them and to enhance the role of a market mechanism in the educational system” (p. 1).

#### Parents and Charter School Choice

Never before have so many choices for education been available, nor have so many parents made choices about schooling for their child or children: home schooling, magnets, charters, voucher programs, parochial, and/or private. As parents route and maneuver their child or children through a K – 16 education system, there are signs that school districts are providing planning assistance for parents in the form of academic road maps (Buchen, 2004). Hassel and Hassel (2004) also stated that while parents are driving the school choice movement nation-wide, few have a map directing them on the road of choice.

In 2003, 12.5 million children attended schools other than their assigned public school, excluding home-schooled children. This was a 45% increase, up from 8.6 million in 1993. However, the school-age population increased by only 4% during this 10 year period. Up by 57% to 7.4 million, it was the chosen public schools which had the greatest increase in student population. Real-estate figures showed that “roughly 13

million students had parents who moved to their current neighborhood because of the schools” (Hassel & Hassel, 2004, p. 34).

Parents from different classes “tend to differ with respect to the choice of a school for their child” (Denessen et al., p. 4). This class-related issue is important to the topic of education policy debates, as school choice could enhance segregation between schools (Goldhaber, 1997; Karsten, 1994). Good and Braden (2000b) reported that the Harvard project report on school desegregation data concluded that growing racial and ethnic segregation of African American and Latino students has produced a deepening isolation from middle class students and from successful schools. Orfield, Bachmeier, James, and Eitle (1997) also concluded that poverty, associated with low-income households, makes it very difficult for disadvantaged students to maintain a commitment to education. Differences in family income, parents' education levels, and employment status are troubling. Efforts should be made to expand opportunities for lower income families to participate more broadly in the system of choice (Orfield et. al.).

From the most recent National Center for Education Statistics survey, Hassel and Hassel (2004) reported that among parents aware of public options, “poor African-American, and the least educated parents were more likely to opt for public schools of choice other than parents in other income, ethnic, and education groups” (p. 34). Shumow, Kang, and Lowe-Vandell (1996) found that most parents taking advantage of choice were more likely to be African American, lower-income, and high-risk children. Their research found that, contrary to their predictions, “parents who had chosen schools were found to be less directly involved in their children's schooling” (p. 99).



In contrast, parents assigned to their neighborhood schools were more directly involved in their children's schooling. Shumow et al., (1996) acknowledged that this finding substantiates those arguments by school choice critics who support the view that low-income parents, who choose schools, may be unable to become directly involved in their children's education due to limited transportation, time, and other factors.

The Great School Quality Factors define and base school quality on those items which notably differentiate average from low-performing schools (Hassel & Hassel, 2004). A clear mission, high expectations, frequent monitoring and adjustments, effective teaching methods, strong home-school connections, a safe and orderly environment, and instructional leadership were the most familiar indicators identified (Hassel & Hassel). As educational choosers, parents ranked the academic reputation of the school as the number one reason for school selection (Anderson, 2003)

According to Buchen (2004), parents today are the best educated, and most independent, of any group prior to this generation. They are informed and know which laws benefit and help their child. Buchen stated that approval of schools in Ohio increased 20% when factoring in parental involvement into the rating and approval of schools. The wealthiest and most educated parents were more likely to choose private schools. However, Schneider and Buckley (2002) stated that “many doubt the ability of parents to make appropriate choices ” (p.3).

The biggest supporters of Florida charter schools are the parents. In a recent survey conducted by the Charter School Accountability Center (Solmon & Wiederhorn, 2003), parents viewed charter schools as filling a need by providing smaller, better run schools, and by giving parents more accessibility to the schools than do the traditional

public schools. In response to this survey, parents listed their top seven reasons for choosing a charter school over a traditional public school:

1. Smaller class size
2. Strong academics and curriculum
3. Better teachers
4. Reputation
5. Greater opportunities for parental involvement
6. Convenient location
7. Unhappiness with their child's prior school

Parent survey data from New Mexico charter schools supported these findings, placing class size as first, followed by quality of instruction, the curriculum, and dissatisfaction with local public schools. Open-ended responses suggested that parents were pleased with having chosen a charter school, finding more positive than negative characteristics in the charter school (Casey, Andreson, Yelverton, & Wedeen, 2002). Solomon (2003) reported that parents (34.6%) rely on what others had to say about the charter school they selected ("People told me this is a better school"). In this Arizona study, parents chose charters for better teachers and curriculum.

Chubb and Moe (1990) stated that the development of bureaucracy in the public schools poorly serves the low-income and minority students, as they have little political clout against the school's bureaucracy. Centralized control can debilitate a school's effectiveness, thus supporting the genesis for charter schools. Marzano (2003) agreed that Chubb and Moe provided compelling evidence regarding the effect of bureaucratic controls placed on schools. Therefore, charter schools are better able than the larger

bureaucratic traditional public schools to provide parents with the leverage and voice required when dealing with curricular and other issues (Good & Braden, 2000b).

### Parent Involvement

When speculating about the future impact of change on education, parents become the most major pivotal players. According to Buchen (2004), and Vanourek et al., (1997), there are five common factors which drive greater parental involvement:

1. Education
2. Communication
3. Research-based curriculum
4. Rise of school choice
5. Advocacy

Given choices, parents become more actively involved and more satisfied with the education their child receives.

A key element in parent involvement benefiting most children is a sense of partnership between parents and the school. A survey study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found discrepancies between the schools' and parents' reports on whether schools used various practices to involve parents in their child's education (U.S. DOE, 2001b)

“Involved parents sense that the school values and welcomes not only their ideas, but also their physical participation” (Marzano, 2003, p. 35). The benefits listed from parent involvement included lower absenteeism, truancy, and dropout rates. Added benefits from parent participation found in a 1987 study by Tangri & Moles (Marzano) included using parents as a resource base to do the following: (a) locate resources for

specific topics and subject areas; (b) expand teacher contacts by reaching out to the community for additional school resources; (c) solicit business support and direct financial contributions, including business donations and equipment. According to Marzano, communication is the first feature of effective parent involvement, with daily participation in the school setting as the second most important factor.

Marzano's (2003) third factor for effective parent involvement requires the school to establish a governance structure that invites parent and community participation. Marzano cited a 1982 parent study by Stallworth and Williams, which found that parents had little interest in decisions regarding personnel, but were very interested in decisions involving practices and programs impacting the achievement of their children.

The U.S. Department of Education's *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report* (U.S. DOE, 2004a) found that "charter schools are more likely than traditional public schools to have high levels of parent involvement in the areas of budget decisions, governance, instructional issues, parent education workshops, and volunteering" (p. 28). Volunteering is not involvement, according to those researchers who argue that the parent-volunteer requirement serves as admission criteria, and naturally excludes some families. On the other hand, Nathan (1996a) stated that volunteer requirements indicate the strong relationship between the charter school and its parents.

Listed in the U.S. DOE (2004a) report, parent involvement activities (required and voluntary) included participation as: (a) advisory or governing board; (b) supervising lunch or field trips; (c) school fundraising; (d) student or parent recruitment; (e) participate in workshops offered at the school; (f) serve as class assistants;

(g) supervise or direct extracurricular activities; and (h) clerical tasks. The U.S. DOE found that in 2001- 2002, 87% of charter schools reported that parents served on school advisory committees. However, 14% of charters required parents to serve on the governing boards, 75% allowed parents to volunteer for this role, and 11% stated that it was both required and voluntary.

As important as choice may be to the selection process (the best fit), parents rarely make the decision using the type of framework described. Instead, mention of school scores, reputation, class size, and facilities draw the initial interest to making a choice (Henig, 1994). Access to information is not often easy, but knowing or understanding just what information is important is more difficult. Visiting schools may be one of the best ways to determine if a school is a “good fit” for a child, and asking questions of school administrators may bring a sense of what school factors or conditions parents would find satisfying (Henig).

Another way parents are asked to determine their level of satisfaction with their school choice is through a parent survey. Similar to corporate climate surveys, school surveys have become the norm to gauge parent satisfaction in schools.

#### Climate Surveys

According to Roberts, Konczak, and Macan (2004), “The organizational climate survey is a valuable tool used to measure the *pulse* of an organization, department, or group” (p. 14). Assessment and change are the overarching goals of organizational surveys, which are used to support a variety of human resource-related functions (Kraut, 1996). Items surveyed by human resource specialists may include benefit preferences, customer service satisfaction, outcomes of departmental reorganization, and/or employee

opinions regarding the climate of a department or organization. The climate survey is of importance to human resource (HR) professionals and to management, as it provides employees with a medium to express their concerns, and a tool for implementing positive change, improving productivity and satisfaction.

Organizational climate surveys began as early as the 1930s and increased steadily in use since the mid-1960s. Organizational climate, according to literary findings, is related to the structure of the organization (Payne & Pugh, 1976), and to the degree of similarity between the organization's expectations and the employees' expectations (Glick, 1985). Climate surveys facilitate an understanding of the organization's climate and target opportunities for improvement.

To date, there is no agreed-upon definition of the term school climate. Hoy et al., as quoted by Haller and Kleine (2001) stated that what distinguishes one school from another are those "internal characteristics" which "influences the behavior of its members" (p. 339). According to Haller and Kleine, other researchers such as Coleman, Cookson and Persell, and McDill and Rigsby, equated school climate with culture, stating that over time, a set of shared norms, beliefs, and interactions influences the views and behaviors of groups. Haller and Kleine stated that "one implication of this conception is that the same student's behavior will vary in distinctive ways depending on the school that he or she attends" (p. 339).

Empirical study of school climate dates to the early 1960s and to the published work of Halpin and Croft (1963) entitled *The Organizational Climate of Schools*. Influenced by Rokeach, Halpin and Croft's study in educational administration distinguished a school's climate as having a personality, that one could feel the

differences among various schools. Schools were said to have open and closed climates, much like the open-closed characterization of an individual's mind.

Halpin and Croft (1963) crafted the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), an instrument designed to measure four dimensions of an elementary teacher's interaction and four dimensions of an elementary principal's behavior using 64 Likert-scale items. Of six different types of climates, patterns of the eight subscales measuring the dimensions of school climate appear on an open to closed continuum. Open schools are characterized as low on disengagement, hindrance, aloofness, and production emphasis; but, high on esprit, thrust, consideration. The reverse is true for closed schools. Haller and Kleine (2001) stated that the Halpin and Croft research strategy characterizes much of the research on school climate in the following ways:

1. The presumption is made that climate is not an attribute of individuals, but of schools, even though it is the respondents (teachers or administrators) who are used as observers of the school's climate.
2. Climate is computed and averaged on various dimensions, not one single concept.
3. Individuals within a school will rate a school similarly, with sharp differences in aggregate ratings, and climate differences seen among schools.
4. The theory of school climate drives the choice of dimensions to be measured, likening schools to people in that there is a personality component. Thus, components like friendliness and commitment become measurable.

5. Administrators, teachers, students and parents are four sets of observers that might reliably report on various aspects of school climate. One may be better able to respond to certain dimensions than another.

Andrews (1965) disputed the existence of intermediate and distinct climates, stating that the metaphor of an organization with a personality was highly problematic, pointing to the inherent difficulty in changing personalities. Of utmost importance was the misplaced focus on a school's characteristic versus what happens in a classroom (i.e., the influence on the student). Haller and Kleine (2001) stated that the most important and serious criticism of Halpin and Croft's research is that the original OCDQ "had no consistent empirical relationship to any student outcome, either affective or cognitive" (p. 341). In relationship to school improvement planning, ". . . if the fundamental responsibility of administrators is to ensure that their schools create prescribed changes in students, then an organizational attribute that has no effect on students loses significance" (Haller & Klein, p. 341).

Using a climate survey in a school setting is an effective tool for school improvement. The purposes may include (a) diagnostic and assessment, (b) periodic benchmarking, (c) teacher involvement and accountability, (d) staff development, and (e) systematic approach to problem solving. Information provided from the results can be used for improvement between teacher and administration working relationships and/or satisfaction, morale, and communication.

As part of the Florida's System for School Improvement and Accountability, every Florida school is required to report annual School Climate Survey results involving parents, students, teachers, and other staff. The survey's purpose is to gather information



from these groups on what their thoughts and perceptions are about their child(ren)'s school, and how the school can be improved. Results of the surveys are reported with other key data from school accountability documents. An additional purpose of the survey is to yield results which will assist school administrators in identifying priorities for improvement planning.

In Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS), the School Climate Survey is an integral part of the District's effort to promote school improvement and educational accountability. The Parent Form of the survey is designed to allow parents to voice their opinions and feelings about their child(ren)'s school. Parents are informed that "the results will be used to help plan for school improvement" (MDCPS, 2004b). Climate surveys consist of several questions related to a single outcome/topic of interest. The stated purpose or single outcome/topic of this school questionnaire is to "survey perceptions based on experiences in the school" (MDCPS, 2005a).

#### School Climate, Effective Schools, and Leadership

School climate, quality instruction, and leadership are frequently associated with effective schools. Early researchers (Rutter, Maughn, Mortimore, & Iystin, 1979) found a correlate of effective schools included strong leadership, a climate of expectation, an orderly atmosphere, and effective communication.

Hoy and Tarter (1992) stated that crucial to having a good school is a healthy organizational climate. Research of the literature supports the premise that organizational climate is important for successful reform (Bulach & Malone, 1994). Further, support for the role of school climate in student achievement is found in the research of Bulach, Malone, and Castleman (1994). Their research showed a significant difference in student

achievement among 20 schools with good versus poor school climates. Bulach and Malone cited Sweeney as stating that a winning school climate is the foundation for sound educational programs. "When the climate is right, people are inspired to do their best . . . . Achievement generally rises" (p. 2). Additional researchers identified a common core of variables relevant to student achievement: climate, leadership, parent and community involvement, and instruction. Research cited several studies stating the importance of climate for student achievement, and the support of parental involvement for student achievement. Yet, little research has yet to be found directly linking the three elements of school climate, student achievement, and parent satisfaction.

In the importance of school-level factors on student achievement, Marzano (2000) defined communication as the first feature necessary for effective parent involvement. According to the NEA (2004), parents are not obligated to communicate with the school; therefore, it is the school's responsibility to initiate the communication, and to establish an atmosphere in which parents feel welcomed. While communication seemed limited to paper correspondence, new technology is moving communication to a new level via the Internet.

Research suggests student achievement is directly influenced by strong leadership and school climate (Kelly, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005), and relates principal behavior to school climate (Bulach, Boothe, & Pickett, 1998). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) found that the actions and behaviors of a building principal affect the climate of a school. In addition, Bossart, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982) linked both the principal's instructional leadership and the climate of a school to student achievement. Additional research studies have established relationships between instructional leadership and

school climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Hoy, Tartar, & Bliss, 1990; Lane, 1992; Kelly, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005).

The literature on school climate frequently mentions the importance of effective schools research on student achievement. Parents, students and educators agree that the paramount goal of education is the high-level performance of schools (Anderson, MacDonald, & Sinnemann, 2004). School administrators know what they face in the name of school improvement: financial expense, high-stakes academic credibility, and politically charged accountability (Haller & Kleine, 2001). Timely and accurate information must be presented and explained by educators to parents in a way that allows both groups to work together in improving school results (Anderson et al.).

#### Charter Schools and Student Achievement

The question of whether school choice improves student outcomes continues to persist, despite years of research and debate (Goldhaber, 2001). In one study, students in charter schools showed smaller gains in achievement than students in traditional public schools; however, for charters in existence for 3 or more years, the gains between the two school types became insignificant (Bracey, 2005b).

While research has established a direct correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, a review of the literature on school choice and student achievement yields inconsistent results. In some instances, school choice is associated with enhanced achievement, but in other cases it is not. Even in studies showing a positive relationship between student achievement and school choice, the impact of school choice was minor, with stronger variables associated with student achievement.

Goldhaber (2001) stated that those public school districts facing greater

competition within the same metropolitan area have better student outcomes and are more efficient. As an example, evidence from New York City's District 4 suggests that choice affects student achievement. Private school students outperform their public school counterparts and are more likely to attend college. Positive effects are predominantly found for minority students in urban settings. The evidence is mixed, however, as the question remains: Is this an effect of the school or a result of other factors, such as family background?

A positive relationship between choice and school quality implies that parental decisions academically benefit their child. Two arguments about why it appears school choice results in better educational outcomes were presented by Goldhaber (2001):

(a) It appears that schools of choice better attract students with particular interests or learning styles, and (b) it appears that choice schools force a competition in a current public school educational monopoly. At the root of the choice incentive was the positive response by parents and schools to schooling options and greater competition.

In their study on school choice, Shumow et al. (1996) found a very small but statistically significant difference in mathematics achievement (but not reading achievement). This relationship, however, made less difference than did parent involvement in schooling. The study concluded that parental involvement in their children's schooling was found to have a more powerful effect than school choice on both mathematics achievement and school orientation.

When compared to regular public schools on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, charter schools did not do as well, even with comparable neighborhood schools. The data, however, did not provide information regarding student

growth, a factor of importance to charter schools serving at-risk students (Gratz, 2004). Choice advocates argue that school choice especially helps low-income Americans.

Marzano (2003) cited the research of Chubb and Moe (1990) when concluding that the more effective schools are at being organized the more likely they are to be a school that produces students with higher achievement gains. In terms of the effects on student achievement, however, school choice has not proven to be a consistent or robust variable (Good & Braden, 2000a).

#### Parent Satisfaction: Making the Grade

When the 1997 Hudson Institute study investigated the question, “How satisfied are you with specific features of this school?” the findings revealed that two thirds of parents in the study found (a) class size, (b) more individual attention, (c) better teaching, and (d) a stronger curriculum as more satisfactory than their previous school experience. Overall, parents seemed pleased with most aspects of their child’s charter school (Vanourek et al., 1997).

Ogawa and Dutton (1994) cited two studies cautioning that satisfaction improves with choice. In a 1991 study by Witte, satisfaction levels changed during the first year of parental involvement and at the end of the first year. Parents were generally more satisfied than other parents in the Milwaukee school district, and considerably more satisfied than they had been in their previous school. In 1992, Witte confirmed that the patterns were repeated after the second year (Richmond, 1999).

The second study conducted by Bridge and Blackman in 1978 produced different results (Richmond, 1999). Regarding vouchers, parent satisfaction increased during the first 2 years of the program. However, when the program was replaced with an open

enrollment plan, parents' satisfaction decreased considerably. From these two studies, Ogawa and Dutton (1994) concluded that research does suggest that parents' satisfaction improves as a result of participation in choice programs; however, if initial expectations are not met, and/or if parents become frustrated with highly constrained choices, satisfaction can be temporary.

Research suggests that, in part, dissatisfaction with their former public school is why parents choose charter schools (Bielick & Chapman, 2003). Other factors of dissatisfaction or concern included (a) academics, (b) a non-humanizing culture, (c) safety concerns or fears, and (d) an unresponsiveness to parental involvement. In response, charter schools capitalize on one or more of the following themes to attract parents: (a) high-quality academic programs with standards, (b) supportive environment, (c) small school size, (d) flexible scheduling and/or (e) a highly structured school environment (U. S. Department of Education, 1998).

In New Mexico, charter school survey data and interviews indicated parents were "very satisfied with their charter school experiences" for the following reasons: "class size, quality of instruction, curriculum, and dissatisfaction with local public schools" (Casey et al., 2002, p. 253). The study reported parents as feeling "grateful" for the opportunity to have their child in a charter school, "happy" to be participating in their child's education, and "a personal sense of responsibility for the success of their schools" (p. 523).

The 3-year National Household Education Surveys Program (Bielick & Chapman, 2003) study found that those parents whose children were in public choice schools were more likely to be very satisfied with the school, felt that their children were getting a

good education (academic standards), and were satisfied with the order and discipline of the school than those parents in public-assigned schools. Parents with children in private schools were more involved in school activities than both groups: traditional public schools and public choice schools.

A survey conducted by Florida State University's Charter School Accountability Center in the College of Education, showed overwhelmingly that parents were satisfied with their charter school. To indicate their level of satisfaction, parents were asked to issue a report card grade to their child's school. According to the survey, 69% of charter school parents assigned their child's charter school the letter grade of "A." Forty-one percent of parents gave an "A" to the public school their children attended before they enrolled in a charter school. The 2004 survey, a first-of-its-kind statewide, reported that 97% of parents chose a charter school for academic reasons, with nearly 89% of those parents planning to re-enroll their children in the charters the next year (Cox, 2004).

A poll taken of 300 parents of New York charter school students found that 42% of parents graded their child's charter school an "A" compared to 21% who gave their child's prior school an "A." The grade reflected satisfaction with the quality of instruction. When rating satisfaction on individual components of the charter school, safety was rated 90%; parent-teacher satisfaction was 87%, with class size at 85%. The most common response to the question of what the charter school was doing better than the child's previous school was academics and/or education instruction (McCully & Malin, 2003).

Arizona, one of the top states serving chartered students, reported data from over 45,000 parents in a survey conducted in 2001 to 2002. The 29.1% parent response

concurred with the FSU study: 66.9% graded their charter school an “A” or “A+” as compared to 64% a year earlier. Parents gave nearly identical grades to the charter schools as the state issued to schools, based upon school achievement profiles. The survey also found greater parent satisfaction with the current charter school education than with the school (traditional public) previously attended (Solomon, 2003).

#### Charter Schools: The Other Side

Teacher, Ray Budde, is credited with the charter-named idea for restructuring and organizing schools. Although conceived in the 1970s, it was not until the 1980s *Nation At Risk* report (National Commission on Education Excellence, 1983) which drew attention to those schools failing to thrive. Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, championed the idea, only to later distance himself, “. . . finding them [charter schools] divisive” (Bracey, 2005b, p. 143).

While strong claims have been made about the effects of allowing more public school choice for parents, the literature is mixed, as passions run deep on all sides of the charter movement. Supporters of traditional public schools believe that (a) Public schools do a good job of educating students; (b) parents, especially in non-inner city settings, are generally supportive; (c) retaining the current traditional school system is far better and cost effective than replacing or duplicating other schools; and (d) it is the public schools which unite Americans in the ways necessary for maintaining a democracy (Good & Braden, 2000a).

One of the most contentious arguments centers on funding. With state formulas dictating how much funding a charter school should receive and federal funds divided up between the local school district schools (traditional schools) and the charter schools, the



ongoing disagreements focus on the finances. Darling-Hammond's (1997) criticism is grounded in the view that of the numerous experimental, alternative, and demonstration schools granted waivers to pursue reform, most come and go because little is done to change the system as a whole. Reflecting on the past, Darling-Hammond stated that strategies which "rely on competition or special schools without increasing the capacity of the system to offer good education will produce improved education for only a few and with little lasting effect" (p. 24).

Good and Braden (2000b) stated that public schools, in general, are doing well, and when found to be inadequate, it was often due to funding issues. Traditional school advocates noted that "the quality of education is more likely to be improved by direct investments than by beliefs in 'pie in the sky' theories like marketplace competition" (Good & Braden, p. 7). The argument continues by questioning the response to the expensive school bureaucracies, which are often blamed for being insensitive to parents and students. Good and Braden questioned why legislation to handle the abuses are not enacted; instead, more directors and charter school administrators are hired in the hope they will be more responsive to students. "Changing the public school system through duplication (e.g., charters) means more money spent on administrators and facilities and less on children and instruction" (Good & Braden, p. 7).

Confronted by problems in the public schools, a shift of financial support and authority from the public to the private sector has been advocated by some citizens (Kober, 1996). Kober gave the example that if private school enrollments doubled (e.g., the voucher program), "the vast majority of American children (78%) would attend

public schools –a compelling justification for maintaining the public schools and making them better, instead of abandoning them” (p. 22).

The value of diversity and the common good is a repetitive statement. Levin (2000) presented education as a central component of childrearing, a right consistent with freedom of educational choice. However, Levin continued, the reproduction of institutions for a free society ensures the rights, freedoms, and civic functioning for democratic societies. In search of improved educational productivity for all families, minorities, and immigrants efforts extend from greater technology use to school reforms to market competition. Other advocates support the traditional public schools because they view it as a system uniting the common good. Good and Braden (2000b) cited Barber as arguing that the public schools define and shape the country as a public. Postman (1995), also cited by Good and Braden, made a similar argument: “It *creates* a public” (p. 8). As various educational reforms are proposed and weighed, Kober (1996) stated, we must be “true to the spirit of history” (p. 22), and “maintain the very features of public schooling early leaders believed were necessary to maintain “a strong, cohesive and just nation” (p. 22).

According to Levin (2000), a key argument is the replacement of an educational monopoly with competition, supported by Chubb and Moe (1990), and a recurring theme originating from Friedman’s educational marketplace incentive for improved delivery of services and education innovation. The argument for making public schools more innovative and responsive to consumers is “to make them compete more—let parents choose their school” (Good & Braden, 2000b, p. 8).

In mid-August 2004, an article in the *New York Times* reported the data from an NAEP study on charter schools. The Charter School Leadership Council, an advocacy group, had proposed the analysis, and was joined by the Education Leaders council, the Progressive Policy Institute, and the Black Alliance for Educational Options in asking for a nationally representative sample of charter school analysis to be included in the NAEP review. According to Bracey (2005a), proponents of the movement (Paul Peterson, William Howell, Martin West, Rod Paige, Floyd Flake, Jay Greene, Jeanne Allen, Howard Fuller, Caroline Hoxby, and Chester Finn, Jr.) rejected the study with claims that the data were misleading. Instead, the proponents prepared to defend the results reported: Achievement in charter schools was not higher than traditional public schools, and they were actually underperforming as compared to other public schools.

When the results did not produce desired outcomes, charter school proponents rejected the study, claiming the study's limitations. Bracey (2005a) reported that recent book publications examining charter school studies [e.g., *The Charter School Dust-Up* (Carnoy, Mishel, Jacobsen, & Rothstein), and *School House Schlock* (Mishel)], refer to the standards in charter schools as clearly lower than traditional public schools. One reason for the low performance, however, was not attributed to charters serving a more disadvantaged population, as expressed by charter supporters. When analysis controlled for family income and location, regular public school students showed higher scores. The student populations showed no ethnic differences; however, the white/minority achievement gap was as large in the regular (traditional) public schools as it was in the charters (Bracey).

The U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE, 2004b) released its own results in December 2004, fully replicating the AFT analysis. Although the results favored public schools over the charters in 20 of 22 comparisons, not all differences were statistically significant. The complaints that the data were a snapshot of information were challenged by two additional studies. Both the Hoxby study and the Ladd and Bifulco study of students in North Carolina showed that charter school students do not progress as fast as students in traditional schools (Bracey, 2005a). In addition, the Ladd and Bifulco study examined the gains for the same students when they were in public schools, as well as when they were in the charter school. "Growth differences in the two types of school could not be attributable to the charters' and publics' different mix of ethnic groups or different socioeconomic status" (Bracey, 2005a, p. 555). The results of the study show substantial negative results for charters. The differences in growth were greater than the differences between students whose parents are drop-outs and those whose parents have graduate degrees, as well as the growth differences between Whites and Blacks. Although this same study found the negative impact declining with the number of years the charter school was open, the large differences remained negative even after 5 years of charter operation.

In response to the market competition, the Bifulco and Ladd (2004) study found no evidence to suggest that the public schools "ratcheted up their performance because of competition from the charters" (Bracey, 2005a, p. 555). The authors concluded that the attrition rate plays a substantial part of the differences found in the study, with charter schools losing almost twice as many students as their public school counterparts. According to Bracey (2005a), the U.S. Department of Education is the one source named

for dragging its heels to report the very data on charter schools required to appropriately analyze the comprehensive data collected.

Advocates of existing traditional public school systems charge that charter schools are provided a safety net by the traditional schools and ultimately responsible if other school systems cannot or will not provide needed services. In Arizona, a number of affluent private schools converted to charter school status. Students arriving from the public schools showed the smallest gains.

A Goldwater Institute study claimed gains for students who remained in charter schools for 3 years. Over the 3 year period, 43% of students who returned to public schools then showed the largest gains. “Goldwater claimed this as a *benefit* of having attended a charter school” (Bracey, 2005a, p. 146); however, a review by Michael Martin, research director for the Arizona School Boards Association called the same claim a recovery. Bracey concluded that “given the students had the smallest gains while they attended charter schools, Martin’s conclusion seems more reasonable” (p. 146).

To date, charter schools around the country show that a school operator in California, under investigation by the state, closed 60 of his schools, leaving 10,000 students in search of a new school, and hundreds of teachers and administrators without jobs. The Ohio Department of Education was accused by the Coalition for Public Education for inflating the grades of charter schools. Additionally, fewer than 45% of Ohio’s teachers in the 250 charters have full state certification. Texas also targeted teacher certification and retention, charging that 11% of charter teachers lacked college degrees, with the average charter losing more than half of its teachers every year. After the Citizens for the Public Schools in Massachusetts compared the charter schools

enrollment to the department of education, and the department's reporting of charter enrollments, it charged that the state was exaggerating charter school waiting list claims (Bracey, 2005b).

Early on, fears were expressed that charters would "skim" better students away from public schools. Some evaluations have found evidence for such skimming. A study in Arizona turned up evidence that the charter schools there were much more ethnically segregated than were nearby public schools. A Michigan evaluation also revealed evidence for such segregation. However, a recent survey of charters in 23 states found the evidence mixed and inconclusive (Bracey, 2005b).

A closer analysis suggested a tendency that will either exacerbate or create more isolation by social class among students. It seemed likely that some charter schools were responding to the legislation asking to serve higher percentages of at-risk students (Bracey, 2005b).

In summary, establishing and maintaining charter schools has proven to be a much more complicated undertaking than initially thought. Charter school enthusiasts seem to view them as a magic bullet that would offer immediate and major improvements in education. The actual outcomes have been much more modest. It is too early to draw firm conclusions about the ultimate usefulness of charter schools.

#### Trends and Insights

Hassel (1999) stated that for charter schools to survive, changes must take place in the following areas: (a) laws (policy/charter), (b) infrastructure, and (c) oversight (independent). Remedies for problems in public education today are replete with change agents and paradigms ready to transform and alter the conditions within a school setting,

all in the name of reform. However, Bulach and Malone (1994) asked: Is the school's climate ready for implementing reform? According to Marzano (2003), public schools may be up to the challenge of research-based reform.

The National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) provided survey data results that may be used to estimate the use of school choice in the U.S. Trends in the use and users of public schools choice are provided from 3 years of the study: 1993, 1996, and 1999. Results show a decrease in the percentage of children enrolled in public schools (Grades 1 – 12) from 80% in 1993 to 76% in 1996 and 1999, with public choice enrollment increasing from 11% in 1993 to 14% in 1996 and 1999. Enrollment in private, non-church-related schools, and private church-related schools remained relatively stable at about 2%, and 7% to 8%, respectively, for the 3 years of the study (Bielick & Chapman, 2003).

Family and student characteristics of this trend toward public-choice enrollment were evidenced among students from low-income and urban-area households. Student characteristics associated with school choice showed that Black students had a higher rate of enrollment than did White or Hispanic students. In all 3 survey years, students living in two-parent households, whose parents possessed at least a bachelor's degree, had a higher enrollment rate in private schools (church and non-church related). A higher rate of students with disabilities attended public or public choice schools (Bielick & Chapman, 2003).

As indicated in every Rose and Gallup poll since 1999, the public chooses to reform existing educational systems rather than seeking alternatives. The fact that the public is involved with, or has interest in, reform strategies is more than a simple

assumption. The existing reform model is a decade-old trend which certain states have adopted. Although education is still a state responsibility, these particular states no longer include the school improvement agenda as a responsibility of their department of education. Rather, the classic “top-down” approach to reform has been replaced by “making available massive amounts of comparative data on the performance of all of the schools and districts . . .” (Haller & Kleine, 2001, p. 334).

With easy access to the Internet, parents and taxpayers are able now to access and evaluate their own schools and/or to make comparisons with similar schools located throughout the state. Haller and Kleine (2001):

It is one thing for local administrators and school boards to get around obscure regulations promulgated by faceless bureaucrats in a distant state capital. It is quite another for them to get around indignant parents and taxpayers asking public, pointed, and informed questions about their own schools. (p. 334)

Haller and Kleine (2001) continue by stating that school administrators must become aware of this new trend and learn to use and interpret the data available to the public. The school report card is one example. Data and information on a given school can be found at a website specific to a school, including percentage of graduates, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, per pupil expenditures, salaries of faculty and staff, attendance, and dropouts.

The primary purpose of the annual *Phi Delta Kappal*/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes toward the Public Schools is to trace and interpret the public’s view of its schools. The 36<sup>th</sup> Rose and Gallup (2004) annual poll continued the focus on the No Child Left Behind Act because of its potential for improving student achievement. While



the results showed a continued trend to give reasonably high marks to the public schools, an even higher grade is given when parents rate the school their oldest child attends. Hence, the grades vary considerably between the community's schools and the schools nationally (Rose & Gallup, 2004).

In response to the question: "What do you think are the biggest problems the public schools of your community must deal with?" the public affirmed that lack of financial support was the biggest problem. Other major problems from which to select included (a) lack of discipline, more control; (b) overcrowded schools; (c) use of drugs/dope; and (d) fighting violence/gangs (Rose & Gallup, 2004).

With school and district data available on the web, the growth of cyber charter schools is also on the rise. Sixteen cyber charter schools now exist nation-wide. Online charter schools fall under charter revisions at the state level (e.g., Pennsylvania State Education Department is the sole authority to grant charters for virtual charter schools in the state). The funding formula, however, continues to draw the ire from districts vying for the same student funds (Trotter, 2003). The Florida Virtual School, which began the K – 12 online trend as early as 1997, and is the nation's largest state-sponsored online school, became the state's 73<sup>rd</sup> school district during the 2003 – 2004 year. As any other state district, the online district now receives state aid as any other Florida district, through a set amount for each full-time equivalent student (Trotter).

Snider (2002) presents an alternative to cyber charter schools. According to Snider, the President's call for greater choice does not include those suburban and rural students trapped in classrooms with an incompetent teacher and/or less than attractive curriculum. Snider's answer to school improvement and reform is to make federal grants

available to local schools for information technology, contingent upon telecourses for credit while on school property and during school hours. An additional reform creates a nationwide system to accredit telecourses, even to the degree of providing vouchers for needy students.

To date, California is on the trend's leading edge, creating Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), not to be confused with EMOs or Educational Management Organizations. Eleven CMOs in California are supported by philanthropy as a way to open new charter schools and sustain them. CMOs support the start up of new high quality charter schools, especially those serving disadvantaged students, and operate them from within (Hendrie, 2005).

Schools converting to charter status are among another slow, but continuing trend. Schools may change their status from an affiliated charter to an independent charter school, and traditional public schools may convert to charter status. This conversion frees the school from district personnel, budgetary issues, and other policies. Charter conversions spur districts to address a trend that is having a major repercussion on long-term educational systems and fiscal viability. To prevent a checkerboard representation of schools, the Los Angeles superintendent called for creating a type of charter district within the current second-largest school system in the nation (Hendrie, 2003).

Charter districts, while new, have been a closely watched controversy since 1999 (Hendrie, 2003). As autonomous districts, charter districts continue to be publicly financed. The growing interest and trend to establish charter districts is evidenced by current legislation passed in three states: Colorado, Idaho, and Utah (Borja, 2004). Charter districts may create alternative charter school authorizers or providers, such as

Microsoft Corporation Chairman, Bill Gates, who promote not only small schools, but charter schools throughout the country, as well. Business executives and consulting groups wanting to make their mark in education continue to promote charter schools through financial pledges. Although not all states respond positively to sanctioning new charters backed by such capital, public policy is influenced in the process.

### Summary

Named as market-driven entities, charter schools have been characterized to have a tight connection between the parents who choose them and the academic performance they promise. Effective schools research points to the relationship of school climate, quality instruction, and school leadership. It was the intent of this chapter to investigate these topics as they related to the study of parent satisfaction and charter school improvement. A capsulated summary of each sub-heading follows.

#### *Background: School Choice*

This chapter began with an historical perspective of school choice. As early as 1993, the idea of competition through choice was a policy issue discussed at the national level (Uchitelle, 1993). With Milton Friedman's privatization providing the framework, and a shift to local control, the market solution to improve public education had taken hold.

#### *Charter Schools as Schools of Choice*

Charter schools are public schools which operate under a contract, or charter, between a local educational agency and a group who desire to create alternatives and choices within the existing public school system. Each charter selects its own emphasis

or focus, in the hope that rigorous competition will stimulate continual improvement in all public schools (FLDOE, 2005).

In Florida, the first charter school opened in 1996, 4 years after charters first appeared in Minnesota. Funding is provided by the Florida DOE, as other traditional schools. Unlike the traditional schools, however, monitoring and assessment standards are what keep the charter schools open, while other Florida traditional public schools are not held accountable to the same number of standards.

### *Educational Reform and School Choice*

Central to the argument for school choice is the acknowledgment that school choice empowers parents. Educators today recognize that the involvement of parents in the school choice reform movement presents a new advocacy role. Parents who seek choice spur a viable competitive reform movement. Assumptions about choice as a reform movement were produced by Ogawa and Dutton (1994). These assumptions included whether or not (a) parents would exercise the opportunity for choice; (b) parents would make informed choices; (c) the schools would respond to parent preferences; (d) students, teachers, and parents would be more highly motivated; and (e) parent choice would improve student achievement outcomes, thus improving parent satisfaction with the school.

### *Parents and Charter School Choice*

Although a review of the research found some studies conducted on parent options and satisfaction with school choice, more insight is needed into the reasons parents choose a school and those factors that may influence their reasons (Denessen et al., 2001).

Between 1993 and 2003, there has been a 45% increase in the number of children who are attending schools other than their assigned school, excluding home-schooled children. With more educational choices, it seems parents are taking advantage of the opportunities provided to them. While research showed that African American parents were more likely to take advantage of choice, it was not always their involvement in the school that improved. The number one reason for choosing a school was the academic reputation of that school.

When listing the top reasons for choosing a charter school, parents selected small class size and strong curriculum as their number one and two choices, respectively. A greater opportunity for parental involvement was listed fifth in their selection.

#### *Parent Involvement*

Five factors which drive greater parental involvement included education as the top factor. Key to the success of a school-parent partnership was effective communication. A clear distinction was made between volunteering and involvement. Movement away from bake sales towards serving on strategic planning committees was reported (U.S. DOE, 2004a).

Assessing parents' satisfaction continued to play an important role in the charter school movement. Parental interest surfaces immediately when questions of school scores, reputation, class size, and facilities are mentioned. In addition to visiting schools, asking the right questions, and accessing information to make a choice, parents are voicing their levels of satisfaction through school surveys.

### *Climate Surveys*

Although there is no agreed upon definition for school climate, there is a general association of climate with school environment, culture, and healthy organization. Climate surveys are effective tools for school improvement, as the results provide information which can be used to improve school working relationships, morale, and communication, including parent perceptions about the school. The degree to which parents are satisfied with the survey statements, combined with the school administrator's response to these survey results, will be of significant value to educators seeking to improve parental involvement or support, academic excellence, and an opportunity for growth, change, and reform within the school's culture.

### *School Climate, Effective Schools, and Leadership*

Frequently mentioned in the research is the importance of effective schools on student achievement. The paramount goal of parents, students and educators is the high performance level of the school. Several studies have established relationships between principal leadership and school climate. Research also suggests that both instructional leadership and school climate impact student achievement.

### *Charter Schools and Student Achievement*

Despite years of debate and research, the question of school choice improving student achievement still exists. Studies reviewed in the literature did not show charter schools doing as well as comparable neighborhood traditional schools. However, the positive relationship between parental decisions and charter school choice has a positive relationship and benefit to the child.

### *Parent Satisfaction: Making the Grade*

While the research suggested that parents were overall pleased with their school choice and satisfied with the small class size, individual attention, and academic program, some researchers cautioned that the satisfaction may be temporary. Parent satisfaction was reflected in the grades issued to the school. Overall, the studies presented found that, percentage-wise, when parents graded schools, there was a greater increase in rating charter schools with an *A* than in previous schools (traditional public schools) which also were graded as *A*.

### *Charter Schools: The Other Side*

Issues with charter schools centered on privatization, funding, diversity, and inaccurate findings related to student achievement gains. The banter on each side of the issue counters the other. To date, no clear evidence in research findings has offered a position to bring the charter school debate to an end.

### *Trends and Insights*

Recent research trends over a 3 year period of time (1993 – 1999) have shown a decrease in the number of students enrolled in traditional public schools, with choice enrollment increasing. The population growth within the choice movement showed Black students with a higher rate of enrollment than White or Hispanic.

While the growth continues, nation-wide polls show the public continues to support a traditional public school education. To date, the major concern centered on the lack of financial support for schools. The trend toward cyber-schools or virtual schools brings questions of funding formulas to districts vying for the same student funds.

Access to information has made educational reform and school agenda available

to all. Reform seems to have shifted from a top-down approach to making massive amounts of data and information readily available through the latest of technological tools (e.g., the Internet).

Growing interest, and a closely watched controversy since 1999, is the trend toward establishing charter districts. Although the response from the states has been gradual and slow, it remains a closely watched movement which may be influenced by public policy.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter describes and details the study's research methodology. This descriptive study employed two methodologies, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research retrieved data results from the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey in seven Miami-Dade County charter schools. These data were analyzed for the purpose of determining the effect of parent satisfaction on charter school leadership. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with the charter school administrators to determine how the results of their school's Parent Form of the School Climate Survey impacted the revision and writing of the annual School Improvement Plan (SIP).

The methods and procedures are organized in the following format: (a) Overview: Research Design; (b) Population and Sample (c) Hypotheses; (d) Instrument; (e) Quantitative Research Procedure (Data Collection and Analysis); (f) Qualitative Research Procedure (Data Collection and Analysis); and (g) Summary.

#### Overview: Research Design

The review of the literature showed that most charter schools maintain a base of constituents from a strong parental involvement component and advertise an academic program delivered with high quality instruction. The parent-charter school relationship is, perhaps, the charter movement's greatest contribution to public education. This descriptive study aimed to go beyond the charter school-parental involvement level by

seeking to determine in which of the three climate survey areas parents find most important or most satisfying: Is it safety, good education, or the overall school climate? How parent responses on a climate survey may impact the planning, improvement, or reform in charter schools by school administrators was determined from data analysis and interviews with charter administrators.

Three research questions guided the quantitative study:

1. What differences, if any, exist between charter school parents and parents of traditional public schools on how they view their school on the School Climate Survey?
2. In which of three areas of the Parent Form on the School Climate Survey are charter school parents most satisfied: (a) safety; (b) good education; (c) overall school climate?
3. In a given 2 year period, what differences, if any, are there in the charter school grades issued by parents?

Quantitative test data for both charter and traditional public schools identified for the study were collected through the public domain. Access to the Parent Form of the School Climate Surveys for the 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005 school years was retrieved from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools intranet database, and from the Florida Department of Education website. In addition, the results of the climate surveys were reported annually in the district's Statistical Abstract, and selected results were also reported in the District and School Profiles (MDCPS, 2004a).

Following the quantitative survey data analysis, qualitative analysis triangulated the study with interviews of charter school administrators to determine the extent to which changes in the charter's School Improvement Plan (SIP) and/or school operation

was affected by parental influence. By combining the methods (quantitative and qualitative), the study is strengthened (Patton, 2002). Denzin is quoted by Patton as stating that “multiple methods should be used in every investigation” (p. 247).

Interviews were conducted with the seven identified charter school administrators. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the parent results on selected areas of the School Climate Survey may impact or influence the annual update of the charter schools’ School Improvement Plan. Based upon their leadership experiences, charter school administrators are in a pivotal position to provide feedback and insight relative to working with parents within a school setting. In addition, these administrators have the knowledge and expertise from participating on Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC) committees and writing School Improvement Plans (SIPs) as required by their district.

### Population and Sample

#### *Quantitative Design*

The research study was conducted in the Miami-Dade County Public School district (M-DCPS). The quantitative design required establishing three master database files from the district’s raw data files of parent responses from the School Climate Surveys for 2003 – 2004 (Year 1 of the study) and for 2004 – 2005 (Year 2 of the study). The raw data response results were obtained from the public domain and/or the M-DCPS Office of Evaluation and Research. Using SPSS Statistical Software, version 11, and SPSS guide and reference (George & Mallery, 2003), the raw data were used to create the following three master database files:

1. Seven Selected Charter Schools,
2. Twenty-Five Traditional Public Schools,
3. Seven Selected Charter Schools and 25 Traditional Public Schools.

The first sample of schools identified for the study were seven K - 5 elementary charter schools, which had been identified as operating for three specific years (2002 – 2003, 2003 – 2004, 2004 – 2005). The second population of schools selected for a master database was a random sample of 25 traditional public schools from a total district-wide elementary bank of 210 schools. Both of the sample school populations (charter and traditional public) had data available from the School Climate Surveys for the 2 years of the study.

#### *Qualitative Design*

The purpose of interviewing charter school administrators was to determine how, and to what extent, these school administrators utilized their School Climate Survey in strategic school improvement planning sessions. The effect or impact of parental satisfaction on leadership decisions or school reform was the outcome in question.

The population of charter administrators invited to be interviewed were the administrators of the seven K – 5 charter schools pre-selected in the study. A Letter of Solicitation and an Informed Consent Form were sent to the administrator. Follow-up phone calls were made to invite participation in the interview at a time and location of the administrator's choice. Administrators who agreed to the interview were asked to sign the Informed Consent Form, which stated that the participant could withdraw at any time from the study without a penalty. Participants also received a copy of the consent form.

### Instrument

The M-DCPS School Climate Survey has been regularly administered to parents since the early 1990s and has shown exceptional stability of response from one year to the next. The primary purpose of the survey is to facilitate an in-depth view of the learning climate at each school, as well as to gather information regarding the thoughts and perceptions of parents about their school and how the school could be improved. Survey results are intended to assist schools to identify priorities for their annual School Improvement Plan (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2005b). The results are reported annually in the *Statistical Abstract*, and selected results are also reported in the *District and School Profiles*. The instruments used for the 2003-2004 survey administrations were constructed prior to the 1997-98 surveys and reviewed by district administration, parents, principals, teachers, students, community, and representatives of the United Teachers of Dade (UTD). There are now 6 years of comparable data available since the 1998-99 change in the survey instruments, enough to observe gross trends.

Parents asked to complete a School Climate Survey from their school are selected at random by the M-DCPS. The parent survey sample size is dependent on the total school enrollment and the returns of the previous year's survey sample. Therefore, the amount of survey forms for parents will be inversely proportional to the school's average percentage return over the past 3 years. The better a school's response rate, the fewer will be surveyed in the current year. The purpose is to provide return counts large enough to yield meaningful survey results.

To date, parent survey data collection is conducted using paper and pencil to bubble responses. According to Roberts et al. (2004), reduced cycle time and cost as a result of printing and mailing expenses or manual data entry, scheduling flexibility, data integrity, and improved response rates have resulted in rapidly rising popularity of web-based survey administration (Thompson, Surface, Martin, & Sanders, 2003). Yost and Homer (1998) found substantial differences between ratings made between climate surveys online versus paper version. The researchers suggested that the differences were attributable to a self-selection bias (better job positions, greater resources, support, computer access, etc.). In conclusion, the authors stated that “the survey method appeared to have only minimal effect on responding” (Roberts et al., 2004, p. 15). In order to increase the response rate, and to meet the language needs of a diverse community such as Miami-Dade County, the climate surveys are provided in three languages: English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole.

The validity of data gathered from parent surveys is directly tied to the participants’ trust in the confidentiality of their responses. Parents are informed that their responses will be combined with those of other parents, and are cautioned to not place their name or other personal information on the questionnaire. The Parent Form states that “the information gained from this questionnaire is anonymous” (MDCPS, 2005a). Belief in the anonymity of survey responses is critical to survey truthfulness, as is the reduction of fear that responses may lead to retribution or negative impact.

## Quantitative Research Procedure

### *Data Collection*

Annually, the district identifies a random sample of classes spanning the grade levels within a school to receive the survey. Not all classes are selected to participate, but all students in selected classes are asked to have their parent(s) complete a survey form. The survey itself consists of three separate forms, distributed to each of the following entities, and yields separate results from each: parents, teachers, and students.

School Climate Surveys subsequent to the first year of charter operation will be preferred to avoid a honeymoon effect. This effect may result from choice of a new school, anticipation of greater satisfaction because of the choice, and/or an expectation of a higher level of satisfaction due to an unpleasant or dissatisfaction with a previous school experience. Selection of the seven charter schools (Grades K – 5) used in the study were based upon available climate survey data for the 2 consecutive years studied, 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005. To protect the confidentiality of each charter school involved in the study, the schools were identified by an assigned code to protect the identity of each, such as CS1, CS2, etc. The random sample of traditional public schools were coded, (PS1, PS2, etc.), although no part of this study included or specified a school from this particular sample population.

For the purpose of this study, data collection was limited to the results from the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey on three specific areas: (a) safety (Item 1), (b) good education (Item 33), and (c) school climate (Item 34). In addition, data collection included parent responses to Item 35, in which the parents issue the school an overall grade for the year.

Boxed School Climate Surveys arrive at Miami-Dade County Public Schools during the month of January each year. Data collection begins that month with the distribution of the surveys a week after parents are pre-notified by a district letter sent on letterhead from the schools' administration. Each machine-scored parent survey is enclosed in a large envelope clearly marked Parent School Climate Survey.

Teachers from the selected classrooms are given specific instructions in stating directions to the students regarding the Parent Forms. A statement, appearing on each parent survey, states the purpose of the survey. This statement explains to the parent/respondent that the purpose is to survey the parent's or respondent's perceptions based on his/her experiences in this particular school. The instructions, highlighted in a box below the stated purpose, explain to the parent/respondent that each of the (35) statements describes a particular aspect of the school climate. Parents/respondents are asked to read each statement carefully and to decide to what extent the parent/respondent agrees or disagrees with the statement, as it applies to the school. Response choices range on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = *Strongly Agree*, 2 = *Agree*, 3 = *Undecided/Unknown*, 4 = *Disagree*, and 5 = *Strongly Disagree*.

The last item in the questionnaire, Item 35, asks the parent/respondent to give the school a grade analogous to the grade that students receive in their work. This grade may be regarded as a summary of the attitudes that the respondent holds toward the school. The grade also is indicated on a Likert scale, as follows: 1 = A, 2 = B, 3 = C, 4 = D, and 5 = F.

Directions to the parent reinforce confidentiality and ask parents to properly seal the envelope before returning to the school. The school is responsible for transferring the



surveys by school mail to the district. A high, quick turnaround rate is desirable to insure valid and reliable opinion data for each school. Although the official survey period lasts 5 school days, the district receives surveys as late as March of the surveyed year.

Teachers are directed to bring the completed forms in sealed envelopes to a centrally located site within the school, using a timeline and location established by the school's administrator. Due to confidentiality and sensitive material contained within, the envelopes must be held in a secure and limited access area.

All survey forms are returned to the M-DCPS Office of Evaluation and Research to be optically scanned. Responses from the parent sub-group are analyzed for change from one year to the next by the Office of Accountability, M-DCPS. When the schools receive survey results, the responses are presented in terms of the percent of respondents agreeing with each item, where the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses are combined by the district to present an overall percentage. In order to accurately report the output of the statistical tests required for this research study, it will be necessary to obtain the raw data from the surveys.

Results of the surveys are available to the schools before the end of the school year. This enables schools to use the survey results for school improvement planning purposes. Once available, data from survey results can be accessed via the Florida educational Internet, [www.myflorida.com](http://www.myflorida.com) and the M-DCPS Intranet <http://schoolclimatesurveys.net>.

#### *Data Analysis*

SPSS Statistical Software, version 11, was used to collate the master database files, and to test each hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: There are no significant differences between charter school parents and parents of traditional public schools on how they view their school on the School Climate Survey. An independent sample *t*-test was used to determine if the two sample distributions (charter schools and traditional public schools) differed significantly from each other on item or statement 34 from the School Climate Survey: “The overall climate or atmosphere at my child’s school is positive and helps my child learn”(M-DCPS, 2004b).

Hypothesis 2: There are no significant differences in parent satisfaction among the three areas of the annual School Climate Survey (safety, good education, school climate), as indicated by parent response. The statement for each item in the climate survey is stated as follows:

- (a) Safety (Item 1): “My child’s school is safe and secure.”
- (b) Good education (Item 33): “My child is getting a good education at this school.”
- (c) School climate (Item 34): “The overall climate or atmosphere at my child’s school is positive and helps my child learn.”

A reliability test was run on the total number of items of the survey, producing a case processing summary of the validity of cases, those excluded, and reporting the coefficient of reliability or consistency (Cronbach, 1951). A reliability coefficient of .80 or higher was considered acceptable. Once reliability of items was established, a frequencies statistics chart provided the mean or single fixed (preset) value for each of the three items to be compared, and a frequency table provided the total sample number for each of the items required to run a one-sample *t*-test.

A one-sample *t*-test provided the statistical analysis. This statistical test compared a sample mean to a preset value. This test was performed for each of the three areas: safety, good education, and school climate.

Hypothesis 3: There are no significant differences in the grading of the charter school by parents for 2 consecutive years. Item 35 from the School Climate Survey addresses the grading of the school and is stated as follows: “Students get grades A, B, C, D, and F for the quality of their school work. What overall grade would you give your child’s school?”

An independent samples *t* test was used as the statistical analysis. After examining the results for this hypothesis, additional independent samples *t* tests were run to analyze results for the following questions:

- (a) What, if any, are the differences in the school grades issued by parents from traditional public schools for 2 consecutive years?
- (b) What, if any, are the differences in the school grades between parents of charter schools and parents of traditional public schools in Year 1 (2003 – 2004)?
- (c) What, if any, are the differences in the school grades between parents of charter schools and parents of traditional public schools in Year 2 (2004 – 2005)?

#### *Effect Size*

Statistics such as effect size are independent of sample size and provide information about the significance of a study’s results. Effect size allows for comparisons between group differences and relationships between sets of scores. Cohen’s guidelines for effect size was applied in the analysis of the data.

The calculation for effect size used in the study was Cohen's *d*:

$$r^2_{pb} = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + df}$$

The rule of thumb suggested by Cohen stated that “the estimated effect (estimated difference between population means) is small and could lack importance if the squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient is in the vicinity of .01” (Witte & Witte, 2001, p. 356).

## Qualitative Research Procedure

### *Data Collection*

Prior to beginning the interview sessions, two charter school administrators, lead teachers, and/or directors from charter schools not participating in the study were asked to participate in a focus group with the researcher for the purpose of refining the subsidiary questions for the final interviews. The interview guide and subsidiary questions were written and prepared by the researcher. Selected from the methods for qualitative data collection, the researcher opted to use a combination of the interview guide and the standardized open-ended interview.

The questions or issues to be asked and/or explored during the interview were prepared as a guide. The interview guide ensured that a particular format of inquiry would be used with each interview of a charter administrator. Patton (2002) stated that the advantages of an interview guide include how to best use available and often limited time and allows for a more systematic and comprehensive organization when interviewing numbers of people.

Following the survey data analysis, interviews were conducted with charter

principals to determine the extent to which change(s) in the charter school setting was affected by parental influence (satisfaction). For confidentiality purposes, codes replaced names of the charter schools and principals.

Analysis of notes written and/or audio tape-recorded sessions taken during the interview were transcribed in a timely manner to ensure the accuracy of the responses and to maintain the validity of the information. The analysis included identifying a range of possibilities for reporting the outcomes, to include emerging themes and patterns. Data from the qualitative study were summarized in narrative form, using the words from charter administrators (research subjects), for clarification or emphasis (see Appendix B).

The interview was organized into three categories with a guide question for each category:

**Category I. Traditional Schools versus Charter School Settings**

**Guide Question:** Based upon your conversations with and feedback from parents, what do parents offer as explanations or reasons for why they are leaving traditional public schools for charter schools?

**Category II. The Impact of School Climate Survey on School Improvement Planning**

**Guide Question:** In what way(s) have the results from the School Climate Survey impacted the strategic planning sessions and annual revisions of the School Improvement Plan?

### Category III. The Relationship between School Climate Survey and Parent Satisfaction

Guide Question 3: In what way(s) do you, as a charter school administrator, account for the similarities or differences in results of the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey between the 2 years considered for this study?

Seven to eight subsidiary questions were asked for each of the three guide questions. A rubric-type of matrix was used to tally, transcribe, and analyze the data from the taped sessions for recurring themes and key words.

Eligible charter school principals were telephoned by the researcher to invite their participation in the research study. The principals understood that as a subject in the study, he/she would be volunteering to participate in the interview with the researcher.

The researcher explained that the interview would be audio-taped in order to preserve the raw data of the interview (Patton, 2002). The transcribed audiotape session would ensure accuracy and preserve the validity of the information provided by the participant. Assurance was given to the administrator that at no time would the interviewee's identity be compromised and that all collected and/or audio-taped materials would be treated with the confidentiality. At the conclusion of the interview, the principal could review the portion recorded, and request that his/her taped responses be destroyed, thus, eliminating that participant from the study.

Upon the return of the Informed Consent Form, a follow-up phone call was made to establish the time and date of the interview. Venues for interview location, selected by the principals, included (a) the principal's charter school; (b) a charter school not participating in the study; (c) a local university library or a community library; (d)

another location, as recommended by the subject, and acceptable to the researcher. Upon request, a list of the interview questions to review prior to the interview session were made available.

### Summary

The methodology to test the research quantitative research questions analyzed the significance and importance of results from a parent climate survey. Qualitative interview responses from charter principals provided information relative to how the data influences charter school improvement planning. Independent samples *t* tests and one sample *t* tests were used to compare the mean scores from the parent responses on the survey items. The data were analyzed to determine if there were statistically significant differences between groups of parents (charter and traditional), satisfaction of parents on three items from the climate survey, and time spent in the charter setting (over a 2 year period).

Charter principal interviews offered the viewpoint of the principals and their work with parents in their community. When research shows that charter schools can be strengthened through creating trusting, satisfying relationships with parents, the significance becomes relevant beyond this type of public school choice.

Chapter 4 presents data in answer to the research questions. SPSS outputs and qualitative interview themes are provided to summarize the results.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explain the impact of parent satisfaction on charter school improvement by examining parent feedback from School Climate Surveys conducted in Miami-Dade County Public schools for a 2 year period (2003 – 2004, 2004 – 2005) and by interviewing charter administrators. The study required statistical examination of quantitative data and the thematic examination of qualitative data.

Findings from the quantitative design have provided significant information to education leaders in search of understanding the anomaly associated between charter schools and traditional public schools. Understanding the factors which may motivate parents to leave traditional public schools for charter schools may also be the same items that score in the highly satisfied range of the School Climate Survey. Results from the qualitative design add a dimension of thought and enriches the overall findings.

Following the introduction, chapter 4 presents the quantitative and qualitative data results, concluding with a summary of the chapter. Necessary to the analysis of the study's quantitative research is the organization and explanation of those items selected from the School Climate Survey and included in this research study. Subsequent to this, the quantitative data findings are presented. The Table of the Group Statistics is followed by the Independent Samples *t*- Test or One-Sample *t*- Test, with an explanation of the findings for each research question. In addition, to determine Effect Size (differences



between population means) calculations using Cohen's  $d$  are reported for statistical significance.

### Presentation of the Quantitative Research

#### Survey

Parents whose child attended a public school (charter or traditional public) in Miami-Dade County for the 2 school years 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005 were asked to think about 35 features of the school their child attended and to indicate their level of agreement (satisfaction) with each of the school's features. The parents were to respond by indicating on a 1 – 5 Likert Scale the degree to which they (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, (3) *Undecided/Unknown*, (4) *Disagree*, (5) *Strongly Disagree* with each of the 35 items.

The 35 items listed in the School Climate Survey are organized into five sections. Sections 1 – 4 are introduced by a stem sentence fragment [e.g., Section 1. (Items 1 – 8)]

1. . . . is safe and secure.
2. . . . is kept clean and in good condition.

Selection of items 1, 33, 34, and 35 was based upon the findings as reported by the district in the District and School Profiles, and on the Internet site <http://dadeschools.net>. These statements are reported as follows:

- (a) The students are safe and secure at this school.
- (b) The students are getting a good education at this school.
- (c) The overall climate at this school is positive and helps students learn.
- (d) Students get grades A, B, C, D, or F for the quality of their school work.

What overall grade would you give to your child's school?

### *Population and Sample*

The charter schools identified and selected for this study had been in operation for a minimum of 3 years, and had had 2 years of climate survey data available in the public domain. Traditional public schools were selected at random from a data base of over 200 traditional public elementary schools in M-DCPS.

The number of Parent Forms from the School Climate Survey distributed and returned and the percentage of the return rate for each year of the study is represented in Table 1 and Table 2, charter and traditional public schools, respectively. From the data in Table 1, it appears that there has been fluctuation in the rates of return from the parents from one year to the other. In three schools, CS4, CS6, and CS7, the numbers of forms distributed decreased, and the rate of return increased. Yet, for one charter school where the number of forms distributed increased, the rate of return decreased (CS1). Only one school (CS3) did not show an increase or a decrease in survey forms. The percentage rate of return remained consistent for that school for 2 consecutive years.

Table 1

*Charter School Climate Survey Return Rates: Parent form*

Charter Schools	2003 – 2004		2004 – 2005	
	Returned /Distributed	% Returned	Returned /Distributed	% Returned
CS1	155 / 172	90.1	170 / 221	76.9
CS2	80 / 121	66.1	113 / 155	72.9
CS3	115 / 150	76.7	116 / 150	77.3
CS4	132 / 245	53.9	120 / 194	61.9
CS5	170 / 188	90.4	98 / 112	87.5
CS6	105 / 185	56.8	101 / 168	60.1
CS7	98 / 228	43.0	118 / 188	62.8

Table 2 presents the data from parent forms returned the 2 years of the study for the random sample of 25 traditional public schools. As the numbers of survey forms distributed increased, the rate of return decreased for six of the schools (PS9, PS 13, PS15, PS17, PS19, PS 20). Likewise, when the number of forms distributed to parents decreased, the rate of return increased for only three schools (PS14, PS24, PS25). Eight schools had both increased distribution and increased rates of return (PS2, PS6, PS7, PS8, PS11, PS18, PS21, and PS22).

Table 2

*Traditional Public Schools Climate Survey Return Rates: Parent Form*

Traditional Schools	2003 – 2004		2004 – 2005	
	Returned /Distributed	% Returned	Returned /Distributed	% Returned
PS1	123 / 168	73.2	96 / 169	56.8
PS2	142 / 333	42.6	288 / 367	78.5
PS3	62 / 200	31.0	94 / 229	41.0
PS4	129 / 150	51.6	129 / 250	51.6
PS5	39 / 118	33.1	30 / 110	27.3
PS6	103 / 129	79.8	123 / 141	87.2
PS7	71 / 175	40.6	102 / 221	46.2
PS8	123 / 176	69.6	124 / 154	80.5
PS9	133 / 253	52.6	1212 / 286	42.3
PS10	114 / 200	57.0	141 / 209	67.5
PS11	91 / 142	64.1	137 / 169	81.1
PS12	138 / 202	68.3	115 / 171	67.3
PS13	79 / 208	38.0	79 / 236	33.5
PS14	114 / 295	38.6	113 / 279	40.5
PS15	111 / 133	83.5	106 / 160	66.3
PS16	112 / 142	78.9	109 / 143	76.2
PS17	120 / 184	65.2	77 / 198	38.9
PS18	78 / 111	70.3	128 / 143	89.5
PS19	90 / 353	25.5	91 / 403	22.6

Table 2 (continued)

*Traditional Public Schools Climate Survey Return Rates: Parent Form*

Traditional	<u>2003 – 2004</u>	<u>2003 – 2004</u>	<u>2004 – 2005</u>	<u>2004 – 2005</u>
<u>Schools</u>	<u>Returned /Distributed</u>	<u>% Returned</u>	<u>Returned /Distributed</u>	<u>% Returned</u>
PS20	87 / 144	60.4	72 / 182	39.6
PS21	100 / 185	54.1	123 / 218	56.4
PS22	80 / 163	49.1	118 / 188	62.8
PS23	106 / 234	45.3	86 / 227	37.9
PS24	110 / 188	58.5	101 / 171	59.1
PS25	125 / 161	77.6	126 / 146	86.3

As reviewed in chapter 2, research studies on school choice show African American families as more likely to take advantage of choice. Miami-Dade County's multi-ethnic population is represented by Tables 3 and 4, respectively, which show the ethnic background of those parents (charter and traditional) who responded to the climate survey for the 2 years of this study.

Table 3

*Charter Schools Ethnic Group Representation: Parent Survey Returns*

	<u>2003 – 2004 / 2004 - 2005</u>					
	<u>W - %</u>	<u>B - %</u>	<u>H - %</u>	<u>A P%</u>	<u>A I - %</u>	<u>M - %</u>
CS1.	9.5 / 4.8	0.0 / 0.0	88.4 / 92.8	1.4 / 2.4	0.0 / 0.0	0.7 / 0.0
CS2.	0.0 / 1.9	0.0 / 2.8	100.0 / 95.4	0.0 / 0.0	0.0 / 0.0	0.0 / 0.0
CS3.	7.0 / 5.6	0.0 / 0.0	89.5 / 93.5	2.6 / 0.9	0.0 / 0.0	0.9 / 0.0
CS4.	15.6 / 18.9	3.9 / 3.8	77.3 / 70.8	0.8 / 3.8	0.0 / 0.0	2.3 / 2.8
CS5.	3.2 / 2.2	0.6 / 0.0	95.6 / 96.8	1.6 / 1.1	0.0 / 0.0	0.0 / 0.0
CS6.	32.0 / 43.0	9.3 / 2.0	52.6 / 48.0	2.1 / 1.0	0.0 / 0.0	4.1 / 6.0
CS7.	0.0 / 0.9	93.4 / 95.4	5.5 / 1.9	0.0 / 0.0	0.9 / 0.9	1.1 / 0.9

*Note.* W =White B =Black H =Hispanic AP =Asian Pacific AI= American Indian M=Multi-Ethnic

Table 4

*Traditional Public Schools Ethnic Group Representation: Parent Survey Returns*

	<u>2003 – 2004 / 2004 - 2005</u>					
	<u>W - %</u>	<u>B - %</u>	<u>H - %</u>	<u>A P%</u>	<u>AI - %</u>	<u>M-%</u>
PS1.	7.1 / 5.8	.09 / 2.3	90.3 / 89.5	0.0 / 1.2	0.0 / 0.0	1.8 / 1.2
PS2.	0.0 / .07	87.3 / 85.8	6.7 / 8.6	0.07 / 0.07	0.07 / 0.4	4.5 / 3.7
PS3.	0.0 / 0.0	91.4 / 91.9	3.4 / 5.8	0.0 / 1.2	0.0 / 0.0	5.2 / 1.2
PS4.	32.2 / 23.3	21.2 / 24.1	42.4 / 48.3	3.4 / 1.7	0.0 / 0.9	.8 / 1.7
PS5.	14.7 / 12.0	29.4 / 32.0	52.9 / 48.0	0.0 / 4.0	0.0 / 0.0	2.9 / 4.0
PS6.	3.2 / 0.0	1.1 / 0.0	90.3 / 98.3	4.3 / 0.9	0.0 / 0.0	1.1 / .09
PS7.	6.0 / 6.7	0.0 / 0.0	92.5 / 91.1	1.5 / 0.0	0.0 / 0.0	0.0 / 2.2
PS8.	6.9 / 10.1	4.3 / 2.5	80.2 / 81.5	4.3 / 2.5	0.0 / 0.0	4.3 / 3.4
PS9.	0.0 / 0.0	95.0 / 93.0	1.7 / 4.4	1.7 / 0.0	1.7 / 1.8	0.0 / 0.0
PS10.	9.8 / 5.4	50.0 / 61.2	32.4 / 24.0	2.0 / 3.1	0.0 / 0.0	5.9 / 6.2
PS11.	28.9 / 23.0	2.4 / 1.6	62.7 / 64.3	3.6 / 6.3	0.0 / .80	2.4 / 4.0
PS12.	0.8 / 2.9	74.2 / 79.6	16.1 / 11.7	1.6 / 1.0	2.4 / 0.0	4.9 / 4.9
PS13.	0.0 / 0.0	96.1 / 90.5	1.3 / 4.1	0.0 / 0.0	0.0 / 0.0	2.6 / 5.4
PS14.	1.0 / 0.0	73.3 / 79.6	16.8 / 12.6	1.0 / 1.9	0.0 / 2.9	7.9 / 2.9
PS15.	17.0 / 52.9	12.3 / 0.0	62.3 / 31.4	4.7 / 11.8	0.0 / 2.0	3.8 / 2.0
PS16.	0.0 / 2.1	28.7 / 22.9	70.3 / 75.0	0.0 / 0.0	1.0 / 0.0	0.0 / 0.0
PS17.	5.4 / 3.0	53.6 / 54.5	31.3 / 34.8	0.9 / 0.0	2.7 / 1.5	6.3 / 6.1
PS18.	17.1 / 44.7	1.4 / 1.6	78.6 / 49.6	0.0 / 0.8	0.0 / 0.0	2.9 / 3.3

Table 4 (continued)

*Traditional Public Schools Ethnic Group Representation: Parent Survey Returns*

	2003 – 2004		/		2004 - 2005	
	W - %	B - %	H - %	AP%	AI - %	M - %
PS19.	0.0 / 0.0	92.9 / 92.0	2.4 / 4.6	0.0 / 0.0	0.0 / 1.1	4.8 / 2.3
PS20	18.3 / 26.5	2.4 / 4.4	76.8 / 60.3	0.0 / 4.4	0.0 / 0.0	2.4 / 4.4
PS21.	14.9 / 11.8	2.6 / 10.0	69.0 / 75.5	1.1 / 0.0	0.0 / 0.0	2.3 / 2.7
PS22.	4.1 / 8.1	0.0 / 2.7	90.5 / 85.6	1.4 / 1.8	0.0 / 0.0	4.1 / 1.8
PS23.	2.0 / 6.3	82.2 / 73.8	7.9 / 8.8	2.0 / 3.8	0.0 / 0.0	5.9 / 7.5
PS24.	6.3 / 9.7	17.9 / 18.3	69.5 / 68.8	2.1 / 2.2	0.0 / 0.0	4.2 / 1.1
PS25.	4.1 / 3.3	.8 / 1.6	93.4 / 93.4	.8 / 1.6	0.0 / 0.0	0.8 / 0.0

*Note.* W =White B =Black H = Hispanic AP = Asian Pacific AI =American Indian M =Multi-Ethnic



### *Quantitative Analysis of Research Questions*

The presentation of the test data is organized by each question of the study, with the statistical test and results of the findings to follow. Independent sample *t* tests and one sample *t* tests were used as the statistical tests. Results of the findings follow.

#### Research Question 1.

What differences, if any, exist between charter school parents and parents of traditional public schools on how view their school on the School Climate Survey?

The hypothesis was: There are no significant differences between charter school parents and parents of traditional schools on how they view their school on the school climate survey.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the mean differences between parents of charter schools and parents of traditional public schools on Item 34 of the School Climate Survey which states: "The overall climate or atmosphere at my child's school is positive and helps my child learn" (M-DCPS, 2004-2005). Table 5 shows that 1420 charter school parents had a mean score of 1.47, and 5076 traditional (public school) parents had a mean score of 1.68 in response to Item 34 (Overall School Climate). The difference between the means is statistically significant ( $t = -9.886$ ,  $df = 6494$ ,  $p = .000$ ) at the  $p < .05$  level, equal variances assumed.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted and was found to be statistically significant ( $F = 18.104$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Therefore, an equality of variance cannot be assumed, and the unequal variance *t* test is used. The unequal variance *t* test indicated a *t* value of (-10.901) and was statistically significant at the  $p = .000$  level.

However, statistical significance does not indicate importance. One way to determine the importance of statistically significant results is to use the squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient, defined by Witte & Witte (2001) “as the proportion from (0 to 1) of variance in the dependent variable that is predictable from, or explained by the independent variable” (p. 355). Cohen, as cited in Witte and Witte, suggests “that the estimated effect (estimated difference between population means) is small (and could lack importance) if  $r^2_{pb}$  is in the vicinity of .01 . . .” (p. 356). Table 6 presents the guidelines for Cohen’s effect size. “Using this rule of thumb, the estimated effect of .01 would be judged to be small and could lack importance” (Witte & Witte, p. 357).

Table 5

Independent Samples *t* Test

*A Comparison of Means between Charter School Parents and Traditional School Parents on Item 34 (Overall School Climate)*

Group Statistics								
		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	Std. Error			
Type of School					Mean			
Item 34	Charter	1420	1.47	.621	.016			
	Public	5076	1.68	.740	.010			

Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		<i>t</i> test for Equality of Means				
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-Tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Item 34	Equal variances assumed	18.104	.000	-9.886	6494	.000	-.21	.021
	Equal variances not assumed			-10.901	2652.128	.000	-.21	.019

Table 6

*Cohen's Guidelines for Effect Size*

$r^2_{pb}$	Effect
.01	Small
.06	Medium
.14	Large

The squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient for Item 34 of the survey is  $r^2_{pb} = 0.04$ . With a squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient of 0.04, the effect of the charter school parents and the way they look at their school has a small to medium effect on the traditional public school parents and the way they view their schools on the School Climate Survey.

The data suggest that a significant difference exists between the charter school parent group and the traditional public school parent group with respect to how each parent group views their school on a climate survey.

*Research Question 2.*

In which of the three areas of the Parent Form on the School Climate Survey are charter school parents most satisfied: (a) safety, (b) good education, or (c) overall school climate?

The hypothesis was: There are no significant differences in parent satisfaction among the three areas of the annual School Climate Survey (safety, good education, school climate), as indicated by parent response.

One-sample *t* tests were used to provide the statistical analysis for this research question which examines the differences among three areas of the climate survey:

1. Safety, 33. Good Education, and 34. Overall School Climate. Reliability and frequencies were first determined to establish means and preset values.

Table 7

*Case Processing Summary and Reliability Statistics*

Case Processing Summary			
		<i>N</i>	%
Cases	Valid	2526	73.6
	Excluded	907	26.4
	Total	3433	100.0

*Note.* Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's

Alpha	<i>N</i> of Items
.941	35

Cronbach's alpha of .80 or higher is considered acceptable. Therefore, the Cronbach's alpha of .941 for 35 items on the climate survey indicates a high reliability of the instrument.

Table 8 presents the mean for each of the study's survey items: Item 1: safety ( $M = 1.55$ ); Item 33: good education ( $M = 1.46$ ); and, Item 34: overall school climate ( $M = 1.47$ ). The mean for each item is the preset value used in the one-sample  $t$  tests in Tables 12, 13, and 14.

The total frequency number established for each of the three items is presented in Tables 9, 10, and 11 (Item 1: = 1444, Item 33: =1428, Item 34: = 1420.) The valid values for 1 – 5 are based on a Likert Scale of the School Climate Survey, where 1 = *Strongly Agree*, 2 = *Agree*, 3 = *Undecided/Unknown*, 4 = *Disagree*, and 5 = *Strongly Disagree*.

Table 8

*Frequency Table to Establish Means*

		Item 1	Item 33	Item 34
<i>N</i>	Valid	1444	1428	1420
	Missing	15	31	39
<i>M</i>		1.55	1.46	1.47
<i>SD</i>		.751	.630	.621

Table 9

*Frequency Table: Item 1 (Safety)*

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	1	779	53.4	53.9	53.9
	2	579	39.7	40.1	94.0
	3	41	2.8	2.8	96.9
	4	40	2.7	2.8	99.7
	5	5	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	1444	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	15	1.0		
Total		1459	100.0		

Table 10

*Frequency Table: Item 33 (Good Education)*

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	1	858	58.5	60.1	60.1
	2	505	34.6	35.4	95.4
	3	49	3.4	3.4	98.9
	4	13	.9	.9	99.8
	5	3	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	1428	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	31	2.1		
Total		1459	100.0		



Table 11

*Frequency Table: Item 34 (Overall School Climate)*

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	1	837	57.4	58.9	58.9
	2	518	35.5	36.5	95.4
	3	52	3.6	3.7	99.9
	4	11	.8	.8	99.9
	5	2	.1	.1	100.0
	Total	1424	97.3	100.0	
Missing	System	39	2.7		
Total		1459	100.0		

Table 12 presents a one-sample *t* test used to test whether the means of two survey items (Item 33, good education:  $M = 1.46$ ; Item 34, overall school climate:  $M = 1.47$ ) differed significantly from the preset value of Item 1, safety ( $M = 1.55$ ). The *t* value for Item 33 is  $t = -5.519$ , and  $t = -5.041$  for Item 34. The *t* test analysis indicates that both the mean for Item 33: good education ( $M = 1.46$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and the mean for Item 34, overall school climate ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $p = .000$ ) were statistically lower, and significant at the  $p < .050$  level than Item 1: safety, with a test value of 1.55.

The evidence seems to suggest that there is a significant difference in parent satisfaction when comparing safety and good education with school climate. Parents are

more likely to agree that good education and overall school climate are more important than safety when rating their child's charter school on a School Climate Survey.

Table 12

*One Sample t- Test (Safety: preset value)*

<i>One Sample Statistics</i>						
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>		
Item 33	1428	1.46	.630	.017		
Item 34	1420	1.47	.621	.016		

<i>One Sample Test</i>						
Test Value = 1.55						
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Item 33	-5.519	1427	.000	-.092	-.12	-.06
Item 34	-5.041	1419	.000	-.083	-.12	-.05

In Table 13, a one-sample  $t$  test was used to test whether the means of the two survey items Item 1: safety and Item 34: overall climate differed significantly from the preset value of Item 33: good education. The  $t$  value for Item 1 is  $t = 5.030$ . The  $t$  test analysis indicates that the mean for Item 1: safety ( $M = 1.55, p = .000$ ) is statistically higher and significant at the  $p < .050$  than Item 33: good education, with a test value of 1.46.

The  $t$  value for Item 34 is  $t = .419$ . The  $t$  test analysis indicates that the mean for Item 34: overall school climate ( $M = 1.47, p = .675$ ) was not statistically different or significant from good education at the  $p < .05$  level. The evidence seems to suggest that parents are more likely to agree that a good education is more important than safety. With respect to the overall school climate and good education, there was no significant difference in how charter school parents rated these items.

Table 13

*One Sample t Test (Good Education: preset value)*

<i>One Sample Statistics</i>						
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean		
Item 1	1444	1.55	.715	.019		
Item 34	1420	1.47	.621	.016		

<i>One Sample Test</i>						
Test Value = 1.46						
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference						
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Lower	Upper
Item 1	5.030	1443	.000	.095	.06	.13
Item 34	.419	1419	.675	.007	-.03	-.04

In Table 14, a one sample  $t$  test is used to test whether the means of the two survey items 1: safety and 33: good education differed significantly from the preset value of Item 34: overall school climate (test value 1.47). The  $t$  value for Item 1 is  $t = 4.499$ . The  $t$  test analysis indicates that the mean score for Item 1 ( $M = 1.55, p = .000$ ) is statistically different and significant at the  $p < .050$  than Item 34: overall school climate. The  $t$  value for Item 33 is  $t = -.721$ . The  $t$  test analysis indicates that the mean for Item 33 ( $M = 1.46, p = .471$ ) was not statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  from Item 34.

The evidence seems to suggest that parents are more likely to agree that the overall school climate is more important than safety. There was not a statistically significant difference in how parents rated good education and overall school climate.

Table 14

*One-Sample t- Test (Overall School Climate: preset value)*

<i>One Sample Statistics</i>						
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>		
Item 1	1444	1.55	.715	.019		
Item 33	1428	1.46	.630	.017		

<i>One Sample Test</i>						
<i>Test Value = 1.47</i>						
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
					<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Item 1	4.499	1443	.000	.085	.05	.12
Item 34	-.721	1427	.471	-.012	-.04	-.02

*Research Question 3a.*

Hypothesis (3a) was: There are no significant differences in the charter school grades issued by charter school parents for 2 consecutive years. The test for this hypothesis is presented in Table 15.

This independent samples *t* test analysis indicates that for the 2003 – 2004 school year, 573 charter school parents issued a school grade which had a mean score of 1.50, where 1 = A, 2 = B, 3 = C, 4 = D, 5 = F. The grades for the 2004 – 2005 school year issued by charter school parents had a mean score of 1.43. The difference between the means is statistically significant ( $t = 2.076$ ,  $df = 1374$ ,  $p = .038$ ) at the  $p < .05$  level, with equal variances assumed.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted and was found to be statistically significant ( $F = 8.532$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Therefore, an equality of variance could not be assumed, and the unequal variance *t* test was used. The unequal variance *t* test indicated a *t* value of (2.043), and  $p = .041$ . The results from this data were significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

To measure the size of the effect, the squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient was used (Cohen's *d*). The squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient for Item 35 and charter school parents is  $r_{pb}^2 = 0.003$ . With a squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient of 0.003, the effect of the grades issued by charter school parents had a small effect between the 2 years grades were issued. The results suggest, however, that although the effect or importance between the means was small, a significant difference does exist in how charter school parents graded their school from one year (2003 – 2004) to the next (2004 – 2005).

Table 15

*Independent Samples t- Test Comparing School Grade of Charter Schools for Year 1 and Year 2*

*Group Statistics*

	<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Item 35	2003	573	1.50	.678	.028
	2004	803	1.43	.616	.022

*Independent Samples Test*

		<i>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</i>		<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>				
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Diff.</i>	<i>Std. Error Diff.</i>
Item 35	Equal variances assumed	8.532	.004	2.076	1374	.038	.073	.035
	Equal variances not assumed			2.043	1157.933	.041	.073	.036



*Research Question 3b*

The hypothesis was: There are no significant differences in the school grades issued by traditional public school parents for 2 consecutive years. The test for this hypothesis is presented in Table 16.

An independent samples *t* test was used to compare the mean differences of the grades given by traditional public school parents in 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005. This *t* test analysis indicates that for the 2003 – 2004 school year, 2465 traditional public school parents issued a grade ( $M = 1.75$ ) for their school, and for the 2004 – 2005 school year, 2328 parents issued a grade ( $M = 1.72$ ). The difference between the means is not statistically significant ( $t = 1.370$ ,  $df = 4791$ ,  $p = .171$ ), at the  $p < .05$  level, equal variances assumed.

To measure the effect size between the means, the squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient was used (Cohen's  $d$ ). The squared point bi-serial correlation for Item 35 and traditional public school parents is  $r^2_{pb} = 0.000$ . With a squared point bi-serial coefficient of 0.000, the effect of the grades issued by traditional public school parents for both school years 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005 was negligible. The results suggest there is no significant difference in the grades issued by traditional public school parents for 2 consecutive years.

Table 16

*Independent Samples t-Test Comparing School Grade of Traditional Schools for Year 1 and Year 2*

<i>Group Statistics</i>					
	<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Item 35	2003	2465	1.75	.802	.016
	2004	2328	1.72	.829	.017

<i>Independent Samples Test</i>								
<i>Levene's Test for Equality</i>								
<i>of Variances</i>			<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>					
					<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>(2-tailed)</i>	<i>Diff.</i>	<i>Diff.</i>
Item 35	Equal variances assumed	5.419	.020	1.370	4791	.171	.032	.024
	Equal variances not assumed			1.368	4752.474	.171	.032	.024

### *Research Question 3c*

The hypothesis was: There are no significant differences in the school grades issued by charter school parents and parents from traditional public schools in 2003 – 2004. The test for this hypothesis is presented in Table 17.

An independent samples *t* test was used to compare the mean differences between charter school parents and parents of traditional public schools on Item 35 of the School Climate Survey for the 2003 – 2004 school year. The *t* test analysis indicates that 573 charter school parents had a mean score of 1.50, and 2465 traditional public school parents had a mean score of 1.75. The difference between the means is statistically significant ( $t = -6.862$ ,  $df = 3036$ ,  $p = .000$ ) at the  $p < .05$  level, with equal variances assumed.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted and was found to be statistically significant ( $F = 8.943$ ,  $p = .003$ ). Therefore, an equality of variance could not be assumed, and the unequal variance *t* test was used. This test yielded a *t* value of (-7.611) and indicated statistical significance at the  $p = .000$  level.

To measure the size of the effect, the squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient was used (Cohen's *d*). The squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient for charter school and traditional public school parents is  $r^2_{pb} = 0.02$ . With a squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient of 0.02, the effect of the grades issued by charter school parents has a small effect on the traditional public school grading for the 2003– 2004 school year. Although the data suggest that a significant difference exists between the charter school parent group and the traditional parent group and their grading of their

respective schools for the 2003 – 2004 school year, the effect or importance is small, as indicated by Cohen's *d*.

Table 17

*Independent Samples t- Test Comparing School Grade between Charter and Traditional Schools in Year 1*

<i>Group Statistics</i>				
Type of School	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
Item 35 Charter	573	1.50	.678	.028
Public	2465	1.75	.802	.016

<i>Independent Samples Test</i>								
Levene's Test for Equality								
of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means					
						Sig.	Mean	Std. Error
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	(2-tailed)	Diff.	Diff.
Item 35	Equal variances assumed	8.943	.003	-6.862	3036	.000	-.248	.036
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.611	980.077	.000	-.248	.033

*Research Question 3d*

The hypothesis was: There are no significant differences in the grades issued by charter school parents and parents from traditional public schools in 2004 – 2005. The test data are presented in Table 18.

An independent sample *t* test was used to compare the mean differences between charter school parents and parents of traditional public schools on Item 35 of the School Climate Survey for the 2004 – 2005 school year. The *t* test analysis indicates that 803 charter school parents had a mean score of 1.43, and 2328 traditional public school parents had a mean score of 1.72. The difference between the means is statistically significant ( $t = -9.054$ ,  $df = 3129$ ,  $p = .000$ ) at the  $p < .05$  level, with equal variances assumed.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted and was found to be statistically significant ( $F = 65.832$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Therefore, an equality of variance could not be assumed, and the unequal variance *t* test was used. This test yielded a *t* value of (-10.426) and indicated statistical significance at the  $p = .000$  level.

To measure the size of the effect, the squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient was used (Cohen's *d*). The squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient for Item 35 and charter school grades in 2004 – 2005 is  $r^2_{pb} = -0.01$ . With a squared point bi-serial correlation coefficient of -0.01, the effect of the grades issued between charter school parents and traditional public school parents had a small effect. Although the data suggest a significant difference exists between the charter school parent group and the traditional parent group and the grading of their respective schools for 2004 – 2005, the effect or importance of the effect is quite small, according to Cohen's *d*.

Table 18

*Independent Samples t-Test Comparing School Grades between Charter and Traditional Schools in Year 2*

<i>Group Statistics</i>				
Type of School	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
Item 35 Charter	803	1.43	.616	.022
Public	2328	1.72	.829	.017

<i>Independent Samples Test</i>								
Levene's Test for Equality								
of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.
Item 35	Equal variances assumed	65.832	.000	-9.054	3129	.000	-.289	.032
	Equal variances not assumed			-10.426	1864.262	.000	-.289	.028

## Presentation of the Qualitative Data Results

### *Interviews with Charter School Principals*

Prior to beginning the interview sessions, two charter administrators, not selected for the study, participated in a session with the researcher to refine the interview guide and questions. The feedback from the session revealed that for a few questions, responses might be typical and overlap. However, the administrators felt that by leaving the questions intact, the participants would have the option and opportunity to add other thoughts or to clarify previous information. The researcher agreed with the recommendation.

Of the seven charter school administrators whose schools were identified for the study, six participated in the interviews. Although previously confirmed for the interview, one charter administrator became ill and was out on leave for an extended period of time. Due to time constraints and work load upon return to the school, the charter administrator chose not to participate in the study. All principals were female, with only one having had prior administrative leadership experience in a public school. Most administrators were Hispanic, with one African American administrator (see Table 19).

For each charter participant, initial contact was made with a phone call, followed by a letter to solicit participation, a letter of consent, and a copy of the interview questions (Appendix A). Prior knowledge of the interview questions seemed to set the participants at ease with the setting, and once engaged in the session, they seemed eager to discuss and respond to the researcher's questions. The interview was standardized in

that all participants were asked the same set of questions in the same order. The average completion time for the interview was 35 minutes.

Table 19

*Demographics of Charter Administrators*

	Ethnicity	Gender	Years administration experience	
			Previous charter	Years with charter
CS1	H	F	Yes	8
CS2	H	F	No	4
CS3	H	F	No	3
CS4	H	F	No	4
CS5	H	F	No	8
CS6	B	F	No	10

Charter school administrators are appointed to their positions by the Board of Directors or management companies which represent their schools. Of the selected schools for the study, five out of six charter schools have Education Management Companies (EMO) which manage and provide outside accountability for the charter and hire the charter administrators. In addition to the EMO, these charter schools also function under the auspices of a Board of Directors, with one EMO representative sitting on the Board. One charter school functions directly under a Board of Directors, to which



the principal is accountable. The Local Educational Agency (LEA) for all charter schools in M-DCPS is the Miami-Dade County Public School Board.

For the purpose of clarification, the charter school administrators participating in the study will heretofore be referred to as principal, as all administrators were Leadership Credentialed.

### *Qualitative Analysis*

Within hours of completing each interview session, the researcher transcribed the participant's responses for each question. The school and principal were coded for anonymity. Upon completion of all six interviews, the information from the individual participants was organized question by question in a rubric-coded matrix, as a master data document. This document was used for cross-case analysis to interpret and to identify themes, patterns and insights. This inductive analysis ("open coding") according to Patton (2002), "emphasizes the importance to be open to the data" (p. 453-454).

"There are no formulas for determining significance" (Patton, 2002, p. 433). Rather, the researcher must fairly represent and communicate the data results related to the study's purpose. An inductive approach to interpretation of the data preceded a deductive approach, where the results appear. This grounded theory is explained by Patton as what happens when the researcher, immersed in the data, emerges with embedded meanings and relationships from the analysis. The results are reported by category and guide question, and subsidiary questions (see Appendix B).

*Category I: Traditional schools versus charter school settings*

The guide question for this category was: Based upon your conversations with and feedback from parents, what do parents offer as explanations or reasons for why they are leaving traditional public schools for charter schools?

*Description of the charter school's enrollment and growth pattern.* Principals characterized their enrollment and growth patterns as steady or fast-growing and/or capped to full-capacity with a waiting list of students (sometimes over 200) to enter the school. All agreed that enrollment has never been an issue.

*Characterization of school setting.* Responses to how administrators would characterize their charter school setting ranged from a focus on curriculum and school organization to the “feel” and size of the school. The emphasis on school size and the offering of a small, intimate environment was portrayed by all six principals in the following ways: “loving, caring, environment;” “bringing a personal touch by knowing the character of the child;” “a small school where everyone knows everyone.”

Curriculum-wise, all charter schools use the Florida Sunshine State Standards as the teaching and learning benchmarks. Three charters, all managed by EMOs, organized their schools using multi-age classrooms.

*Charter school vs. traditional public school offerings.* With respect to what their charter school offers to parents that former traditional public schools did not offer, again the overwhelming response was small class size, followed by the use of paraprofessionals in the classrooms to reduce the student ratio. Common to three principals was the comparison of the charter school to a private school environment: “We have a private (school) feel without the cost”; “I run the school like a private school and the parents

know it”; “Parents get the feeling of a private school without the tuition.” One principal named “family environment” and that “people become family to you” as another reason for attracting parents to the charter school. According to one principal, school climate played an important part. “It feels like a family here—they (parents) are not just a number.”

*Option selection for why parents leave traditional schools for charter.* Principals were presented with three options for why parents leave traditional public schools for charter schools. They were (a) safety, (b) academic program, or (c) school’s climate (did parents feel welcomed in the school). Option (d) was open for other responses, as well. Three principals responded with safety as key, followed by academic program, and proceeded to explain their position. One principal stated that while the parents knew the students were safe in the school, parents also knew that the principal takes great pride in the school’s excellent teaching staff. “I weed out poor teachers. Ineffective teachers don’t stay, and my parents know it.”

The idea that all three options were important was noted by one principal. What about the parent who might have had a bad experience in another school? Could it be a bright child was not challenged? Or, a worry about a discipline problem, or an environment that was not caring? This principal pondered the question, as all the schools surrounding her charter were also graded A schools by the state of Florida.

Another principal stated that safety was a huge issue for her parents, but now that they had moved to a smaller campus, access to the principal had improved, and the school overall was more personal. It was not only that small class size was important, but the size of the facility was also viewed as significantly important to parents.

Seeking security in a school and looking for a school that filled this insecurity was important in school choice, according to one principal. Insecurities could come from the school environment; the fact that their child is not adequately prepared for his/her future; or, that the parents, themselves, just want to feel secure. “They get that (the security) from us (our school).”

*Category II: How the school climate survey impacts school improvement planning*

The guide question for this category was: In what way(s) have the results from the School Climate Survey impacted the strategic planning sessions and annual revisions of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)? Charter school and traditional school principals are required to submit to the district and to the state a School Improvement Plan (SIP). This plan includes the goals, objectives, and actions the school will take within the year to improve its academic performance. Included in the SIP is an action plan for parental involvement. Documents used to complete the SIP are numerous and varied. Targeted state assessment test goals and objectives for student achievement are at the core when writing the SIP. The district conducts the annual climate survey, “as part of the effort to promote school improvement and educational accountability” (M-DCPS, 2004b).

*What the school does with climate survey results.* When the interviewees were asked what they do with the results from the School Climate Survey, all six responded that they review the results with their staff. No one went beyond to indicate that the results were published or communicated directly to the parents or to the community at large by the school.

*The value of the climate survey to administrators.* Considering the climate survey on its own merit, the overall response from the principals was “Yes”, the survey did have value. The survey was seen as a check and balance to the school’s operation, allowing administrators to keep their focus. Using the instrument as a way of looking from one year to the next was another way the results were used by the school. One principal would have the staff question any item that changed from one year to the next by asking: “Why is that?”

For some administrators, the survey brought attention to the school’s strengths and weaknesses, and assisted administrators in decision-making. With their staffs, principals would review any deficits, look at strengths, and discuss ways to “keep it strong and make it better.” This principal commented that “it is too easy to become complacent,” i.e., maintaining the A grade. Another principal commented that the survey was of no value as it did not provide any measurable goal like the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). One principal viewed the survey as a “continuous evaluation tool from a random and objective outside party,” while another disagreed and stated that it was not an evaluation tool but a “reflection tool.”

For parents, the principals saw the survey as a way for them to voice their concerns, an attempt by the district to reach out to them, and “make them feel involved.” Although “boasting” their high parent approval on the climate surveys, principals also stated that “there are always those few disgruntled parents.” “People respond differently on any given day.” The survey gave administrators a “birds-eye view” of how the parents see the school, and at the end, they (the principals) “take it with a grain of salt,” because it (the survey) was a “pain . . . .”

*The impact of the climate survey on school leadership.* From a leadership perspective, the impact of the survey on the school was divided, with three of the six principals indicating little or no impact, and the other three principals stating that the survey impacts the school, and to some degree, has a high impact. The survey provided a framework to act upon; yet, while the survey was a tool to impact direction or change, “it sometimes is not relevant to where we are headed.” One principal seemed to target the essence of the climate survey’s importance to school administration: “There just aren’t too many leadership questions.”

*Value of climate survey when updating SIP.* This segment interfaced with a previous question, “As an administrator, of what value is the climate survey?” It was this latter question in the interview, when asked the value of the survey when updating the school’s SIP, that the principals came forth and stated the survey results provided no or little value and had little benefit in writing the SIP. “The parental involvement portion has value, but it does not transfer over to student achievement and the FCAT.” This pattern of thought was repeated by three other principals, that is, the SIP targets student achievement, while the survey was good for accreditation reporting. The climate survey and SIP, “just aren’t correlated.” One principal asked: “Do the parents even know how to fill out the survey?”

*Prioritizing three items of climate survey.* Of importance was the question which asked principals to prioritize three items from the climate survey that was also asked as a quantitative question: (a) safety, (b) good education, and (c) overall school climate (see Table 20).

Three of the six principals selected (a) safety as the most important. The school's neighborhood location, the need for the students to feel safe, and the importance to the school community were all statements in support of safety as the first choice. The second choice to safety was school climate, selected by four principals. For those principals, they strongly supported the position that one was dependent upon the other, and vice versa. By ensuring safety in the school, the school's climate will be positive.

Although all principals touched on the necessity of a challenging curriculum, the demands of constant student assessment, the rigors of how students progress through the system, and the importance of student performance, only two principals rated good education as first, followed by school climate and safety. Those two principals were passionate about their first choice of good education, and voiced strong opinions regarding the FCATs.

One principal touched on a subject none other had shared. It came about from the difficulty she was having in selecting or prioritizing the items in importance. "Any one of them could lead to us shutting down."

Table 20

*Principal Priorities for Items in School Climate Survey*

Charter School	Safety	Good education	School climate
CS1	3	1	2
CS2	1	2	3
CS3	1	3	2
CS4	3	1	2
CS5	1	3	2
CS6*	-	-	-

\*Note. Principal could not prioritize

*What drives the school towards improvement, change or reform?* All six responses varied and targeted specific areas:

CS1: Commitment to lead.

CS2: "I do not like the question!"

CS3: Knowledge gleaned from a doctoral program.

CS4: A philosophy that students come first.

CS5: Test scores.

CS6: State mandates.



*Current significant issues or challenges.* This question drew the most immediate response from all principals. Without hesitation, the responses were as follows:

CS1: Maintaining the A grade. “We are creating a climate where teachers are doing what they need to do to achieve success.”

CS2: The population served (more than 90% on Free and Reduced Lunch). “It is physically exhausting to help them (non-English speaking parents) help their child.”

CS3: The parents! “We’re trying to do our best, and they think they run your school.”

CS4: Money! “We are doing so great with so little.”

CS5: Time Constraints. “(I’m) being both a manager and education leader.”

CS6: Regulations: “We have grown to comply.”

### *Category III: The Relationship between school climate survey and parent satisfaction*

The guide question for this category was: In what way(s) do you, as a charter school administrator, account for the similarities or differences in results on the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey between the 2 years considered for this study. The first subsidiary question of this category was one of the questions almost eliminated in the group review of the instrument, as it seemed repetitive.

*Comparison of charter perception of parent satisfaction with climate survey results.* When asked to assess parent satisfaction as compared with the parent results from the School Climate Survey, principals again voiced their disappointment with methodology of random selection. The overwhelming preference was for all school parents to be surveyed, or, better yet, a whole different instrument for their type of school

setting, that is, charter, should be employed. One principal reiterated that a class could have an issue and, “that would be it” (re: negative climate results). Another commented about what can happen when a few angry parents are a part of the random selected group. “It becomes personal; it’s not about who we are.” And, finally, “not all parents will be satisfied, no matter what.”

*Climate results and accurate description of parent satisfaction.* The perception of how accurately the parents describe their satisfaction with the charter school was rated as accurate to “major accuracy” by all the principals. However, the issue of using this particular climate survey for the charter school population was a recurring concern. “Our surveys should be modified to measure what we are doing—our volunteer hours, contractual hours, events, and so on. Are they (survey items asked) meaningful?”

In general, principals were highly satisfied with their parent survey results, agreed and felt positive with their level of satisfaction and the overall assessment parents gave of the school. “They (the parents) have a good idea of what is going on here.” Although one principal did agree with the parent level of satisfaction, she raised a note of caution for her school: She was not sure what the cause was, but felt there was a difference in parent satisfaction as compared to the survey. “(My) parents are easily intimidated. I think the language (English) is a barrier. It is tough to get them to come in and speak with us (administration).” And: “I’m a lot harder on me and the school (than my parents). I want to be better at what we’re doing.”

*Grade definition by administrator perspective.* Regarding the grading of the school (Item 35 on the School Climate Survey), and how parents arrive at the grade issued for their school, the common refrain was this: “It’s a combination of everything

we've talked about." Principals placed the responsibility for the parents' perception of how they (parents) graded the school on (a) the school's leadership; (b) communication with teachers ("depends on how connected they are with their child's teacher"); (c) the grade already issued by the state. ("They arrive at the grade with a personal perception of how well the students are doing"); and, (d) on their most recent impression of the school or the last interaction parents had with school personnel. Two principals commented that the grading was subjective, not objective like the FCAT.

*Significance, importance and comparison of school grade and state grade.* When comparing the parent's grading of their school with the State's grade of the school, five out of six principals took the State's grading as the one which best defines their school (see Table 19). The state's grade was defined as the "meat and potatoes" of what their work involves, and again, the theme noting "student achievement is what we are all about."

Principals observed that they have more control over the quality of their academic programs for students than they do over parent satisfaction. In at least three of the schools, the parent grade and the state grade have always been the same. The word "collaboration" was used to describe how the effort of both parent and state must be there for the school. The numbers might be there, and the grade of A may be issued by the state, but it is the parents who experience the school day to day and see the on-going results in the school's setting. In the view of one principal, however, "We are not out to please the parents." The emphasis of the comment was meant to clarify the intensity felt by this principal (and others) to "make the grade."

One principal expressed that it is difficult to know which grade best defines the school, as only a segment of the school's population completes the climate survey. Here, again, a better picture of the school would include surveying the entire school population, and include more information on the (charter) school (e.g., the turnover in student enrollment, facilities, management, etc.).

In determining importance, five principals gave less importance to the school grade by parents than the state's grade of the school. Their statements are worthy to note:

1. Without state recognition, we would not be eligible for other types of school recognition programs (e.g., Blue Ribbon Schools, SACS accreditation, grants, etc.)
2. How parents feel and see the school morale (climate) is important. But, parents can be your best friend or your worst enemy.
3. As a principal, you have to go with the flow, and at the end of the day, know you did a good job.
4. So much comes (recognition) from the data and the population we serve.
5. I could be perceived as a great principal by the parents, but if students aren't making the grade, it will not matter.

Table 21

*Grades Issued to the Charter Schools*

	<u>2003 – 2004</u>		<u>2004 – 2005</u>	
	Charter	Florida	Charter	Florida
	Parents	State	Parents	State
CS1	A-	A	A	A
CS2	A-	A	A-	A
CS3	A	A	A	A
CS4	A-	A	A-	A
CS5	B+	A	A-	A
CS6	A-	C	B+	B

*Agreement with overall grade assessment of the school by parents.* The one principal who stated the parent grade was “very significant” also stated that “it is important to know what they (the parents) think.” Again, her supporting statement was original in thought from other principals interviewed: “They (the parents) vote with their feet.”

*Recommendations to the district re: climate survey.* With the last question of the interview, the principals were asked to offer recommendations to the district regarding the feedback on how the School Climate Surveys were used in the schools. The

responses varied but were consistent with the line of thinking expressed throughout the interview.

To summarize their views, the principals recommended the following:

1. If charter schools were required to continue issuing the survey, then it (the survey) should encompass and survey all parents of the school.
2. Miami-Dade County is a data-driven district. Enough information has already been given to the schools.
3. The survey is vague, and simply not correlated to the SIP. The survey seems to offer more accountability to the district than needed information for the school's SIP.
4. It is a good measure to see if (the charter schools) are comparable to traditional schools. However, (charter schools) should not be expected to do this. (Charter schools) should not be compared to other public schools. The variables are too different. "Currently, this (charter) school completes the survey out of courtesy, as it is not in the charter contract to participate."

#### Summary

This study was designed to investigate parent satisfaction in a charter school setting and to examine if selected areas from a School Climate Survey, viewed as important by parents, were considered for school improvement, change, or reform, by charter school administrators.

### *Quantitative Research*

Chapter 4 presented the results of the quantitative data analysis. The quantitative methodology involved collecting data from seven Miami-Dade County charter schools, 25 randomly selected traditional public schools, and examining the data for during a 2 year period: 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005.

Regarding the response rate, there are many reasons why a change might occur from one year to the next, mobility index being one. A low response rate or return can skew results, especially if there are a few potential respondents who hold strong views on the topic to which the item refers. Of significance is the actual numbers of parents from each school group whose survey responses were compared to each other. Based upon student enrollment and school population, traditional public schools, as well as charter schools, had an ample number of survey responses. Variations are viewed as typical.

With 6 years of results available for each survey, there are now five sets of year-to-year changes to observe (MDCPS, 2005b). Counting the difference from one year to the next for each item as a score, there are 170 scores for each of the parent subgroups (34 items x 5). It is initially assumed that the changes that occur are random fluctuations caused by small independent changes in respondents and conditions in each survey each year.

Independent and one sample *t* tests were used to test each research question and hypothesis. Results show that there are statistically significant differences between charter and traditional public schools, and charter school parent responses from one year to another, as indicated by the School Climate Survey for 2 consecutive school years.

However, there was no significant difference between the 2 years of the study and how traditional public school parents graded their school.

1. Charter school parents and traditional public school parents show differences in the way they view their schools on the school climate survey. Although the differences were significant, the effect (or importance) was small.
2. In the areas of safety, good education, and overall school climate, charter school parents indicated a preference of good education and overall school climate over safety.
3. Parents were more likely to agree that a good education is more important than safety. There was no significant difference between overall school climate and good education, as rated by charter parents.
4. Parents were more likely to agree that the overall school climate is more important than safety. There was no significant difference in how parents rated good education and overall school climate.
5. Although the effect size or importance was small, parents graded their charter school differently for 2 consecutive years. The second year of charter experience yielded a higher grade for the school.
6. When comparing one year to the next school year, parents in traditional public schools did not grade their schools differently.
7. When comparing charter school parents with traditional school parents and the way they graded their schools for the 2003 – 2004 school year, charter school parents graded their school higher than did the traditional parents for their public school



on the climate survey. Although the differences were significant, the results show the importance was small.

8. When comparing charter school parents with traditional school parents and the way they graded their schools for the 2004 – 2005 school year, the results show that charter school parents graded their school higher than did the traditional parents for their public school for the second consecutive year. While a significant difference did exist, the effect size (importance) was smaller than the previous year's comparison.

### *Qualitative Research*

The quantitative data was triangulated with qualitative data, with interviews of charter school principals from the participating charter schools. Ethnicity of principals interviewed, and parents who completed the surveys were provided to the reader. In an observed comparison, the principals of the charter schools reflect the parent population of the schools they serve. Similarly, traditional public schools reflected high Hispanic populations, followed by Black representation. White, Asian-Pacific, or American Indian was not as prevalent among the ethnicities presented. On the rise in demographic reports is the choice to code Multi-Ethnic.

The interview questions were categorized into three headings, followed by a guide question for each heading with subsidiary questions. Responses from the principals interviewed were presented categorically, followed by the guide question and a prompt from each subsidiary question:

*Category I: Traditional schools versus charter school settings*

The guide question was: Based upon your conversations with and feedback from parents, what do parents offer as explanations or reasons for why they are leaving traditional public schools for charter schools?

1.1 The overwhelming response offered by principals as a reason charter schools attract parents was not only small class size, but also the size of a small school facility, characterized as a “loving, caring environment.” Charter schools are small enough to allow this family feeling to permeate the school climate, a place where “everyone knows everyone.”

1.2 The use of paraprofessionals in the classrooms supported the small class size ratio.

1.3 The comparison of the charter school to a private school was also prevalent: Parents get the feeling of a private school without the cost of tuition.

1.4 To the charter principals, safety was a key factor explaining why parents preferred charter schools over traditional public schools. Academic programs followed as second. School climate was closely associated with Safety in their explanations.

*Category II: How the school climate survey impacts school improvement planning*

The guide question was: In what way(s) have the results from the School Climate Survey impacted the strategic planning sessions and annual revisions of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)?

2.1 What principals do with the survey was different than how they value the survey. All principals review the results of their school’s climate survey with staff.

None of the principals offered or extended comments to state if the survey results were shared with the parents or community.

2.2 Principals value the climate survey as a tool for leadership, not as an evaluation of their school. The climate survey was valuable to gauge strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of parents from one year to another.

2.3 Principals were concerned with the state's grading of the schools, as an indication that the survey and SIP were not correlated.

2.4 While three principals indicated that the climate survey had no impact on how they revised the SIP, three indicated that it did provide a framework or tool to impact direction or change. Each item, survey and SIP, were not congruent.

2.5 Presented again with the choice to prioritize safety, good education, and overall school climate, three principals chose safety as the most important, two selected good education, and none selected overall school climate as the first choice.

2.6 Good education was rated third by two principals, with two other principals selecting safety as the third choice.

2.7 Four principals selected school climate as their second choice.

2.8 School climate was rated second by 50% of the principals with little comment appended. The pattern which emerged seemed to connect safety to school climate, while good education was clearly in a cell by itself.

2.9 Change and reform produced substantive and varied responses from each principal. Each is worthy to note:

- a. Commitment to lead
- b. Higher education studies

- c. Personal philosophy that students come first
- d. Test scores
- e. State mandates

*Category III: The Relationship between school climate survey and parent satisfaction*

The guide question was: In what way(s) do you, as a charter school administrator, account for the similarities or differences in results on the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey between the two years considered for this study?

3.1 Overwhelmingly, the principals recommended that all charter school parents should be surveyed, not a segment of the school's population.

3.2 Of greater preference was to give a survey to charter parents based upon their type of offerings and school setting.

3.3 Principals were satisfied with their parent survey results and stated that their parents had accurately indicated their level of satisfaction and fairly assessed the school.

3.4 Concern was voiced regarding how a few disgruntled parents could impact the survey results.

3.5 Principals stated that parents issued the grade of the school based on parents' perceptions of the school. These perceptions included (a) the administration, (b) communication with classroom teacher, (c) grade already issued by the state of Florida, (d) their most recent interaction with school personnel.

3.6 The majority of principals stated that the state's assessment grade of their charter school better defined their school and was of more value than the parent grade.

As noted: “We are all about student achievement.” Supporting this statement was the fact that principals can better control their school programs than keeping their parents satisfied.

3.7 With regards to the school, the word collaboration was used to describe the effort put forth by both parents and the state.

3.8 Although student achievement was at the forefront of the interview responses, one principal acknowledged that pleasing the parents was not her priority; “making the grade” was what her school was all about.

From the results presented in chapter 4, and the next and final chapter, chapter 5, will include a summary of the findings, conclusions and suggested recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter will begin with a brief synopsis of the research study as a precursor to the discussion of the research findings and summary for both quantitative and qualitative research questions. Discussion of the research questions will be followed by conclusions and recommendations for future study.

#### Synopsis of Research Study

The idea of competition through choice was a policy issue discussed at the national level as early as 1993 (Uchitelle, 1993), and in 1996, the charter school movement arrived in the state of Florida with the opening of the state's first charter in Miami-Dade County. To date, there are 50 charter schools within the M-DCPS and over 333 charters in the state (Florida Department of Education, 2005). To some, charter schools stir a healthy competition to improve and reform the educational system (Gross & Gross, 1985); to others, there is no evidence to suggest that the traditional public schools improved student performance as a result of this competition (Bifulco & Ladd, 2004).

Charter schools developed a reputation for not only encouraging innovation, but also for providing powerful roles to parents and encouraging involvement in the education of their children. The parental involvement component was huge; however, research has yet to fully explain the phenomena. Are parents dissatisfied with the system

they are leaving, or are they seeking to find an alternative opportunity for their child? Perhaps the bigger question remains: Once deciding on a charter school, will parents be more (or less) satisfied with what they see once they are there? To seek a better understanding to this question, this research study went beyond the parent-charter school attraction and satisfaction factors to study if this involvement touched the core of the charter's purpose: innovation and curriculum reform to improve student achievement.

The purpose of this descriptive study was to investigate how school climate surveys completed by parents were utilized for school improvement by charter school administrators. Examination of the quantitative data and qualitative data provided insight into the impact parents and their levels of satisfaction have on charter school improvement. As a result of this study, parent expectations and satisfaction afford school administrators in both charter school and traditional public school the opportunity to better understand how to attract and retain a growing student population. The research findings are important and relevant to all educators who desire to better serve their own communities.

Two methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, were used for the collection of data. The instrument used to collect the parent data was the Miami-Dade County annual School Climate Survey given to parents, as well as teachers and students. The study was triangulated with qualitative methodology using interviews to discuss parent satisfaction and school improvement issues with charter school administrators.

The study focused on two school settings: charter schools and traditional public schools in the Miami-Dade County Public School system, fourth largest school district in the nation. Four items for investigation were selected from the M-DCPS School Climate

Survey instrument issued annually to a random selected parent population for each school in the district: safety, good education, overall school climate, and school grade. Items chosen for the study reflect the district's selection when reporting survey results to the schools and through the public domain. The study followed the results of the climate survey for a 2 year period of time: 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005.

School Climate Survey data for seven charter schools and 25 randomly selected traditional public schools was obtained from the public domain. Two-tailed independent sample *t* tests and one sample *t* tests were used as the statistical tests. Of the three quantitative research questions, questions one and two yielded one null hypothesis each, with four null hypotheses for research question three. The findings are as follows.

## Quantitative Research Findings and Summary

### *Research Question 1*

The first research question examined whether any differences existed between charter school parents and parents of traditional schools on how they viewed their respective schools on the School Climate Survey. The results from the two-tailed independent sample *t* test were statistically significant, rejecting the null hypothesis. Effect size, determined by Cohen's *d*, was .04 (close to medium at .06). The way charter school parents viewed their charter schools was moderately different from the way parents of traditional public schools saw their schools. The findings suggest that charter school parents may be more involved and more satisfied with their school than traditional public school parents. The research by Solomon and Wiederhorn (2003) concurs, stating



that parents viewed charter schools as providing smaller, better run schools, and allowing them more access to the school than the traditional public schools. Also, Casey et al., (2002) supported this finding as parents were pleased with their choice of charter school (over traditional schools). The research of Bielick and Chapman (2003) suggests that dissatisfaction with a former public school is why parents choose charter schools.

The nature of charter schools emphasizes something different is going on, and the schools are able to exercise certain options without the bureaucratic waiting line (Gratz, 2004). Parents may be saying now what Vanourek et al., (1977) already discovered: When parents are given choices, they become more actively involved and are more satisfied with their child's education.

#### *Research Question 2*

The second research question asked in which of three items of the school climate survey parents would be most satisfied: safety, good education, or school climate. With the preset or test values determined, three one-sample *t* tests were run to determine the level of significance.

Parents viewed good education and overall school climate as more important than safety when rating their child's charter school. Safety was not as important as the overall school climate, and there was no significant difference between good education and the overall school climate. Charter parents' responses showed their first priority was good education, followed by overall school climate, with safety as third and last.

Review of the literature in chapter 2 supports the premise that high achievement in schools is of the utmost importance (Bulach & Malone, 1994). High-stakes testing, including No Child Left Behind legislation, is at the forefront of good education for all

Florida schools, with the state's priority testing program (FCAT) primed to show that students are making a year's growth of learning in a year's time. Parents, students, and educators agree that the paramount goal of education is the high level performance of schools (Anderson et al., 2004).

A healthy school climate is the foundation for sound educational programs (Sweeney, 1988), and student achievement is directly influenced by school climate (Kelly et al., 2005). Both studies support the association and the findings that good education and overall school climate are more important to parents than safety.

School climate, often equated with school culture, is a barometer for measuring the pulse of an organization (Roberts et al., 2004). Synonymous to keeping students safe is school discipline. Are procedures for student behavior in place? Haller and Kleine (2001) found that students' behavior will vary in distinctive ways, depending on the school that he or she attends. A report of the School Climate Survey results indicated that 85 % of the parents agreed that their school is safe and secure (MDCPS, 2004b). The research hypothesis was substantiated. There are differences among the three items from the school climate survey; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

### *Research Question 3*

The third research question sought to examine if there were differences in how parents graded the schools, both charter and traditional, and to see if the grades improved or not over a 2 year period of time. The results for each null hypothesis are as follows:

3a. There were significant differences in how charter school parents graded their schools for 2 years in a row (2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005); the null hypothesis was rejected.

3b. There were no significant differences in how traditional school parents graded their schools for these 2 consecutive school years. The null hypothesis was accepted.

3c. – 3d. There were significant differences in the school grades issued by charter school parents and traditional public school parents for their schools for both 2003 – 2004 and 2004 – 2005 school years. For the 2 consecutive years, charter school parents assigned a higher grade to their schools than did the parents from the traditional public schools. The null hypotheses were rejected for both school years.

In survey results for the year 2003 – 2004 distributed by the M-DCPS, the majority of parents showed their satisfaction with their schools by issuing an overall grade in the “B” range. This has been a gradual trend since the climate survey instrument was introduced in the 1998-99 school year (M-DCPS, 2004c).

The research on parents and grading of charter schools in Florida indicated an increase in the number of parents grading their charter school an A or A+ (2004 – 2005), as compared to the year before (Solomon, 2003). Likewise, McCully and Malin (2003) found that New York charter school parents graded their child’s charter school an “A” as compared to the previous year and/or to their former school. Their reason? Their children were doing better academically than in their previous school.

As described by the M-DCPS (2004c), the School Climate Surveys show exceptional stability of response from one year to the next. According to district results, parent response rates for 2004 – 2005 were consistent with the previous year’s rates (46% for 2003 - 2004). Overall, the parent group responses from 2004 – 2005 continued an increment increase in satisfaction from the 2003 – 2004 school year.

Parents with children in the traditional public schools were consistent in the way they assigned the grades for 2 years in a row. The importance or effect of any movement or change of grading from one year to the next was negligible. Perhaps Albert Shanker did say it best when Kolderie (2003) quoted him as saying that public education was taking its customers for granted. The idea that the ripple effect did not occur, that is, charter schools have not, cannot, and do not change traditional public schools or district schools may be an accurate one (Kolderie).

The findings from this research question are supported by Chubb (1998) and Solomon (2003) who concur: parent satisfaction points to the grades given at schools (Chubb) and, grades of A and B are indicators of parent satisfaction (Solomon). Further support is offered by Solomon, who found that the grade a school receives is commensurate with the number of years the child is enrolled in the school. This assumes that a dissatisfied parent would leave the school. The expectation, therefore, is that as the tenure of the student rises, so also will the satisfaction with the charter school. (It is important to note that the charter schools in this study had been in operation a minimum of 3 years. However, the number of total years was not a part of this research design.)

#### Qualitative Research Findings and Summary

Of the seven charter schools in the study, six of the principals from the schools were available and agreed to participate in an interview session for the purpose of better understanding how parent satisfaction impacts school improvement at the school site. Five of the six principals were Hispanic, one African American. All were female. Only one principal had had administrative experience in a public school prior to her current

charter school position. Two had served as principal for less than 5 years; four with 5 to 10 years experience.

Three research questions guiding the qualitative portion of the study revealed patterns and themes. These themes present “substantive significance” to the qualitative outcomes of the study (Patton, 2002). Themes crossed boundaries and overlapped from one guide question to another. A summary of the guide questions, with thematic responses from the principal interviews follow. (A complete listing of the interview questions, including the subsidiary questions, can be found in Appendix A.)

*Category I. Traditional schools versus charter school settings*

*Small Class Size*

The guide question for Category I asked principals to offer their explanations or thoughts on why parents leave traditional public schools for charter schools. The resounding response was small class size, followed by a smaller facility/school building. Paraprofessionals offered smaller teaching-learning ratios, and, the smallness gave a safe environment feel. When parents listed their top seven reasons for choosing a charter school over a traditional school, smaller class size was rated first (Solomon & Widerhorn, 2003). A parent survey from New Mexico indicated satisfaction with their charter school experiences, placing class size as first (Casey et al., 2002). Similar conclusions were found in a study by the Hudson Institute. Two thirds of parents in this study rated class size as more satisfactory than previous school experience (Vanourek et al., 1997), and the National Study of Charter Schools (1998) found that small class size was a theme which attracted parents.

### *Safety*

Throughout the literature review, climate and safety were related, and the principals interviewed agreed. However, climate and safety were not correlated or connected in the quantitative study results. According to the parents, safety was not a priority, but was rated highly with principals. According to Finn and Kanstorrom (2002), parents want to know whether their children will be safe in these (charter) schools. Survey results from M-DCPS (2004c) stated that, with respect to safety, 85 % of elementary parents agreed with the proposition that their school “is safe and secure.”

Of the five biggest problems facing the public schools in the community at the time of the 37<sup>th</sup> Rose and Gallup Poll (2004), safety was not listed. It was reported, however, that the concern about drugs, which started in 1991, was preceded by discipline, which had been at the top of the list for the first 16 years of the poll. Schools with discipline problems, as well as schools with drug problems, would not be considered safe or secure.

### *Good Education*

Presented with three options, the principals were asked to prioritize their reasons or thinking on why parents left traditional schools for charters. Of the three (safety, good education, and overall school climate), principals responded with safety first, followed by good education (academic programs), and school climate as third. However, these were not the findings by parents (see quantitative research question 2). According to the National Study of Charter Schools (1998), parents are attracted to charter schools because of high quality programs (good education), supportive environment (school climate), small school size and either flexible scheduling or highly structured school environment

(school climate). Safety was not mentioned. Bielick and Chapman (2003) found that parents whose children were in schools of choice were more likely to feel their children were getting a good education and were satisfied with the order and discipline of the school (safety) than parents from traditional public schools. Both of these studies pointed to the priority of good education as rated by parents.

However, while principals exhibited some ambivalence with prioritizing the items, there was no hesitation when the question of student achievement and meeting state requirements entered into the conversation. Interestingly, principals voiced strongly the importance of student achievement in their school, especially when discussing state assessment standards and the state's A+ plan. Yet, good education was not the top priority in the principals' ratings.

### *School Climate*

Three charter school principals likened their school climate and setting to that of a private school environment. Again, it was the "feel" of the school, the way they, as administrators, ran the school, and the fact that parents recognized it. "We have a private school feel without the cost" seemed to summarize best this thinking. The other thematic reference to the charter school's climate was the emphasis on "family." Parents are attracted to the charter schools because they are treated like family and are recognized by name.

Charter school principals would agree with the Rose and Gallup (2005) poll finding that "the closer people are to schools, they better they feel about them" (p. 50). Marzano (2003) would concur, finding that effective parent involvement resulted from

parents sensing that the school (administration) values and welcomes their ideas, as well as their physical participation.

*Category II. How the school climate survey impacts school improvement planning*  
*Climate Survey*

Climate surveys target opportunities for improvement (Glick, 1985). This guide question stepped into the center of the main research question by asking in what ways the climate survey results impacted school improvement at the school site. The principals did not view the climate survey as connected to improvement planning in this way. Instead, the survey was valuable for screening the strengths and weaknesses of the school, as perceived by parents. Principals were not pleased that their schools were using an instrument surveying traditional schools as a comparison to charter schools. Strongly voiced was the need for their own (charter school) survey, focusing on features unique to schools of choice. They agreed that the climate survey was a valuable tool for leadership, but it was not an evaluation of their school. It was a gauge, not the last word. Although principals acknowledged that the survey results were reviewed with staff, none stated that the results were communicated further (e.g., parent community).

As a group, the principals did not see a correlation between the climate survey and school improvement planning. What was vital to these principals, however, was the test score data received from the state the previous year. How they would fare with meeting the state's expectation for an A grade performance was the challenge and their goal.



*Making the Grade*

According to the principals, parent perceptions play an important role in how their schools are graded. This perception included how parents viewed the school's administration; a positive and open communication with their child's teacher; the most recent encounter the parent had at the school site, positive or negative; and the grade issued to the charter school by the state of Florida. The research by Solomon (2003) did not support this last view stated by principals, unless the principals were referring to previously issued school grades. Parents issued school grades prior to the release of the years' FCAT scores and Florida state grade results. Given that the state's assessments are correct, then parents may also have an accurate sense of their school's relative academic performance. Therefore, the results of the state's testing did not influence parent rankings (Solomon, 2003). The principals inferred that parents would be familiar with their charter school's grades. Most likely, this reference was to the grade issued to the school in the previous year.

Henig (1994) pointed out that test scores, school reputation, and class/facility size is what draws the parents' interest to schools of choice. Principals would agree with the importance of the test scores, although they did not place good education at the top of their list. Parents, however, did. The 2004 study of Florida's charter schools reported 97% of parents had chosen a charter school for academic reasons, with nearly 89% planning to re-enroll their children the following year (Cox, 2004). Similar to Henig's findings, parents ranked the academic reputation of the school as the number one reason for school selection (Anderson, 2003).

One variable not mentioned, yet valuable, was found in the research regarding charter school longevity. According to Solomon (2003), parent grading must take into account that the parent grade may depend more on how long their child has been attending the charter school than how long the school has been in operation.

### *School Improvement*

Parents agreed that school improvement should come through the existing public school framework, as indicated by the high levels of satisfaction with their children's community schools (Rose & Gallup, 2005). Marzano (2003) had also stated that factors supporting the proper focus for school reform included parent involvement, school climate and leadership. The school climate survey as a tool for school improvement had already been dismissed as valuable by the principals. Therefore, when school improvement was discussed, there was a disconnect between the association of parents and school improvement.

The school choice movement has emerged in response to a school reform initiative. Principals were distinctively clear when stating what drives their improvement or reform initiatives. Their responses varied from drawing upon a leadership perspective or a personal philosophy on what makes their school unique (e.g., students come first, to restating previously discussed issues such as test scores and state mandates). Perhaps this is an example of Kolderie's (2003) statement when he indicated that troubles affecting schools are numerous and varied.

Miami-Dade County offers the School Climate Survey to principals as an additional data source for their School Improvement Plans (SIP). As stated earlier, principals found the survey of value and regretted that they did not have an instrument of

their own for this specific purpose. Suggestions made to the district's research and accountability office regarding the implementation and use of the survey by the schools included the recommendation that charter schools should not only have their own survey instrument, but that all parents at a school should be included in the survey, not a mere percentage of classes school-wide. In the end, the principals stated that the survey results were a matter of compliance with a district request, than of real importance or significance to them. It offered data accountability for a data-driven district and state.

*Category III. The relationship between school climate surveys and parent satisfaction*  
*Leadership*

School climate, quality instruction, and leadership are frequently associated with effective schools, as early research studies had shown (Brookover, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Rutter et al., 1979). As school leaders, the principals verbalized that they establish the tone and climate in their schools. Research supporting this statement suggested that principal behavior is related to school climate (Bulach, Boothe, & Pickett, 1998), and that student achievement is directly influenced by strong leadership and school climate (Kelly, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005).

It also became clear from the interviews that each principal had her own focus on the school, be it the students, the parents, the State assessment testing program, and/or the grading of the school. This sense of purpose was common to all interviewed and was expressed in their own manner and personality style: commanding yet agreeable; assertive yet complying; confident not aggressive; questioning and seeking, each with an individual and clear perspective of her school. Principals offered a rationale for what

they considered important in their school, inferring how important it was to stay on top of their game.

Their leadership challenges included maintaining the high performance standards, which had earned this school (and most all others) an A grade; the high population of non-English speaking parents; the parents themselves, who want to “run the schools”; finances; time; and, a growing sense of imposed district regulations. Supporting these issues was the research of Hassel and Hassel (2004) which defined school quality on those items differentiating good schools from low-performing schools. These factors included a clear mission, high expectations, frequent monitoring and adjustments, effective teaching methods, strong home-school connections, a safe and orderly environment, and instructional leadership.

Although not targeted for the study, yet of importance, was the concern regarding the growing expectation from the bureaucratic powers of the district that charter schools fulfill requirements not previously expected or issued. A main contention by one principal was that these types of compliance issues were not stated in the charter’s contract with the school board. According to the research of Chubb and Moe (1990), centralized control can debilitate a school’s effectiveness.

#### *State and Parent Grading of Schools*

According to Good and Braden (2000b), school choice has not been a consistent or resilient variable with respect to student achievement. This issue has continued to persist, despite the years of research and debate (Goldhaber, 2001). All principals expressed the importance of this issue—not to debate it, but to say that high-stakes testing and accountability was a reality to them. Four of the six charter schools in the

study maintained an A grade issued by the state for 2 consecutive years. Parents' grades indicated an A grade for those same schools. Two schools fluctuated between B+ and A- with grades issued by parents for 2 consecutive years. A study in Arizona reported similar findings. Almost 67% of the parents graded their charter school an "A" or A+ as compared to 64% a year earlier. Parents gave nearly identical grades to charter schools as the state issued to schools (Solomon, 2003).

According to a recent Rose and Gallup poll (2005), the grades assigned to public schools remain as high as ever, and are impressive when parents give the evaluation. As a nation, 24% graded the schools an A or a B, and the percentage rose to 48% when parents graded their own community schools. It appears that parents may grade their home schools higher than schools at large. The quantitative findings of this study support what principals already knew: Parents grade their charter schools higher than do parents in traditional schools. In another study of New York charter school students, 42% of parents graded their child's charter school an "A" as compared to 21% who gave their child's prior school an "A." The grade was said to reflect satisfaction with quality instruction.

### *Parent Satisfaction*

Parental involvement covers a wide range of activities from bake sales to school planning committees, and seems the least controversial concept in education reform. Results from a 1997 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll supported the importance of parents' involvement in their child's education. Greater opportunities for parental involvement were also among the reasons given by parents for selecting charter schools for their child (Vanourek et al.,1997). Since parent involvement has become a MDCPS district and

State goal, efforts of both charter and traditional schools to invite parent participation in key school opportunities has been a major effort. From the conversation with principals, it was not always apparent that this parental involvement was all that positive or welcomed. Three principals stated that parents liked the control the principals had exercised in their schools regarding having school policies and procedures in place; however, it was not always easy. When issues from the climate survey surfaced in the discussion, a few principals acknowledged that their parents wanted to run the school—or overrun the school. Two principals gave an example: Of concern to their parents was the food being served; the food was inferior and not tasty. The principals changed catering services to appease the growing complaints. Principals shook their heads in disbelief. “Here we are talking about high achievement and safety issues, and the parents are worried about the quality of our food.”

### Conclusions

Parents continue to show satisfaction with charter schools. Whereas school administrators are pleased with the levels of satisfaction and grades issued by parents, principals are not influenced by the survey results when updating their school improvement plans. Though small in importance, the charter school advantage, as evidenced by parent grades of the school, did not fade over the course of 2 years.

“Education reform through charter schools cannot succeed unless innovative practices from charter schools are shared with other public schools” (Andrews & Rothman, 2002, p. 510). Small class size continues to be a high priority with parents choosing charter schools. Florida residents recently voted to decrease class size in all public schools in the state. Beginning in the fall 2006 school year, charter schools will no

longer be able to sell small class size as an advertising edge. It is a reform now shared with all public schools.

In order to survive in a market system, charters must satisfy their clients (parents) (Solomon, 2003). The results of this study show that the charter school parents studied are satisfied with their charter schools in Miami-Dade County. Parents were most satisfied with the good education of charter schools, which to them was the most important quality about school, and they were consistently satisfied for 2 consecutive years of the study. Although this study did not investigate this question from the point of view of the parents from traditional public schools, it well may be that parents, in general, value and expect a good education from their child's school.

For Miami-Dade County, all schools are showing positive results from the parents on their school's survey; however, the effect between the charter schools and the traditional schools is becoming greater as time goes on. The effect or importance, although small, suggests that the differences between the two school groups are widening. Overall, as evidenced from the study, both charter and traditional Miami-Dade County Public Schools are solid with respect to delivering a safe environment, good education, and providing a positive environment.

The School Climate Survey was vital to the research study. While the survey had limitations, it did give a perspective on how parents viewed their schools. According to this study's data, parent perception of their charter school was better every year. This finding was supported by the Florida state data, as well. Over time, Florida charters continue to strengthen in number, and studies of the state's charters support the importance parents place on good education for their children.

There is movement and growth towards grading charters with an "A."

Traditional schools have been graded with a B+ for 2 consecutive years. While B+ is a good grade, the findings show charters are taking it to the next level (i.e., with the A grade) and doing something traditional schools are not perceived to be doing in the same way.

Parent satisfaction did not impact school improvement planning, as stated by the charter school principals. Principal ratings of safety, good education, and school climate were not allied with parent ratings on the climate surveys; parents rated good education as first, and did not feel safety was an issue; principals rated safety as first and placed education third in almost every case. The parent perception that safety is not as important may be an assumption (or reality in some school environments) that safety simply is not an issue at a charter school; or, safety has been made such a priority at the school, and has been given so much attention, that it is not something parents need to worry about.

Fundamental to the charter school movement is the belief that it is a market-driven organization which will outperform traditional public schools (Good & Braden, 2000b). As long as charter schools share a small space of the education marketplace, they may not be perceived to be of significant threat to the traditional public schools. However, once charters (a) continue to grow in number, (b) show growth in student achievement, and (c) indicate high levels of satisfaction by the consumers (parents), it is expected that greater regulation and restriction demands will be made (Solomon, 2003). The concern that charters will be regulated into traditional schools was a reality expressed by the charter school principals.



## Recommendations

*Florida Governor Jeb Bush (2006):*

*“Success is never final and reform is never finished.”*

Data from this study suggests that charter school research, parent satisfaction, and student achievement continue to offer recommendations for potential practices, implications for policy makers, and investigation for further study.

### *Practice*

Principals may need to pay more attention to their climate surveys. If good education is as important to parents as the data suggests, then their input on what they consider important may be the mainstay of their charter choice. It is worthy for principals to take note of these factors: Is it grades, curriculum programs, state test results, or other? A closer look into this item (good education) on the school climate survey might provide insight and direction for changing, revising, or reforming a School Improvement Plan. Then, parent input would not only be valuable, but would make an impact as suggested by the research premise.

### *Policy Implications*

As the school choice debates continue, the venue for the exchange has moved from the collective voices of advocates expressing their strongly held positions from both sides of the issue, to a more existential fight finding its place through the court system. As recently as February 2006, the Florida Supreme Court struck down one of Florida’s three choice programs on the grounds that it “created competition for public schools—the very competition that has helped drive improvement in Florida’s schools” (Bush, 2006, p. 2). In the State of Florida, educational reform is measured, with the expectation of

rewards and consequences for results, and requires long-term commitment. It is the cumulative effect of incremental improvement that creates significant progress. And, in Florida, reform efforts will continue by changing state law or the Florida Constitution “to protect choice programs from activist court rulings” (Bush, 2006).

According to the 2005 Rose and Gallup poll, the public wants to support and improve its public schools, and has a limited interest in “alternative systems” such as charter schools. The message to policy makers is to unite in a collaborative effort to improve these (traditional) schools. If policy makers were to follow this advice, the New Orleans School Board should not have approved the conversion of all 13 schools to charter status (Gewertz, 2005), but would have rebuilt the existing traditional schools. Most likely, the availability of a \$20.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to repair and expand charter schools provided the incentive needed for Board approval. The question of who would serve as the Local Education Agency to monitor the new schools was a larger concern, as the schools lacked a framework to guide and support them.

As the market theory goes, it is a buyer’s market right now. Understanding the competition is one way to capitalize on the gains or “profits.” It may be that charter schools will change traditional schools. One charter school principal presented the paradigm that perhaps it is the traditional schools that are looking more like charters rather than the charters changing traditional schools. Charter school uniqueness may diminish over time, as traditional schools become savvier. District regulations may enforce or level the playing field.

Caution must be taken to not dilute the value each setting offers as a school choice. In the end, differences aside, educational options or choices of public schools, charter or traditional, may come down to looking at the same three factors again: Safety—which schools are perceived as safer? Good education—which schools are perceived to offer a better education? And, school climate—which schools offer the best small class size environment? If an association can be made between student achievement patterns and the way parents grade their schools, then future research studies may show results with greater significance and gains.

### *Findings and Implications*

1. Finding: Florida State legislation has mandated small class sizes throughout the district, thus equalizing the number of students allowed in both charter and traditional public school classes.

Implication: Understand the market value, and capitalize on product improvement. The competition is closing the gap.

2. Finding: Principals do not find climate surveys of value when updating school improvement plans, nor were their priorities of the school indicative of parent survey results.

Implication 2.1: Principals, as leaders, must keep current on research regarding parent satisfaction and involvement in the school.

Implication 2.2: Principals who include parents in strategic planning may find an increase in the parents' level of satisfaction with their child's school.

3. **Finding:** As suggested by the principals, there is a need for the charter schools to have their own school climate survey, one that reflects the nature and needs of their own type of public school.

**Implication:** By addressing this concern, both charter advocates and opponents may agree to accept and value the research outcomes from one charter instrument.

4. **Finding:** The Gallup polls supported what this study found: safety was no longer a primary concern of the parents. Financial issues are top priority in the nation according to the poll, and charter principals in Miami-Dade County agree.

**Implication:** As long as charters are viewed as taking dollars (students) away from traditional public schools, the arguments will continue. Policy and politics are the bedfellows of this, and other, education debates.

5. **Finding:** Quantitative findings on how parents rated the priorities of safety, good education, and overall school climate were counter to how the charter principals prioritized these same areas.

**Implication:** Principals need to be aware of what the parents view as priorities in a school setting, as their priorities may keep them satisfied and involved with the school.

6. **Finding:** According to charter school principals, charter schools are beginning to mirror traditional schools.

**Implication:** To date, M-DCPS is giving more power to a pilot group of school principals to manage their own budgets, without the bureaucracy of the district's approval for spending.

7. Finding: Statistical significance was found in all but one hypothesis test. The findings, while significant, were of a small effect, except for one area: how charter school parents view their schools versus traditional public school parents. This finding suggests that charter schools are doing something to gain greater parent satisfaction than are traditional public schools.

Implication: Both charter and traditional schools in Miami-Dade County are fairing well. Caution must be taken to not dilute the value of any school setting; each offers the public a choice.

8. Finding: The school choice/charter school movement is not a dance. One misstep may hinder progress, but does not necessarily stop the music.

Implication: Research must continue as there is much to learn about charter schools and their place in the education marketplace.

#### *Future Research*

To paraphrase Governor Bush, research is never ending; a study never finished. Trends show parent involvement in charter schools going beyond the bake sales of volunteerism and extending to such school improvement planning committees as the Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC). Further research would be required to investigate the degree to which parent participation in strategic planning sessions contributes to a school-wide effort to reform charter education.

Parental choice is seen as a stimulus for school improvement and quality control of schools (Denessen et al., 2001). A review of the research found some studies conducted on parent options and satisfaction with school choice, but more insight is

needed into the reasons parents choose a school and the factors which not only influence their reasons, but keep them there.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

1. Examine the traditional public school climate survey results and interview administrators from those schools.
2. Investigate how traditional public school parents prioritize the three items of safety, good education, and school climate, as a comparison to the charter school parents.
3. Conduct a longitudinal study and follow the results over a period of time to determine the endurance of the satisfaction and findings of school grading by parents;
4. Extend the study to encompass more charter schools and charter administrators;
5. Compare the charter school's first year to the most current year, following the same class (e.g., the kindergarten parents who have stayed until Grade 5).
6. Examine the relationship of parent satisfaction with charter schools as compared to parent satisfaction with independent private schools.

#### **Closing Statement**

Parent satisfaction is reflected in more than a survey given once a year. This study examined how parent satisfaction impacts change or reform within a charter school setting. The research provided insight into parent expectations and satisfaction, affording charter administrators with the opportunity to better understand how to attract and retain a growing school population.

With the numbers of students leaving traditional schools to participate in charter schools, this study served to inform educators in charter schools and traditional public schools how they may better serve their own educational setting and community. Charter schools, as well as traditional public schools, must understand what brings their clients to their doors. This level of awareness could prompt a higher level of analysis. In the end, it is the common entity, the students, who will benefit from the relevance research has to offer.

Using the market place metaphor, the charter principals continue to prepare their store-fronts to greet their new clientele. Anxious to please, yet driven to sell, charter school principals stand ready to deliver their well-defined product to interested consumers. The extent of their success remains to be seen.

**REFERENCES**



- Anderson, A. S. (2003). A descriptive study of the criteria used for school choice selection and preference among African-American parents/caregivers in an integrated magnet school district of choice. (Doctoral dissertation, Seton Hall University, 2004). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, LB1027.9.A5.
- Anderson, B., MacDonald, D. S., & Sinnemann, C. (2004). Can measurement of results help improve the performance of schools? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(10), 735 – 739.
- Andrews, J. H. M. (1965). School organizational climate: Some validity studies. *Canadian Education and Research Digest*, 5, 317-334.
- Andrews, K.A., & Rothman, M. (2002). Cultivating innovation: How a charter/district network is turning professional development into professional practice. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(7), 507 – 512.
- Archer, J. (2004). Private charter managers team up. *Education Week*, 23(21), 1, 15.
- Barber, B.R. (1997). Public schooling: Education for democracy. In J. I. Goodlad & T.J. McMannon (Eds.), *The public purpose of education and schooling* (pp. 21-32). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Belfield, C. R., & Levin, H. M. (2002). The effects of competition between schools on educational outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 72, 279-341.
- Bielick, S., & Chapman, C. (2003). Trends in the use of school choice. *The Education Statistics Quarterly*, 5(2). Retrieved July 8, 2004, from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly>

- Bierlein, L., & Mulholland, L. (1995). *Charter schools update and observations regarding initial trends and impacts* (Policy Brief). Tempe: Arizona State University, School of Public Affairs, Morrison Institute for Public Policy.
- Bifulco, R., & Ladd, H. F. (2004). *The impact of charter schools on student achievement: Evidence from North Carolina* (Working Papers Series SAN04-01) Duke University, Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy.
- Borja, R. R. (2004). Despite \$20 million pledge, S.C. charter plan dead for now. *Education Week*, 23(40), 32.
- Bossart, S., Dwyer, D., Rowan, B., & Lee, G. (1982). The instructional management role of the principal. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 18, 34 – 64.
- Bracey, G. W. (2005a). Research: Checking up on charters. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(7), 554-555.
- Bracey, G. W. (2005b). The 15<sup>th</sup> Bracey report on the condition of education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(2), 138 – 153.
- Bridge, R., & Blackman, J. (1978) *A study of alternatives in American education. Vol. 4: Family choice in schooling*. National Institute of Education. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.
- Brimley, V. Jr., & Garfield, R.R. (2002). *Financing education in a climate of change*. Boston: Pearson Education Company.
- Brookover, W. (1979). *School social systems and student achievement: Schools can make a difference*. New York: Praeger.
- Buchen, I. (2004). The rise of the 'parentariat.' *Education Week*, 24(6), 31.

- Bulach, C., Boothe, D., & Pickett, W. (1998). *Should nots for school principals: Teachers share their views*. ERS SPECTRUM, *Journal of School Research and Information*, 16(1), 16-20.
- Bulach, C., & Malone, B. (1994). The relationship of school climate to the implementation of school reform. ERS SPECTRUM, *Journal of School Research and Information*, 12 (4), 3 – 8.
- Bulach, C., Malone, B., & Castleman, C. (1994). The effect of school climate on student achievement. In C. Bulach & B. Malone (Eds.), *The relationship of school climate to the implementation of school reform*. ERS SPECTRUM, 12 (4), 3 – 8.
- Bush, J. (2006). Five rules for school reform. In an adaptation from a lecture given at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. E-mail received January 30, 2006, from the Office of Governor Bush, and published in the *Wall Street Journal*, January 30, 2006.
- Casey, J., Andreson, K., Yelverton, B., & Wedeen, L. (2002). A status report on charter schools in New Mexico. *Phi Delta Kappan* 83(7), 518-524.
- Charter School Accountability Center (2003). Florida State University. Retrieved May 12, 2004, from <http://csac.fsu.edu/>
- Chubb, J. E. (1998). Edison scores and scores again in Boston. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(3), 205-212.
- Chubb, J., & Moe, T. (1990). *Politics, markets, and America's schools*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Clinton, W. J. (1997, February 4). *State of the Union Address*. ERIC Document  
Reproduction Service No. ED 404 744

- Coleman, J.S. (1961). *The adolescent society: The social life of the teenager and its impact on education*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe
- Coleman, J. S. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity, U.S. Department of Education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Cook, G. (2001). Searching for miracles. *American School Board Journal*. Retrieved July 23, 2004, from <http://www.asbj.com/2001/12/1201coverstory.html>
- Cookson, P. & Persell, C. (1985). *Preparing for power: America's elite boarding schools*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cox, D. (2004). *FSU Study: Parents happy with their children's charter schools*. Florida State University Press. Retrieved November 10, 2005, from [http://www.fsu.edu/~unicomm/pages/releases/2004\\_07/release\\_2004\\_07\\_8a.html](http://www.fsu.edu/~unicomm/pages/releases/2004_07/release_2004_07_8a.html)
- Cremin, L.A. (1975, September). Public education and the education of the public. *Teachers College Record*, 77, 11.
- Cronbach, L. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, 16, 527-530.
- Curti, M. (1968). *The social ideals of American educators*. Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield Adams and Co.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Denessen, E., Slegers, P., & Smit, F. (2001). *Reasons for school choice in The Netherlands and in Finland*. National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Dianda, M., & Corwin, R. (1994). *Vision and reality: A first year look at California's charter schools*. Los Alamitos, CA: Southwest Regional Laboratory.
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for urban poor. *Educational Leadership*, 37(1), 15-23.
- Fashola, O. (2004). Being an informed consumer of quantitative educational research. *Phi Delta Kappan* 85(7), 532-538.
- Finn, Jr., C., & Kanstoroom, M. (2002). Do charter schools do it differently? *Phi Delta Kappan* 84(1), 59-62.
- Finn, Jr., C., Manno, B., & Vanourek, G. (2000). *Charter schools in action: Renewing public education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Finn, Jr., C., & Osberg, E. (2005). Foreword. *Charter school funding: Inequity's next frontier*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved October 23, 2005 from <http://www.edexcellence.net>
- Florida Charter Schools (2004). *Florida legislation authorizing charter schools*. Retrieved December 10, 2004, from <http://www.miedresearchofrice.org/charterschools.htm>
- Florida Department of Education. *School Choice*. Retrieved October 23, 2005, from [http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/Charter\\_Schools/](http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/Charter_Schools/)
- George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference* (11.0 update). Boston: Pearson Education.

- Gewertz, C. (2005). New Orleans adopts plan for charters: Local, state leaders push for new design for district. *Education Week*, 25(8), 1, 15.
- Glick, W. H. (1985). Conceptualizing and measuring organizational and psychological climate: Pitfalls in multilevel research. *Academy of Management Review*, 10, 601-616.
- Goldhaber, D. (1997). School choice as educational reform: What do we know? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(2), 143-147.
- Goldhaber, D. (2001). Significant but not decisive. *Education Matters*, 1(2), 61-65.
- Good, T. L., & Braden, J.S. (2000a). Charter schools: Another reform failure or a worthwhile investment? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(10), 745 – 750.
- Good T. L., & Braden, J. S. (2000b). *The great school debate: choice, vouchers, and charters*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gross, B., & Gross, R. (1985). *The great school debate*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Gratz, D. (2004). Unchartered waters. *Education Week*, 24(6), 44, 32.
- Haller, E. J., & Kleine, P. F. (2001). *Using educational research: A School administrator's guide*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Hallinger, P., Murphy J. (1987). Assessing and developing principal instructional leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 45(1), 54-61.
- Halpin, A.W., & Croft, D.B. (1963). *The organizational climate of schools*. University of Chicago: Midwest Administrative Center.
- Hassel, B. C. (1999). *The charter school challenge: Avoiding the pitfalls, fulfilling the promise*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

- Hassel, B. C., & Hassel, E. A. (2004). Parents take choice driver's seat, but few have a map. *Education Week*, 24(3), 34, 36.
- Hendrie, C. (2003). Once called unrealistic, 'charter districts' attract attention. *Education Week*, 22(38), 11.
- Hendrie, C. (2005). Managers team up to run charters. *Education Week*, 24(40), 1, 14-15.
- Henig, J. R. (1994). *Rethinking school choice: Limits of the market metaphor*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hill, P. T., & Lake, R. J. (2002). *Charter schools and accountability in public education*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Hoxby, C. M. (2001). *How school choice affects the achievement of public school students*. Paper presented for Koret Task Force meeting, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA.
- Hoy, W. K., & Sabo, D. J. (1998). *Quality middle schools: Open and healthy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Hoy, W. K., & Tarter, C. J. (1992). Measuring the health of the school climate: A conceptual framework. *NASSP Bulletin* 76(547), 74 – 79.
- Hoy, W. K., & Tarter, C.J., & Bliss, J. R. (1990). Organizational climate, school health, and effectiveness: A comparative analysis. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 26(3), 260-279.
- Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Kottkamp, R. B. (1991). *Open schools/healthy schools: Measuring organizational climate*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Karsten, S. (1994). Policy on ethnic segregation in a system of choice: The case of the Netherlands. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(3), 211-225
- Kearney, C., & Arnold, M. (1994). Market-driven schools and educational choices. *Theory Into Practice*, 33(2), 112 – 117.
- Kelly, R., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R. (2005). *Relationships between measures of leadership and school climate* (Project Innovation Fall 2005). Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada, Department of Educational Leadership.
- Kemerer, F. R. (2000). *Legal issues involving educational privatization and accountability*. NYC, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University, The National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education. Retrieved October 10, 2004, from [http://www.ncspe.org/publications\\_files/](http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/)
- Kober, N. (1996). *Do we still need public schools?* Center on National Education Policy. Washington, DC.
- Kohn, A. (2002). The 500-pound gorilla. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 84(2), 113-119.
- Kolderie, T. (2003). 'Chartering': How are we to evaluate it? *Education Week*, 23(6), 40, 30.
- Kraut, A. I. (1996). *Organizational surveys: Tools for assessment and change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lane, B. (1992). Cultural leaders in effective schools: The builders and brokers of excellence. *NASSP Bulletin*, 76, 85-96.



- Levin, H. M. (2000). *A comprehensive framework for evaluating educational vouchers*. NYC, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University. National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education. Retrieved November 20, 2004, from [http://www.ncspe.org/publications\\_files/opqz.pdf](http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/opqz.pdf)
- Levin, H. M., & Belfield, C. R. (2002). *Families as contractual partners in education*. NYC, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University. National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education. Retrieved October 20, 2004, from [http://www.ncspe.org/publications\\_files/opqz.pdf](http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/opqz.pdf)
- Marzano, R. L. (2000). *A new era of school reform: Going where the research takes us*. Aurora, CO: McREL.
- Marzano, R. L. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- McCully, D., & Malin, P. (2003). *What parents think of New York's charter schools* (Civic Report 37), Zogby International for the Manhattan Institute. Retrieved November 10, 2005, from [www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr\\_37.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_37.htm)
- McDill, E.L., & Rigsby, L.C. (1973). *Structure and process in secondary schools: The academic impact of educational climates*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- McGree, K. (1995). *Redefining education governance: The charter school concept*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401619
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2004a). *District and school profiles, 2003 – 2004*. Assessment and Data Analysis. Miami, FL: Office of Evaluation and Research.

- Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2004b). *School Climate Survey (2003-2004)*. DCA Auth; Miami-Dade County, FL: Office of Evaluation and Research.
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2004c). *School Climate Surveys, district results for 2003 – 2004*. Miami, FL: Office of Accountability and System-wide Performance, Research Services.
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2005a). *District and school profiles, 2004 – 2005*. Retrieved September 14, 2005, from <http://www.drs.dadeschools.net>
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2005b). *District strategic plan 2005 – 2008*. Retrieved September 14, 2005, from <http://osp.dadeschools.net/districtstrategicplan>
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2005c). *School Climate Survey (2004-2005)*. DCA Auth; Miami-Dade County, FL: Office of Evaluation and Research.
- Minnow, M. (2003). Parents, partners, and choice: Constitutional dimensions of school options. In A. Wolfe (Ed.), *School choice: The moral debate* (pp. 217 – 230). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nathan, J. (1996a). *Charter schools: Creating hope and opportunity for American education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Nathan J. (1996b). Possibilities, problems, and progress: Early lessons from the charter school movement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78(1), 18 – 23.
- Nathan, J. (1999). (Preface to the paperback ed). *Charter schools: Creating hope and opportunity for American education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- National Commission on Education Excellence (1983). *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Education Association (2004). *Charter schools*. Retrieved October 28, 2004, from <http://www.nea.org/charter>
- National Study of Charter Schools (1998). *Why charter schools are started and what attracts parents to them*. Retrieved May 30, 2004, from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/charter98/chap5.html>
- Noguera, P. (1994). More democracy not less: Confronting the challenge of privatization in public education. *Journal of Negro Education*, 63(2), Spring. Retrieved October 20, 2004, from <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/pnpriv1.html>
- Ogawa, R., & Dutton, J. (1994). Parental choice in education: Examining the underlying assumptions. *Urban Education*, 29(3), 270-297.
- Orfield, G., Bachmeier, M., James, D., & Eitle, T. (1997). *Deepening segregation in American public schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Project on School Desegregation.
- Paige, R. (June, 2004). *Foreward*. Successful charter schools: Innovations in education. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Payne, R. L., & Pugh, S. S. (1976). *Organizational structure and organizational climate: Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Postman, N. (1995). *The end of education: Redefining the value of school*. New York: Knopf.
- Richmond, N. (1999). *Parental choice in selection of a charter school in New Jersey*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Roberts, L. L., Konczak, L. J., & Macan, T. H. (2004). Effects of data collection method on organizational climate survey results. *Applied H.R M. Research*, 9(1), 13 – 26. Retrieved February 20, 2004, from [http://www.radford.edu/~applyhrm/2004/ms%209\\_1\\_%20Roberts.pdf](http://www.radford.edu/~applyhrm/2004/ms%209_1_%20Roberts.pdf)
- Rokeach, M. (1960). *The open and closed mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Romanik, D., & Froman, T. (1992). *Results from the 1991-92 Administration of the School Report Card Survey*. Miami-Dade County, FL: Miami-Dade County Public Schools Office of Educational Accountability.
- Rose, L.C., & Gallup, A. M. (2004). The 36<sup>th</sup> annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappa*, 86(1), 41-58.
- Rose, L.C., & Gallup, A. M. (2005). The 37<sup>th</sup> annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappa*, 87(1), 41-57.
- Rutter, M., Maughn, B., Mortimore, P., & Iystin, J. (1979). *Fifteen thousand hours: Secondary schools and their effects on children*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Schneider, M. & Buckley J. (2002). *What do parents want from schools? Evidence from the Internet* (Occasional Paper No. 21). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education.
- Sergiovanni, T., & Starratt, R. (1998). *Supervision: A redefinition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Shumow, L., Kang, K., & Lowe-Vandell, D. (1996). School choice, family characteristics and home-school relations: Contributors to school achievement? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88, 459.
- Smith, K., & Meier, K. (1995). School choice: Panacea or Pandora's box. *Phi Delta Kappan*, December, 77(4), 312 – 316.
- Snider, J. H. (2002). Should school choice come via the Internet? *Education Week*, 21(16), 41.
- Solomon, L.C. (2003). *Findings from the 2002 survey of parents with children in Arizona charter schools: How parents grade their charter schools*. Santa Monica, CA: Human Resources Policy Corporation.
- Solomon, L., & Wiederhorn, J. (2003). *How Florida parents grade their charter schools: Views from the grassroots*. Charter School Accountability Center: Florida State University: Human Resources Policy Corporation.
- Statistical Abstract*, (2004). District and school profiles. Miami-Dade County Public Schools: Department of Research Services.
- Sweeney, J. (1988). *Tips for improving school climate*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

- The Florida Statutes (2001). Title XVI. Chapter 228. Retrieved April 23, 2005, from <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes>
- Thompson, L.F., Surface, E. A., Martin, D. L., & Sanders, M. G. (2003). From paper to pixels: Moving personnel surveys to the Web. *Personnel Psychology*, *56*, 197 – 227.
- Trotter, A. (2003). Einstein out as PA shuffles 'cyber charter' lineup. *Education Week*, *22*(38), 11.
- Uchitelle, S. (1993). *School choice: Issues and answers*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- United States Department of Education (1998). *A national study of charter schools: Second year report*. Retrieved May 30, 2004, from [www.ed.gov/pubs/charter98/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/charter98/index.html)
- United States Department of Education (2001a). *Challenge and opportunity: The impact of charter schools on school districts, A report of the National Study of Charter Schools*. RPP International. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- United States Department of Education (2001b). *Efforts by public K – 8 schools to involve parents in children's education: Do school and parent reports agree?* (NCES 2001 – 076). National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- United States Department of Education (2001c). *A study of charter school accountability, National Charter School Accountability Study*. Center on Reinventing Public Education. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- United States Department of Education (2002). *No Child Left Behind Act: Executive Summary*. Retrieved July 10, 2005, from [www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml)
- United States Department of Education (2004a). *Evaluation of the public charter schools program: Final Report*. Office of the Under Secretary, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- United States Department of Education (2004b). *Successful charter schools: Innovations in education*. Office of Innovation and Improvement. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Vanourek, G. (2005). *State of the charter movement: Trends, issues, & indicators*. Charter School Leadership Council. Retrieved September 25, 2005, from <http://www.charterschoolleadershipcouncil.org>
- Vanourek, G., Manno, B., Finn, C., & Bierlein, L. (1997). *Charter schools as seen by those who know them best: Students, teachers and parents*. Hudson Institute: Charter Schools in Action Project: Final Report. Retrieved September 25, 2005, from <http://www.edexcellence.net>
- Viteritti, J. P. (2003). Defining Equity: Politics, markets, and public policy. In A. Wolfe (Ed.) *School choice: The moral debate* (pp. 13 -30). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press:
- Witte, R.S., & Witte, J.S. (2001). *Statistics* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Wolfe, A. (Ed.) (2003). *School choice: The moral debate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Yost, P.R., & Homer, L.E. (1998, April). *Electronic versus paper surveys: Does the medium affect the response?* (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Dallas, TX) In L. Roberts, L.J. Konczak, & T.H. Macan (Eds.), *Effects of Data Collection Method on Organizational Climate Survey Results* (pp. 13 – 26). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



**APPENDIX A**

**Interview with Charter School Principals**

## Interview with Charter School Principals

### I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which the results from your school's *School Climate Survey* impact or influence the targeted goals and/or objectives in the annual update of your school's *School Improvement Plan*. Based upon your experiences as the principal or administrator of a charter school, you are in a pivotal position to provide feedback and insight relative to working with parents within a school setting. In addition, you have the knowledge and expertise from participating on *EESAC* committees and writing *School Improvement Plans*.

The interview has been designed for you to respond to three guide questions with seven to eight subsidiary questions for each guide question. Your responses will be combined in the findings with the other six charter school administrators participating in the study. Nothing you say will be identified with you personally. As we go through the interview, please feel free to stop and ask any questions you may have or for clarification. If there is a question you do not wish to respond to, please say so.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Category I: Traditional Schools versus Charter School Settings

**Guide Question:** *Based upon your conversations with and feedback from parents, what do parents offer as explanations or reasons for why they are leaving traditional public schools for charter schools?*

Subsidiary Questions:

- 1.1 Have you previously worked as an administrator in a traditional public school setting?
- 1.2 For how long have you been the principal/administrator of this school?
- 1.3 Describe your charter school's enrollment and growth pattern since you began operation.
- 1.4 How would you characterize your charter school's setting?
- 1.5 In your view, what does your school offer to parents that their former traditional public school did not offer?
- 1.6 Which of the following best characterizes why parents leave traditional public schools for charter schools:
  - (a) Parents are seeking a safer environment;
  - (b) Parents are not satisfied with the (traditional) school's student achievement and academic programs;
  - (c) Parents do not feel their ideas or participation are welcomed in the school;
  - (d) Other reasons why parents leave traditional public schools for charter schools included:
- 1.7 Is there any other information regarding traditional public schools and charter schools that you feel would be of value to this study?

Category II: How the School Climate Survey Impacts School Improvement Planning

**Guide Question:** *In what way(s) have the results from the School Climate Survey impacted the strategic planning sessions and annual revisions of the School Improvement Plan?*

Subsidiary Questions:

- 2.1 What does your school do with the results from the *School Climate Surveys*?
- 2.2 As the principal/administrator of this charter school, of what value is the *School Climate Survey*?
- 2.3 From a leadership perspective, how does the *School Climate Survey* impact your school?
- 2.4 Of what value are the results of the *School Climate Survey* when updating the school's *School Improvement Plan*?
- 2.5 If one was the most important, and three the least important, how would you prioritize the areas of the *School Climate Survey* for your school, i.e., (a) Safety; (b) Good Education; (c) School Climate?
- 2.6 From a leadership perspective, what drives the vision and mission of your charter school towards improvement, change and/or reform?
- 2.7 What are the significant issues or challenges you currently face as a charter school administrator?
- 2.8 Are there any other comments you would like to make or views to share regarding how the *School Climate Survey* impacts the writing of the *School Improvement Plan*?

Category III: The Relationship between School Climate Surveys and Parent Satisfaction

**Guide Question:** *In what way(s) do you, as a charter school administrator, account for the similarities or differences in results on the Parent Form of the School Climate Survey between the two years considered for this study?*

Subsidiary Questions:

- 3.1 How does your assessment of parent satisfaction compare with the parent results from the *School Climate Survey* in describing how satisfied the parents are with your charter school?
- 3.2 From your view, how do the parents in your school arrive at the grade issued for your school?
- 3.3 To what degree do the parent results from your *School Climate Survey* accurately describe how satisfied parents are with this charter school?
- 3.4 As the principal/administrator, which grade do you feel best defines your school: (a) parents' grade; or (b) state's grade? Please explain.
- 3.5 Does the school grade given by parents on the *School Climate Survey* translate as more important, less important, or not significant as compared with the state's grading of your school? Why do you think that is so?
- 3.6 Do you agree or disagree with the overall grade assessment of your school by the parents? Why or why not?
- 3.7 What recommendation(s) would you give the district regarding feedback on how the SCS was used by schools?

- 3.8 Is there any other information you would like to share regarding the *School Climate Survey*, as it relates to parent satisfaction and parent grading of your charter school that you feel would be of value to this study?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Categorical Presentation of Charter Principal Responses to Interview Questions**

Categorical Presentation of Charter Principal Responses to Interview Questions

Category 1: Traditional Schools versus Charter School Settings

~ Guide Question with Seven Subsidiary Questions

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 1.1-1.2
CS1	Former assistant principal in MDCPS; 5-10 years experience
CS2	Four years as a principal; seven years Lead Teacher
CS3	No prior experience; 5-10 years as a charter principal
CS4	No prior experience; less than 5 years as a charter principal
CS5	Eight years as a principal
CS6	No prior experience; 5-10 years as a charter principal

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 1.3
CS1	steady enrollment—never an issue; capped at 800; growth in applications and waiting lists;
CS2	real estate market took off and the jump in enrollment has been amazing; from 75 to 420 in three years; also moved to a smaller building; made a big difference; know the students better; observe teachers and meet with parents; I feel more accessible.
CS3	started with 200 students and now up to 650; capped and adding new campus;
CS4	500 students; fast growing and holding at full capacity; had a waiting list from the beginning; opened strong and has held;
CS5	from 65 to 525 students; while the growth has been fast, it has been steady.
CS6	maintained a steady growth.



CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 1.4
CS1	K – 8 prep school for high school; core knowledge curriculum;
CS2	neighborhood was prime for a school of choice; offer smaller classes; parent involvement; a loving, caring environment; multi-age classes;
CS3	multi-age; other assessments are used for placement besides age;
CS4	give our students a foundation to reach highest potential—as citizens, life skills, and academics;
CS5	small school where everyone knows everyone;
CS6	small, intimate setting; 1:1 brings a personal touch—we know the character of each child;

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 1.5
CS1	smaller class size; lower teacher ratio with teacher assistants; strict code of student conduct; refer students to Board for dismissal;
CS2	Title 1 school; paraprofessionals hired per NCLB; multi-age classrooms in grades 1 – 5; After School Care tutoring is mandated 3 times a week;
CS3	intimate setting—has a private feel—smaller classes;
CS4	teacher and computer systems on line; volunteer hours input and tracked on line;
CS5	safety and closeness to students; a caring atmosphere;
CS6	more personalized touch—cater to people; we know the parents' names and their child's name; a family environment and the people become family to you;

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 1.6
CS1	Safe environment and student achievement are key to our success; I run the school like a private school and the parents know it; if we are ineffective, the teachers don't stay.
CS2	Safety is the big #1 in our school; it is a big issue for me and for my parents; parents like the small campus; they have more access to the administration and it makes it more personal; facility is not huge and the classes are small.
CS3	Safe environment is important, but a combination of all three is more likely; parents might have had a bad experience at the other school; maybe a bright child wasn't challenged; or discipline policies were wrong; or not a caring environment; all the neighboring schools are A schools, so it's not for that;
CS4	The feeling of a private school without the tuition. It feels like a family—they are not just a number here.
CS5	Safe environment;
CS6	Security: parents come here because they are insecure about something; could be the environment; child not prepared adequately for their future; people want to feel secure—they get that from us.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 1.7
CS1	Pride in excellent teaching staff—we weed out the poor, ineffective teachers a lot easier than non-charter schools;
CS2	(No further comment.)
CS3	(No further comment.)
CS4	(No further comment.)
CS5	Private school rules without the cost.
CS6	(No further comment.)

Category II: How the School Climate Survey Impacts School Improvement Planning

*~ Guide Question with Eight Subsidiary Questions*

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.1
CS1	We discuss the SCS at the faculty meeting; 95% parent approval; if there is a deficit, they address it; the climate survey is a way for parents to voice their concerns;
CS2	We review at faculty meeting. We look at the strengths and ways to keep it strong and make it better; we have to get creative to maintain that strong feeling; too easy to become complacent, e.g., maintaining the A grade.
CS3	The survey is used to make administrative decisions—tied into student performance program so the focus is on the students' education and their impact;
CS4	We discuss at faculty meeting: what's low—for example, our parents don't like the food quality in our cafeteria, so we changed catering services.
CS5	We review together and then we boast "They are great results!"
CS6	We look at the survey from one year to the next; the staff reviews and for an item that is a strength or not, I ask them: "Why is that?" We discuss it together.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.2
CS1	I look at it—we are 85-95% above; you always have 1 or 2 disgruntled parents;
CS2	Keeps our focus on objectives; a way to continue to go back for reference—it's really a pain in the ----; you have to maintain that strong feeling—too easy to become complacent, e.g., maintaining the A.
CS3	The survey gives a birds-eye view of the school; you have to take it with a grain of salt; how people respond on a given day; it is an attempt to reach out to the parents and get to them; it makes them feel involved.

continued, CHARTER PRINCIPAL	continued, RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.2
CS4	The climate survey is not a measurable goal like the FCAT.
CS5	It has value for SACS accreditation; it validates what we are doing—to check ourselves.
CS6	Very valuable—it is a continuous evaluation, a tool from year to year; it is random and objective from an outside party.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.3
CS1	It is a reflection tool—not an evaluation tool.
CS2	Need to keep our focus and it helps us do that.
CS3	It is a framework to act upon. It does not have too many leadership questions—a narrative survey would be more beneficial. Do parents know how to fill out the survey?
CS4	Little value in its impact on SIP;
CS5	Not really—I don't see it.
CS6	Yes, it impacts the school. It is a tool to impact on where we need to be—sometimes not relevant to where we are headed, though.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.4
CS1	I use it for SACS accreditation reporting;
CS2	The SCS has exceptional value when we update SIP. Our technology growth, for example. Parents do not have computers; have to look at building a lab with parents and teachers to work on improvement in this area.
CS3	SIP targets student achievement and FCAT; the climate survey is not a good correlation; maybe the Parent Involvement portion, but it does not transfer over to student achievement and FCAT.
CS4	No value when we update our SIP—as it's not about student performance.
CS5	No value to SIP.
CS6	It has some value to SIP.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.5
CS1	Good education is important to me. The curriculum and what the kids are learning –how they progress—that's what its all about.
CS2	For this school, safety is first. The neighborhood requires it. Then, I would say good education, and third is school climate.
CS3	Students do not know what safety is—they must feel safe and then they know. Climate is effective when I get feedback from the students. Then I can figure out what they need so I can help them, e.g., bullying; then, good education.
CS4	Good education is first—it's all about performance! Then, school climate, and safety.
CS5	Safety—then school climate—then good education.
CS6	I can't decide which is more important. Any one of them could lead to shutting us down.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.6
CS1	From my perspective as a leader, I have made a commitment to lead my staff. I have to set a good example, and set a climate where enthusiasm and commitment are there—do not throw in the towel. It can be very rewarding. We all share that weeding out of negativity—it makes teachers more accountable. We just aren't about that (negativity).
CS2	I don't like this question. However, the FCAT scores, analysis of curriculum/data, and ongoing teacher observations are what drives improvement in my school.
CS3	I use the knowledge I have gained in the doctoral program I am in to move my school forward. I think working on SACS accreditation, becoming a stakeholder in the school, and integrating the input into the SIP is how we work on improvement. Then, we revisit it frequently throughout the year.
CS4	I have a philosophy that students come first.
CS5	Test scores drive my school—and the regulations imposed.
CS6	State mandates that come down regarding student performance. We have grown to comply.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.7
CS1	The challenges facing me are to maintain that A grade. It's about student achievement, gains in learning, and creating a climate where teachers are doing what they need to do to achieve success.
CS2	My biggest challenge is the population I serve. More than 90% of my students are on free and reduced meals—a low socioeconomic level; the language—my parents do not speak English. It is difficult for them to help their child. It is physically exhausting to help them to help their child. And, third, we do a mock writing test two times a month—the whole <i>schmeal!</i>
CS3	My biggest issue? THE PARENTS! We're trying to do our best and they think they run your school. They are constantly challenging—claim they have rights--!
CS4	MONEY! Short on funds; we are not equal to other schools; we are doing so great with so little.
CS5	Being both a manager and education leader is my biggest challenge. I have a big problem with time constraints.
CS6	REGULATIONS. What we were created to avoid is now bringing us down. Bureaucracy is holding back private industry from grants. It is extremely difficult to get away from it.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.8
CS1	My climate survey showed food was an issue with my parents—they did not like the food we were serving so I had to get a new catering service. There is no soap in the bathrooms was another complaint. I think consistency is important. Parents need to have the continuity in administration—one person they can grow with.
CS2	(No further comment.)
CS3	(No further comment.)

continued:	continued:
CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 2.8
CS4	(No further comment.)
CS5	(No further comment.)
CS6	Our differences (charter vs. traditional schools) are disappearing.

Category III: The Relationship between School Climate Survey and Parent Satisfaction

*~ Guide Question with Eight Subsidiary Questions*

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.1
CS1	School-wide use of the climate survey would be better for leadership use. The survey sample is so limited. One class could have an issue and that would be it.
CS2	There is a high level of satisfaction with our school. But, parents are easily intimidated, and I'm not sure what it is. Perhaps it is the language.
CS3	A match—I think that parents are as satisfied as they indicate on the survey. We have a great overall grade. It's just that a small percentage of parents do not always agree (with what is happening in the school).
CS4	Satisfaction and how we are doing is a personal perception from the parents.
CS5	On target. Our assessment of how our parents see us is the same as the survey results.
CS6	I'm a lot harder on me and the school. I want to be better at what we're doing—even though the parents may think we are doing great.



CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.2
CS1	I think that it is a combination of everything we talked about. A leader's perspective reflects parents perception. I love the feeling I get when I walk into the school. There are 26 kids in a class vs. 35. I see my staff enthused—homework has been checked—and parents get the same feeling.
CS2	Parents determine the grade based on how well we deal with Safety, and they have a lot of communication with the teachers. They feel connected with their child's teacher. It's tough to get them to come in and speak with the administration. I feel this causes a difficulty with their satisfaction.
CS3	The survey is designed to give them what to grade. They base it on what they have read. We are an AAA school—how can you dispute that?
CS4	Parents arrive at the grade with a personal perception of how well our students are doing.
CS5	It's subjective—depending on their (parents) level of satisfaction.
CS6	I didn't know the parents gave grades. But I think that the parents grade the person they had the most recent contact with at the school.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.3
CS1	Sometimes I feel like it's a chance—but up to now it has been positive. I see the desperation on their (parents) faces—when they do not have a spot (to place their child in the school).
CS2	As I said earlier, it is based on how well we deal with safety.
CS3	I feel the climate survey accurately describes how satisfied my parents are with my school.

continued:	continued:
CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION 3.3
CS4	Major accurate!
CS5	I would say that the accuracy is about average—
CS6	Our surveys should be modified to measure what we are doing: volunteer hours, contractual hours, events, and so on. Are they meaningful?

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.4
CS1	Between the state's grade and the parents' grade, it doesn't matter—it has always been the same for both. But, with the state, there is more involved with the grade. It is a collaborative effort!
CS2	I think both grades best define my school. Parents see achievement but also see the on-going results in the school setting. With the state—the numbers are there!
CS3	The state's grade! It is the meat and potatoes. The principal has more control over quality of programs for students than the perception of parents' grade.
CS4	The state. We are about student achievement—not out to please the parents.
CS5	State. It's all about the numbers.
CS6	I don't know. The survey only takes a segment of the school. You need to get all the parents and average together, consider ratios, turnovers, facilities management. Then I would have a better picture of what kind of school we have.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.5
CS1	The parent's grade on the survey is less significant than the state's grade.
CS2	With the state, there is so much that comes from the data and the population served. Parents see daily what's going on: Blue Ribbon nominations, school accreditation for SACS. These are all important for us because of the high percent of free and reduced students we serve. Without the state's recognition, we would not be eligible for these and other types of school recognition programs. How parents feel and see the school morale (climate) is important. Parents can be your best friend or your worst enemy. As a principal, you have to go with the flow, and, at the end of the day, know you did a good job.
CS3	I could be a great principal in the parents' perception, but if students aren't making the grade, it will not matter.
CS4	Less significant.
CS5	Less significant.
CS6	It is important to know what parents think. They vote with their feet.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.6
CS1	Yes, I agree with the overall parent grades. It's been positive.
CS2	They have a good idea of what is going on here.
CS3	Similar to what I stated earlier—
CS4	I always get about three angry parents to respond to the survey—it becomes personal, you know? It's not about who we are.
CS5	(No further comments offered.)
CS6	The parents are important to the school, but we must modify the survey for us (charter schools).

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.7
CS1	I would tell the district that the survey should be given to every parent—the results just aren't indicative of all.
CS2	We have enough information! We already have a lot of data. I see a trend that charters are expected to pick up more district expectations—we are falling into the Bureaucratic Mold!—just what we were created to get away from. It was good in the beginning to run a school without someone telling me what do, like the traditional schools. I see a trend that it is changing.
CS3	The climate survey is vague. I see it as more accountability for the district, but not used for SIP. They just aren't correlated.
CS4	It's a good measure to see if we are comparable to traditional schools. We should not be expected to do this. We should not be compared to other schools—our variables are too different. We do it out of courtesy—it's not in our contract to participate.
CS5	The results come back a year later—it's too late.
CS6	None—it means greater compliance.

CHARTER PRINCIPAL	RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTION: 3.8
CS1	(No further comment.)
CS2	(No further comment.)
CS3	(No further comment.)
CS4	(No further comment.)
CS5	Questions seemed too general.
CS6	They (the traditional schools) have become more like us. We need to reinvent ourselves. For our own cohesion, we must modify the survey for our own accountability. Is it a weeding out process or is it the beginning of the end?

**APPENDIX C**

**School Climate Survey: Parent Form**



