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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

Adunni Slackman Anderson

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**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**

BY

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education
Seton Hall University**

2003

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First, I would like to thank God for all of the Blessings that He has bestowed on my family and me throughout our lives, and over many generations. I am deeply grateful for this day, and humbled by the total experience. I know that my accomplishments have been made possible through His grace and through the love, and support of a *village* of individuals – immediate and extended family members, and various circles of friends, colleagues, mentors, and acquaintances – too numerous to name. I thank you all from the depths of my heart for your generosity of self, spirit, and time!

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I am sincerely grateful for each of you!

DEDICATION

To my Father, John Horace Slackman

With love, gratitude, admiration, adoration, and smiles

In loving memory ~ February 18, 1921 – October 1, 2000

I miss you, Daddy!

To my sons, Nkosi and Anwar Anderson

Remember to hold fast to your dreams

To my mother, Lula Marie Slackman

For loving us all unconditionally

And her mother ~ *Nana* ~ Pearl Miles Baugh and my great aunt, Maggie Miles Coy

For empowering lessons on being a daughter, sister, wife, mother and woman

To God

From Whom All Blessings Flow

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

We find that at the start of the 21st century, the Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision (as cited in Justice Warren, 1954) continues to exert a pattern of social, ideological, political, and economic influence over education reform. The May 27, 1954 court decision challenged the constitutionality of segregation of the races in public schools on the basis of its dehumanizing effects. Then in 1954, Justice Warren concluded that “[I]n the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the *Fourteenth Amendment*” (§ 3). The ruling reversed the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Fiorina & Petterson, 1998), which had established the doctrine of separate, but equal, and determined that segregation was in direct violation of the interpretation of the *Fourteenth Amendment*. A landmark decision for integration, the case ruled in favor of desegregation concluding that segregation, disguised as separate but equal, was unjustifiable and inherently unequal. The immediate challenge to the courts, and subsequent policy makers, and stakeholders was how to end segregation within the public schools. The Brown decision set the stage for the court-ordered mandate for public schools to desegregate. A major school reform movement was now underway; one that challenged policy, values, public opinion, and public school practice. Desegregation of America’s public schools was no longer debatable. The method used

to end desegregation, however, could either be voluntary or involuntary, or based on a district-created plan or a court order. As in other arenas of public policy and implementation, there would be the interplay and public shift between the three values that are deeply embedded in the American ethos: equality, efficiency, and liberty (Guthrie & Koppich, 1987, p. 37). Each value would hold its own special significance and manifestation among the races. Nevertheless, the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decisions would stand, and serve as both cornerstone and catalyst to America's postmodern education reform efforts.

It's ironic that the reform models that followed the 1954 Supreme Court decision and catapulted American education into the 21st century should center on the concept of choice. Whether one considers the options of inter-/intra-school public schooling; magnet schools; voucher plans; public-private plans; alternative schools; home-schooling; or charter schools, at the heart of the matter is the democratic right of people to choose. It's ironic because "just a generation ago, freedom of choice was the rallying cry of those who clung to their self-proclaimed right to attend single-race schools" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992, p.1). Today, school choice remains "the single most rousing idea in the current school reform effort" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992, p.1), but with a more inclusive, and constitutionally protected, appeal and freedom. This researcher will examine the criteria that attracts and matters most to parents and caregivers of African American children with respect to selection and preference when making a school choice in one particular integrated, magnet school district of choice.

Background of the Problem

School choice continues to be regarded as a popular strategy for public school reform, and as an important, though controversial, item on the national, economic and political public policy agenda to improve education within America's schools. The variability of school choice policy ranges among four prominent types of choice programs (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a). These include magnet schools, charter schools, inter-district transfers, and public/private vouchers. On the surface, school choice seems to inherently appeal to the democratic values and civil rights (Holt, 2000) of individuals to choose. Regardless of the approach or policy to school choice, all plans share the common principle of giving parents the option to select their children's school, and in turn, to seemingly direct their children's education.

In the article, *Race and School Choice*, Levin (1999), reminds us that "one difficulty in talking about the politics of school choice is that different groups support school choice as a means of accomplishing very diverse goals" (p. 269). While we turn to public opinion polls, Levin also warns that given the diversity of goals and forms of school choice, one should not place too much faith in poll results because often the language that is used is designed to sway, persuade or distort data results and public opinion. Nevertheless, several poll results have been cited simply to give a perspective to public opinion about the school choice debate.

In considering a variety of choice plans, Clewell and Joy (1990) reported the results of a 1986 Gallup Poll in which 68 percent of the public school parents favored the right to choose their child's public school. That percent level remained unchanged in a 1992 poll conducted by the Associated Press (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement

of Teaching, 1992). On the other hand, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1992) explored the depth of parent interest in school choice with respect to required versus optional school choice programs. Availability of public or private choice options, educational and economic status, and limitations due to desegregation mandates, were factored in. Interestingly enough, in theory, the general public appeared to favor the idea of school choice but in practice, “more than 80 percent of the respondents [still] favored the neighborhood school approach” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992, p.12). Ten years later, the results of the 2002 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (as cited in Jacobson, 2002) continued to show “significant support for public schools and for efforts to improve them. Seventy-one percent of the public school parents polled said they would give the school their oldest child attends a grade of A or B” (p. 7). When so-called neutral respondents, those removed from public schools, were asked to rate the schools in their community, 47 percent, a drop of 4 percent from the year before, gave a grade of A or B. As reported by the same survey, “when asked to grade the public schools nationally, only 24 percent of the sample gave the schools top grades, while the largest proportion -- 47% - gave them a C” (Jacobson, 2002, p. 7) – giving public schools a grade of A, B, or C by 71 percent of those answering the survey.

The 29th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitude Towards the Public School (1997, p. 41) reported that 70 percent of the 18 – 29 years old polled, favored choice when choosing a private school at the expense of the government, but not at the expense of the public. When the public in general, was polled with respect to the use of vouchers to pay for part or all of the tuition to attend private, church-related schools, the result was split between those who favored (49 %) and those who were

opposed (48%) to the use of tax-based vouchers. However, within this category, 61% of non-Whites, as well as lower income groups, younger people, and southerners favored the use of vouchers as a choice option. The same Gallup poll results (Levin, 1999) also reported that 72 percent of Blacks “favored the right to choose a private school at government expense” (p. 269). The most recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll and follow-up (2002) continue to show rising support, in general, for market-oriented choice options, even at public expense. While the majority of polled Americans still oppose the use of public funds to pay for private schools, there is rising support for the use of tax dollars, euphemistically referred to as scholarships, to fund a school of one’s choosing, be it private, public or parochial. As reported in Education Week (Jacobson, 2002) “while 52 percent of those surveyed for the annual PDK/Gallup poll said they oppose allowing students to attend private school at ‘public expense’, support for the notion had still jumped 12 percentage points since the 2001 poll – from 34 percent to 46 percent” (p. 7). When asked through a poll conducted by The Center for Education Reform with respect to how much was one in favor of or against allowing poor parents to be given the tax dollars allotted for their child’s education and permitting them to use those dollars in the form of a scholarship to attend a private, public or parochial school of their choosing, 63% responded that they strongly or somewhat favor versus 33% who were somewhat or strongly against. The breakout by race was comparably meaningful: 62% White favor v. 34% oppose; 64% Hispanic favor v. 37% oppose; 53% Other favor v. 38% oppose; and 72% African American favor v. 28% oppose. Majority support for school choice also resulted from the 2002 polls conducted by the Associated Press (2002) (51 percent), and ABCNews.com (2002) (50 percent). In both polls, adults were surveyed with respect to

their support or opposition to helping low income families pay for tuition using tax money or other funding resources (Associated Press, 2002 & ABCNews.com, 2002). Results from the Center for Education Reform survey (“National survey of Americans . . .”, 2002) conducted by Zogby International Polling found that 76 percent of the surveyed adults favored school choice at the basic conceptual level of being allowed to send ones’ children to a public, private, or parochial school of ones’ choice, “with the strongest support found among African Americans (75 percent)” (“National survey of Americans . . .”, 2002); and 63 percent of all Americans favored school choice as supported by vouchers or scholarships, with agreement from 72 percent of the African Americans polled.

These results support the general trend, in theory if not yet in practice, that school choice has not only been endorsed as the “ultimate civil rights issue of the 1990s but also as an empowering mechanism for the urban poor in particular and African Americans in general (Holt, 2000, p. 183). As documented by John Witte (as cited in Fuller, 2000), “Choice can be a useful tool to aid families and educators in inner city and poorer communities where education has been a struggle for several generations . . . If programs are devised correctly; they can provide meaningful educational choice for families that now do not have such choice (p. 6).

Despite the Supreme Court rulings, and court-mandated order, practices have not been equal or equitable within the nation’s traditional, neighborhood public schools. In fact, the issue of equity is what led the majority of Supreme Court Justices to rule favorably on the matter of vouchers in the 2002 ruling of *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*. Concurring with the majority, Justice Thomas (2002) wrote, “failing urban public schools

disproportionately affect minority children”, and “many blacks now support school choice programs because they provide the greatest educational opportunities for their children in struggling communities” (p. 2). Though a dissenting minority vote, Justice Souter (2002) also concurred, stating that “the record indicates that schools are failing to serve their objective” (p. 2). Thus many parents, including the most often disenfranchised, have turned to market-based educational opportunities offered most popularly offered through private or church-related school vouchers, and charter schools.

Magnet schools, once heralded as viable public school options, have come face to face with the competitive edge offered through the voucher and charter school initiatives. As a public, non-tuition based educational option, Magnet schools, had often been described as “thematic islands of choice within a traditional, intra-district assignment or controlled choice plan” (“Intrasectional choice plans . . . ,” n.d., ¶ 1). They also provided a public school choice with the initial purpose to desegregate urban schools. However, in a 1998 survey of 800 White parents and 800 Black parents conducted by Public Agenda (2000), 82% of the Black parents said that raising academic standards was more important than achieving more diversity and integration. Integration was still valued if offered along with high standards. This is key when one considers that the primary goal of magnet schools, in addition to school improvement and raising test scores through competition, was for desegregation purposes, and thus depended upon effectively serving ethnically and racially diverse student populations.

As vouchers and charters schools, have become increasingly available, accessible and popular among more marginalized parent groups (namely the urban poor, and/or low-income and/or families of color) as well as among the general public, so has the focus on

the market metaphor returned. Following an era of mandated or voluntary court-ordered desegregation plans, school districts with surviving magnet programs have returned to the more market-based theme first espoused in 1986 when choice was first heralded as cutting edge reform at the National Governors' Conference. The governors documented in their report "Time for Results" (as cited by Cookson, 1994), "If we first implement choice, true choice among public schools, we unlock the values of competition in the marketplace. Schools that compete for students, teachers, and dollars will, by virtue of the environment, make those changes that will allow them to succeed" (p. 34). As a result, high interest, performance and achievement, in tandem with customer service and parent satisfaction, are now paramount to the survival of magnet schools, and other public schools, especially in light of the growing financial availability of private, and parochial school options. Whether the choices are through vouchers, charters, magnets or inter-district transfers, Gill, Timpane, Ross and Brewer of the RAND (as cited in Nelson, 2002) corporation have concluded that overall, "choosers [tend] to be more satisfied than [non-choosers] - those remaining in the traditional public school".

In establishing a framework for the research project, this researcher will consider school choice within the broadest structural context of educational options; attempt to capture the various perspectives of African Americans as educational choosers involved in the theoretical and practical aspects of school choice; and then more closely examine the phenomenon of school choice as identified and experienced in one particular public magnet school system of choice where controlled, intra-district, magnet school choice has been required for approximately 25 years. The study will identify and examine the criteria used by families for school choice selection and preference when choosing for

their African American children. At the heart of the study are the questions of what attracts and what matters most to parents/caregivers of African American children when choosing a school of choice, and is there a preference for socially-based/non-instructional reasons or academically-based/instructional reasons? The study will also attempt to capture the voice and behavior of African Americans as choosers in the broadest of educational contexts.

Historical Context: An Overview at the Local Level

As the subject of this particular research project, the magnet school district of choice is one where all the obstacles generally associated with providing equal and equitable educational experiences have been controlled resulting in equal and equitable choice opportunities for all school aged residents. Regardless of race, socio-economic status, and residence, the playing field for equitable school access was leveled through the establishment of non-neighborhood schools, a designated magnet theme at each school, equal and equitable distribution of instructional and curricular resources, a centralized application process and placement, and a transportation system based on distance. Here, racially balanced schools resulted based on a desegregation plan of voluntary, as opposed to forced, bussing.

Against the backdrop of the 1954 Supreme Court decision; the quest for equal educational opportunity; a social and political climate focused on civil rights; segregated housing patterns; racially- imbalanced school enrollments; the threat of White flight; the threat of legal court action by the professional, affluent, Black community; and the threat of losing state funding, the community of Montclair proposed several plans of action to desegregate its public schools. Following a decade long review of school segregation

issues that began in the early 1960's, the year was 1976 when the actual magnet school plan was first introduced to end segregation. The subsequent proposals and action plans, which included the consideration of forced busing and redistricting, led to conflict and disagreement among the town's public. Under the pressure of a 1-year time-table to come to agreement before state intervention, a Citizen's Task Force was convened which allowed the voices of all stakeholders - parents, teachers, and community members - to establish a workable, voluntary solution to desegregate its public schools. Beginning with only two magnet schools, the design began to successfully attract and balance the enrollment of Black students through a traditional, structured, fundamental magnet program now featured in a school located in the residentially segregated, White part of town. In 1947-48, the student population of African American students in that school had been 0%, and remained unchanged as late as 1964-65. At the same time, the design began to attract and balance the enrollment of White students through a gifted and talented program located in the residentially segregated, Black part of town. The student population of White students in that school had been 14.6% in 1947-48, and reduced to 3% in 1964-65 (Clewell & Joy, 1990). As reported in School Leader (Dandy, 1992), "The first year of the magnet program was overwhelmingly successful in moving toward more racially-balanced schools. [Black] enrollment in the fundamental school increased [in range between] 24 to 46 percent; the [White] population at the gifted and talented school increased [in range between] 36 to 51 percent. Parents were voluntarily sending their children four miles across town to attend the school of their choice" (p. 28). The overall plan continued and worked relatively well for five years, but not without incident,

controversy nor necessary modifications in 1979 and 1982. As cited in the study by Clewell and Joy (1990) from the ETS Policy Information Center:

Proponents of choice argue[d in favor] that it [would] promote educational excellence; increase parental involvement in the schools, encourage varied program offerings, and improve racial balance. Opponents, on the other hand, [argued against the choice plan citing] that choice [would] result in better educational opportunities only for White, middle class, and talented students; increase transportation costs for the school district; cause re-segregation of the schools; and result in a lack of diversity in program offerings (p. 59).

Nevertheless, in 1985, the voluntary magnet school plan of choice was expanded to an exclusive magnet, non-neighborhood school system, and has since stood the test of time in successfully meeting its goals to provide educational excellence, equity, racial balance, diversity, and parental choice. Montclair's success rests with the district's commitment to provide equal access for all students and equal resources to all schools by leveling the playing field for all. This has been accomplished by maintaining and enhancing magnet school themes designed to attract students and families to a particular school; by structuring opportunities for parent involvement and participation, by creating a friendly competition between schools to maintain a level of quality, appeal, and equitable distribution of resources; by providing transportation based on distance; and by establishing a controlled procedure for school selection based on parent/student choice versus assignment by the district. Regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, freedom of choice was available to the residents of the township of Montclair.

Historical Context: The African American Perspective at the Local Level

In 1996, Theodore Shaw, Deputy Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (Anand, Fine, et al., 2000), reflected that:

For African Americans, *Brown [v. the Board of Education]* meant more than the mandate to desegregate public schools. It meant the end of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* era of officially sanctioned American apartheid. *Brown* split American history into B.C. and A.D. in which the promise of the Constitution's protection and of full participation in the life of our democracy finally applied to all its citizens. The Supreme Court's decision was one of the sparks that lighted the fires of the civil rights movement. It stands as one of the defining moments in American history (p. 1).

Hence, the *Brown* Decisions put into motion the legal, social, and political foundation, rationale, and mechanism for ending de jure (by law) and de facto (by fact) segregation, and for organizing around civil rights.

A significant presence of African Americans began to emerge in Montclair during the mid 19th century. During that time, a viable but separate Black community began to settle in the southeastern part of Montclair, known as the South End. Blacks were mostly artisans or domestics in the nearby, wealthier, White households. It must be noted that during this same period, immigrant Italians, not yet accepted by Montclair's White community, were also relegated to the houses and schools located in the southern end of town (Manners, 1997). In the early 1900's, a growing college-educated, Black middle class began to develop in Montclair as well. In addition to the segregated neighborhoods, hospitals, churches, movie theatres, and schools (which unlike in the South were taught

by an all White teaching staff), Montclair had Black-owned businesses, and churches. As early as 1926 the Washington Street YMCA was conceived and built by and for the Montclair's Black community. The restrictions of segregation clearly delineated residential, religious, and educational policies, practices, and patterns of Montclair's early African American population that glaringly continued through the early civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, and spurred on the challenges by the African American community to end de facto segregation in the 1970's.

While by law, *Brown v. Board of Education* mandated the elimination of segregated public schools, by fact, other residential policies and practices insured the continuation of segregated schools. One such practice was gerrymandering – the drawing of neighborhood borders to isolate or protect certain groups by assuring a segregated school system. In her thesis, "Selling Integration: A History of the Magnet School System in Montclair", Jane Manners (1997) writes:

To ratify this segregation, the Board established the boundaries of school districts to correspond as precisely as possible with the lines that divided neighborhoods according to race and ethnicity. For those few middle-class [W]hite families whose homes fell outside of a middle-class [W]hite school district, the Board adopted a policy allowing them to send their children to a school outside their district. This policy, referred to as the optional area sight, lasted until the early 1950s (p. 9).

The contrived student attendance zones intentionally separated Black and White neighborhoods resulting in White schools and Black schools. Montclair's schools, particularly those located in the southern part of town, became even more segregated following the historic Brown decision. As previously cited, this resulted in part when

White wealthy parents who lived in the southwestern part of the town were permitted the option to send their children to the predominantly White schools in the northern part of town; and with the early 1950's conversion of a mansion into a neighborhood school to serve Whites also located in the southwestern part of the town.

In 1961, a group of active African American parents in conjunction with the local chapter of the NAACP publicly challenged school segregation in Montclair. For the newly formed Parents' Emergency Committee, neither compliance with the mandated court decision of *Brown* nor the liberal desire for integration nor the progressive solution school choice nor gerrymandered restrictions of neighborhood and school boundaries served as the impetus for the developing protest to end the separation by race within the town's schools. Simply put, Montclair's African American community was spurred on by the unequal and inadequate educational experiences within the segregated schools. As documented by Jane Manners in her thesis (1997):

[The NAACP and African American Emergency Committee] found [d]isparities similar to those found in 'separate but equal' systems in the South. The schools in Montclair's [W]hite neighborhoods had new supplies, more rigorous curricula, better facilities and more experienced teachers than [the B]lack schools. The predominantly [W]hite schools received new textbooks and furniture on a regular basis, while [the segregated Black school] had to be content with hand-me-downs . . . Where [W]hite schools had new science laboratories, extensive library, and fully-equipped gymnasiums and cafeterias, [the segregated Black school] had exposed and leaky pipes, faulty toilets, and a run-down gymnasium that converted to a cafeteria during lunch hours. Finally, [the segregated Black school's]

teaching staff did not have the same credentials as those in other schools . . .

(p.12).

Throughout the early 1960's, the African American community continued to push the Board of Education towards the development of desegregation plans in an effort to end the inadequacies within the existing separate and unequal school system. Early attempts were not without dissent. There were challenges to the concept of integration as a solution to educational inequities, and to issues of community control. There was even a brief boycott of one particular Black school. Whites also challenged pending plans to ease segregation within their schools. In the interest of preserving the White neighborhood schools, and to avoid bussing, the Committee for Neighborhood Schools filed suit against the Board of Education for the using race to determine school assignment. A 1964 decision by the Supreme Court ruled against the committee's charge. At this time, "Of the town's eleven elementary schools serving grades K - 6 in 1964, four were 100% White, two were 70% white, one was 85% Black, and two were 90% Black" (Manners, 1997, p. 22). Following in 1966, a suit was filed by African American parents with the New Jersey Commissioner of Education. It charged failure on the part of the Board of Education to seriously and swiftly establish plans to eliminate racial segregation and discrimination. Over the next several years and through the early to mid 1970's, amid sit-ins, and other protests, plans to eliminate segregation and to implement desegregation would be proposed and/or rejected by the various constituencies from African American and White parents to the Board of Education and State Commissioner. Finally in 1976, the school community accepted a magnet school plan based on parent choice and voluntary bussing. The plan, like other voluntary

desegregation programs, which “stressed quality as well as integration had become the desegregation concept of choice for politicians who feared that their white constituents consider desegregation the equivalent of dumbing down America’s public school” (Manners, 1997, p. 41).

Historical Context: A Current Perspective

Since 1976, Montclair Public School System and community have provided a test-tube through which to examine aspects of school choice, diversity, integration, and student achievement at their operative best within a mature magnet system of choice. The community of Montclair has long been recognized as a microcosm of society because of the racial and economic diversity of its residents. Montclair’s choice plan was originally implemented to achieve desegregation and racial balance, and was able to do so because of its racially- and ethnically-based population. Since 1999, under its current administration, the magnet choice plan has been revitalized as an educational reform strategy similar to other market-based reform models. Marketing emphasis and direction have been designed to foster increased parent involvement and satisfaction, and in turn, improved perception of the schools; to promote competition towards improved student performance and academic gain; and to prove the possibility of high student achievement - one not predicated on race, ethnicity, nor socio-economic status - in an integrated school system. In the welcome address at the 4th Annual Minority Student Achievement Network (as cited in MSAN Newsletter, 2002), the district’s superintendent, Dr. Michael Osnato, reiterated that Montclair is a national model for integrated education - proving that an integrated, high quality educational system can work. “Montclair [remains] unique in its school system in that children can attend any school of their choice

providing space is available and racial balance maintained through the magnet school system" (p. 1).

More recently, the increase of school choice options on a national level, in the form of public/private vouchers, inter-district movement, alternative or home schooling, revitalized magnets, and charter schools, has brought attention to the selection processes used by parents when deciding a school choice option. Customer service, parent satisfaction, educational options, parental involvement; and parent empowerment (Holt, 2000; Vassallo, 2000) appear to be the driving forces behind the resurgence of interest in school choice. Though sparse, it is documented in the literature that parents in general, and Montclair parents in particular choose schools for a variety of reasons but based on the educational, social, and economic context in which they find themselves. Earlier school choice studies, and prior research inevitably cite both instructional and non-instructional reasons (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Darling-Hammond & Kirby, 1985; Dunshee, 2000; Morken & Formicola, 1999). Prior research has also documented that African American parents, particularly those who have made financial sacrifices to send their children to private or parochial schools, have done so based on their dissatisfaction with their traditional public school setting (Jones-Wilson, et al., 1992; Levin, 1999; Morken & Formicola, 1999). The composite list of reasons for exercising school choice includes but is not limited to the quest of parents/caregivers for quality education, equal educational opportunity, academic achievement, competitive test scores, administration, safety, location, better curriculum, preparation of school staff, familiarity with the neighborhood, start and dismissal times, school/class size, discipline, higher standards, appreciation of diversity, moral, ethnic, and/or cultural values, and so forth.

Of particular interest to this researcher is the voice and behavior of the African American community around issues of school choice, with particular attention to parent selection and preference. While reports and discussions may reflect demographic opinions by ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status, focused input from the African American community is extremely limited, and an important perspective that is often diluted or omitted. The once prominent voice from the African American community that played a major role in the early 1960's and 1970's of providing equal educational opportunities through the eradication of segregation within Montclair schools and in turn, supporting the magnet school choice plan, seems to have been camouflaged under the guise of diversity. Montclair's African American community has a legacy of civil rights activism, a tradition of political involvement and influence, and a history of economic stability and affluence. Against the backdrop of a successful magnet school program of choice, this researcher feels that the selection and preference criteria used by Montclair's parents/caregivers in deciding a school of choice for their African American children in an integrated school district can contribute to a larger and more universal body of knowledge around school choice options, educational achievement, and school reform.

Significance of the Study

Having achieved the initial goals of its magnet program of choice, Montclair is regarded today as an example of an integrated, racially balanced school system of choice that works. It is a unified system with an unswerving commitment to parent choice - evidenced by the continual renewal and revitalization of the magnet school foci, and a fiscal commitment to public school transportation.

The various structures, including the Montclair Public School District (Carnegie Foundation for the Advance of Teaching, 1992) of school choice models and programs have been widely discussed and documented in the literature. In-depth research, however, on the criteria used by parents in the selection of a school of choice is sparse. Even less available is information about the voice and behavior of African American parents/caregivers on what is most important when selecting a school choice option for their children.

The study is significant because it will provide insight about what is most important to parents/caregivers when selecting a school of choice for their African American children thus contributing a perspective to the school choice and public policy literature that has either been overlooked, or cast in a pathological light. It is a perspective, however, that could serve as a mechanism to enhance school improvement and reform. On both a local and national level, the study is significant because it will provide useful information about the criteria used by parents when making decisions about their children's education. Knowledge of selection preferences, whether based on social/non-instructional reasons or academic/instructional reasons, could assist local school districts and national departments in their efforts to provide equal educational opportunity to all students, close academic disparities including the Black/White achievement gap, and insure equal academic outcomes for all students. A closer look at the criteria that influence the decision-making of parents/caregivers in the selection of a school of choice for their African American youngster could provide useful information about what's important, and what could make a difference in achievement and attainment for African American students. The relevance of the reasons, whether socially-

based/non-instructional or academically-based/instructional, also has far reaching implications for the decisions about the culture of school and schooling, and the educational achievement climate that teachers and administrators make. In a race-/class-conscious society such as ours, the voice and behavior of African American families in the selection of a school choice could shed light about instructional practices, curricular design, teacher expectations, social and academic student outcomes, achievement performance and improvement, and home-school relationships necessary for equitable student outcomes. Such a study then could help determine what attracts and what matter most to African American families when choosing a school of choice by identifying what is important to African American families when making a school selection; by providing insight into the voice and behavior of African American families around school selection in one particular district; by pin pointing a perspective about school choice that is often underrepresented in the literature; and by expanding the knowledge base of administrators and teachers that informs decisions, practices and policy about the culture of school and schooling in an integrated district of choice.

Organization of the Study

The study has been organized in a way as to establish a conceptual, and historical framework around school choice selection. The chapters have also been organized as a backdrop for the identification and examination of the criteria used by families in general, and African American families in particular in the selection of a school of choice. As best possible, the data has been collected, and organized in a way as to make a determination as to what matters most to parents/caregivers, in general and by certain demographic background, in the selection of a school of choice for their African

American children within the Montclair Public Schools. A survey, Study Survey for School Choice Selection and Preference, was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, and to facilitate answering the seven research questions of the study. Part I of the survey was designed to collect demographic, background information about the respondents. Part II presented formulated criteria to be rated using a four point Likert Scale of 1- Very Important to 4 – Least Important. Part III of the instrument provided open-ended questions designed to qualitatively corroborate the quantitative findings as well as to give phenomenological credence to the voice and behavior of the respondent sample. The researcher has been continuously mindful of the fact that the study reflects information as perceived by a particular group of individuals at a particular time thus its phenomenological context.

To that end, the study has been organized as follows: Chapter I establishes the research problem, and supports its research rationale through the background for the study including historical contexts, significance and purpose, delimitations and limitations of the study, questions pertinent to the research project, and definitions of relevant terms. Chapter II presents a two-part literature review designed to provide a historical and theoretical framework, and a comparative basis for the study. The first part of the literature review begins with a general overview of school choice theory and design with some general attention to how parents exercise choice in the selection of any school choice alternative. The second part zeroes in on the criteria for selection and preference identified in the literature and field, and used by parents/caregivers when engaged in the process of school choice selection and preference for African American children. Chapter III details the methodology of the research design, including a

description of the setting and targeted population, instrumentation constructs, and provisions for data collection, analysis, interpretation and evaluation. Chapter IV presents the analysis of data. A concluding Chapter V summarizes the research and the findings by concluding the evaluation of the data. Here, recommendations have been proposed with respect to implications for policy at the local, state, and national levels; for school- and district-based practice and practitioners; and for future research and study.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

This researcher has made three primary assumptions. The first is that the African American experience with school choice in the diverse community and integrated school choice district of Montclair, represents a varied perspective and contributing body of knowledge that should be included in school choice literature. The second assumption is that Montclair's African American families have access to the same criteria and choice procedures as other choosing families in the selection of a school of choice. The third assumption is that the voice and behavior of school choice selection among African American families has important implications for student achievement, and home-school relationships that can contribute to public choice policy, and practices for school reform. Apropos to these assumptions is a school district that has had more than 25 years of experience with magnet school choice thus making school choice an integral part of the culture of schooling within the community. Consequently, parents/caregivers, regardless of ethno-racial background or socio-economic status, are generally familiar with the choice process, and motivated to make a school choice selection. Also unique to the district is a community whose population demographically and naturally allows for racially balanced, desegregated schools as engineered through the voluntary-bussing,

controlled choice program. It is also important to note that the overall family incomes and educational levels of Montclair's residents generally exceed national and neighboring levels. Equally important has been the continuing commitment of the district to provide educational opportunity, access and equity through the maintenance of its non-neighborhood, magnet, elementary schools as facilitated by the equitable allocation of resources, school busing based on proximity, and the freedom of choice selection process.

The following limitations and delimitations of the research project have been offered in order to provide some parameters through which to better appreciate the validity of the study.

First, it is the intention of this study to neither stereotype nor over generalize the criteria of school selection used by African Americans either on a local or national level. The study is designed to provide a sampling of the criteria used by a randomly selected group of parents/caregivers in their selection of an elementary school of choice for their African American child at the Kindergarten level as required under one district's specific magnet school choice program. The study is limited then to a sample population of parents/caregivers of African American children, all Montclair residents, who filed the required Freedom of Choice-Kindergarten Registration application for a Kindergarten placement for September 2002. The study represents a snap shot of factors used for school selection of one community's residents when determining placement for its African American students. Second, this research is not intended as a study of judgment about the perceived effectiveness, academic outcomes, or popularity of any one of the magnet schools or its staff. The six elementary schools and their respondents have been

treated as a single anonymous system and entity. The research project is also not a study about the merits of any particular plan along the variability continuum of school choice. It is an examination of what matters most to parents and/or caregivers of African American children when selecting a school of choice within a magnet system at the elementary level. Third, the phenomena of school choice selection and preference among the participants will be evaluated and quantified through Survey Research. A descriptive survey of formulated criteria, a Likert rating scale, and open-ended questions will be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis, evaluation, and interpretation. According to Leedy (2001), "Survey research captures a fleeting moment in time, much as a camera takes a single-frame photograph of an ongoing activity. By drawing conclusions from one transitory collection of data, we may extrapolate about the state of affairs over a longer time period. At best, the extrapolation is a conjecture, and sometimes a hazardous one at that, but it is our only way to generalize from what we see" (p. 196). This researcher recognizes the weaknesses yet strengths of the methodology, however, chooses to rely on the wisdom of Heraclitus (as cited in Leedy, 2001) who said, "There is nothing permanent but change" (Leedy, 2001, p. 196) in justification of the approach. The survey approach then supports the researcher's main purpose to identify, examine, and describe the reasons for school choice selection and preference as perceived by a sample population of parents/caregivers for the 2002 school year and whether the tendency is for socially-based or academically-based reasons. The study's findings represent a synthesis of the selection and preference responses from the six elementary schools as a whole. Data will be quantified based on a 4-point Likert Scale of 1 – Very Important to 4- Least important, descriptive and frequency statistics. The open-

ended questions have been designed to provide an opportunity for personal and anecdotal feedback and comments from the respondents. It was the hope of the researcher to capture the expressiveness of oral tradition that is often gleaned from face to face interaction, notwithstanding the limitations of memory, recall, candor, and the written word. Open-ended, written responses have been presented to the respondents in hopes of accomplishing this end, as well as to eliminate any possible bias that might possibly result from interviews conducted between this researcher and the respondents. This researcher cites this as a limitation in light of the richness of direct conversation and dialogue usually afforded through interviews or focus groups. According to Krathwohl (1998), "A [survey] questionnaire gathers large amounts of data from many respondents . . . [but] you will get less depth and richness of information, however, because people will say more than they will write" (p. 361).

The uniqueness of the Montclair community as an economically and racially diverse town, and its racially balanced, quality integrated magnet school system of choice where there is a commitment and financial investment to equity for all students, makes it difficult to draw exact parallels to other communities and districts. This study, therefore, is inherently phenomenological in that it captures the uniqueness of one particular community and its residents. This researcher is convinced that a combined quantitative and qualitative design will produce a substantive, and rich research finding for the identification of selection/preference criteria used by parents/caregivers when making a school choice for their African American children.

Purpose of the Study

Almost a half-century has passed since the Supreme Court ruled on the historic 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* to end racial segregation in America's public schools. And, more than a quarter of a century has passed since the implementation of Montclair's voluntary magnet school plan of choice as a way to desegregate its schools, insure diverse student bodies, improve the quality of schools and the performance of all students, and favorably impact the town community. The Montclair Public Schools has long enjoyed a reputation as a successful, and mature magnet school program of choice where high achievement and excellence are attainable within an integrated, racially balanced district of choice. Regardless of magnet theme, schools are racially balanced and secure in their magnet themes; assignments are equitably accessible through a centralized Freedom of Choice application process and free transportation system; and student outcomes are consistent thus contributing to the perception that the elementary schools are equally good. It is important to note from a historical perspective, that in conjunction with the formation of the magnet school choice plan to provide equal and equitable educational opportunity, and to achieve racial desegregation, there has also been the focus on academic performance among African American and other students of color, as well as the closing of all gaps and disparities in student achievement.

It is against this backdrop that this researcher proposes to conduct a descriptive study of the criteria used for school choice selection and preference among parents/caregivers in an integrated magnet school district. The purpose of the study is to identify and examine the criteria used by families when making a school choice selection for their African American child. Preference for criteria that is either socially-based/non-

instructional indicators or academically-based/instructional indicators will also be determined. Specifically, the study will investigate what attracts and what matters to parents/caregivers when making their school choice selection. The study is not intended to judge the popularity of any one elementary school over another; it is designed to look at the districts' six elementary schools, with Kindergarten populations, as a whole system. A more substantiated understanding of parent priorities in school choice selection will help policy makers, administrators, and teachers alike, better meet the learning needs of families, and in turn, increase parent satisfaction, address disparities in achievement, and improve student performance.

Research Questions

The research questions have been designed to identify the criteria used by parents/caregivers in the selection of an elementary school of choice; to categorize the selection criteria as being either socially-based/non-instructional or academically-based/instructional; and to determine what criteria attracts and matters most to African American parents when making a school choice within an integrated magnet school district of choice. Two primary, and five ancillary questions guided the research, and are stated as follows:

1. What formulated criteria are used by African American parents/caregivers in school choice selection?
2. What selection/preference criteria matter most to parents/caregivers when making an elementary school choice selection for their African American child?
3. Is there a preference for the socially-based/non-instructional indicators when making a choice?

4. Is there a preference for academically-based/instructional indicators when making a choice?
5. Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' residential longevity / history in the community under study?
6. Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of educational attainment?
7. Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of socio-economic income?

Definition of Terms

Academically-based/Instructional Indicators: Criteria or reasons that imply measures of academic achievement or scholarly outcomes such as test scores, math/reading scores, educational preparation of school staff, instruction, curriculum, etc. and/or an association to achievement results such as student gains, academic reputation, cognitive skills, caliber of homework, and so forth. (Cookson, 1994; The American Heritage Dictionary, 2001). As categorized by the researcher, the definition is further clarified by the formulated criteria of the survey instrument to include: Magnet School Theme/Program Emphasis; Overall Perceived School Quality; Academic Reputation of the School; Reputation of School Staff; Size of Student Population/Building; and Instructional Approach.

African American: A reference to, or an ethno-racial term used to describe Americans of African descent, particularly Black Americans of African ancestry. Used interchangeably with the biologically based and politically-based term of Black, African

American may also refer to people whose familial background is Caribbean, African, Hispanic, Biracial or Multicultural.

Controlled Choice: “A student assignment plan (Freedom of Choice plan) that requires families to choose a school within a community, but choices can be restricted to ensure the racial, gender, and socioeconomic balance of each school. Often, such plans reflect a strategy to comply with court-ordered desegregation” (Cookson, p. 15).

Magnet Schools: “Public schools that offer specialized programs, often deliberately designed and located so as to attract students to otherwise unpopular areas or schools. Magnet schools are often created to promote racial balance” (Cookson, 1994, p. 15). The creation of magnet schools was part of a general effort in the 1970s to promote peaceful racial integration to create innovative schools” (p. 76).

Socially-based/Non-instructional Indicators: Criteria or reasons that imply non-academic, culturally-bounded influences including social strata; peers, friends; siblings and relatives, location or neighborhood; family tradition or history; sense of community; race, ethnicity; and nurturance – and any thing else that defines the day to day context of one’s life, human condition, and human welfare (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2001). As categorized by the researcher, the definition is further clarified by the formulated criteria of the survey instrument to include: Overall Perceive School Quality; Caring Reputation of the School; Word of Mouth; Location of School; Overall School Building Atmosphere; Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community; Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School; Siblings Attending School; Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate; School Reflects Family Values; and Opportunities for Parent Involvement.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The following literature review was designed to build a conceptual framework and foundation of research in support of the proposed research study. The first section provides a fundamental overview about the scope of school choice options. The second section takes a closer look at existing research and studies with respect to African Americans as choosers in the school choice arena. As gleaned from existing studies and identified through the literature, criteria and factors that inform and influence parents/caregivers when considering an educational option or school of choice for their African American children, have been presented.

Public School Choice: Research, Theory and Design

To date, the special report from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *School Choice* (1992), is still hailed as one of the most comprehensive, and user-friendly resources on public school choice. According to the Carnegie Report, "Choice has, without question, emerged as the single most rousing idea in the current school reform effort" (p.1). While the Carnegie report credits Minnesota as having "led the way in 1987" (p.1), the Montclair Public Schools (Clewell & Joy, 1990), actually initiated its first magnet school of choice program as early as 1976, as an alternative to forced busing to achieve its desegregation goals.

In 1991, another choice option, the Charter School Movement, was launched, and has rapidly spread throughout the nation as a growing educational phenomenon at the forefront of the school choice movement (Cobb, & Glass, 1999). And in 2002, the Supreme Court decision in favor of voucher-supported tuition for parochial, church-

related private schools has further popularized, and increased the accessibility of school choice options. Needless to add, school choice – the ability to pick the school that one's child will attend and as a radical approach to school reform and improvement – has lasting appeal, especially in a democratic, market-driven society.

While the research appears to be fragmented and sparse with respect to the effectiveness of school choice programs, the problems and possibilities of school choice theory and design, as culled from a variety of examples and sources, are quite conclusive. This is what we have learned about America's responses to school choice as concluded from The Carnegie Report for the Advancement of Teaching (1992, 9 – 27) entitled *School Choice*. First, Americans in general feel positive about the idea of school choice. However, in practice, Americans seem satisfied with their current public school arrangements and very few have opted to participate in statewide choice programs. Second, many parents who do decide to send their children to another school appear to do so for nonacademic reasons. This conclusion challenges the rationale that school choice will prompt parents to choose schools based on academic quality thus creating a competitive force for low performing schools to improve. Third, not all families have multiple school options available to them. For example, not all programs of choice offer transportation. It's to be expected then that choice programs work much better for those who are most advantaged economically and educationally. Fourth, evidence about the effectiveness of private-school choice, limited as it is, suggests that such a policy does not improve student achievement or stimulate school renewal. Since the Carnegie report, the public/private voucher model has gained more attention especially with the use of vouchers to support parochial, church-related school enrollment. Fifth, parents and

students who do participate in school choice in both the public and private sectors tend to feel good about their decision and like the programs in which their children are enrolled. This finding seems to support the expectation that school choice will energize schools and empower parents. Sixth, the educational impact of school choice is ambiguous at best. In some district-wide programs, a correlation may exist between choice and the improvement of students' academic performance. In statewide programs, no such connection could be found. Seventh, school choice, to be successful, requires significant administrative and financial support. It is not a cheap path to educational reform. Eighth, statewide choice programs tend to widen the gap between rich and poor districts. While school choice is built on the marketplace model, what is often overlooked is that schools vary greatly in their capacity to compete. School resources and per pupil expenditures differ dramatically. Ninth, school choice works best when it is arrived at gradually, locally, and voluntarily – not by top-down mandates. Montclair is sited as one of the “best” models for this very reason.

In the article, *Choice in Public Education*, Richard Elmore (1988) contends that in the absence of a broad base of documented, empirical evidence, the actual effectiveness of school choice “is suggestive, but hardly definitive” (p. 85). School choice then is an inherently appealing concept whose lifeline continues to be sustained through the assumption-of-effectiveness as opposed to the empirical evidence-of-effectiveness. Elmore has summarized the assumptions as follows: (a) Parents are more likely to be satisfied with a school they have chosen, and to support their children's learning in such a school; (b) Students are more likely to engage in the work of schooling more seriously when they (and their parents) have chosen the kind of school that they find appropriate to

their needs; and (c) Teachers are more likely to enjoy their work and make the commitment necessary to successful teaching when they have chosen the setting in which they work and take an active hand in the construction of their school program.

The continued attention to school choice, as a viable strategy for school reform that will lead to increased student achievement through increased parent involvement, seems to be grounded more by the expectation of better schools, better students, better parents, and better results, rather than actual empirical data. School choice remains a hot topic that continues to dominate the national agenda; one that becomes even hotter in a social, and political context where race and socio-economic status matter.

For purposes of this study, this writer has turned to four prominent models of public school choice: magnet schools; charter schools; inter-district transfers; and public/private vouchers. The four seem to best reflect the continuum of variability among school choice design. Central to this continuum concept is the balance of control. Ogawa and Dutton (1994a) contend "on one end are magnet school programs where a substantial amount of control remains with central authorities. On the other end are the public/private voucher plans where the bulk of control could potentially lie with individual schools and parents. Charter schools and inter-district transfer programs lie somewhere between these extremes" (pp. 271 - 272). What is not included along the continuum is the idea of school choice as evidenced by a parent's choice decision for home schooling, a particular residence, or private schooling independent of any state regulated incentive. With respect to the dominant choices along the continuum of school choice options, the literature (Bomotti, 1996; Carnegie Foundation, 1992; Goldhaber, 1999; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a; Shujaa, 1992) suggests that there is little agreement or

rather, a wide variability, as to the criteria used for parent selection among schools of choice. There appears to be a gap between the reasons proposed by the architects of the various forms of school choice and the actual reasons parents assign when making their school selection that includes a diverse range of political, social, economic, and educational motives and provisions. As substantiated by the literature, this is not surprising. The underlying premise is that the various choice options, from magnet schools to public/private voucher to inter-district choice to charter schools, are supported by a variety of constituencies for a variety of purposes and with diverse goals and outcomes in mind. One commentator has grouped the different school choice rationales as being driven by one of four choice-related categories (Levin, 1999): education driven; economics driven; policy driven; or governance driven. They have been described as follows:

Education-driven choice is grounded in perceived differences in learning styles of children and in the amount of structure they need as well as opportunities for parental choice in accordance with family values and orientation; Economics-driven choice reflects the view that the problems of public schools are due to 'their noncompetitive, monopolistic, and no-incentives status' and that the market approach, by requiring public schools to compete with private schools, will reform public education and force bad schools out of business; Policy-driven choice is directed toward equity-based initiatives. These can include vouchers based on a family's income and willingness to invest in education, or what are characterized as ways of equalizing opportunities for families to find a good school or to enable their children to escape a bad one; and Governance-driven

choice is characterized as the 'desire to remove education from the arena of collective decision and return its control to individuals' or the 'libertarian case for choice (p. 269).

The four categories effectively provide a lens through which to better understand the choices that parent/caregivers make, and the reasons they assign to their selection and preference when considering an educational option.

In connecting the four prominent types of educational options under one heading, Ogawa and Dutton (1994a, pp. 278 - 291) offer five unifying assumptions, and underlying corollaries for thinking about the common expectations and outcomes of a school choice program.

Assumption 1: When given the opportunity, parents will make informed choices in selecting schools for their children based on the assessment of their children's interests and educational needs and the capacity of schools to engage their children's interests and meet their needs. (Corollary 1A: Low- and middle-income families will have choice opportunities previously available to high-income families. Corollary 1B: Because children have varying interests and needs, parents will select schools with different types of educational programs.);

Assumption 2: Schools, acting as largely autonomous units, will respond to parents' preferences. (Corollary 2A: School programs will have greater focus because they will be developed in response to particular types of students' interests and needs. Corollary 2B: Schools will develop innovative curriculum and instructional programs that, in turn, will produce diversity among programs across schools. Corollary 2C: The need for centralized educational bureaucracies

including state and district offices, will be reduced.); Assumption 3: The major participants in the educational enterprise – students, teachers, and parents – will be more highly motivated; Assumption 4: Parental choice will improve educational outcomes. Students' academic performance will be enhanced, and parents' satisfaction with schools will improve; and Assumption 5: Parental choice will reduce the costs of providing educational services (pgs. 291).

The existing research or evidence regarding the desired, orchestrated, and/or expected outcomes of choice proposals, remains uneven, inconclusive and incomplete. As concluded by Ogawa & Dutton (1994a), the authors of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1992), and others, "the absence of empirical grounding suggests that the debate over educational choice is being waged over values rather than scientific evidence, . . . and may not be about what we know will make education more effective and efficient [but] rather, it may be about what we, as a society, believe about whose interests education should serve" (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a, p. 294).

Regardless of the type of educational option, school choice affords parents the opportunity to choose a school that is the right fit for their youngster, along a varied spectrum of political, economical, social, and educational reasons (McDonald, 1999). As documented by scholars and analysts, there is overwhelming evidence about the limited educational opportunities and failing quality of schools provided for the children and families of America's most disenfranchised, and disadvantaged groups including the poor, African Americans, Hispanics, and other ethnic groups. And yet, parents across all socio-economic, ethno-racial, and educational strata have acted upon their choices in guiding their children's education, even choosing not to choose, Ogawa & Dutton.

During the early 1950s, and following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme court ruling, White and Black parents made pivotal decisions with respect to sending their children to segregated or integrated schools. Fifty year later, there has been renewed interest and access to choice programs – magnet schools, and the voucher and charter school movements - by members of society that at one time had to depend on the nation's failing, and troubled public schools. Being able to choose the educational options that seemed to be available to only certain segments of society has spurred on support for voucher and charter school programs as the new movements of school choice, and has revitalized magnet schools as market place competitors. At the start of the 21st century, and as championed by the Black Alliance for Educational Options, school choice has received national attention as “ a movement that describes its mission as promoting education alternatives for Black [and/or low income] families . . .” (Kane, 2001, p. 42). Not only have parents been given the option to shop around, but also “low-income children [have now gained] access to educational environments with a proven history of academic achievement” (Holt, p. 163).

Magnet school programs (Clewell & Joy, 1990; Cookson, P, 1994; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a) represent a voluntary, inter-district model of choice. Magnet school programs may involve only several schools in a district, or as is the case in Montclair, may require that all schools develop a magnet theme thus leveling the playing field by creating a non-neighborhood school system. In fact, a major criticism of the magnet school model has been leveled at districts in which only a few magnet schools have been developed. The concern is that the limited availability of magnet schools has a tendency to pull the best and the brightest away from the same district's neighborhood schools.

The primary concept of the magnet school model is to offer a unique, thematic programmatic emphasis designed to attract families based on the needs and interests of the students. While the impetus of control may rest with central authorities, magnet schools often function as decentralized entities with strong input from its respective parents, teachers, and administrators. For the most part, the magnet school model is a program of controlled choice designed to achieve desegregation goals, and to provide equal educational opportunity, and quality education to all students. Parents are therefore required to list several magnet school choices. In Montclair, for example, prior to 1999, parents were required to list their top three choices. With changing demographics that match national trends of increased student diversity, and the 1998 court decision banning race-based school assignments, parents are now required to rank order the entire list of school choices. Clewell and Joy's (1990) contention that "magnet plans appear most promising in meeting the educational goals of achieving racial balance, providing quality education, and offering diverse education programs" (p. 4) remains in effect within the Montclair schools. Current studies on school choice reform continue to identify magnet school programs as the most commonly occurring, and viable form of school choice option. Several studies including the 1997 report by the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights (as cited in "Intrasectional (Public) Choice Plans" . . . , n.d.) have documented "magnet schools' effectiveness in reducing racial isolation and providing high quality educational programs . . . that benefit all students, regardless of race, sex, or national origin . . . encourage desegregation, and [satisfy] the test of serving poor children more effectively than the schools they previously attended" (2002, ¶ 5 – 6).

Charter schools have been characterized as being very similar to magnet schools in terms of program development and curricular design. Charter schools typically have been developed around unique themes related to family interests and students' needs or in direct response to a political, and social agenda. According to an article by Pearl Rock Kane (2000), "... charter schools share several defining characteristics: The schools serve similar student populations; founders often form partnerships with organizations outside of traditional education circles; and the schools are generally small in size, mission-driven, and staffed by teachers, and administrators attracted by the schools' distinctive features" (p.68). Charter schools have also been characterized as "publicly sponsored autonomous schools that are substantially free of direct administrative control by the government but are held accountable for achieving certain levels of students performance (and other specified outcomes)" (Cookson, 1994, p. 15.) On the issue of balance of control, charter schools lie somewhere between the centralized and decentralized extremes. Ogawa and Dutton (1994a) support this premise by contending "charter school programs generally place more control in the hands of school level professionals and patrons than do magnet school programs" (p. 273). Another component of charter schools is the actual charter.

The charter which serves as a contract between the school and the district board, specifies measurable outcomes for which the school will be held accountable by the board. The charter also describes the school's curriculum, instructional approaches, governance system, personnel policies, and school management functions. A school's charter may specify which functions that will continue to be provided by the district. The district board of education maintains authority to

approve charters. Many charter policies enable schools whose charters have been denied to appeal to a higher authority, namely, a county or state education office (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a, p. 273).

One critical concern about the Charter School Movement, which also had been leveled at the private-/public-school voucher program, was the potential for charters to stratify, and further separate schools and their populations along ethno-racial, and socio-economic lines. However, according to "A Study of Charter Schools: First-Year Report", sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1997), "Charter schools have, in most states, a racial composition similar to statewide averages or have a higher proportion of students of color (p. 24).

Another form of public school choice is provided through inter-district transfers. Essentially, students are allowed to attend schools outside of their respective, home districts. While inter-district transfers is a public school choice option, it is not unrestricted. As reported by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1992), attributable factors include lack of space in schools, little interest from students and parents, restrictions due to existing desegregation plans, and lack of transportation.

Unlike during the early sixties when publicly financed vouchers were first introduced, public/private vouchers, as another form of school choice, have recently gained momentum as an instrument of educational reform. The concept of public/private vouchers is essentially the use of public school funding and/or tax-supported funding, to finance private schooling, and as of the 2002 ruling, parochial, church-related schools as well. Ogawa and Dutton (1994a) suggest that "on its face, the voucher approach to parental choice can appear to be quite simple. Parents select their children's schools

from available options, including public and private schools; district boundaries cease to be a consideration. Parents are issued a voucher for each of their school-aged children. They redeem the vouchers at the schools they select" (pp. 275). However, the voucher system (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992) is not without complications nor restrictions. Support for publicly funded vouchers that would support parents' efforts to send their children to private, and now church-related schools, at public or government expense continues to gain momentum among the nation's public, thus broadening the scope of educational options further. Most controversial is the growing allied relationship between working class and/or low income Blacks, and conservative Whites with a vested interest in the Republican agenda as well as progressive Black educators, parents, and activists around the issue of vouchers (Kane, 2001).

The NAACP, the National Urban League and other Civil Rights groups oppose the joint support of private-/church-related vouchers because of the potential threat to the public education system. The Black Alliance for Educational Options, founded by Howard Fuller, has nationally mobilized the African American community around the issue of school vouchers. His rallying point is that "school choice isn't just vouchers. It's all of these other ways people can be empowered to be able to choose the best option for their children. Other people want to brand us as the voucher organization but we're more than that" (Fuller, 2000, p. 43).

An overview of school choice theory, and design has been presented in order to provide a backdrop for understanding the conditions, assumptions, expectations, and outcomes, real or perceived, with which parents, consciously or unconsciously, as

educational choosers, must contend. While school choice is favored, it is not without opposition from within the African American community. Jones-Wilson, Arnez and Asbury (1992), add to the backdrop through research findings that purport that “many intellectuals of color have voiced suspicions that school choice plans are sophisticated means of subverting racial and socioeconomic integration. Some have raised claims that this initiative is potentially another means of denying equality of educational opportunity to Blacks, Hispanics, and other disadvantaged persons in this country’ (p. 127). The threat of stratification along racial, social, political, and economic lines with respect to the various choice options is relative to the extent that minority and disadvantaged communities participate in choice options. As an example, Robin Barnes (1997) notes with respect to that “Black critics view [schools of choice] such as charter schools as quick fix, reforms on the cheap measures that ignore the urgent needs of urban schools where, they argue, the majority of black children will continue their enrollment after ‘charter school mania’ has died down” (Barnes, 1997, p. 12).

This conclusion may be based on conjecture, reality or perception because most of the studies report total numbers of students without disaggregating the data by race or class (Levin, 1999). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1998) of the total number of all school-aged children, 12 percent attend private schools, (the majority of which are religious or church-related), and approximately 1 to 2 percent are home-schooled. What has been extrapolated is that the percentage of Blacks and Hispanics relative to Whites is still much greater in public schools than in private schools. “African Americans are more likely to take advantage of choice in the public sector while Whites and Asian Americans are more likely to take advantage of expanded

opportunities for choice in the private sector” (Levin, 1999, pp. 274-275). In an attempt to identify to what extent African Americans and others of color participate in the school choice movement, and in order to predict to what extent educational choice really fosters racial, social and economic stratification, it is important to examine why parents, when given the option, exercise educational choice by choosing the school that they do, and/or choose a school other than the one assigned.

While the four types of school choice programs differ along several variables, their relevance to this research proposal study is the common ground each provides with respect to why parents choose the schools or choice programs that they do. There is general agreement that the research base on how parents select a school of choice is sparse. The research findings are speculative at best when one combines the limited literature and information as it pertains to any one particular type of choice program. Yet it is the compilation of those studies that has led Ogawa and Dutton (1994a), and others to conclude when given the opportunity, that parents, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational background do base their choice of schools on diverse factors.

African Americans as Educational Choosers

Limited as it may be, research studies on parent selection of schools of choice have included responses from various socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial groups. It is the belief of this writer, that parents/caregivers of African American children select schools of choice probably for the same reasons as other ethnic and racial groups. There is, however, one caveat. In a race conscious society such as the United States of America, race matters, and adds an extra dimension to the school choice movement, and decisions

pertinent to the choosing a school. In their book, *The Politics of School Choice*, social scientists Morken and Formicola (1999) contend that “being Black transcends partisan politics and business as usual. The special nature of the economic, social, and educational needs of African Americans, Hispanics, and other ethnic groups challenges all those in public office to think again about what makes a school public, and what makes an education equal” (p. 199). As a result, African Americans as educational choosers find it necessary to not only have to deal with the issue of quality education but also with the issue of equality of educational opportunity.

The remainder of this section of the literature review will focus on what the research tells us about what matters to African Americans choosers – parents/caregivers of African American children – when considering a school choice option. For the sake of this research, parent selection criteria regardless of school type, will be generalized to the decision-making process for school choice selection and preference along the continuum of the previously discussed school choice models, and will reflect reasons across a wide spectrum of educational choice options, including at the college level. Researches acknowledge the need, (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a), in the absence of research on choice programs, to turn to non-public school studies (e.g. private schools) as a strategy to enrich the research base on the selection of school of choice. Crawford and Freeman (1996) agree that while much has been written about the philosophical and historical underpinnings of school choice, there is not much actual data, and even less when trying to isolate reasons for school selection along racial lines. With that in mind, it is necessary to highlight the findings from several

classic studies that bring to the fore the more dominant themes and reasons that parents cite as informing their school selection decisions.

The Alum Rock, California, Voucher Demonstration Project (Bridge & Blackman, 1978) is often referenced as one of the most comprehensive set of studies about school choice in a district primarily serving a population described as low-income and/or of color. The study contributed to the literature about school choice behavior in two ways. First, it highlighted the importance and role of information in the dissemination of materials about school choice along socio-economic, and educational levels. The higher the education level and income of families, the greater the reliance on information and printed materials about the schools; and the lower the educational and income levels of the families, the lower the information level, and the greater the dependence on personal contacts for information about the schools. Second, it identified the importance of geographic location as a determining school selection factor. Cookson (1994) has summarized that "on the basis of this study, it appear[ed] that most parents at the outset of the experiment preferred their neighborhood schools. But as families gained experience, they began to choose more distant schools" (p.75). Here, cost and availability for transportation as well as rules for inter-district/intra-district movement surfaced.

The studies by Nault and Uchitelle (1982) in an unidentified, racially integrated Midwestern town focused on choosers of one of two elementary schools, each different in instructional organization and ethno-racial, socio-economic composition. The findings not only corroborated the importance of location as a school selection reason, but also identified the use of information sources based on the socio-economic and educational

levels of its choosers similar to that found in the Alum Rock project. The research of Nault and Uchitell (1982) was especially important for three other reasons. First, the research highlighted the overall importance of the school's general atmosphere as influenced by the administrative and instructional style of the principal and teaching staff. Second, the research identified reasons that, taken in the broadest context, seemed to matter least to the choosers of one Midwestern town: overall achievement levels; availability and convenience of transportation; school facilities; and other children's backgrounds. Third, it served to suggest that, within an integrated community, the diversity generally associated with race and class was something to value rather than avoid.

In a 1985 study, Darling-Hammond and Kirby (as cited in Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a) surveyed "predominantly White, fairly affluent, typically well-educated, and largely Protestant" (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a, p. 7) Minnesotans in order to investigate the impact of the state's tuition tax deductions on parental choice. Their findings highlighted that parents, (albeit predominantly White in this instance), who were active school choosers were also more likely to be dissatisfied with their children's schools (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a, p. 7). The findings from the evaluations of the Milwaukee Public Schools' Parental Choice Program (Witte, 1999) later corroborated this tendency for parent choosers, as a whole, to be more dissatisfied with their current school placements but in this instance, the parents were not White. Parent interviews resulting from The Milwaukee Program also provided pertinent information about school selection criteria. "Although the most emphasized criteria for selecting a school was perceived educational quality, 75% of the parents considered the 'other children in chosen school'

to be an important or very important factor in tier decision. Incidentally, 80% deemed location of chosen school important or very important" (Cobb & Glass, 1999, p. 6).

In one of a very few studies that specifically focused on African Americans, Jones-Wilson, Arnez and Asbury (1992) looked to the Washington, DC area to study the behavioral pattern of school selection among Black parents. The researchers acknowledge "historically, Black parents have been prime supporters of public schooling for their young, and for generations they have fought to actualize equality of opportunity for them in those schools" (p. 126). The researchers further contend that "by the 1980s, . . . more Black adults had become disenchanted with the conditions and/or results of public schooling, and significant numbers were choosing nonpublic educational options for their children, grandchildren or other youngsters under their protective care" (p. 126). Although the research of Jones-Wilson, et al. (1992), focused on the selection of private schools over public schools by Black parents, much can be gleaned from the respondents about what matters in the selection of a school. Overwhelmingly, "the primary reason cited by Black adults from all socioeconomic levels for enrolling their children . . . [was] to provide for them an environment that offers a smaller student-teacher ratio, a greater sense of caring, and a higher quality education" (p. 126). In another study (Bauch, as cited in Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a) parents, of students in five successful, inner city Catholic high schools were surveyed. Approximately 90% of the parents were either African American or Hispanic, almost 50% were mothers with a high school education, and 40% were Catholic. The study's findings reported differences among the various ethnic groups with respect to reasons for school choice selection. While academic and curricular reasons were cited as most important by all groups, those factors were most

valued by the African American respondents. Whites indicated that they had chosen primarily based on religious values and the Hispanics choose primarily based on location and discipline within the school. The majority of private schools selected by African American choosers are affordable, Catholic or religiously-based (Levin, 1999). Thus, other criteria for choice includes private, parochial schools that focus on self-esteem, morals, and shared family values (Dove, 1998; Shujaa, 1992) as well as more structure and discipline typically afforded by the private school. As summarized in an earlier survey conducted by Arnez and Jones (as cited in Jones-Wilson, Arnez & Asbury, 1992), the preference by Black parents, for private versus public schooling in the Washington, DC area, rests with where they feel most comfortable entrusting their most precious possessions, their children (1992). A comparative look at the educational research between private and public school choice reveals a relevant finding about the parents of each camp of school choice. An examination of the relationship between choice program and parent involvement reports that "public school parents, compared to private school parents, use superior searching methods; that is they engage in a greater number of search activities in choosing a school such as visiting more than one school, gathering information during school visits, and seeking the advice of parents who already had children enrolled in the schools" (Bauch & Goldring, 1995, p. 3).

Founder Howard Fuller, and the conservative-backed Black Alliance for Educational Options membership, have been very active in reforming and recruiting poor, urban school families about the opportunities available through school choice, albeit vouchers. As reported by Eugene Kane in the September/October 2001 issue of *The Crisis*, not only does the Black Alliance for Educational Options, and others,

“frustrated by failing public schools [see as] its mission to promote education alternatives for Black families disappointed by their public schools, . . . [but] many believe that what’s at stake is the future of a nation of Black children” (p. 42). Thus two other reasons for school choice selection by African American choosers emerge: options and empowerment resulting in more control over ones’ children’s education. In the book *Not Yet “Free at Last”*, Mike Holt (2000) chronicled the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program from the 1970s to 1999, documenting one community’s African American, and/or poor families’ discontent with its public schools failure to educate its students. This failure among has been documented across the nation’s public schools. Here again, the motivation for seeking school choice centers on the issues of increased educational options and educational opportunities for families who had been denied and disenfranchised based on their socio-economic status.

Several researchers have turned to what matters to African American families in general, and to Black mothers in particular to identify factors for school choice selection. This approach takes into consideration the strong influence of the African American mother as a central figure in guiding and direction family life and culture, and in determining what’s best for African American children. Much of this information about what drives the decision-making about important issues such as schooling has been gleaned from the life stories and personal narratives of African American women in the day to day of care their children and families. Dove (1998), analyzed the her-stories of African mothers in the United States and the United Kingdom. She and other scholars (Dove, 1990; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987) examined school choice selection within the framework of culturally affirmative options. Supported by her London Study (Dove,

1990), Dove (1998) found that “the impact of racism was the major influence in the decision” (p. 195) to send ones’ children to culturally affirming schools. Other reasons cited included “teacher support and help; cultural awareness; Black/Afri[c]an history; a better learning environment; A Black/Afri[c]an perspective; positive role models; and relationships with other Black/Afri[c]an children” (p. 195). It must be noted that within the conceptual framework of her research, Dove has made a distinction between culturally affirmative schools (a reference to an African experience in Europe) and Independent Black Schools (a reference to an African/African American experience in America).

According to Foster (2000),

African Americans have always believed that education is the key to gaining a foothold in the American mainstream. Consequently, they want their children taught by teachers who expect them to graduate, go to college, and get good jobs. Like most other Americans, African American parents, regardless of income level, want schools that will provide their children with high academic standards, discipline, and an affirmation of their identity (p. 291).

That rationale again suggests the importance and interplay of both socially-based and academically-based indicators as significant factors of influence in school selection.

In building a conceptual framework through which to appreciate parental choice in the context of Afrocentric transformation and African American Independent Schools, Shujaa (1992) contends that “African American independent schools are products of the African American social and cultural experience” (p. 156). Parents who select to send their children to a Black Independent School have made a critical choice based on the

perception of the school's social and cultural significance. Two findings from Shujaa's study, as summarized in the article, "Afrocentric Transformation and Parental Choice in African American Independent Schools" (Shujaa, 1992), are especially relevant for the identification of a criteria for parental decision-making in school selection. These two findings are especially applicable for consideration when applied to any one of the four prominent types of public school choice. The first finding (Shujaa, 1992) represents the desire of parents to choose a school environment where the values and beliefs are closely attuned to that of the home environment. "The school, therefore, is used by parents to extend the educational foundation begun at home" (p. 157). The second finding emphasizes the importance for "children to be exposed to an educational program which not only emphasizes high academic standard but also concentrates on an African American educational perspective" (p. 157). Here the idea of a culturally affirming school environment that affirms the child and celebrates diversity (Dove, 1998; Pigford, 1993) resurfaces.

As an African American parent, and educational chooser, author Aretha Pigford (1993) suggests the importance of asking two key questions when considering a school choice selection: "Does the school celebrate diversity?" and "Does it offer an affirming environment?". Pigford (1993) further suggests that one's concept of a "good education" needs to be considered in the broadest sense. For her, "a good school must first and foremost help children recognize their worth as individual human beings" (p. 67). Pigford maintains that "no matter how wonderful a school's reputation might be, parents should not assume that it is the 'right' environment for their child" (p. 67). Pigford further insists upon visitations and observations by Black parents as crucial decision-

making behavior. Her list of questions when making a selection have been paraphrased for consideration: Is there diversity among the administrative and professional staff or are Blacks represented only among the custodians and secretaries? Is the staff friendly and warm? Do teachers greet you? Do they want you to be there? Do they want you there? How do staff members interact with students? How many Black students are in the classes? Where are they seated? Do the Black children seem to be disproportionately represented in any group? Do the children seem comfortable and uninhibited? Do they raise their hands and willingly participate? Pigford and other purport that important academic reasons such as high achievement standards and quality education may be necessary for determining a school selection but are not sufficient. Social, and culturally-bound reasons that form the circle of care and foster an appreciation for diversity and an affirmation of the one's ethnic, racial, and social identify, seem to also matter most when considering an educational option.

To further identify criteria for school choice selection by African American choosers, it was useful to turn to studies about parent and student satisfaction with school choice, and the advantages for participation in school choice programs, particularly charter schools and voucher projects (Levin, 1999). Several positive factors and advantages have been consistently cited throughout the various studies with respect to school satisfaction among African American parents. They include: "small size of the school; size of classroom; sense of community (and the sense of ownership that choosing a school gives to parents and students); more involved and caring teachers; the belief that the individual needs of the particular child are given greater attention; and the adaptation of the curriculum to ethnic and cultural considerations" (Levin, 1999, p. 275). Safety was

cited by African American, Hispanic, and low-income parents who perceived their neighborhood school as unsafe. Other indicators of satisfaction include increased parent involvement; extended hours for working families; opportunity for academic improvement; and an identifiable mission or single focus characteristic of choice schools.

The 5 year case study by Wells and Crain (1997) represents a comprehensive investigation of an inter-district, public school choice program as a strategy to address desegregation goals in St. Louis, Missouri. Seventy-one African American parents and students were interviewed with respect to the family decision to participate or not in the educational choice plan. Parents were initially motivated to participate in the choice plan program primarily for the opportunity for higher quality schools and education, and exposure to the potential life long social networks. For many of the study's parents at the time, the perceived advantages seemed to outweigh the risks of sending one's children to inconvenient, hostile and/or racist communities and schools. In the end, many of the parents and students withdrew from the choice plan in favor of the neighborhood schools, while others remained and managed the inconveniences of their school choice placement. Wells' and Crains' research is important for two reasons. First, it highlighted the social and academic trade-offs, and tough decisions faced by African American families when choosing to send ones' children to integrated suburban. Second, it highlighted that school choice options, and/or the opportunity to choose are not always the most satisfactory alternatives for parent choosers. Third, the authors' work highlighted that school choice options that provide a caring environment is as paramount in importance as the initial enticement of a quality academic program.

Overall, the research, studies, and observations suggest that as educational choosers, African Americans exercise school choice selection for a variety of reasons.

Chapter Summary

Chapter II provided an overview of the literature with respect to the research project on the criteria used for school choice selection and preference. The first section provided a general overview of four school choice options with respect to school choice design and theory. The second section presented studies and research that identified and discussed reasons for school selection among diverse ethno-racial and socio-economic groups with a specific attention to studies pertaining to African Americans as educational choosers.

Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter III describes the study's research methodology. This chapter details the setting and the participants from whom the data was collected; the instrumentation constructs used for obtaining the research data; and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

Setting: The Montclair Community / District / Elementary Schools

Described as an integrated, diverse community, Montclair has been touted as an attractive, suburban/urban community. As described by Laroocca (2002), Montclair is a cultural oasis, which offers the commercial advantages and excitement of an urban town, and the leafy and architectural amenities, and surroundings of the suburbs. Characterized as a "railroad suburb" [when it] first began attracting commuters in 1856, the year train service was introduced (p. 26)", Montclair is regarded by its commuters as a perfect bedroom community that is just 12 miles outside of New York City, and as of October 2002, "just a 29 minute commute" (Laroocca, 2002). Montclair's residents of just over 36,000 people represent a wide spectrum of racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and political diversity. Its racially balanced schools are supported by a citizenship that is approximately 30% Black, 65% White, and 5% of Color.

The Montclair Public School System

The Montclair Public Schools is a magnet system of controlled choice with almost 25 years of choice experience, thus its status as a mature magnet system of choice. It has been hailed as a national model for educational excellence and integration. The district operates seven elementary schools, three middle schools, and a single comprehensive

high school. To provide equitable and equal, intra-district choice options and opportunity, the district has distinguished itself as a non-neighborhood magnet school system of choice by designating each school as a magnet with its own unique thematic or program focus. Placement is facilitated through a centrally-based registration procedure whereby public school eligible residents are able to rank order their school choices versus being automatically assigned based on proximity or zoning codes. Transportation is also provided by the district to all students based on distance. Each school is aligned with and accountable to the state core curriculum content standards and mandated district curriculum but is enhanced by its own unique "magnetism" or draw. Each building is racially balanced, housing populations that are evenly distributed between Whites and Blacks/Students of Color.

According to the enrollment report (Report of District Enrollment, October 2001), the ethno-racial profile of the district's approximately 6313 students enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 12 for September 2002 is 46.4% White(2932 students) ; 43.8% black (2766 students) ; 5.3% Hispanic (332 students); 0.3 % American Indian (18 students); 4.2% Asian/Pacific Islander (265 students). The setting for this particular study was the six elementary schools within the Montclair Public School system that house kindergarten classes. The seventh elementary school, Hillside, Gifted and Talented magnet, houses grades 3 -5, and was not included in the study. The three middle schools Glenfield - Gifted and Talented / Fine and Performing Arts magnet; Renaissance - Where Learning Is Constant and Standards Are Exceeded; and Mt. Hebron - Science and Technology as well as Montclair High School - non-magnet school focus but consisting of Small Learning Communities - were also not included.

The population in the study was represented by the six elementary schools housing kindergarten classes. Because this study focused on the criteria used by parents/caregivers of incoming African American kindergarten children for school choice selection and preference, the magnet focus of each of the six schools has been described using the same written information, Montclair's Magnets and the Montclair Elementary School Guide made available to the parents/caregivers.

Bradford Academy, with a magnet focus around Communication, offers a communication-rich environment through the innovation use of technology. Its theme-based educational environment strives to enhance its students' ability to gather information, communicate, problem-solve, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills. The enrollment at Bradford Academy is approximately 360 students.

Edgemont Montessori School, the only public Montessori school in New Jersey, offers a cutting-edge educational program based on the developmental theory, pedagogy, and practices of Dr. Maria Montessori in a nurturing, family-like environment committed to educating the whole child as a natural, active and life-long learner. The enrollment at Edgemont Montessori is approximately 302 students.

Northeast School, the International magnet, offers a program of international studies which features three main components: Core Academic Subjects, International Studies, and World Language. The program stresses cultural awareness, communication, environmental concerns and knowledge of global trends and issues. The enrollment at Northeast School is approximately 360 students.

Rand School, the Family and Environment magnet, recognizes the uniqueness and diversity of all families, and works to include this philosophy into the development of the

whole child. The school draws upon the strengths of its families and sees them as partners in and out of the school setting. The enrollment at Rand School is approximately 365 students.

Watchung School, the Science and Technology magnet, offers an applied learning, inquiry-based program that encourages children to learn through active exploration. Students are given knowledge to negotiate a world where technology and science are the tools utilized to retrieve, interpret, and manipulate information.

Nishuane School, the K – 2 Gifted and Talented magnet, feeds into Hillside School, which is the grades 3 –5 Gifted and Talented counterpart. The school's responsibility is to identify and nurture children's special abilities based on the belief that all students have special gifts and talents. The educational program offers a wide variety of choice so that students of varying abilities, interests, and backgrounds may discover areas of interest particular to their talents.

Controlled Choice

In the mid seventies (1976), The Montclair Public Schools agreed to a voluntary desegregation plan based on school choice. Hence, with parental input from inception, a variety of magnet school programs were established within each of the elementary (and middle) schools, thus the designation as a non-neighborhood school district. Each magnet was established with collaborative input from the community's stakeholders of parents and teachers. The magnets were designed to attract diverse segments of the school-aged population based on family interests, societal conditions, academic practices and range of learning needs and interests of students and families. Having achieved its original goal to desegregate its schools through a volunteer program of choice, the district continues in its

commitment to maintain racially-balanced school environments, and an integrated school system of quality education. To insure equity of opportunity, each parent/caregiver, regardless of residential location or proximity to a given school, is required to list several school choices. As well, eligibility for bus transportation is determined based on the criterion of distance. Allocation of per pupil expenditures, budgetary funding, and other resources are equitably distributed in order to support, maintain and enhance the district's educational goals, state standards and mandated curricula as well as each of the magnet themes of the schools from which the study's population was identified: Bradford Academy, K-5; Edgemont Montessori, K-5; Northeast School, K-5; Rand School, K-5; Watchung School, K-5; and Nishuane School, K-2.

The Kindergarten Registration Process: Freedom of Choice

Because the study focused on the criteria used by parents/caregivers when choosing a first time placement for their child in an integrated magnet school district of choice, this researcher turned to the families of incoming kindergarten students for September 2002 who more recently engaged in the school selection process. Prior to 1999, parents had listed, in order of preference, their first three choices. At that time, parents generally received their first or second choice at a rate of 95% satisfaction. When it became apparent that the Registrar's Office was no longer able to grant even the third choice at a rate of 75% satisfaction, the parent selection application was modified. Since 1999, the application now requires that parents rank-order (1 – 6) their choices for kindergarten placement from among the six elementary schools. While parents now understand that choice selection includes all six elementary schools, the Central Office Registrar, located

at the Board of Education, continues to make every effort to grant the top three choices as ranked.

In September 2002, a total of 422 students were registered for a kindergarten placement within the six schools. According to the July 18, 2002 letter from the district's Superintendent to the parents, guardians and caregivers of kindergarten students, . . . "this year, after the first run of school assignments, about 90% of families requesting their first or second choice were satisfied. However, our goal is 100% satisfaction, and we expect to surpass last year's 95% satisfaction rate prior to schools opening in September" (2002). In fact, the first choice request of the 132 incoming African American kindergarten students were granted.

The importance of information sources and ways that parents obtain information about the schools of choice has been well documented (Cookson, 1994; Nathan, 1989). To help parents in the selection process, the Board of Education in cooperation with the schools' principals, provides a registration process that is designed to help parents/caregivers make an informed decision when choosing a first time kindergarten placement. Months before the actual week of registration for incoming students, the parent community is provided with a wealth of orientation and information opportunities. These include public service announcements, newspaper articles and advertisements; the district's magnet booklet, and individual school brochures; a public orientation and presentation by principal and staff; cable-vision presentations; school-based tours, classroom visitations; and conversations with principals and parents. District personnel, members of the schools' staff and parent representatives are also hosted by individual neighborhood childcare centers, and local nursery / preschool programs.

Parents/caregivers are welcome and free to repeat any aspect of the schools' overview throughout the year. While there is a dedicated week for school visitations, weekly tours usually continue throughout the school year. Once the applications have been filed, the central office Registrar begins the process of school assignment based on the ranked choices of the schools by the parents/caregivers. After the July 1st placement notification, those new to the community are also given an opportunity to rank order their choice of schools but this is sometimes limited to or based on the availability of space. According to the Open House, School Visitation and Registration Calendar School Year (2001), the process began in January with an all school Elementary Orientation. For 1 week beginning in February, the elementary schools were open for visitations during the school day, and as scheduled by individual school. The school visitation schedule also included an Elementary School Evening Visitation as an added convenience to accommodate working family members. Registration for new students (grades Kindergarten through 12) was held for 1 week beginning in mid March. Intra-district Freedom of Choice applications became available for current students the beginning of April, with an early May submission deadline.

The Participants

The study's participants were selected from among the parents/caregivers of African American students who filed an entering Freedom of Choice-Kindergarten Registration application into one of the six elementary schools for September 2002. Of the 422 newly registered kindergarten students, 132 or 31% were described by parents/caregivers as Black/African American. Using Gay's guidelines (as cited in Leedy, 1985, p. 221) for selecting a sample size, there seemed little point in sampling the

entire population of parents/caregivers as represented by the 132 incoming African American kindergarten students comprising the total population of possible participants. For purposes of this study, the participants or study's respondents were generally characterized as the parents/caregivers of an African American child as gleaned from the ethno-racial, self-identification of the student for whom the kindergarten placement of choice was sought. Eligibility for participation in the study was based on the submission of the Freedom of Choice-Registration Kindergarten application, and subsequent kindergarten placement and enrollment for September 2002. The parents/caregivers of incoming kindergarten students were selected as the population to be included in the study because of their recent involvement in the school selection and registration process. It was assumed that they were in a better position to recall, with a degree of accuracy and familiarity, the reasons that informed their school choice decision.

With written permission (see Appendix B) from the Superintendent of Schools to release the data to the researcher, the list of names of parents/caregivers of incoming kindergarten students for September 2002 was obtained from the District Registrar. The researcher mailed to each participating family a Selection/Preference Survey Study packet which consisted of a solicitation letter of introduction to the researcher and study; a copy of the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference; a complementary pen for use to complete the survey; and a stamped, self addressed envelope for return to the researcher. Based on the initial return response, a second mailing was sent to the participants. Participation was voluntary, and responses were kept in strict confidence.

Sixty-three or a little more than 50 percent (.504) of the mailed packets were completed and returned to the researcher. One hundred and twenty eight packets had been mailed, and three were returned unopened and undeliverable as stamped by the U.S. Post Office services.

Instrumentation Constructs

The purpose of the study was to learn about the criteria that parents/caregivers use when making a school choice selection for their African American children. The study sought to identify and examine the criteria used by parents/caregivers of incoming African American students for the 2002 school year when given the opportunity to make a school choice selection, and to determine whether there was a preference for socially-based/non-instructional indicators or a preference towards academically-based/instructional indicators. Seven research questions, two primary, and five ancillary questions helped to focus the study. They were:

1. What formulated criteria are used by African American parents/caregivers in school choice selection?
2. What selection/preference criteria matter most to African American parents/caregivers when making an elementary school choice selection?
3. Is there a preference for the socially-based/non-instructional indicators when making a choice?
4. Is there a preference for academically-based/instructional indicators when making a choice?
5. Are criteria for school selection and preference influenced by the respondents' residential longevity / history in the community under study?

6. Are criteria for school selection and preference influenced by the respondents' level of educational attainment?

7. Are criteria for school selection and preference influenced by the respondents' level of socio-economic income?

Specifically, the study investigated what attracts and what matters most to parents/caregivers of African American children when making their school choice selection. The study was not intended to judge the popularity of any one elementary school over another; it was designed to look at the districts' six elementary schools as a whole system. The study was also designed to capture the perspective of one group of respondents during a given time period. A more substantiated understanding of parent priorities in school choice selection will help policy makers, administrators, and teachers alike, better meet the learning needs of families, and in turn, create school environments that increase parent satisfaction, address disparities in achievement, and improve students' performance. However, it was understood that the responses collected through this study represented only those of a given group of individual respondents.

It was very important to this researcher to be able to capture the anecdotal voice, and the influencing reasons for school choice selection by the population of the study while eliminating the possible bias – “any influence, condition, or set of conditions that singly or together distort the data (Kratwohl, 1998, p. 221)” - that the researcher's position might unintentionally present within the setting and to the potential participants. As supported by Leedy (1985 :

The social scientist who collects data with a [survey] and the physicist who determines the presence of radioactivity with a Geiger counter are at just about

the same degree of remoteness from their respective sources of data: Neither sees the source from which the data originate. From the perspective of survey participants, this distance becomes an additional advantage: People can respond to questions with assurance that their responses will be anonymous, and so they may be more truthful than they would be in a personal interview . . . " (p. 197).

To that end, it was determined that a descriptive survey, consisting of a Likert scale (1-Very Important to 4-Least Important) and open-ended questions, would be the best way to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for a rich research base, and a descriptive quantitative research result. Given the parameters of this study, the decision to use a survey instrument was further substantiated and supported by the literature. "Survey research captures a fleeting moment in time, much as a camera takes a single-frame photograph of an ongoing activity. By drawing conclusions from one transitory collection of data, we may extrapolate about the state of affairs over a longer time period (Leedy, 1985, p. 196). "Whenever you use . . . rating scales, you simplify and more easily quantify people's behaviors or attitudes (Leedy, 1985, p. 199). In defining survey research, Babbie (1999) contends that "today, survey research is perhaps the most frequently used mode of observation in the social sciences" . . . that it "is used in studies that have individual people as the units of analysis" . . . that it is "probably the best method available to the [researcher] in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly" . . . and that "surveys are also excellent vehicles for measuring attitudes and orientations" (p. 234).

A school choice survey from a prior dissertation study on school choice was identified. Permission was sought and granted from the researcher, Dr. Suzanne

Dunshee (see Appendix B) for the modification and use of the instrument as appropriate. This researcher adapted and modified the survey in order to capture the essence of this particular study, and renamed it the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. Several steps were taken, with care, to modify and improve the instrument in ways that would insure its validity, reliability, and usefulness for collecting and measuring the data specific to this study, and for producing similar results if applied again.

First, consistent with findings gleaned from the literature review, criteria was minimally modified, and enhanced for a professional-looking, user-friendly document. Several open-ended questions were also added to encourage anecdotal feedback, and to capture the authentic voice of the respondents.

Second, consistent with the stages of the survey research process (Rea & Parker, 1997) as a way to enhance the validity of the instrument, the preliminary draft of the modified survey was then mailed to a Jury of Experts for their assessment and feedback. The Jury of Experts included: Suzanne Dunshee, Ed. D., a Colorado-based, Associate Professor and creator of the borrowed instrument; Charlotte Houston, Ph.D, a California-based Clinical Psychologist and Graduate Associate Professor with a private consultation and therapy practice; Gerry Weiss, Ph. D., a Professor Emeritus of Literary Studies from a New Jersey university; and a Maryland-based, nationally renowned educational motivator and speaker, Attorney Crystal Kuykendall, Ed. D.

Third, to further establish the instrument's reliability, parents/caregivers, representative of the population defined for the study, were identified, and invited to pre-test the instrument. According to Rea and Parker (1997), "... to obtain the information

necessary to achieve the goals of [a] study, it is important to pretest the instrument under actual survey conditions. During the course of the pretest, poorly worded questions will be identified and the over-all quality of the survey instrument refined. Based on the experience of the pretest, the [survey] will be fine-tuned for use in the actual survey process” (pp. 12–13). To that end, 14 parents/caregivers of African American students were asked to complete the preliminary survey, and 14 surveys were returned to the researcher in the stamped, self-addressed envelopes providing a 100% pretest response rate. An analysis of reliability of the pretest data was performed using the SPSS Base system statistical program in order to obtain a single summary statistic about the level of reliability of the preliminary draft of the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. According to the SPSS Base 10.0 Applications Guide (1999), “Mathematically, reliability is defined as the proportion of the variability in the responses to the survey that is the result of differences in the respondents. That is, answers to a reliable survey will differ because respondents have different opinions, not because the survey is confusing or has multiple interpretations” (p. 362). As a result of the analysis of reliability of the pretest data as facilitated an Excel spreadsheet and the SPSS statistical program, a reliability coefficient of alpha equaling .6065 was obtained. In the context of the pretest that was administered to only fourteen respondents, the alpha represented an acceptable level of reliability with the expectation that the reliability coefficient would increase with the larger sample population of the actual study. In actuality, the alpha, based on the larger sample size of 60 cases, showed a slight improvement with a reported reliability of .6107 (see Appendix A). While the total number of respondents was 63, the

SPSS program calculated reliability based on 6 cases which reflects three instances of missing responses.

Data Collection

The research project was a descriptive study that combined both quantitative and qualitative research. The instrument, Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference was used to collect the data. The survey consisted of three parts. Part I was designed to collect general demographic, background information about the participants, and to identify the sources used by the participants to obtain information about the schools. Information was collected about the child's gender; the residential longevity and history in the community, socio-economic status, and educational characteristics of the parent/caregiver completing the survey. Information about racial background was sub-categorized under the overarching category of African American. Part II was the questionnaire section that listed the formulated criteria identified in part through the research literature, and on the borrowed instrument as the reasons parents use for school choice selection. A 4-point Likert Scale required that the participants circle the number that applied to the criteria including 1 (Very important), 2 (Important), 3 (Somewhat Important), and 4 (Least important). 2.50 was the midpoint of the scale. Mean scores equal to or less than 2.50 were considered Very important to Important, and mean scores higher than 2.50 were considered Somewhat important to Least Important. Mean scores equal to and less than 1.50 were considered Very Important, and regarded as an indication of preference. Part III consisted of open-ended questions to allow the participants to give anecdotal, authentic responses. The open-ended questions sought to collect information about other criteria that was regarded by parents/caregivers in their

decision-making but had not been listed on the survey. Respondents were also asked to write in the one factor that mattered most to them, to state three reasons that initially attracted them to the school, and to elaborate about what mattered most when making the school choice decision. The survey instrument was estimated to take approximately 15 minutes to complete in its entirety.

Prior written approval had been granted by the Superintendent of Schools for the researcher to conduct the study within the school district, and to obtain the address labels from the Office of the Registrar. The study's population had been identified as the parents/caregivers of African American students who registered for a Kindergarten placement for September 2002. Participation was strictly voluntary.

A Letter of Solicitation (see Appendix C)), the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference (see Appendix D), a complementary pen, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return to the researcher were mailed to the study's population by first class mail. It was anticipated that participants would also receive a friendly Thank you and/or Reminder letter 2 to 3 weeks after the first mailing based on the level of initial return. Once the data had been collected and recorded, it was analyzed for interpretation. Throughout the process, all data was handled by the researcher only, and kept completely confidential. Anonymity was preserved as no names were included nor requested on the survey form. All data and forms were secured in a locked cabinet, to be destroyed after 3 years.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was quantitatively facilitated by the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), and qualitatively facilitated by the coding of key words, and phrases in

order to pinpoint common responses. Aggregate results, descriptive statistics, tables, and narratives were used to summarize the data for interpretation and presentation.

Demographic information and characteristics, Likert Scale responses, and open-ended questions from Parts I, II, and III of the survey were analyzed and interpreted in several ways. First, information about gender and racial background of the student, residential history or longevity in Montclair, level of educational attainment, level of socio economic income, and the sources used to obtain information about the schools were recorded using frequency statistics, and graphic representation on tables. Second, the Likert Scale responses from Part II of the survey with respect to the varying degrees of importance of the criteria for making a school choice decision were recorded and examined using descriptive and frequency statistics, comparison of the means, standard deviations, and ranked means. Third, further analysis of the stated criteria for school choice selection based on the respondents' residential longevity, educational attainment, and socio-economic income was provided using a *t*-test (for residential history/longevity) and one-way ANOVA (for level of educational attainment, and income), in order to determine statistical significance. Post Hoc tests with Tukey results were also analyzed to further identify specific associations between the groups found to have statistical significance. Fourth, the school choice indicators were tallied to reflect either academically-based/instructional reasons or socially-based/non-instructional reasons, and then graphically represented by tables, using frequency and mean results. Fifth, the open-ended responses in Part III were professionally transcribed, and analyzed for common and recurring themes and key words. Identification of other criteria (not previously listed), the one factor that mattered most, and the three reasons that initially attracted the

respondents were also coded, and compared to the prior responses. Tables were constructed to graphically represent all categories and subcategories of data, and narratives were used to describe and capture voice and behavior of the respondents as gleaned from the open-ended transcriptions.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III provided a multifaceted, and inclusive overview of the research project's methodology. It included descriptive information about the study's setting with attention to the community, the school district, and the participating elementary schools. Various perspectives, a historical overview, and current practices were also described with respect to the participants of the study, school choice options, and the Freedom of Choice/Kindergarten registration process. The discussion of the research project's methodology detailed the instrumentation method with respect to its development, measurement product, use for data collection, and measures for data analysis. It is against this backdrop that the criteria used for school choice selection and preference in an integrated school district with a long history of choice will be presented for analysis in the remaining two chapters.

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to gain insight about the criteria used by parents/caregiver when making a school choice selection for their African American children. The research was based on the perceptions and opinions of parents seeking a current kindergarten placement for their child in a particular integrated school district of choice. Data was collected using the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. At the heart of the research, the study sought to identify what matters most to parents/caregivers of incoming African American Kindergarten students when given an opportunity to make a school choice selection.

Towards that end, this study addressed the following seven, primary and ancillary questions:

First, what formulated criteria are used by African American parents/caregivers in school choice selection?

Second, what selection/preference criteria matter most to African American parents/caregivers when making an elementary school choice selection?

Third, is there a preference for the socially-based/non-instructional indicators when making a choice?

Fourth, is there a preference for the academically-based/instructional indicators when making a choice?

Fifth, are school selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' residential longevity/history in the community?

Sixth, are school selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of educational attainment?

Seventh, are school selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of socio-economic status/income?

This chapter reports the results of the participants' responses to the three-part Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. It reports the respondents' demographic information, Likert Scale ratings, and open-ended responses, and in turn, answers the study's primary and ancillary research questions. The data are presented and discussed as follows: demographics and characteristics relative to the study population are discussed and recorded using frequency analysis, and graphic representation on tables; each primary and ancillary research question is stated and supported by table(s) of data; each school choice factor and Likert Scale response are presented and examined using frequency analysis, comparison of the means, and standard deviations; a determination of statistical significance with respect to each selected criteria and its association to the respondents' residential longevity/history in the town, level of educational attainment, and socio-economic status are presented and supported by tables of the data resulting from a one-way ANOVA (for level of educational attainment, and income), and *t*-test (for residential history/longevity); open-ended questions are stated, transcribed (see Appendix E), and analyzed for recurring themes and key words; a discussion and summary of the results and findings follows each category and research question. Tables graphically represent all categories and subcategories of data, and narratives describe and capture the opinions of the respondents. Reliability of alpha may be found in Appendix A.

Presentation of Data for the Analysis of School Choice Selection and Preference

Part I of the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference was designed to collect demographic information. Respondents were asked to provide background information with respect to gender of their child; racial background; residential longevity and family history in the town; level of educational attainment; and socio-economic income level. Included in this section of the survey was also an opportunity for respondents to indicate the sources or steps they took to obtain information about the schools by checking or writing in all the categories that applied.

Description of the Respondents

The researcher surveyed the 128 parents/caregivers who represented the 132 African American students registered for kindergarten for September 2002. Three envelopes were returned, unopened, as non-deliverable by the post office leaving a possible sample size of 125 parents/caregivers. Sixty-three completed surveys, slightly more than 50%, (.504), were received by the researcher.

Gender

Respondents to the survey were asked to identify the gender of the African American child registered for the 2002 kindergarten placement, and for whom the school choice decision had been considered. Table 1 shows that of the sample, school choice selection was made for 30 males students (47.6 %); and 33 girls female students (52.4%).

Table 1

Frequency Table by Gender of Kindergarten Student

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	30	47.6	47.6	47.6
	Female	33	52.4	52.4	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Racial Background

The study's sample population was the parents/caregivers of kindergarten students broadly described as checked on the district's registration application as African American. Given the diverse ethno-racial composition of the town's population and its designation as the best community in New Jersey for interracial families, this researcher thought it might be interesting to disaggregate the racial classification of Black or African American even further. The study's African American participants were given an opportunity to self-identify, and self-describe themselves using the sub-categories relative to people of African descent. The racial background categories were expanded to include, in addition to African American, the following: Biracial, Caribbean American, African, Black of Hispanic Descent, and Multiracial. The subcategories were especially apropos, and perhaps even somewhat limiting, in light of the proposal from the Department of Education to expand the variety of racial and ethnic choices to allow families 63 ways in which to describe themselves (Davis, 2002). According to Education Week reporter, Michelle R. Davis (2002), "it used to be that students, at least in the official view of the federal government, were black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native. No shades of gray or any other color . . ."

(p. 11). According to a 1995 document from the White House Office of Management and Budget (as cited by Davis, 2002), forcing someone of mixed lineage or parentage to choose from one category forced people “to deny their full heritage and to choose between their parents” (p.11). The 63 newly proposed categories match the racial and ethnic options in the most recent U.S. Census. One of this researcher’s respondents checked the African American category and offered the following clarification about her kindergarten child: “Technically, she is biracial as both of her parents are products of African American and Caucasian marriages but as we both identify as African American, I’d classify her as African American as well” (Respondent 41). Of the sample population of African American respondents, when given the opportunity to further self-identify racial background, 65% checked African American; 17% checked Biracial; 6% checked Caribbean American; 6% checked Multiracial; 3% checked African; and 2% checked Black of Hispanic Descent. Biracial and multiracial explanations included combinations of African American and Caucasian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Asian. Table 2 details the racial backgrounds of the survey respondents.

Table 2

Frequency Table by Racial Background

	Frequency	Percent
African American	41	65.0
Biracial	11	17.5
Black of Hispanic Descent	1	1.6
Caribbean American	4	6.3
African	2	3.2
Multiracial	4	6.3
Total	63	

Residential Longevity/Family History in Montclair

The respondents were asked to describe their residential history and status in the community. As written in by the respondents new to Montclair, the year for establishing residency ranged from as early as 1987 to 2001. Of the respondents who grew up in Montclair and attended the public schools, six indicated that they also had a family history in the community that included previous generations who attended the Montclair schools. Some reported family ties to the community that dated back to the early 1920's. Of the respondents new to the community, seven indicated that they had a family history in Montclair, and those family members or previous generations had attended the Montclair public schools. Table 3 shows that of the survey sample, 30.2% indicated that they had grown up in the community, and attended the Montclair Public Schools; and 69.8% indicated that they were new to the community.

Table 3

Frequency Table by Residential Longevity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Grew up in Mtc.	19	30.2	30.2	30.2
New to Mtc.	44	69.8	69.8	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Level of Educational Attainment

The survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of educational attainment by identifying the last grade or highest level of schooling completed. No respondents indicated that they had not completed high school. One respondent checked High School Graduate as the highest level completed, and all other respondents indicated

at least a post high school education. More than three-fourths of the respondents were at least college graduates. One respondent did not reveal an educational level. Based on the responses, the six survey categories for education attainment were collapsed into three levels: Post High School Education which included those who had completed high school and/or had some college and/or technical school/professional school; College Graduate; and Graduate Degree. Table 4 shows that of the respondents, 15.9% indicated a level of educational attainment of Post High School Education; 38.1 % of the respondents were College Graduates; 44.4 % of the respondents indicated a Graduate Degree as the highest level of educational attainment, and 1.6% (one respondent) was missing. Of the survey population, 82.5 %, more than three-fourths of the respondents, were college graduates.

Table 4

Frequency Table by Level of Educational Attainment

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Post High School Educ.	10	15.9	16.1	16.1
College Graduate	24	38.1	38.7	54.8
Graduate Degree	28	44.4	45.2	100.0
Total	62	98.4	100.0	
Missing from System	1	1.6		
Total	63	100.0		

Level of Socio-economic Income

The respondents were provided with a diverse range of four income categories from less than \$25,000 to over \$100,000. Three respondents reported incomes of less than \$25,000. (Two of those three respondents also reported growing up in the

community, and indicated a level of educational attainment of College Graduate. One indicated new to Montclair, and did not reveal a level of educational attainment.) Based on the responses, the four survey categories for socio-economic income were collapsed into three levels: 0 - \$49,999; \$50,000 - \$99,999; and \$100,000 and over. Of the survey population, more than one-fourth of the respondents reported an income level of \$100,000 and over, and more than three-fourths of the respondents reported an income level of more than \$50,000. Table 5 shows that of the respondents, 17.5% indicated an income level of Less than \$25,000 - \$49,999; 44.4 % of the respondents indicated an income level of \$50,000-\$99,999; and 38.1% of the respondents indicated an income level of \$100,000 and over. For purposes of this study, three income categories have been categorized as Lower, Middle, and Higher income levels.

Table 5

Frequency Table by Socio-economic Income Level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Lower	11	17.5	17.5	17.5
Middle	28	44.4	44.4	61.9
Higher	24	38.1	38.1	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Sources for Information About the Magnet Schools

Sources to obtain school choice information, and steps that parents take to learn about school choice options are important considerations when examining the reasons and behaviors surrounding school choice selection (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Naulte & Uchitelle, 1982). The respondents were asked to indicate all sources of school choice

information, as listed and as applicable, and to specify alternative (Other) steps taken by them that may not have been listed. Each respondent reported using a minimum of at least one source of information while the majority of respondents used a combination of three or more sources to obtain information about the schools. More than half used, and wrote in Other Sources/Steps to obtain information. Among the alternatives to the listed sources, Spoke to Parents was written in by 44% of the respondents. Respondents also wrote in Spoke to Family Members (6%); Personal Experience/Knowledge (5%); Test Scores (3%); Pre. K Teacher (2%); and Internet (2%). Three or more sources of information and/or steps taken were cited when making a school choice selection by almost three-fourths of all respondents. Table 6 details the sources of information or steps taken by the survey respondents as follows: Read Material About Magnet Schools (86%); Toured the Schools (67%); Attended the Elementary Orientation (62%); Other (56%); and Spoke Personally with Central Office or School Staff (48%).

Table 6

Frequency Table of Information Sources

	Magnet Materials	Elementary Orientation	School Tours	Spoke w/CO/School	Other
Frequency	54	39	42	30	35
Percent	86%	62%	67%	48%	56%

Part II of the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference presented formulated criteria that had been identified as reasons used by parents/caregivers for school choice selection. Respondents were asked to assess the 16 descriptors using the following Likert Scale: 1 – Very Important; 2 – Important; 3 – Somewhat Important; and 4- Least Important. The reliability alpha for the sixteen items for school choice selection

from the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference was .6107. It is a reliability result that is comparable to but higher than the reliability alpha of the survey when pre-tested on a smaller sample size. The reliability alpha analyses may be found in Appendix A.

Part III of the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference sought to capture the anecdotal and authentic voices of African American choosers. Five open-ended questions were presented in order to provide an opportunity for the respondents to freely identify, propose, and discuss school selection criteria that helped to inform their decision-making when choosing a school. This was intended to provide an opportunity for the respondents to corroborate data, and/or to offer information and reasons that may not have appeared within the survey. A transcription of the Open-ended Questions may be found in Appendix E.

The initial presentation and analyses of data address the first four research questions. Formulated criteria, and frequency statistics have been presented and analyzed with respect to school choice selection and preference as indicated by the responses from 63 respondents to the 16 items.

Presentation of Data Related to Research Question 1

What formulated criteria are used by African American parents/caregivers in school choice selection?

The respondents rated, by varying degrees of importance, the formulated criteria listed on the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. Each criterion was found to be regarded with some degree of importance, from very important to least important, by the respondents. For the purposes of this study, the formulated criteria

was used by parents/caregivers when considering the best school choice option for their children in an integrated magnet school program, and consisted of the following indicators: Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis; Overall Perceived School Quality; caring Reputation of the School; Academic Reputation of the School; Word of Mouth; Reputation of School Staff; Size of the Student Population / Building; Location of School; Overall School Building Atmosphere; Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; Instructional Approach; Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School; Siblings Attending Same School; Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate; School Reflects Family Values; and Opportunities for Parent Involvement.

In addition to the formulated criteria presented on the survey for school choice selection and preference, respondents listed or described a variety of other factors that helped inform their school choice decision (see Appendix E). Of all the respondents, approximately 40% either stated "no response" or indicated that the criteria had already been listed on Part II of the study's survey. Although worded differently, much of the additional criteria also overlapped with those previously listed on the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference.

Taken as a whole, the spectrum of additional criteria creatively and euphemistically represented some aspect that would contribute to a good education for the respondents' children, and enhance the quality of the schooling experience for the family. Comments included non-instructional items such as after school and extra-curricular activities; play ground; district-provided bussing as well as the accessibility of public transportation; gymnastics; and opening and closing time of the school. More

instructionally-based reasons included academic compatibility with respect to the respondents' academically-advanced children as well as to the children's learning styles; time and attention to their children; test scores; and an overall (academically and socially) good fit for their children.

The dominant criterion written in by the majority of respondents focused on the schools' leadership or principal. This criterion had not been included among the formulated selection/preference indicators listed on the study survey. As an example, Respondent 47 commented: "I believe very strongly in the relationship and perception that my wife and I have with the Principal". Respondent 55 added: "School's leadership. I believe that the philosophy of the leadership will have a lasting, trickle down effect to teachers and staff. This includes personality, i.e. if leadership appears personable, open, inviting, comforting, caring, interesting, etc.". As listed by Respondent 3: "Administrators and faculty who are not only comfortable with, but also who actively encourage intelligent African-American children".

The importance of the added criterion of leadership/principal by the respondents was often coupled with the racial identification of the principal, and other staff, as African American. As an example, Respondent 58 listed: "An African-American principal and a substantial African-American teaching staff". Words such as diversity, integration, and multi-racial population were interspersed throughout the respondents' comments, and served to substantiate the importance of acceptance, and role models for the respondents, and their children. As an example, [It is v]ery important to us that [the] teaching staff is diverse, and African-Americans are well represented to provide role models for our children" (Respondent 44). Respondent 45 elaborated that "A mix of race

and socio-economic levels was important to our family. When I selected [a] school, I did so because the school seemed more accepting of all families. I particularly felt that poorer Black parents were more accepted at [this] school. This may be a comfort level with the neighborhood or a sense of ownership of the school . . . Because I felt that acceptance, I wanted my child to learn tolerance in that environment. In summary, I guess I picked a school that I was comfortable with as opposed to one that I deemed best for my child. This magnet has been wonderful, and I would pick it again by the same criteria.”

Respondents were also given an opportunity to identify the three things that initially attracted them when making a school choice selection for their African American child (see Appendix B). Ninety-four percent of the respondents listed criteria that represented a combination of factors that either appeared on the survey or were initiated in writing by them; and 6% of the respondents gave no response. Academics (including test scores, instruction, teachings, curriculum, etc.) emerged as the initial primary factor followed by School Climate (including safe environment, atmosphere, comfort level, overall feeling, racial diversity, etc.); and School Size (including condition of the facility, teacher-student ratio, size of building, etc.), Principal and Staff (including attitude, caring personality, racial diversity, respectfulness, etc.); and Theme.

Presentation of Data Related to Research Question 2

What selection/preference criteria matters most to African American parents/caregivers when making an elementary school choice selection?

Table 7

Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	31	49.2	49.2	49.2
Important	16	25.4	25.4	74.6
Somewhat Important	15	23.8	23.8	98.4
Least Important	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows that the criterion, Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis, was rated Very Important by 49.2 % of the respondents; Important by 25.4% of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 23.8 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 1.6 % of the respondents. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (74.6 %) of the respondents valued the criterion, Magnet School Theme/Program Emphasis as either very important or important.

Table 8

Overall Perceived School Quality

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	44	69.8	69.8	69.8
Important	16	25.4	25.4	95.2
Somewhat Important	3	4.8	4.8	100.0
Least Important	0	0	0	
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 shows that the criterion, Overall Perceived School Quality, was rated Very Important by 69.8 % of the respondents; Important by 25.4% of the respondents; and Somewhat Important by 4.8 % of the respondents. None of the respondents rated it as Least Important. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (95.2 %) of the respondents valued the criterion, Overall Perceived School Quality as either very important or important.

Table 9

Caring Reputation of the School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	44	69.8	69.8	69.8
Important	17	27.0	27.0	96.8
Somewhat Important	2	3.2	3.2	100.0
Least Important	0	0	0	
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 shows that the criterion, Caring Reputation of the School, was rated Very Important by 69.8 % of the respondents; Important by 27.0 % of the respondents; and Somewhat Important by 3.2 % of the respondents. None of the respondents rated it as Least Important. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (96.8 %) of the respondents valued the criterion, Caring Reputation of the School, as either very important or important.

Table 10

Academic Reputation of the School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	47	74.6	74.6	74.6
Important	15	23.8	23.8	98.4
Somewhat Important	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
Least Important	0	0	0	
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 shows that the criterion, Academic Reputation of the School, was rated Very Important by 74.6 % of the respondents; Important by 23.8 % of the respondents; and Somewhat Important by 1.6 % of the respondents. None of the respondents rated it as Least Important. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (98.4 %) of the respondents valued the criterion, Academic Reputation of the School, as either very important or important.

Table 11

Word of Mouth

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	19	30.2	30.6	30.6
Important	20	31.7	32.3	62.9
Somewhat Important	17	27.0	27.4	90.3
Least Important	6	9.5	9.7	100.0
Total	62	98.4	100.0	
Missing from System	1	1.6		
Total	63	100.0		

Table 11 shows that the criterion, Word of Mouth, was rated Very Important by 30.2 % of the respondents; Important by 31.7 of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 27.0 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 9.5% of the respondents. One respondent (1.6 %) had no response. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (61.9 %) of the respondents valued the criterion, Word of Mouth, as either very important or important.

Table 12

Reputation of School Staff

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	30	47.6	47.6	47.6
Important	22	34.9	34.9	82.5
Somewhat Important	11	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 shows that the criterion, Reputation of School Staff, was rated Very Important by 47.6 % of the respondents; Important by 34.9 % of the respondents; and Somewhat Important by 17.5 % of the respondents. None of the respondents rated it as Least Important. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (82.5 %) of the respondents valued the criterion, Reputation of School Staff, as either very important or important.

Table 13

Size of Student Population / Building

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	34	54.0	54.0	54.0
Important	15	23.8	23.8	77.8
Somewhat Important	12	19.0	19.0	96.8
Least Important	2	3.2	3.2	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 13 shows that the criterion, *Size of Student Population / Building*, was rated Very Important by 54.0 % of the respondents; Important by 23.8 % of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 19.0 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 3.2 % of the respondents. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (77.8 %) of the respondents valued the criterion, *Size of Student Population / Building* as either very important or important.

Table 14

Location School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	15	23.8	23.8	23.8
Important	15	23.8	23.8	47.6
Somewhat Important	7	11.1	11.1	58.7
Least Important	26	41.3	41.3	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 14 shows that the criterion, Location of School, was rated Very Important by 23.8 % of the respondents; Important by 23.8 % of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 11.1 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 41.3 % of the respondents. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (52.4 %) of respondents regarded the criterion, Location of School, as either somewhat important or least important.

Table 15

Overall School Building Atmosphere

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	41	65.1	65.1	65.1
Important	16	25.4	25.4	90.5
Somewhat Important	6	9.5	9.5	100.0
Least Important	0	0	0	
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 15 shows that the criterion, Overall School Building Atmosphere, was rated Very Important by 65.1 % of the respondents; Important by 25.4% of the respondents; and Somewhat Important by 9.5 % of the respondents. None of the respondents rated the criterion as Least Important. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (90.5 %) of respondents valued the criterion, Overall School Building Atmosphere, as either very important or important.

Table 16

Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	9	14.3	14.3	14.3
Important	12	19.0	19.0	33.3
Somewhat Important	9	14.3	14.3	47.6
Least Important	33	52.4	52.4	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 16 shows that the criterion, Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community, was rated Very Important by 14.3 % of the respondents; Important by 19.0% of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 14.3 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 52.4 % of the respondents. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (66.7 %) of respondents regarded the criterion, Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community, as either somewhat important or least important.

Table 17

Instructional Approach

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	40	63.5	63.5	63.5
Important	20	31.7	31.7	95.2
Somewhat Important	3	4.8	4.8	100.0
Least Important	0	0	0	
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 17 shows that the criterion, Instructional Approach, was rated Very Important by 63.5 % of the respondents; Important by 31.7 % of the respondents; and Somewhat Important by 4.8 % of the respondents. None of the respondents rated the criterion as Least Important. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (95.2 %) of respondents valued the criterion, Instructional Approach, as either very important or important.

Table 18

Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	4	6.3	6.3	6.3
Important	10	15.9	15.9	22.2
Somewhat Important	8	12.7	12.7	34.9
Least Important	41	65.1	65.1	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 18 shows that the criterion, Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School, was rated Very Important by 6.3 % of the respondents; Important by 15.9 % of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 12.7 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 65.1 % of the respondents. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (77.8 %) of respondents regarded the criterion, Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School, as either somewhat important or least important (65.1%).

Table 19

Siblings Attending School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	18	28.6	29.5	28.5
Important	10	15.9	16.4	45.9
Somewhat Important	6	9.5	9.8	55.7
Least Important	27	42.9	44.3	100.0
Total	61	96.8	100.0	
Missing from System	2	3.2		
Total	63	100.0		

Table 19 shows that the criterion, Siblings Attending School, was rated Very Important by 28.6 % of the respondents; Important by 15.9 % of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 9.5 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 42.9 % of the respondents. Two respondents (3.2%) had no response. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (52.4 %) of respondents regarded the criterion, Sibling Attending School, as either somewhat important or least important.

Table 20

Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	39	61.9	61.9	61.9
Important	20	31.7	31.7	93.7
Somewhat Important	3	4.8	4.8	98.4
Least Important	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 20 shows that the criterion, Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate, was rated Very Important by 61.9 % of the respondents; Important by 31.7 % of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 4.8 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 1.6 % of the respondents. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (93.7 %) of respondents valued the criterion, Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate, as either very important or important.

Table 21

School Reflects Family Values

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	36	57.1	58.1	58.1
Important	22	34.9	35.5	93.5
Somewhat Important	4	6.3	6.5	100.0
Least Important	0	0	0	
Total	62	98.4	100.0	
Missing from System	1	1.6		
Total	63	100.0		

Table 21 shows that the criterion, School Reflects Family Values, was rated Very Important by 57.1 % of the respondents; Important by 34.9 % of the respondents; and Somewhat Important by 6.3 % of the respondents. None of the respondents rated the criterion as least important. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (92 %) of respondents valued the criterion, School Reflects Family Values, as either very important or important.

Table 22

Opportunities for Parent Involvement

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Important	26	41.3	41.3	41.3
Important	24	38.1	38.1	79.4
Somewhat Important	10	15.9	15.9	95.2
Least Important	3	4.8	4.8	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 22 shows that the criterion, Opportunities for Parent Involvement, was rated Very Important by 41.3 % of the respondents; Important by 38.1 % of the respondents; Somewhat Important by 15.9 % of the respondents; and Least Important by 4.8% of the respondents. Overall, these statistics indicate that the majority (79.4 %) of respondents valued the criterion, Opportunities for Parent Involvement, as very important or important.

Table 23

Range of the Means of the Frequency Statistics

	Mean	N	Missing
Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis	1.78	63	0
Overall Perceived School Quality	1.35	63	0
Caring Reputation of the School	1.33	63	0
Academic Reputation of the School	1.27	63	0
Word of Mouth	2.16	62	1
Reputation of School Staff	1.70	63	0
Size of the Student Population / Building	1.71	63	0
Location of School	2.70	63	0

	Mean	N	Missing
Overall School Building Atmosphere	1.44	63	0
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	3.05	63	0
Instructional Approach	1.41	63	0
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	3.37	63	0
Siblings Attending School	2.69	61	2
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	1.46	63	0
School Reflects Family Values	1.48	62	1
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	1.84	63	0

Table 23 shows the mean score for each criterion. A 4-point, versus a 5-point, Likert Scale had been assigned by the researcher to encourage the respondents to take a position with respect to the degree of importance of the criteria in their decision-making process: 1 – Very Important; 2 – Important; 3- Somewhat Important; and 4 – Least Important. The midpoint of the scale was 2.50. School selection criteria that received a mean score of less than or equal to 2.50 were regarded as very important to important reasons for parents/caregivers when deciding a school. Criteria that received a mean score of less than or equal to 1.50 were regarded as very important. Criteria that received a mean score of greater than 2.50 were regarded as somewhat important to least important in the decision-making process. The mean scores ranged from 1.27 (Academic Reputation of the School) to 3.37 (Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School). Almost three-fourths of the criteria had mean scores of less than 2.00, indicating a very important valuing of the formulated criteria listed on the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. Four criteria, (Location of School; Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community; Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School; and Siblings Attending School) had mean scores that exceeded the

midpoint of 2.50, indicating a somewhat to least important valuing of the criteria by the respondents.

Table 24

Ranked Mean Scores of the Criteria for School Section/Preference by Respondents

	Mean	N	Missing
Academic Reputation of the School	1.27	63	0
Caring Reputation of the School	1.33	63	0
Overall Perceived School Quality	1.35	63	0
Instructional Approach	1.41	63	0
Overall School Building Atmosphere	1.44	63	0
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	1.46	63	0
School Reflects Family Values	1.48	62	1
Reputation of School Staff	1.70	63	0
Size of Student Population / Building	1.71	63	0
Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis	1.78	63	0
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	1.84	63	0
Word of Mouth	2.16	62	1
Siblings Attending School	2.69	61	2
Location of School	2.70	63	0
Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community	3.05	63	0
Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School	3.37	63	0

In summary, Table 24 presents the ranked mean scores of the criteria for school selection/preference by the respondents, and indicates the varying degree of importance, from 1 – Very Important to 4-Least Important with a midpoint point of 2.50, of the reason in the decision-making process for school selection and preference. Overall, the respondents ranked all 16 formulated criteria as having some degree of importance in choosing a school for their African American child. Siblings Attending School, Location

of School, Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community, and Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School seemed not as important with means scores in the Somewhat to Least Important range. Academic Reputation of the School, Caring Reputation of the School, and Overall Perceived School Quality emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to the respondents. Instructional Approach; Overall School Building Atmosphere; Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate; and School Reflects Family Values followed, and also had mean scores under 1.50 indicating a degree of very important regard.

In order to answer the third and fourth research questions, the 16 formulated criteria were categorized, as previously defined, by the researcher as either socially-based/non-instructional reasons or academically-based/instructional reasons for school choice selection. Preference for a particular criterion was based on the frequency tally of the Likert scale response of 1 - Very Important assigned to the criteria by parent/caregiver respondents when considering a school of choice. The averages of the mean score and percent of respondents were calculated, and compared.

Presentation of Data Related to Research Question 3 and Research Question 4

Is there a preference for socially-based/non-instructional indicators when making a choice? Is there a preference for academically-based/instructional indicators when making a choice?

Table 25
Preference by Category of Criteria

	Percent of Respondents	Mean Score of Responses
Socially-based / Non-instructional Indicators	42.5	2.07
Academically-based / Instructional Indicators	59.7	1.53

Table 25 shows that on average, 42.5% of the respondents indicated a preference for the socially-based/non-instructional indicators. Based on the Likert scale of 1 (Very Important) to 4 (Least Important) with a midpoint of 2.50, the socially-based/non-instructional indicators received a mean score response of 2.07. On average, 59.7% of the respondents indicated a preference for the academically-based/instructional indicators. Based on the Likert scale of 1 (Very Important) to 4 (Least Important) with a midpoint of 2.50, the academically-based/instructional indicators received a mean score response of 1.53. Overall, these results indicated that the majority of respondents (59.7%) showed a preference for the academically-based/instructional indicators when considering the criteria for school choice selection.

Summary Analysis of the Findings Related to Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4

All 16 items of the formulated criteria were ranked by the respondents as having some level of importance in the school choice selection process. Each criterion was valued from very important to least important. Based on the frequency count results, Academic Reputation of the School received the highest count of the combined ranks of Very Important and Important by 98.4 % of the respondents; 74.6% of the respondents had also ranked this selection criterion as Very Important. Caring Reputation of the School emerged as the second highest combined count of Very Important and Important

by 96.8 % of the respondents. Here Caring Reputation of the School also tied with Overall Perceived School Quality for the second largest number of respondents who ranked the criterion as Very Important. Both were ranked as Very Important by 69.8 % of the respondents. Both Overall Perceived School Quality, and Instructional Approach emerged as the third highest combined count of Very Important and Important each by 95.2% of the respondents. However, a larger number of respondents ranked Overall Perceived School Quality (69.8%) as Very Important over Instructional Approach (63.5%) thus giving the former the edge as the third place selection criterion. With respect to preference criteria, 59.7 % of the respondents rated the academically-based/instructional school choice criteria as Very Important as opposed to 42.5% of the respondents who rated the socially-based/non-instructional school choice criteria as Very Important. It appears that school preference was for the academically-based/instructional category.

Based on the frequency analyses and ranked mean score results, seven criteria emerged as the reasons that seem to best reflect what matters most to parents/caregivers when selecting a school of choice for African American children. In summary, criteria reflective of a school's academic quality, caring quality, and racial sensitivity seem to matter most. These type of criteria had mean score results of less than 1.50 which indicated a high degree rating of Very Important. The top three criteria Academic Reputation of the School (1.27), Caring Reputation of the School (1.33), and Overall Perceived School Quality (1.35) were followed by Instructional Approach (1.41) and Overall School Building Atmosphere (1.44). Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by

School Climate (1.46), and School Reflects Family Values (1.48) were also highly regarded as Very Important based on the 1.50 standard.

These findings were further corroborated by the open-ended responses which elaborated and supported the dominant indicators of academic quality, caring environment, and ethno-racial sensitivity. While academically-related variables emerged as the primary consideration for respondents, it is clear from the quantitative results, and qualitative comments that academic criteria and social criteria that include an awareness and appreciation for diversity are inextricably intertwined as the highest contributors to what matters most to parents and caregivers when making a school choice decision for their African American children. Comments and anecdotal responses to the open-ended questions by a sampling of the respondents further substantiates these findings.

According to Respondent 61: "Our gut told us that the thing we most needed to focus on was balance, picking the school had the best balance of attractive factors. The . . . magnet we picked . . . was important to us because our African American [child] should get as much of a jump . . . as possible." Respondent 1 noted: "I believe the school's method [should] allow children to explore and discover on their own, which is exactly what our [child] likes to do". "I wanted a school with a warm climate. I need to feel secure about my children's safety and happiness while I'm at work" (Respondent 2). "When selecting a school, we needed to make sure that, while we taught [our child] to love [him-/her-self] at home, we would not be undermined at school, and that this pressure would be minimized" (Respondent 3). Respondent 13 shared, "I am a White, single parent with a biracial child. I wanted to make sure my child went to a school where there was significant parental involvement outside the classroom. I believe that . . .

... it takes a village to raise a child” Respondent 23 listed: “A school that is not limited in its academic program in that it offers a variety of programs that appeal to kids of different backgrounds”. “The school met all my academic guidelines, and family is the origin of our teachings, which the school reinforces” (Respondent 31). Respondent 45 noted, “I certainly felt camaraderie, politically, with the parents. I like when parents are comfortable, and children take ownership of education”. According to Respondent 53, “[T]he teacher played an important role in our choice of the school. We desired a school which would mentally [and] physically challenge as well as strengthen the child to be a well rounded, productive individual”. According to Respondent 5, “What attracted me the most was the ‘feeling’ I got when I walked in the building for the first time. I came for the school tour. The classrooms gave the impression that [their] sole purpose was to nurture and enrich the lives of the children. It mattered to me to feel comfortable in the space. It mattered that this be a place that allowed [children] to discover learning in a safe and wholesome environment. It mattered that the environment honor[ed] the magic of children”. Respondent 49 shared, “Knowing your child, administrators, school’s history, etc. determine what program best fits your child. I am very pleased with the principal, [and] with her level of commitment, dedication, and loyalty to the youth at large!!” Respectively, Respondents 29 and 62 simply stated, “Diversity and academics” and “Cousin”. Respondent 61 summarized, “This may sound very abstract, but after participating in two years of open houses, compiling print materials and chatting with tons of parents and teachers . . . [w]hat mattered to us was our gut feeling – what school best fit our overall criteria, what school could we envision our [child] attending. More importantly, it was how we felt when we entered the school – was the atmosphere

bright and welcoming? Were teachers and parents friendly and helpful? That said, all those things contributed to our gut feelings, this year in making our decision, we followed our gut. The school we selected had a stellar reputation, high test scores, an organized principal, seemingly dedicated teachers, active and involved parents, and a passionate PTA." And as concluded by Respondent 63, "I am happy with my decision. Even more importantly, my children are very happy".

The second presentation and analyses of data address the last three questions. Descriptive statistics, including independent t-test, one-way ANOVA, and summary of the means, including ranked means, and standard deviations, have been presented and analyzed based on the respondents' residential longevity/history in the community, level of educational attainment, and level of socio-economic income. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for all three demographics. The 4-point Likert Scale where 1 and 2 represent Very Important and Important respectively, and 3 and 4 represent Somewhat Important and Least Important respectively, allowed the assumption that each criteria had some measure of importance for the respondent. Mean scores less than and equal to the midpoint of the scale (2.50) were assumed to indicate a more valued or higher degree of importance (Very important to Important). Mean scores higher than the midpoint of 2.50 were assumed to indicate a lesser degree of importance (Somewhat important to Least important). An independent t-test was used to investigate statistical significance between the responses of the respondents based on their residential longevity/history in the community. A one-way ANOVA was used each to determine any association of statistical significance between the criteria selected by the respondents and the respondents' level of educational attainment and level of socio-economic income.

Presentation of Data Related to Research Question 5

Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' residential longevity/history in the community?

An independent *t*-test (see Table 26) was used to investigate and identify whether or not there were significant differences between the responses of respondents who Grew Up in Montclair and who were New To Montclair. Table 26 shows the results of the independent *t*-test (2-tailed significance), including Levene's Test for Equality of Variances.

According to Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, there was a statistically significant difference in the response of those who Grew Up in Montclair, and those New To Montclair with respect to the criterion Caring Reputation of the School, therefore, equal variances were not utilized for Caring Reputation of the School on the independent *t*-test. Equal variances not assumed, there was a statistically significant difference in the response of those who Grew Up in Montclair and those New To Montclair in relationship to the criterion of Caring Reputation of the School. Caring Reputation of the School had a *t*-value of -2.043 , and a significance level (2-tailed) of $.046$ where $p < .05$.

There was also a statistically significant difference in the response of those who Grew Up in Montclair and those New To Montclair in relationship to the criterion of Location of School. Location of School had a *t*-value of -2.109 , and a significance level (2-tailed) of $.039$ where $p < .05$. No other statistically significant differences were identified between the two groups of respondents, Grew Up and New To Montclair in response to the formulated criteria for school choice selection and preference.

Table 26

Independent *t*-tests

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		<i>t</i> -test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Magnet School Theme/Program Emphasis	.015	.902	-1.197	61	.236	-.28	.24	-.76	.19
			-1.169	32.519	.251	.21	.24	-.78	.21
Overall Perceived School Quality	2.632	.110	.652	61	.517	.10	.16	-.21	.42
			.581	27.093	.566	.10	.18	-.26	.47
Caring Reputation of the School	13.449	.001	-1.725	61	.090	-.25	.15	-.54	4.00E-02
			-2.043	51.705	.046	-.25	.12	-.50	-4.40E-03
Academic Reputation of the School	6.936	.001	-1.216	61	.229	-.16	.13	-.42	.10
			-1.380	46.686	.174	-.16	.12	-.39	7.34E-02
Word of Mouth	.006	.938	1.697	60	.095	.45	.27	-8.06E-02	.98
			1.756	37.492	.087	.45	.26	-6.90E-02	.97
Reputation of School Staff	.576	.451	-.824	61	.413	-.17	.21	-.59	.24
			-.865	38.375	.392	-.17	.20	-.57	.23

(table continues)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Size of Student Population/Building	3.839	.055	-1.106	61	.273	-.27	.24	-.76	.22
			-1.252	46.268	.217	-.27	.22	-.70	.16
Location of School	.564	.456	-2.109	61	.039	-.70	.33	-1.36	-3.63E-02
			-2.134	35.148	.040	-.70	.33	-1.36	-3.49E-02
Overall School Building Atmosphere	.106	.746	.227	61	.821	4.19E-02	.18	-.33	.41
			.222	32.654	.825	4.19E-02	.19	-.34	.43
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	.088	.767	-.938	61	.352	-.29	.31	-.92	.33
			-.926	33.312	.361	-.29	.32	-.94	.35
Instructional Approach	2.934	.092	-1.340	61	.185	-.21	.16	-.53	.11
			-1.367	35.827	.180	-.21	.16	-.53	.10
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	1.864	.177	1.150	61	.254	.31	.27	-.23	.84
			1.198	37.629	.239	.31	.26	-.21	.82

(table continues)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Siblings Attending School	2.071	.155	-.296	59	.768	-.11	.37	-.85	.63
			-.307	34.541	.761	-.11	.36	-.84	.62
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	.403	.528	.512	61	.610	9.45E-02	.18	-.27	.46
			.471	28.659	.641	9.45E-02	.20	-.32	.51
School Reflects Family Values	4.606	.036	-1.227	60	.225	-.21	.17	-.56	.13
			-1.397	42.996	.170	-.21	.15	-.52	9.42E-02
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	.113	.738	.320	61	.750	7.66E-02	.24	.40	.55
			.319	34.041	.752	7.66E-02	.24	.41	.56

Table 27

Comparison of the Means Based on Residential Longevity / History in the Community

CRITERIA	RESIDENTIAL HISTORY	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Magnet School	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.58	.90	.21
Theme/Program Emphasis	New To Mtc.	44	1.86	.85	.13
Overall Perceived School	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.42	.69	.16
Quality	New To Mtc.	44	1.32	.52	.00781
Caring Reputation of the	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.16	.37	.0085
School	New To Mtc.	44	1.41	.58	.0088
Academic Reputation of the	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.16	.37	.0085
School	New To Mtc.	44	1.32	.52	.0078
Word of Mouth	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	2.47	.90	.21
	New To Mtc.	43	2.02	.99	.15
Reputation of School Staff	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.58	.69	.16
	New To Mtc.	44	1.75	.78	.12
Size of the Student	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.53	.70	.16
Population/Building	New To Mtc.	44	1.80	.95	.14
Location of School	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	2.21	1.18	.27
	New To Mtc.	44	2.91	1.22	.18
Overall School	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.47	.70	.16
Building/Atmosphere	New To Mtc.	44	1.43	.66	.0099
Tied to Family History	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	2.84	1.17	.27
Or Legacy in the Community	New To Mtc.	44	3.14	1.13	.17
Instructional Approach	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.26	.56	.13
	New To Mtc.	44	1.48	.59	.0089
Friends Attending or Planning	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	3.58	.90	.21
To Attend Same School	New To Mtc.	44	3.27	1.00	.15
Siblings Attending School	Grew Up in Mtc.	18	2.61	1.24	.29
	New To Mtc.	43	2.72	1.35	.21

		<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.53	.77	.18
	New To Mtc.	44	1.43	.62	.0094
School Reflects Family Values	Grew Up in Mtc.	18	1.33	.49	.11
	New To Mtc.	44	1.55	.66	.0100
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	Grew Up in Mtc.	19	1.89	.88	.20
	New To Mtc.	44	1.82	.87	.13

Table 27 shows the mean scores of respondents, those who Grew Up and those New To the community, who rated the school selection/preference criteria using a 4-point Likert Scale of varying degrees of importance; 1 (Very Important) through 4 (Least Important) with a midpoint of 2.50. Mean scores equal to and less than 2.50 were assumed to represent a higher degree of importance to respondents than mean scores above 2.50. Mean scores from both groups, those who Grew Up and those New To the community, ranged from 1.16 to 3.58. Overall, the highest and lowest mean scores from those who Grew Up in Montclair ranged from 1.16 to 3.58; and from 1.32 to 3.14 from those New To Montclair. Most of the criteria was valued with a higher degree of importance by the respondents thus the majority of lower mean scores. Overall, 11 of the 16 criteria yielded mean scores from both groups of less than 2.00. Word of Mouth, and Location of School (Grew Up in Montclair only) had mean scores from both groups that ranged from 2.02 to 2.47 but all were still below the midpoint of the scale of 2.50. Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community, Friends Attending or Planning to Attend, and Siblings Attending School indicated a lesser degree of importance by both groups as well as Location of School only by those New To Montclair, thus the higher mean scores.

These scores exceeded the midpoint of 2.50, and ranged from 2.91 to 3.58. Respondents who Grew Up in Montclair reported the overall lowest mean scores (i.e. the greatest value of importance) with respect to the criteria Caring Reputation of the School, and Academic Reputation of the School. Each criterion had a mean score of 1.16 and a standard deviation of .37. Respondents who were New To Montclair reported the lowest mean score (i.e. the greater value of importance) of 1.32 with a standard deviation of 7.81E-02 with respect to the criterion Overall Perceived School Quality.

Mean scores for the two criteria identified as having significantly different responses between respondents who Grew Up in the community or were New To the community ranged from 1.16 to 2.91. Those who grew up in the community reported the lower mean score in each instance. For the criterion, Caring Reputation of the School, those who grew up in the Montclair reported a mean score of 1.16, and a standard deviation of .37 as opposed to a mean score of 1.41, and a standard deviation of .58 for those new to the community. For the criterion, Location of School, those who grew up in the Montclair reported a mean score of 2.21 and a standard deviation of 1.18 as opposed to a mean score of 2.91, and a standard deviation of 1.22 for those new to the community.

Table 28

Ranked Mean Scores by Residential Longevity/History in the Community

Grew Up In Montclair		New To Montclair	
Selection Criteria	Mean	Selection Criteria	Mean
Academic Reputation of the School	1.16	Academic Reputation of the School	1.32
Caring Reputation of the School	1.16	Overall Perceived School Quality	1.32

Grew Up In Montclair		New To Montclair -	
Selection Criteria	Mean	Selection Criteria	Mean
Instructional Approach	1.26	Caring Reputation of the School	1.41
School Reflects Family Values	1.33	Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School	1.43
Overall Perceived School Quality	1.42	Overall School Building Atmosphere	1.43
Overall School Building/Atmosphere	1.47	Instructional Approach	1.48
Size of Student Population / Building	1.53	School Reflects Family Values	1.55
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School	1.53	Reputation of School Staff	1.75
Reputation of School Staff	1.58	Size of Student Population / Building	1.80
Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis	1.58	Opportunities for Parent Involvement	1.82
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	1.89	Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis	1.86
Location of School	2.21	Word of Mouth	2.02
Word of Mouth	2.47	Siblings Attending School	2.72
Siblings Attending School	2.61	Location of School	2.91
Tied to Family History/Legacy in the Community	2.84	Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community	3.14
Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School	3.58	Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School	3.27

In Summary, Table 28 presents the ranked mean scores of the criteria for school selection/preference of the respondents by residential longevity / history in the community, and identifies the degree of importance of the reason in the decision-making process for school selection/preference between the two groups, Grew Up in Montclair, and New To Montclair. Overall, the two groups ranked all 16 formulated criteria as having some degree of importance in choosing a school for their African American child. For both groups of respondents who Grew Up and were New To Montclair, the criteria Siblings Attending School, Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community, and Friends Attending /Planning to Attend Same School seemed not as important with means scores exceeding the 2.50 midpoint of the scale at the Somewhat Important to Least Important range; and for respondents who were New To Montclair, the criterion Location of School seemed not as important based on a mean score that also exceeded the midpoint of 2.50. Academic Reputation of the School, Caring Reputation of the School, and Instructional Approach emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to the respondents who Grew Up in Montclair; and Academic Reputation of the School, Overall Perceived School Quality, and Caring Reputation of the school emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to respondents New To Montclair. Several criteria, also receiving a mean score of less than 1.50, were considered very important by respondents who Grew Up in Montclair and included School Reflects Family Values (1.33), Overall Perceived School Quality (1.42), and Overall School Building/Atmosphere (1.47). Other criterion that was considered very important by respondents who were New To Montclair also received a mean score of less than 1.50,

and includes Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School (1.43); Overall School Building Atmosphere (1.43); and Instructional Approach (1.48).

Summary Analysis of the Findings Related to Research Question 5

Overall, responses to 2 of the 16 school selection/preference criteria emerged as statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level with respect to the respondents' residential longevity or history in the community. There was significant difference between the respondents who Grew Up in the community and those New To the community with respect to the criterion Caring Reputation of the School. It had a t -value of -2.043 and a level of significance at $.046$. Responses to the criterion Caring Reputation of the School by respondents who Grew Up in the community had a mean score of 1.16 which was under the midpoint of 2.50 of the scale (Very Important/Important) and also under the 1.50 cut-off for Very Important. Responses by those New To the community had a mean score of 1.41 which was also under the midpoint of 2.50 of the scale and the 1.50 cut-off. Thus both groups of respondents, regardless of residential longevity or history in the community, seemed to regard the Caring Reputation of the School with a high degree of importance.

There was a statistically significant difference between the respondents who Grew Up in the community and those New To the community with respect to the criterion Location of School. It had a t -value of -2.109 , and a level of significance at $.039$. Based on the criterion Location of School, respondents who Grew Up in the community had a mean score of 2.21 which was under the midpoint of 2.50 of the scale (Very Important/Important), and respondents New To the community had a mean score of 2.91 which was above the midpoint of 2.50 of the scale (Somewhat Important/Least

Important). Thus, respondents who grew up in the community appear to have placed a higher degree of importance on the location of the school than respondents new to the community. In summary, two criteria emerged as being impacted by the residential longevity of the respondents.

Based on the frequency analyses and ranked mean score results, six criteria emerged as the reasons that seem to best reflect what matters most to parents/caregivers whether they Grew Up in the community or were New To the community. In summary, criteria reflective of a school's academic quality, caring quality, and ethno-racial sensitivity seem to matter most. These type of criteria had mean score results of less than 1.50 which indicated a high degree rating of Very Important. The top three criteria that emerged as the reasons that matter most to respondents who Grew Up in Montclair were Academic Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.16 and a standard deviation of .37); Caring Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.16 and a standard deviation of .31); and Instructional Approach (with a mean score of 1.26 and a standard deviation of .56), followed by School Reflects Family Values, Overall Perceived School Quality, and Overall School Building Atmosphere. The top three criteria that emerged for parents/caregivers of African American children who were New To Montclair include Academic Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.32 and a standard deviation of .52); Overall Perceived School Quality (with a mean score of 1.32 and a standard deviation of .52); and Caring Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.41, and a standard deviation of .58), followed by Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School, Overall School Building Atmosphere, and Instructional approach. Criteria indicative of the Academic Reputation of the School, and Caring Reputation of the

School emerged as school selection criteria commonly valued and regarded with a high degree of importance by respondents who both Grew Up in Montclair and who were New To Montclair.

Presentation of Data Related to Research Question 6

Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of educational attainment?

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate whether or not the association between the responses of the respondents to the selection/preference criteria and the respondents' level of educational attainment (Post High School Education; College Graduate; and Graduate Degree) was statistically significant.

Table 29

One Way Analysis of Variance Related to Level of Educational Attainment and School Selection/Preference Criteria

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Magnet School Theme/Program Emphasis	Between Groups	.109	2	5.436E-02	.069	.933
	Within Groups	46.165	59	.782		
	Total	46.274	61			
Overall Perceived School Quality	Between Groups	1.754	2	.877	2.807	.068
	Within Groups	18.439	59	.313		
	Total	20.194	61			
Caring Reputation of the School	Between Groups	.614	2	.307	1.049	.357
	Within Groups	17.273	59	.293		
	Total	17.887	61			
Academic Reputation of the School	Between Groups	.891	2	.446	1.955	.151
	Within Groups	13.448	59	.228		
	Total	14.339	61			

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Word of Mouth	Between Groups	6.543	2	3.272	3.769	.029
	Within Groups	50.473	58	.870		
	Total	57.016	60			
Reputation of School Staff	Between Groups	.602	2	.301	.519	.598
	Within Groups	34.173	59	.579		
	Total	34.774	61			
Size of Student Population/Building	Between Groups	2.974	2	1.487	1.934	.154
	Within Groups	45.364	59	.769		
	Total	48.339	61			
Location of School	Between Groups	5.649	2	2.825	1.922	.155
	Within Groups	86.689	59	1.469		
	Total	92.339	61			
Overall School Building Atmosphere	Between Groups	2.080	2	1.040	2.428	.097
	Within Groups	25.275	59	.428		
	Total	27.355	61			
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	Between Groups	4.810	2	2.405	1.977	.148
	Within Groups	71.787	59	1.217		
	Total	76.597	61			
Instructional Approach	Between Groups	1.381	2	.691	2.067	.136
	Within Groups	19.715	59	.334		
	Total	21.097	61			
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	Between Groups	6.122	2	3.061	3.859	.027
	Within Groups	46.798	59	.793		
	Total	52.919	61			
Siblings Attending School	Between Groups	.336	2	.168	.096	.909
	Within Groups	99.847	57	1.752		
	Total	100.183	59			

		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	Between Groups	.220	2	.110	.238	.789
	Within Groups	27.215	59	.461		
	Total	27.435	61			
School Reflects Family Values	Between Groups	1.428	2	.714	1.899	.159
	Within Groups	21.817	58	.376		
	Total	23.246	60			
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	Between Groups	4.907	2	2.453	3.549	.035
	Within Groups	40.787	59	.691		
	Total	45.694	61			

Table 29, ANOVA, shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups with respect to level of educational attainment and the three selection/preference criteria of Word of Mouth; Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School; and Opportunities for Parent Involvement. With respect to the criterion of Word of Mouth, the *F*-value between the three group levels of educational attainment was 3.760 with a .029 level of significance ($p < .05$). With respect to the criterion of Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School, the *F*-value between the three group levels of educational attainment was 3.859 with a .027 level of significance. With respect to the criterion of Opportunities for Parent Involvement, the *F*-value between the three group levels of educational attainment was 3.549 with a .035 level of significance. No other statistically significant associations with respect to level of educational attainment, and selection/preference criteria between the groups were identified.

Table 30

Post Hoc Tests: Tukey HSD Results of Multiple Comparisons Related to Level of Educational Attainment and School Selection/Preference Criteria

Dependent Variable	Education Level-I	Education Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Magnet School Theme/Program Emphasis	Post High School	College Graduate	-.0091	.33	.959
		Graduate Degree	-.12	.33	.926
	College Graduate	Post High School	.0097	.33	.959
		Graduate Degree	-.0029	.25	.992
Graduate Degree	Post High School	.12	.33	.926	
	College Graduate	.0029	.25	.992	
Overall Perceived School Quality	Post High School	College Graduate	.32	.21	.278
		Graduate Degree	.49	.21	.056
	College Graduate	Post High School	-.32	.21	.278
		Graduate Degree	.16	.16	.559
Graduate Degree	Post High School	-.49	.21	.056	
	College Graduate	-.16	.16	.559	
Caring Reputation of the School	Post High School	College Graduate	-.26	.20	.418
		Graduate Degree	-.0085	.20	.903
	College Graduate	Post High School	.26	.20	.418
		Graduate Degree	.17	.15	.489
Graduate Degree	Post High School	.0085	.20	.903	
	College Graduate	-.17	.15	.489	
Academic Reputation of the School	Post High School	College Graduate	-.32	.18	.191
		Graduate Degree	-.11	.18	.793
	College Graduate	Post High School	.32	.18	.191
		Graduate Degree	.20	.13	.287
Graduate Degree	Post High School	.11	.18	.793	
	College Graduate	-.20	.13	.287	

Dependent Variable	Education Level-I	Education Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Word of Mouth	Post High School	College Graduate	.77	.35	.084
		Graduate Degree	.94*	.34	.023
	College Graduate	Post High School	-.77	.35	.084
		Graduate Degree	.17	.26	.803
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	-.94*	.34	.023
		College Graduate	-.17	.26	.803
Reputation of School Staff	Post High School	College Graduate	-.29	.29	.568
		Graduate Degree	-.21	.28	.726
	College Graduate	Post High School	.29	.29	.568
		Graduate Degree	.0077	.21	.929
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.21	.28	.726
		College Graduate	-.0077	.21	.929
Size of the Student Population/Building	Post High School	College Graduate	.10	.33	.951
		Graduate Degree	-.36	.32	.501
	College Graduate	Post High School	-.10	.33	.951
		Graduate Degree	-.46	.24	.147
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.36	.32	.501
		College Graduate	.24	.24	.147
Location of School	Post High School	College Graduate	.33	.46	.757
		Graduate Degree	-.34	.45	.734
	College Graduate	Post High School	.33	.46	.757
		Graduate Degree	-.66	.34	.131
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.34	.45	.734
		College Graduate	.66	.34	.131

Dependent Variable	Education Level-I	Education Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Overall School Building Atmosphere	Post High School	College Graduate	-.0025	.25	.994
		Graduate Degree	.35	.24	.322
	College Graduate	Post High School	.0025	.25	.994
		Graduate Degree	.38	.18	.107
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	-.35	.24	.322
		College Graduate	-.38	.18	.107
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	Post High School	College Graduate	-.36	.42	.665
		Graduate Degree	-.76	.41	.158
	College Graduate	Post High School	.36	.42	.665
		Graduate Degree	-.40	.31	.401
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.76	.41	.158
		College Graduate	.40	.31	.401
Instructional Approach	Post High School	College Graduate	-.44	.22	.114
		Graduate Degree	-.33	.21	.279
	College Graduate	Post High School	.44	.22	.114
		Graduate Degree	.11	.16	.762
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.33	.21	.279
		College Graduate	-.11	.16	.762
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	Post High School	College Graduate	.92*	.34	.022
		Graduate Degree	.54	.33	.240
	College Graduate	Post High School	-.92*	.34	.022
		Graduate Degree	-.38	.25	.281
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	-.54	.33	.240
		College Graduate	.38	.25	.281

Dependent Variable	Education Level-I	Education Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Siblings Attending School	Post High School	College Graduate	.15	.52	.953
		Graduate Degree	.00	.51	1.00
	College Graduate	Post High School	-.15	.52	.953
		Graduate Degree	-.15	.37	.911
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.00	.51	1.00
		College Graduate	.15	.37	.911
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	Post High School	College Graduate	.14	.26	.845
		Graduate Degree	.17	.25	.773
	College Graduate	Post High School	-.14	.26	.845
		Graduate Degree	.0029	.19	.986
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	-.17	.25	.773
		College Graduate	-.0029	.19	.986
School Reflects Family Values	Post High School	College Graduate	-.19	.24	.698
		Graduate Degree	-.42	.24	.182
	College Graduate	Post High School	.19	.24	.698
		Graduate Degree	-.23	.17	.387
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.42	.24	.182
		College Graduate	.23	.17	.387
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	Post High School	College Graduate	-.31	.31	.589
		Graduate Degree	-.74*	.31	.048
	College Graduate	Post High School	.31	.31	.589
		Graduate Degree	-.43	.23	.154
	Graduate Degree	Post High School	.74*	.31	.048
		College Graduate	.43	.23	.154

Table 30, showing multiple comparisons, reports the details of the Post Hoc tests.

Here the Tukey HSD results further pinpoint where the difference between the three

group levels of educational attainment exist with respect to the school selection/preference criteria.

With respect to the criterion Word of Mouth, the mean difference between respondents with a post high school education and those with a graduate degree was .94. The difference is statistically significant at the .023 level ($p < .05$). This result implies that as a criterion of importance for school choice selection, Word of Mouth is more likely to have an impact on respondents with a post high school education than those with a graduate degree. (The mean difference of -.94, also statistically significant at the .023 level, substantiates the inverse that Word of Mouth is less likely to have an impact on respondents with a graduate degree than those with a post high school education.)

With respect to the criterion Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School, the mean difference between respondents with a post high school education and those who are college graduates was .92. The difference is statistically significant at the .022 level ($p < .05$). This result implies that as a criterion of importance for school choice selection, Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School is more likely to have an impact on respondents with a post high school education than those who are college graduates. (The mean difference of -.92, also statistically significant at the .022 level, substantiates the inverse that Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School is less likely to have an impact on respondents who are college graduates than those with a post high school education.)

With respect to the criterion Opportunities for Parent Involvement, the mean difference between respondents with a post high school education and those with a graduate degree was -.74. The difference is statistically significant at the .048 level ($p <$

.05). This result implies that as a criterion of importance for school choice selection, Opportunities for Parent Involvement, is less likely to have an impact on respondents with a post high school education than those who with a graduate degree. (The mean difference of .74, also statistically significant at the .048 level, substantiates the inverse that Opportunities for Parent Involvement is more likely to have an impact on respondents with a graduate degree than those with a post high school education.)

Table 31

Comparison of the Means With Respect to Levels of Educational Attainment

	Education Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis	Post High School	10	1.70	.82
	College Graduate	24	1.79	.58
	Graduate Degree	28	1.82	.42
	Total	62	1.79	.58
Overall Perceived School Quality	Post High School	10	1.70	.82
	College Graduate	24	1.38	.58
	Graduate Degree	28	1.21	.42
	Total	62	1.35	.58
Caring Reputation of the School	Post High School	10	1.20	.42
	College Graduate	24	1.46	.59
	Graduate Degree	28	1.29	.53
	Total	62	1.34	.54
Academic Reputation of the School	Post High School	10	1.10	.32
	College Graduate	24	1.42	.58
	Graduate Degree	28	1.21	.42
	Total	62	1.27	.48

	Education Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Word of Mouth	Post High School	10	2.90	.74
	College Graduate	23	2.13	.97
	Graduate Degree	28	1.96	.96
	Total	61	2.18	.97
Reputation of School Staff	Post High School	10	1.50	.71
	College Graduate	24	1.79	.78
	Graduate Degree	28	1.71	.76
	Total	62	1.71	.7
Size of the Student Population/Building	Post High School	10	1.60	.84
	College Graduate	24	1.50	.72
	Graduate Degree	28	1.96	1.00
	Total	62	1.73	.89
Location of School	Post High School	10	2.70	1.34
	College Graduate	24	2.38	1.17
	Graduate Degree	28	3.04	1.20
	Total	62	2.73	1.23
Overall School Building Atmosphere	Post High School	10	1.60	.84
	College Graduate	24	1.62	.65
	Graduate Degree	28	1.25	.59
	Total	62	1.45	.67
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	Post High School	10	2.60	1.26
	College Graduate	24	2.96	1.08
	Graduate Degree	28	3.36	1.06
	Total	62	3.08	1.12
Instructional Approach	Post High School	10	1.10	.32
	College Graduate	24	1.54	.51
	Graduate Degree	28	1.43	.69
	Total	62	1.42	.59

	Education Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	Post High School	10	4.00	.00
	College Graduate	24	3.08	1.14
	Graduate Degree	28	3.46	.79
	Total	62	3.40	.93
Siblings Attending School	Post High School	9	2.78	1.30
	College Graduate	24	2.63	1.35
	Graduate Degree	27	2.78	1.31
	Total	60	2.72	1.30
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	Post High School	10	1.60	.97
	College Graduate	24	1.46	.51
	Graduate Degree	28	1.43	.69
	Total	62	1.47	.67
School Reflects Family Values	Post High School	9	1.22	.44
	College Graduate	24	1.42	.58
	Graduate Degree	28	1.64	.68
	Total	61	1.49	.62
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	Post High School	10	1.40	.70
	College Graduate	24	1.71	.69
	Graduate Degree	28	2.14	.97
	Total	62	1.85	.87

Table 31 shows the mean scores among three groups of respondents based on the level of educational attainment. Respondents rated the school selection/preference criteria using a 4-point Likert Scale of varying degrees of importance; 1 (Very Important) through 4 (Least Important) with a midpoint of 2.50. Mean scores equal to and less than 2.50 were assumed to represent a higher degree of importance to respondents than mean scores above 2.50. Overall, the mean score totals from among the three groups (Post High

School, College Graduate, and Graduate Degree) ranged from 1.27 to 3.40. The lowest (greater degree of importance) and highest (lesser degree of importance) mean scores for Post High School respondents ranged from 1.10 to 4.00; for College Graduate respondents from 1.38 to 2.96; Graduate Degree respondents ranged from 1.21 to 3.46. Most of the criteria was valued with a higher degree of importance by the respondents thus the majority of lower mean scores. In turn, 11 of the 16 criteria yielded total mean scores from among the three groups of less than 2.00. Several mean scores exceeded the midpoint of 2.50, and ranged from 2.60 to 4.00, indicating criterion that was rated with a lesser degree of importance. Post High School respondents reported the overall lowest mean score (i.e. the greatest value of importance) with respect to two criteria, Academic Reputation of the School, and Instructional Approach. Each criterion received a mean score of 1.10, and a standard deviation of .32. Post High School respondents also reported the overall highest mean score (i.e. the lesser value of importance) with respect to the criterion, Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School. The criterion received a mean score of 4.00, and a standard deviation of .00.

The following mean scores were reported for the responses to the three criteria (Word of Mouth; Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School; and Opportunities for Parent Involvement) where significant difference was found between the groups with regard to the specific level of educational attainment. As detailed by the Tukey results, for Word of Mouth, Post High School respondents had a mean of 2.90 and a standard deviation of .74, and Graduate Degree respondents had a mean of 1.96, and a standard deviation of .96. For Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School, Post High School respondents had a mean of 4.00, and a standard deviation of .00, and

College Graduate respondents had a mean of 3.08, and a standard deviation of 1.14. For Opportunities for Parent Involvement, Post High School respondents had a mean of 1.40, and a standard deviation of .70, and Graduate Degree respondents had a mean of 2.14, and a standard deviation of .97.

In Summary, Table 32 presents the ranked mean scores of the criteria for school selection/preference of the respondents by level of educational attainment, and identifies the degree of importance of the reason in the decision-making process for school selection/preference between the three groups, Post High School, College Graduate, and Graduate Degree. Overall, the respondents, regardless of educational level, ranked all sixteen formulated criteria as having some degree of importance when choosing a school for their African American children. For Post High School respondents, the criteria Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; Location of School; Siblings Attending School; Word of Mouth; and Friends Attending /Planning to Attend Same School seemed not as important with means scores exceeding the 2.50 midpoint of the scale into the Somewhat Important to Least Important range. For College Graduate respondents, the criteria Siblings Attending School; Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; and Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School seemed not as important with mean scores exceeding the midpoint of 2.50. For Graduate Degree respondents, the criteria Siblings Attending School; Location of School; Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; and Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School seemed not as important with mean scores exceeding the midpoint of 2.50. Academic Reputation of the School, Instructional Approach, and Caring Reputation of the School emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to the respondents with a Post High School

Table 32

Ranked Mean Scores by Level of Educational Attainment

Post High School		College Graduate		Graduate Degree	
Selection Criteria	Mean	Selection Criteria	Mean	Selection Criteria	Mean
Academic Reputation of the School	1.10	Overall Perceived School Quality	1.38	Academic Reputation of School	1.21
Instructional Approach	1.10	Academic Reputation of School	1.42	Overall Perceived School Quality	1.21
Caring Reputation of the School	1.20	School Reflects Family Values	1.42	Overall School Building Atmos.	1.25
School Reflects Family Values	1.22	Appreciation of Diversity	1.46	Caring Reputation of the School	1.29
Opportunities for Parent Involve.	1.40	Caring Reputation of the School	1.46	Appreciation of Diversity	1.43
Reputation of School Staff	1.50	Size of Student Population/Build.	1.50	Instructional Approach	1.43
Size of Student Population/Building	1.60	Instructional Approach	1.54	School Reflects Family Values	1.64
Overall School Building Atmosphere	1.60	Overall School Building Atmos.	1.62	Reputation of School Staff	1.71
Appreciation of Diversity	1.60	Opportunities for Parent Involve.	1.71	Magnet School Theme/Emphasis	1.82
Overall Perceived School Quality	1.70	Magnet School Theme/Emphasis	1.79	Size of Student Population/Build.	1.96
Magnet School Theme/Emphasis	1.70	Reputation of School Staff	1.79	Word of Mouth	1.96
Tied to Family History/Legacy	2.60	Word of Mouth	2.13	Opportunities for Parent Involve.	2.14
Location of School	2.70	Location of School	2.38	Siblings Attending School	2.78
Siblings Attending School	2.78	Sibling Attending School	2.63	Location of School	3.04
Word of Mouth	2.90	Tied to Family History/Legacy	2.96	Tied to Family History/Legacy	3.36
Friends Attending Same School	4.00	Friends Attending Same School	3.08	Friends Attending Same School	3.46

education. Overall Perceived School Quality, Academic Reputation of the School, and School Reflects Family Values emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to respondents who were College Graduates. Academic Reputation of the School, Overall Perceived School Quality, and Overall School Building Atmosphere emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to the respondents with a Graduate Degree. Several other criteria, with mean scores of less than 1.50, were considered very important by Post High School respondents and included School Reflects Family Values, and Opportunities for Parent Involvement. Several other criteria, with mean scores of less than 1.50, were considered very important by College Graduate respondents and included Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate, and Caring Reputation of the School. Several other criteria, also with mean scores of less than 1.50, were considered very important by Graduate Degree respondents and included Caring Reputation of the School, Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate, and Instructional Approach.

Summary Analysis of the Findings Related to Research Question 6

Overall, responses to 3 of the 16 school selection/preference criteria emerged as statistically significant between the groups at the $p < .05$ level with respect to the respondents' level of educational attainment. Levels of Educational Attainment included Post High School, College Graduate or Graduate Degree. Significance between the groups was identified further by the Tukey results based on the Post Hoc tests.

With respect to the criterion, Word of Mouth, the mean total between the groups was 2.18 with a group total standard deviation of .97. Here the F -value between the groups was 3.769 with a .029 level of significance ($p < .05$). According to the Tukey HSD

results, significant difference at the .023 level existed between respondents with a Post High School education, and a Graduate Degree. The mean difference between the two was .94 or the inverse of -.94.

With respect to the criterion, Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School, the mean total between the groups was 3.40 with a group total standard deviation of .93. Here the *F*-value between the groups was 3.859 with a .027 level of significance ($p < .05$). According to the Tukey HSD results, significant difference at the .022 level existed between respondents with a Post High School education, and those who were College Graduates. The mean difference between the two was .92 or the inverse -.92.

With respect to the criterion, Opportunities for Parent Involvement, the mean total between the groups was 1.85 with a group total standard deviation of .87. Here the *F*-value between the groups was 3.549 with a .035 level of significance ($p < .05$). According to the Tukey HSD results, significant difference at the .048 level existed between respondents with a Post High School education, and a Graduate Degree. The mean difference between the two was .74 or the inverse of -.74.

In summarizing the data with respect to the significant difference between the groups, significant difference was found to exist between respondents with a Post High School education and those who were either college graduates or held graduate degrees. Based on the data, it can be implied that respondents with a Post High School education are more likely than College Graduate respondents to be influenced by the selection/preference criterion Word of Mouth. Respondents with a Post High School education are also more likely than Graduate Degree respondents to be influenced by the selection/preference criterion Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School. On

the other hand, Post High School respondents are less likely to be influenced by the selection/preference criterion Opportunities for Parent Involvement than respondents with a Graduate Degree. In summary, the selection of three criteria was influenced by the respondents' level of educational attainment.

Based on the frequency analyses and ranked mean score results, five to six criteria each emerged as the reasons that seem to best reflect what matters most to parents/caregivers according to their level of educational attainment whether Post High School, College Graduate, and Graduate Degree. In summary, criteria, all with means under 1.50, reflective of a school's academic quality, caring quality, and ethno-racial sensitivity seem to matter most. Based on the ranking of the mean scores of the respondents by level of educational attainment, the top three criteria that emerged as the reasons that matter most to respondents with a Post High School education, when making a school choice selection for their African American children included: Academic Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.10 and a standard deviation of .32); Instructional Approach (with a mean score of 1.10 and a standard deviation of .32); and Caring Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.20 and a standard deviation of .42), followed by School Reflects Family Values, and Opportunities for Parent Involvement. The top three criteria that emerged as the reasons that matter most to College Graduate respondents, when making a school choice selection for their African American children included: Overall Perceived School Quality (with a mean score of 1.38, and a standard deviation of .58); Academic Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.42 and a standard deviation of .58); and School Reflects Family Values (with a mean score of 1.42, and a standard deviation of .58), followed by Appreciation of

Diversity, and Caring Reputation of the School. The top three criteria that emerged as the reasons that matter most to Graduate Degree respondents, when making a school choice selection for their African American children included: Academic Reputation of the School (with a mean score of 1.21, and a standard deviation of .42); Overall Perceived School Quality (with a mean score of 1.21 and a standard deviation of .42); and Overall School Building Atmosphere (with a mean score of 1.25, and a standard deviation of .59), followed by Caring Reputation of the School, Appreciation of Diversity, and Instructional Approach.

Presentation of Data Related to Research Question 7

Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of socio-economic status/income?

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate whether or not the association between the responses of the respondents to the selection/preference criteria and the respondents' level of income (Lower: 0- \$49,999; Middle: \$50,000 - \$99,999; and Higher: \$100,000 and over) was statistically significant.

Table 33, ANOVA, shows that there were no statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the groups with respect to level of socio-economic income and school selection/preference criteria.

Table 33

One Way Analysis of Variance Related to Socio-Economic Income Status and School Selection/Preference Criteria

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Magnet School Theme/Program Emphasis	Between Groups	.983	2	.492	.642	.530
	Within Groups	44.906	60	.765		
	Total	46.889	62			
Overall Perceived School Quality	Between Groups	.150	2	.0074	.223	.801
	Within Groups	20.168	60	.336		
	Total	20.317	62			
Caring Reputation of the School	Between Groups	1.246	2	.623	2.232	.116
	Within Groups	16.754	60	.279		
	Total	18.000	62			
Academic Reputation of the School	Between Groups	.638	2	.319	1.389	.257
	Within Groups	13.775	60	.230		
	Total	14.413	62			
Word of Mouth	Between Groups	2.035	2	1.017	1.065	.351
	Within Groups	56.352	59	.955		
	Total	58.387	61			
Reputation of School Staff	Between Groups	5.177E-02	2	.0025	.044	.957
	Within Groups	35.218	60	.587		
	Total	35.270	62			
Size of Student Population/Building	Between Groups	3.166	2	1.583	2.078	.134
	Within Groups	45.692	60	.762		
	Total	48.857	62			
Location of School	Between Groups	1.489	2	.744	.476	.623
	Within Groups	93.781	60	1.563		
	Total	95.270	62			

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Overall School Building Atmosphere	Between Groups	1.650	2	.825	1.910	.157
	Within Groups	25.906	60	.432		
	Total	27.556	62			
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	Between Groups	4.014	2	2.007	1.567	.217
	Within Groups	76.843	60	1.281		
	Total	80.857	62			
Instructional Approach	Between Groups	.409	2	.205	.589	.558
	Within Groups	20.860	60	.348		
	Total	21.270	62			
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	Between Groups	.485	2	.242	.250	.779
	Within Groups	58.119	60	.969		
	Total	58.603	62			
Siblings Attending School	Between Groups	.300	2	.150	.085	.919
	Within Groups	102.782	58	1.772		
	Total	103.082	60			
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	Between Groups	6.638E-02	2	.0033	..072	.930
	Within Groups	27.215	59	.461		
	Total	27.435	61			
School Reflects Family Values	Between Groups	.627	2	.313	.809	.450
	Within Groups	22.857	59	.387		
	Total	23.246	60			
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	Between Groups	.831	2	.415	.547	.582
	Within Groups	45.582	60	.760		
	Total	46.413	62			

Table 34, detailing the Post Hoc Test results, further substantiates the lack of statistically significant differences between the three income groups of Lower (0 - \$49,999); Middle (\$50,000 - \$99,999); and Higher (\$100,000 and above).

Table 34

Post Hoc Tests: Tukey HSD Results of Multiple Comparisons Related to Level of Income and School Selection/Preference Criteria

Dependent Variable	Income Level-I	Income Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Magnet School Theme/Program Emphasis	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.35	.31	.508
		Higher Level	-.20	.32	.797
	Middle Level	Lower Level	.35	.31	.508
		Higher Level	.14	.24	.828
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.20	.32	.797
		Middle Level	-.14	.24	.828
Overall Perceived School Quality	Lower Level	Middle Level	.13	.21	.796
		Higher Level	.12	.21	.834
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.13	.21	.796
		Higher Level	-.0019	.16	.997
	Higher Level	Lower Level	-.12	.21	.834
		Middle Level	.0019	.16	.997
Caring Reputation of the School	Lower Level	Middle Level	.39	.19	.108
		Higher Level	.34	.19	.181
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.39	.19	.108
		Higher Level	-.0041	.15	.957
	Higher Level	Lower Level	-.34	.19	.181
		Middle Level	.0041	.15	.957
Academic Reputation of the School	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.17	.17	.586
		Higher Level	.29	.17	.233
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.17	.17	.586
		Higher Level	.12	.13	.647
	Higher Level	Lower Level	-.29	.17	.233
		Middle Level	-.12	.13	.647

Dependent Variable	Income Level-I	Income Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Word of Mouth	Lower Level	Middle Level	.23	.35	.785
		Higher Level	.50	.36	.350
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.23	.35	.785
		Higher Level	.26	.27	.603
	Higher Level	Lower Level	-.50	.36	.350
		Middle Level	-.26	.27	.603
Reputation of School Staff	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.0077	.27	.956
		Higher Level	-.0072	.28	.964
	Middle Level	Lower Level	.0077	.27	.956
		Higher Level	.0059	.21	1.00
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.0072	.28	.964
		Middle Level	-.0005	.21	1.00
Size of the Student Population/Building	Lower Level	Middle Level	.0009	.31	.999
		Higher Level	-.45	.32	.332
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.0009	.31	.999
		Higher Level	-.46	.24	.144
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.45	.32	.332
		Middle Level	.46	.24	.144
Location of School	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.19	.44	.906
		Higher Level	-.42	.46	.628
	Middle Level	Lower Level	.19	.44	.906
		Higher Level	-.23	.35	.783
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.42	.46	.628
		Middle Level	.23	.35	.783

Dependent Variable	Income Level-I	Income Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Overall School Building Atmosphere	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.15	.23	.792
		Higher Level	.20	.24	.671
	Middle Level	Lower Level	.15	.23	.792
		Higher Level	.36	.18	.133
	Higher Level	Lower Level	-.20	.24	.671
		Middle Level	-.36	.18	.133
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.33	.40	.696
		Higher Level	-.70	.41	.217
	Middle Level	Lower Level	.33	.40	.696
		Higher Level	-.37	.31	.474
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.70	.41	.217
		Middle Level	.37	.31	.474
Instructional Approach	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.12	.21	.835
		Higher Level	-.23	.21	.543
	Middle Level	Lower Level	.12	.21	.835
		Higher Level	-.11	.16	.791
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.23	.21	.543
		Middle Level	.11	.16	.791
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.25	.35	.762
		Higher Level	-.19	.36	.852
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.25	.35	.762
		Higher Level	.0053	.27	.979
	Higher Level	Middle Level	.19	.36	.852
		Higher Level	-.0053	.27	.979

Dependent Variable	Income Level-I	Income Level-J	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Siblings Attending School	Lower Level	Middle Level	-.20	.48	.912
		Higher Level	-.15	.49	.949
	Middle Level	Lower Level	.20	.48	.912
		Higher Level	.0045	.38	.992
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.15	.49	.949
		Middle Level	-.0045	.38	.992
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	Lower Level	Middle Level	.0026	.24	.994
		Higher Level	-.0045	.25	.981
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.0026	.24	.994
		Higher Level	-.0071	.19	.924
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.0045	.25	.981
		Middle Level	.0071	.19	.924
School Reflects Family Values	Lower Level	Middle Level	.18	.22	.713
		Higher Level	-.0037	.23	.985
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.18	.22	.713
		Higher Level	-.21	.17	.446
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.0037	.23	.985
		Middle Level	.21	.17	.446
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	Lower Level	Middle Level	.19	.31	.805
		Higher Level	-.0049	.32	.987
	Middle Level	Lower Level	-.19	.31	.805
		Higher Level	-.24	.24	.576
	Higher Level	Lower Level	.0049	.32	.987
		Middle Level	.24	.24	.576

Table 35

Comparison of the Means With Respect to Income Levels

	Income Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis	Lower Level	11	1.55	.52
	Middle Level	28	1.89	.96
	Higher Level	24	1.75	.90
	Total	63	1.78	.87
Overall Perceived School Quality	Lower Level	11	1.45	.52
	Middle Level	28	1.32	.55
	Higher Level	24	1.33	.64
	Total	63	1.35	.57
Caring Reputation of the School	Lower Level	11	1.64	.67
	Middle Level	28	1.25	.52
	Higher Level	24	1.29	.46
	Total	63	1.33	.54
Academic Reputation of the School	Lower Level	11	1.45	.69
	Middle Level	28	1.29	.46
	Higher Level	24	1.17	.38
	Total	63	1.27	.48
Word of Mouth	Lower Level	11	2.45	.82
	Middle Level	27	2.22	1.05
	Higher Level	24	1.96	.95
	Total	62	2.16	.98
Reputation of School Staff	Lower Level	11	1.54	.50
	Middle Level	28	1.71	.85
	Higher Level	24	1.71	.75
	Total	63	1.70	.75

	Income Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Size of the Student Population/Building	Lower Level	11	1.55	.69
	Middle Level	28	1.54	.74
	Higher Level	24	2.00	1.06
	Total	63	1.71	.89
Location of School	Lower Level	11	2.45	1.37
	Middle Level	28	2.64	1.22
	Higher Level	24	2.88	1.23
	Total	63	2.70	1.24
Overall School Building Atmosphere	Lower Level	11	1.45	.69
	Middle Level	28	1.61	.69
	Higher Level	24	1.25	.61
	Total	63	1.44	.67
Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community	Lower Level	11	2.64	1.21
	Middle Level	28	2.96	1.17
	Higher Level	24	3.33	1.05
	Total	63	3.05	1.14
Instructional Approach	Lower Level	11	1.27	.47
	Middle Level	28	1.39	.57
	Higher Level	24	1.50	.66
	Total	63	1.41	.59
Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School	Lower Level	11	3.18	1.25
	Middle Level	28	3.43	.92
	Higher Level	24	3.37	.92
	Total	63	3.37	.97
Siblings Attending School	Lower Level	11	2.55	1.44
	Middle Level	27	2.74	1.29
	Higher Level	23	2.70	1.33
	Total	61	2.69	1.31

	Income Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate	Lower Level	11	1.45	.52
	Middle Level	28	1.43	.74
	Higher Level	24	1.50	.66
	Total	63	1.46	.67
School Reflects Family Values	Lower Level	11	1.55	.69
	Middle Level	27	1.37	.56
	Higher Level	24	1.58	.65
	Total	62	1.48	.62
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	Post High School	11	1.91	.70
	College Graduate	28	1.71	.85
	Graduate Degree	24	1.96	.95
	Total	63	1.84	.87

Table 35 shows the mean scores among three groups of respondents based on socio-economic income level. Respondents rated the school selection/preference criteria using a 4-point Likert Scale of varying degrees of importance; 1 (Very Important) through 4 (Least Important) with a midpoint of 2.50. Mean scores equal to and less than 2.50 were assumed to represent a higher degree of importance to respondents than mean scores above 2.50. Overall, the mean score totals from among the three income groups (Lower; Middle; and Higher) ranged from 1.17 to 3.43. The lowest (greater degree of importance) and highest (lesser degree of importance) mean scores for Lower income respondents ranged from 1.27 to 3.18; for Middle income respondents from 1.25 to 3.43; and for Higher income respondents from 1.21 to 3.37. Most of the criteria was valued with a higher degree of importance by the respondents thus the majority of individual and total lower mean scores. In turn, eleven of the sixteen criteria yielded total mean scores

from among the three groups of less than 2.00 which indicates a very important valuing of the criteria. Four total mean scores exceeded the midpoint of 2.50, and ranged from 2.69 to 3.37, indicating criterion that was rated with a lesser degree of importance. Higher income respondents reported the overall lowest mean score (i.e. the greatest value of importance) with respect to the criteria, Academic Reputation of the School. The criterion reported a mean score of 1.17, and a standard deviation of .38. Middle income respondents reported the overall highest mean score (i.e. the lesser value of importance) with respect to the criterion, Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School. The criterion reported a mean score of 3.43, and a standard deviation of .92.

In summary, Table 36 presents the ranked mean scores of the criteria for school selection/preference of the respondents by income level, and identifies the degree of importance of the reason in the decision-making process for school selection between the three income levels, Lower (0 - \$49,999); Middle (\$50,000 - \$99,999); and Higher (\$100,000 – over). Overall, the respondents, regardless of income level, ranked all 16 formulated criteria as having some degree of importance when choosing a school for their African American children. For Lower income respondents, the criteria Siblings Attending School; Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; and Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same seemed not as important with means scores exceeding the 2.50 midpoint of the scale into the Somewhat Important to Least Important range. For Middle income respondents, the criteria Location of School; Siblings Attending School; Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; and Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School seemed not as important with mean scores exceeding the midpoint of 2.50. For Higher income respondents, the

Table 36

Ranked Mean Scores by Income Level

Lower Income Level (0 - \$49,999)		Middle Income Level (\$50,000 - \$99,999)		Higher Income Level (\$100,000 and over)	
Selection Criteria	Mean	Selection Criteria	Mean	Selection Criteria	Mean
Instructional Approach	1.27	Caring Reputation of School	1.25	Academic Reputation of School	1.17
Overall Perceived School Quality	1.45	Academic Reputation of School	1.29	Overall School Building Atmos.	1.25
Appreciation of Diversity	1.45	Overall Perceived School Quality	1.32	Caring Reputation of the School	1.29
Academic Reputation of the School	1.45	School Reflects Family Values	1.37	Overall Perceived School Quality	1.33
Overall School Building Atmosphere	1.45	Instructional Approach	1.39	Instructional Approach	1.50
Magnet School Theme/Emphasis	1.55	Appreciation of Diversity	1.43	Appreciation of Diversity	1.50
Size of Student Population/Building	1.55	Size of Student Population/Build.	1.54	School Reflects Family Values	1.58
School Reflects Family Values	1.55	Overall School Building Atmos.	1.61	Reputation of School Staff	1.71
Reputation of School Staff	1.64	Reputation of School Staff	1.71	Magnet School Theme/Emphasis	1.75
Caring Reputation of the School	1.64	Opportunities for Parent Involve.	1.71	Word of Mouth	1.96
Opportunities for Parent Involve.	1.91	Magnet School Theme/Emphasis	1.89	Opportunities for Parent Involve.	1.96
Word of Mouth	2.45	Word of Mouth	2.22	Size of Student Population/Build.	2.00
Location of School	2.45	Location of School	2.64	Siblings Attending School	2.70
Siblings Attending School	2.55	Sibling Attending School	2.74	Location of School	2.88
Tied to Family History / Legacy	2.64	Tied to Family History/Legacy	2.96	Tied to Family History/Legacy	3.33
Friends Attending Same School	3.18	Friends Attending Same School	3.43	Friends Attending Same School	3.37

criteria Siblings Attending School; Location of School; Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; and Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School seemed not as important with mean scores exceeding the midpoint of 2.50. Instructional approach (with a mean of 1.27 and a standard deviation of .47); Overall Perceived School Quality (with a mean of 1.45 and a standard deviation of .52); and Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate (with a mean of 1.45, and a standard deviation of .52) emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to the Lower income respondents. Caring Reputation of the School (with a mean of 1.25, and a standard deviation of .52); Academic Reputation of the School (with a mean of 1.29, and a standard deviation of .46); and ; and Overall Perceived School Quality (with a mean of 1.32, and a standard deviation of .55) emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to the Middle income respondents. Academic Reputation of the School (with a mean of 1.17, and a standard deviation of .38); Overall School Building Atmosphere (with a mean of 1.25, and a standard deviation of .61); and Caring Reputation of the School (with a mean of 1.29, and a standard deviation of .46) emerged as the top three criteria that seemed to matter most to Higher income respondents. Several other criteria, with mean scores of less than 1.50, were considered very important by Lower income respondents and included Academic Reputation of the School; and Overall School Building Atmosphere. Several other criteria, with mean scores of less than 1.50, were considered very important by Middle income respondents and included School Reflects Family Values; Instructional Approach; and Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate. The criterion, Overall Perceived School Quality, also with

a mean score of less than 1.50, was considered very important by Higher income respondents.

Summary Analysis of the Findings Related to Research Question 7

Overall, there were no statistically significant findings between the groups with respect to level of socio-economic income and school selection/preference criteria. The Post Hoc tests and Tukey results further substantiated this finding with respect to the three specific income levels.

Based on the ranking of the mean scores of the respondents by income level, the three top criteria that emerged as reasons that seem to matter most to Lower income respondents when making a school choice selection for their African American children are Instructional Approach; Overall Perceived School Quality; and Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate, followed by Academic Reputation of the School, and Overall School Building Atmosphere. The three top criteria that emerged as the reasons that matter most to Middle income respondents are Caring Reputation of the School; Academic Reputation of the School; and Overall Perceived School Quality, followed by School Reflects Family Values, Instructional Approach, and Appreciation of Diversity. The top three criteria that emerged as the reasons that matter most to Higher income respondents when making a school choice selection for their African American children are Academic Reputation of the School; Overall School Building Atmosphere; and Caring Reputation of the School, followed by Overall Perceived School Quality.

In summary, the formulated selection/preference criteria that was used by parents/caregivers when considering a school of choice for their African American children, was not influenced by the respondents' level of socio-economic income.

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV presented the analyses of data based on the results of the participants' responses to the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference, and in answer to the seven research questions posed by the researcher for purposes of this study. The analysis was based on a three-part survey that was mailed in the late Fall of 2002 to the sample population of 128 parents and caregivers who represented 132 African American Kindergarten students registered for the 2002 school year. The rate of returned surveys was over 50 % (.504). Demographic information about the respondents was compiled and analyzed with respect to the gender of the Kindergarten student for whom the school choice was being considered; the use of subcategories to self-describe, and further disaggregate the ethno-racial identity of the African American; resources and steps taken by respondents to obtain information about the schools of choice; the respondents' residential longevity and history in the community as defined by the two categories of either Grew Up or New To the community of Montclair; the respondents' level of educational attainment as defined by Post High School education, College Graduate, and Graduate Degree; and the respondents' level of socio-economic income as categorized by Lower level (0 - \$49,999), Middle level (\$50,000 - \$99,999), and Higher level (\$100,000 and over). The Likert Scale ratings, from 1- Very Important to 4 – Least Important, of the respondents to the formulated criteria for school selection and preference, were analyzed, graphically represented, and discussed in response to the research questions. Descriptive statistics, frequency analyses, a *t*-test and an analysis of variance with ad hoc tests and Tukey results were used to determine statistical significance between the variables.

Overall, three criteria emerged with the highest percent of frequency by respondents who rated the criteria Very Important/Important, and the lowest Likert mean score based on 1 – Very Important to 4 – Least Important: Academic Reputation (98.4% with a mean of 1.27); Caring Reputation (96.8% with a mean of 1.33); and Overall Perceived School Quality (95.2% with a mean of 1.35). Statistical significance was found in several instances: there was significant difference between respondents who Grew Up and respondents New To the community in response to the school selection criteria of Caring Reputation of the School, and Location based on the t-test results; and using an ANOVA and Post Hoc tests with Tukey results, there was significant difference based on level of educational attainment between respondents with a Post High School education and respondents with a Graduate Degree in response to the criterion Word of Mouth, between respondents with a Post High School education and College Graduate respondents in response to the criterion Friends Attending/Planning to Attend Same School, and between respondents with a Post High School education and respondents with a Graduate Degree in response to the criterion Opportunities for Parent Involvement based. No statistical significance was found between the respondents based on level of income. Findings were further corroborated and supported by the anecdotal responses of the participants to the open-ended questions.

Included in the following and final chapter are the summary of the data in response to the survey and the research questions; the conclusion of the findings in comparison to the research and literature review; the recommendations with respect to policy implications and practices at the local, state, and national levels; and ideas for future research on the topic of school choice as connected to this researcher's study.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study identified and examined the criteria used by parents/caregivers for school choice selection and preference when choosing an educational option for their African American children. Chapter V will consist of four additional sections including Summary, Conclusion: Findings and Implications, Recommendations, and Future Research.

Summary

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a working knowledge about the criteria used for school choice selection and preference by parents/caregivers of African American students. Specifically, this study investigated the reasons that matter most to educational choosers when considering a school choice option for their African American children.

Statement of the Problem

Prior to the mid-1950s, school choice was the “rallying cry of those who clung to their self-proclaimed right to attend single-race schools” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992, p.1). Following the historic 1954 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that ruled that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal, school choice was catapulted to the fore as the “single most rousing idea” to shepherd in what would be the start of a major political, social, economic, and educational movement to reform, and change the face of America’s public schools. Now, at the start of the 21st century, school choice continues as a popular strategy for public

school reform, and as an important, though controversial, item on the national, economic and political public agenda. Harry Brighouse (2000) writes, "School choice is the leading idea of educational reform in the English-speaking world today. . . . The idea that parents should choose which schools their children attend neatly appeals to both the ideological commitment to the market of [some], and the family values agenda of [others] thus helping to diffuse the profound disagreements [among various constituencies] about the proper content and goals of the educational [agenda]" (p. 19). The school choice movement continues to command a broad based appeal among a diverse range of individuals for a variety of reasons with a varied spectrum of goals, expectations, and issues in mind. Regardless of the educational, political, economic, or social agenda or the variability of educational options – from magnet schools to charter schools to private-/public- voucher project to inter-district alternative - at the heart of the matter is the democratic, and civil right of people to choose. It is important then to know what criteria serves to inform, and influence the decisions of parents/caregivers.

Despite the 1954 ruling, and the subsequent reforms to provide equal educational opportunity to all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, or physical ability, the quest for racial and economic justice continue. This goal will either be advanced or impeded (Levin, 1999) by the kinds of school choice options available to the families of school-aged children. Of particular interest to this researcher then was the voice and behavior of parents/caregivers of African American children around issues of school choice, and the impact of African Americans as educational choosers on the anticipated objectives and outcomes of school choice. To explore this idea, this researcher investigated the criteria for school choice selection and preference that attracts

and matters most to the parents/caregivers of African American children when considering an educational choice option.

Description of the Study's Participants

The study's respondents were selected from among the parents/caregivers of African American students who filed an incoming Freedom of Choice-Kindergarten Registration application for one of the six elementary schools for September 2002. Of the total population of 422 registered Kindergarten students, 132 were self-described by a parent/caregiver as African American. For purposes of this study, the participants have been characterized as a parent/caregiver of an African American child as checked on the registration form for whom the Kindergarten placement of choice was sought. The parents/caregivers of incoming Kindergarten students were selected as the population to be included in the study because of their more recent involvement in the school selection and registration process. It was assumed that they were in a better position to recall, with a higher degree of accuracy and familiarity, the criteria that had informed their school choice decision.

With written permission from the Superintendent of Schools to release the data to the researcher, the list of names of parents/caregivers of incoming Kindergarten students for September 2002 was obtained from the District Registrar. The researcher mailed to each participating family a Selection/Preference Survey Study packet. Based on the initial return response, a second mailing was deemed necessary. Participation was voluntary, and responses were kept in strict confidence.

In total, 63, a little more than 50 percent (.504), of the mailed packets were completed and returned to the researcher. One hundred and twenty-eight packets,

representative of 132 African American Kindergarten students, had been mailed. Three packets were returned unopened and undeliverable as stamped by the U.S. Post Office services. In total, 63 completed surveys were reviewed.

Methods of Research

The research project was a descriptive study that combined both quantitative and qualitative research. The instrument, Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference, was used to collect the data. The survey consisted of three parts. Part I was designed to collect general background information about the participants with respect to residential longevity/history in the community, level of educational attainment, and level of socio-economic income, and to identify the sources of information used by the participants to learn about the schools. Part II, the questionnaire section, listed the formulated criteria that had been identified through existing studies, and modified on the borrowed instrument. A 4-point Likert Scale was used by the respondents to indicate the degree of importance of the criteria, from 1- Very Important to 4- Least Important, for school choice selection. Part III consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage anecdotal comments and authentic responses from the participants. The survey instrument was estimated to take approximately 15 minutes to complete in its entirety.

Once the data had been collected and recorded, it was analyzed for interpretation. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) quantitatively facilitated data analysis. The open-ended questions were professional transcribed, and later reviewed by the researcher for recurring themes, key words, and anecdotal comments.

The survey data was summarized, and represented in several ways. The information from Part I of the survey was tallied, recorded, and grouped using frequency statistics, and table representation. The respondents were categorized and characterized into groups for further statistical analysis and interpretation, as applicable to the study. Gender of the student was grouped as either Male or Female. Racial background grouped as African American, Biracial, Black of Hispanic Descent, Caribbean American, or Multiracial. Residential Longevity/History in the Community grouped respondents who Grew Up and were New To Montclair. Survey responses for Level of Educational Attainment were collapsed into three categories including Post High School Education, College Graduate, and Graduate Degree. Survey responses for Level of Socio-economic Income were grouped as Lower, Middle, or Higher income. Sources of information about the magnet school of choice were grouped according to Magnet Materials, Elementary Orientation, School Tours, Spoke with CO Staff, and Other. The survey research method facilitated the use of The Likert Scale in Part II to collect and analyze the data in order to answer the research questions posed by the study. The various forms of data analysis consisted of the following: a test of reliability; a frequency distribution table and summary for each formulated criteria; a profile summary of the range of the means and the ranked mean scores of each criteria by frequency count, and by the residential longevity, educational level, and income of the respondents; a *t*-test for residential longevity/history in the community, and a one-way ANOVA for level of educational attainment, and level of income. Post Hoc tests with Tukey results were also analyzed to further identify specific association between the groups found to have statistical significance. All categories and subcategories of data, were represented on

tables, and narratives were used to describe and capture voice and behavior of the respondents as gleaned from the open-ended transcriptions from Part III of the survey.

Summary of the Findings in Relationship to the Research Questions

Research question 1. What formulated criteria are used by parents/caregivers of African American children in school choice selection?

All 16 criteria presented on the Study Survey for School Choice Selection and Preference were rated by the respondents as having some level of importance in their school selection decision. The formulated criterion consisted of the following criteria: (a) Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis; (b) Overall Perceived School Quality; (c) Caring Reputation of the School; (d) Academic Reputation of the School; (e) Word of Mouth; Reputation of School Staff; (f) Reputation of School Staff; (g) Size of the Student Population / Building; (h) Location of School; (i) Overall School Building Atmosphere; (j) Tied to Family History / Legacy in the Community; (k) Instructional Approach; (l) Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School; (m) Siblings Attending Same School; (n) Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate; (o) School Reflects Family Values; and (p) Opportunities for Parent Involvement. Each criterion was found to be regarded with some degree of importance, from very important to least important, by the respondents. The range of the ranked mean scores of the 16 formulated criteria was 1.27 to 3.37. Based on the Likert Scale midpoint of 2.50, criterion receiving a rating of less than or equal to 2.50 was regarded as very important to important.

In addition to the formulated criteria presented on the survey, the respondents listed or described a variety of other factors that helped inform their school choice decisions

(see Appendix E). Much of the additional criteria, added in response to an open-ended question, overlapped with those previously listed on the survey. Overall, the spectrum of additional criteria represented some aspect that would contribute to a good education for their children, and enhance the quality of the schooling experience for the family. Non-instructional items included after school and extra-curricular activities; the playground; district-provided and public transportation; etc. Instructional items included academic compatibility; responsiveness to various learning styles; academic fit; and so forth. School's leadership or principal, was the dominant criterion to be written in by the majority of respondents. The racial identity of the principal and teaching staff as African American, as well as familiarity and appreciation of diversity, were also frequently, and expressly noted.

Research question 2. What selection/preference criteria matter most to parents/caregivers of African American students when making an elementary school choice selection?

Research question 3. Is there a preference for socially-based/non-instructional indicators when making a choice?

Research question 4. Is there a preference for academically-based/instructional indicators when making a choice?

Several criteria, balanced between socially-based/non-instructional and academically-based/instructional indicators, emerged as the reasons that matter most to the parents/caregivers of African American students as educational choosers. Frequency percents, mean score results of less than 1.50 where 1 is Very Important and 2 is Important, and open-ended responses indicate criteria indicative of academic quality, a

caring environment, and a sensitivity, appreciation and/or presence of ethno-racial diversity matter most. Frequency percents ranged from 98.4% - 90.5%, and mean scores ranged from 1.27 – 1.48 beginning with Academic Reputation of the School; Caring Reputation of the School; Overall Perceived School Quality; Instructional Approach; Overall School Building Atmosphere; Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate; and School Reflects Family Values. The results of the frequency analysis with respect to a preference for either the non-instructional/socially-based category or instructional/academically-based category showed that respondents showed a preference for the instructional/academically-based category. The instructional/academically-based category was preferred by 59.7 percent of the respondents as opposed to 42.5 percent of the respondents who favored the non-instructional/socially-based category. Based on the Likert Scale, as a whole, the academically-based category had a mean score result of 1.53 where 1 is Very Important as opposed to the mean score of 2.07 for the socially-based category, where 2 is Important.

These findings were further corroborated by the open-ended responses which supported indicators related to the dominant criteria of academics, culture or climate, ethno-racial presence and sensitivity and overall quality. While academic or academically-related criteria emerged as the primary consideration for respondents, the quantitative and qualitative findings verify that both academic and social criteria are what matters most to parents and caregivers when making a school choice decision for their African American children. In fact, the third most highly ranked criteria was Overall Perceived School Quality. It had been categorized by this researcher as having merit as

both an instructional/academically-inspired variable and non-instructional/socially-inspired variable.

Research question 5. Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' residential longevity/history in the community?

Overall, responses to 2 of the 16 school selection/preference criteria emerged as statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level with respect to the respondents' residential longevity or history in the community. There was significant difference between the respondents who Grew Up in the community and those New To the community with respect to the criterion Caring Reputation of the School. The criterion reported a t -value of -2.043 and a level of significance at $.046$. Responses to the criterion Caring Reputation of the School by respondents who Grew Up in the community had a mean score of 1.16 and a standard deviation of $.37$. The mean score was under the midpoint of 2.50 of the scale indicating a Very Important/Important regard for the criterion. Responses to the criterion by those New To the community had a mean score of 1.41 which was also under the midpoint of 2.50 of the scale, and standard deviation of $.58$.

There was a statistically significant difference between the respondents who Grew Up in the community and those New To the community with respect to the criterion Location of School. The criterion reported a t -value of -2.109 , and a level of significance at $.039$. Based on the criterion Location of School, respondents who Grew Up in the community had a mean score of 2.21 and a standard deviation of 1.18 . The mean score was under the midpoint of 2.50 of the scale indicating a Very Important/Important regard for the criterion. Respondents New To the community had a mean score of 2.91 , and a standard deviation of 1.22 . The mean score was above the

midpoint of 2.50 of the scale indicating a Somewhat Important/Least Important regard for the criterion. Thus, respondents who grew up in the community appear to have placed a higher degree of importance on the location of the school than respondents new to the community. In summary, a significant difference between respondents who Grew Up in the community, and respondents New To the community was found in response to the two criteria, Caring Reputation of the School, and Location of School. These two criteria emerged as being impacted by the residential longevity/ history of the respondents in Montclair.

According to the ranked mean scores of respondents, several criteria, balanced between socially-based/non-instructional (Caring Reputation) and academically-based/instructional indicators (Academic Reputation), emerged as the reasons that matter most to the parents/caregivers of African American students as educational choosers by residential longevity/ history in the community. Mean score results of less than 1.50 of criteria indicative of academic quality, a caring environment, and a sensitivity, appreciation and/or presence of ethno-racial diversity matter most to both groups of respondents whether they Grew Up in Montclair, or were New To Montclair.

Research question 6. Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of educational attainment?

Overall, responses to 3 of the 16 school selection/preference criteria emerged as statistically significant between the groups at the $p < .05$ level with respect to the respondents' Level of Educational Attainment. There was a significant difference between respondents based on educational levels described as Post High School, College

Graduate, and Graduate, with respect to the criteria Word of Mouth, Friends Attending/Planning to Attend Same School, and Opportunities for Parent Involvement.

Significance between the groups was identified further by the Tukey results based on the Post Hoc tests. Significant difference was found to exist between respondents with a Post High School education and those who were either College Graduates or held a Graduate Degrees. Based on the data, it can be implied that respondents with a Post High School education are more likely than College Graduate respondents to be influenced by the selection/preference criterion Word of Mouth. Respondents with a Post High School education are also more likely than Graduate Degree respondents to be influenced by the selection/preference criterion Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School. On the other hand, Post High School respondents are less likely to be influenced by the selection/preference criterion Opportunities for Parent Involvement than respondents with a Graduate Degree. In summary, the three selection criteria of Word of Mouth, Friends Attending / Planning to Attend Same School, Opportunities for Parent Involvement were influenced by the respondents' level of educational attainment.

According to the ranked mean scores of the respondents by level of educational attainment, several criteria, balanced between socially-based/non-instructional (Caring Reputation) and academically-based/instructional indicators (Academic Reputation), emerged as the reasons that matter most to the parents/caregivers of African American students as educational choosers by level of educational attainment. Mean score results of less than 1.50 of criteria indicative of academic quality, a caring environment, and a sensitivity, appreciation and/or presence of ethno-racial diversity matter most to the three

groups of respondents identified as Post High School, College Graduate, and Graduate Degree.

Research question 7. Are selection/preference criteria influenced by the respondents' level of socio-economic status/income?

Overall, none of 16 school selection/preference criteria emerged as statistically significant between the groups at the $p < .05$ level with respect to the Levels of Socio-economic Income. There was no significant difference between respondents based on socio-economic levels categorized as Lower level (0 - \$49,999); Middle level (\$50,000-\$99,999); and Higher level (\$100,000 and above) with respect to any of the formulated criteria.

Based on the ranking of the mean scores of the respondents by income level, several criteria, balanced between socially-based/non-instructional (Caring Reputation) and academically-based/instructional indicators (Academic Reputation), emerged as the reasons that matter most to the parents/caregivers of African American students as educational choosers by level of economic income. Mean score results of less than 1.50 of criteria indicative of academi/instructional quality, a caring environment, and a sensitivity, appreciation and/or presence of ethno-racial diversity matter most among the Lower, Middle, and Higher income groups.

In summary, the formulated selection/preference criteria that was used by parents/caregivers when considering a school of choice for their African American children was not influenced by the respondents' level of socio-economic income.

Conclusions: Discussion and Implications

School choice has been heralded as perhaps the most enticing and significant, though controversial, educational topic to influence our precepts and options about schooling. It is a concept and practice whose appeal is directly tied to the democratic value of freedom. School choice has served as a major catalyst for school reform within the nation's schools, and continues to inform the educational, political, economic, and social public policy agenda. School choice as the right of parents/caregivers to choose an educational option for their children, feels rights, and continues to garner support from constituencies across all ethno-racial, educational, political and socio-economic groups. Despite the lack of empirical research, and the preponderance of studies that are qualitatively descriptive, school choice offers a wealth of possibilities as the single most leading strategy of school reform that could result in equal educational opportunity for all, educational quality among schools, and improved academic performance among students. The central ingredient to school choice as an impetus of reform, and as a benefit to students, is the parent as educational chooser. The literature suggests that "school choice can be a powerful engine for parental involvement. For example, parents of children in school choice programs are more involved with their children's academic programs; participate in more school activities; believe that their chosen school offers a greater measure of safety, discipline, and instructional quality; and are more satisfied with their children's education in a choice program" (Vassallo, 2000, p. 1).

This researcher believes that a more concise understanding of the criteria valued by parents/caregivers of African American students in one particular integrated magnet system of choice will enhance the potential for the district to achieve its desired

educational outcomes. Broadly speaking, these include improving performance along a continuum of academic excellence that includes closing all disparities in achievement among the various ethno-racial and socio-economic groups, and improving the quality of customer service, satisfaction, and involvement along the continuum of strengthened home-school partnerships. It is the hope of this researcher that the more informed policy makers, school administrators, and educators are about what matters to African American parents as educational choosers the stronger the partnership for schooling experiences that are academically and socially rewarding. It is also the hope of this researcher that the finding and observations gleaned from this investigation about the criteria used for school selection and preference as identified from a sample group of respondents from one particular community will be useful to others. Several interesting observations and salient findings are immediately paramount from this investigation. They will be presented and the impact of their implications discussed. Because of the uniqueness of the story of one integrated magnet school district, and community of racially-balanced residents with a long history of civil rights activism, and cutting-edge familiarity with choice and school reform, and the small prevalence of other communities and school districts that even remotely resemble have those features, certain assertions, in combination with the findings from this research project, have been suggested on the grounds of speculation and assumption.

The literature review provided a conceptual framework and a lens through which to address the essential question of what matters most to parents/caregivers as educational choosers when considering a school option for their African American children. The social and political implications of school choice in a race- and class- conscious society

were also suggested. Based on the literature review, several salient elements pertaining to this study were immediately paramount and noteworthy: (a) The existing and current research on school choice selection by parents in general, and African American parents in particular, is sparse and small. However, that which is available has proven to be insightful and informative for this researcher; (b) The literature suggests that African American choosers select educational options based on a continuum from instructional to non-instructional factors, and are motivated to choose based on academically-inspired and socially-inspired reasons; and (c) Regardless of the social, political, educational and/or economic context in which African American choosers find themselves, race matters. Thus, the quest for educational quality and equality of education opportunity are inextricably intertwined.

The Montclair community and The Montclair Public School System have had more than 25 years of experience with public, magnet school choice. It is a non-neighborhood school system that consists of magnet school themes in each of the elementary and middle school, that requires that all parent to choose their child's school, and that offers voluntary bussing based on distance. Whether or not a parent/caregiver chooses to actively participate in all or some aspect of the Freedom of Choice process offered by the district, choice is not an option but a requirement. Whether deliberately or by default, all parents choose an educational setting for their children. There is a culture of choosing inherent to the community to which all parents/caregivers of school-aged children, and by virtue of residency, are exposed. This perhaps accounts for the study's return rate by the participants, and high degree of regard, and recall of the criteria used by them when considering a placement. A review of the literature reveals that there is a

mixed bag of research with respect to the deliberateness with which parents, in general, choose schools. On one hand, there is a predominance of previous research (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Carnegie Foundation, 1992; Clewell & Joy, 1990; Cobb & Glass, 1999; Cookson, 1994; Fuller, 2000; Levin, 1999; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a) that acknowledges that when given the opportunity parents will make deliberate, and thoughtful school choices. There is also support for the finding that decisions to actively choose (Darling-Hammond & Kirby, 1985; Witte, 1999), are tied directly to parent satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994b) across all racial and economic backgrounds. And yet, only a small percent of the total number of America's parents of school-aged children choose alternatives to their assigned schools, and even less children are home-schooled (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The majority of African American school-aged students, either by default and/or by lack of plausible options, are also in neighborhood schools, or when given a choice, choose among the public sector options (Levin, 1999). For the most part, the research on school choice is sparse, incomplete, and inconclusive, and/or overly descriptive. There is also an under-representation of empirically based studies involving African Americans and their contribution to the school choice literature. It is the intention of this researcher to contribute to the literature based on the findings of this study which has utilized both a quantitative and qualitative research design to investigate the importance of the criteria used for selection and preference by parents/caregivers when considering a school option for their African American children.

The study's participants were parents/caregivers of students identified on the Kindergarten registration form as African American. The participants were presumably

African American parents/caregivers or parents/caregivers of African American children. One of the demographic survey questions, provided an opportunity for the respondents to self-identify and self-describe their children using sub-categories applied to those of African ancestry. The responses confirmed the ethno-racial diversity for which the community is revered. The responses also support the proposal by the federal government to expand their required racial identification categories to 63 ethno-racial options so as not to deny one their mixed lineage or parentage. While the majority of the respondents still checked the African American category, one-fourth of the respondents checked the Biracial and Multiracial categories, describing combinations of African American and Caucasian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Asian (see Table 2).

Generally in the literature on school choice, the findings of researchers have drawn on the socio-economic status and educational backgrounds of the sample. Prior reviews have relied on the differences, and often stark contrast in responses between low-income and high-income participants, and African Americans, Hispanics, and ethnic groups and Whites (Elmore, 1987; Fuller, 2000; Levin, 1999; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a; Nault & Uchitelle, 1982).

This investigation also took into consideration the educational and income level of its participants. Given the familial history of Montclair, and the genesis of its desegregation plan and subsequent system of choice, this researcher also examined the residential longevity or family history of the respondents with respect to those who grew up in Montclair, and those new to the community. Although this study's data has been analyzed with respect to a range of residential, educational, and income levels, most of the findings are consistent with the patterns gleaned from the observations, and research

involving more privileged, and less marginalized populations. Several implications may be drawn from this generalized observation, and be accounted for as follows: (a) The income and educational levels of Montclair's residents generally exceed those of the state as well that of near by and surrounding communities; (b) There is a culture of choosing that has resulted in the absence of neighborhood schools, and a commitment to a non-neighborhood system of choice where every elementary and middle school has a magnet theme, every one participates in the Freedom of Choice program for school placement, and eligibility for school transportation is contingent upon distance only; and (c) Montclair has been in the school choice business for more than 25 years, and is regarded now as an experienced, mature magnet school system. While this magnet school program may not be replicable to other communities, many of its practices can be, and can have positive implications for educational policy on several levels.

An example of the preceding discussion is further illustrated with respect to the ways that parents learn about the various choice options. Based on this study's investigation, the findings indicate that Montclair parents/caregivers actively seek out information about the schools and actively avail themselves to the range of information sources provided by the school district. Each respondent reported using a minimum of at least one source of information while almost three-fourths of the respondents used a combination of three or more sources to obtain information about the schools (see Table 5). With the exception of the respondents who spoke with central office staff (48%), 62 percent attended the district-sponsored Elementary Orientation; 67 percent participated on the school tours; and 86 percent indicated that they had learned about the schools from the magnet materials (an information source associated with higher income parents).

Fifty-six percent indicated other sources of information. Of those responses, 44 percent of the participants wrote in that they had spoken with other parents. Past research on the issue of knowledge about and access to types of information by education and income level is mixed at best. On one hand, findings by Nault and Uchitelle (1982), and Bridge and Blackman (1978) report that parents from lower educational and economic background have less interest in, access to, and knowledge about the sources of school choice information. On the other hand, Ogawa and Dutton (1994a & b) and Ratteray and Shujaa, (1987) and others report that low-income choosers do identify alternative, inexpensive schools or willingly make sacrifices for a better educational opportunity. This researcher believes that Montclair residents, along varied educational and income levels, effectively use the sources of information about the schools as a natural outgrowth of Montclair's culture of choosing, and the types of educational and economic exposures that naturally occur within diverse learning communities. Here conferring with other parents emerged as a critical source of choice information. It must be noted that this conclusion has been presented not without sensitivity for those not represented as part of the participant sample, and whose income and educational levels have not been included. For the purposes of this study, 82.5 percent of the respondents reported education levels of college graduate or graduate degree, and 82.5 percent of the respondents reported an income level between \$50,000 and over \$100,000. Less than 16 percent of Montclair's total student enrollment receive reduced or free lunch.

Based on the findings of this investigation, parents/caregivers of African American children use a range of criteria along a varied spectrum of academic and social reasons when considering a school option for their children as valued by varying degrees

of importance. The overall range of mean scores varied from 1.27 to 3.37 based on the 4-point Likert Scale of 1 – Very Important to 4 – Least Important with a midpoint of 2.50. Overall, the top three criteria of Academic Reputation of the School; Culture of Caring of the School; and Overall Perceived School Quality were indicative of other highly regarded, and quantitatively substantiated criteria that reflect academic quality, caring environments, and ethno-racial appreciation and presence. Variations of these results have been consistently documented throughout the school choice literature (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a; Levin, 1999). While in combination with a range of other variables, educational choosers for African American children want learning environments that provide a quality academic foundation for their children as well as a caring, nurturing environment that mirrors and supports socio-economic and racial diversity. Past research as documented in the literature review for this study corroborate these findings. Both academically-inspired and socially-inspired indicators seem to also be substantiated by the degree of importance given to the criterion Overall Perceived School Quality which includes both academic and caring elements. When categorized as socially-based/non-instructional or academically-based/instructional criteria, this study confirms that parent preference is for academically-based/instructional indicators. This finding on preference is consistent throughout the study regardless of the respondents' residential longevity or history in Montclair, level of educational attainment or level of socio-economic income (see Tables 28, 32, and 36), and along the variability continuum of school choice options. The expectation of academic quality and better academic resources is the primary rationale for seeking a school alternative.

The research study found variations in the responses of the parents/caregivers by background demographic information. The differences among the groups can be attributed to the varying degree of importance of the criteria as rated by the parent/caregiver when deciding a school of choice. Statistical significance was found between respondents within categorical groups with respect to their use of certain school selection criteria when considering a school option for their children. Residential Longevity / History in Montclair was included as a relevant background demographic because of the reputed history of Montclair, and the history of its stellar magnet school (Manners, 1997) which today serves as an example of quality education in an integrated setting. There was a significant difference between the group of respondents who grew up in Montclair and the group of respondents who were new to Montclair with respect to the criterion, Caring Reputation of the School. To account for this result, one might assume that respondents New to Montclair represent parents/caregivers, educational choosers, who moved to the area because of the academic reputation of the public school offerings. One might also assume, and as gleaned from several of the respondents' anecdotal comments with respect to residential longevity and history, that those who Grew Up in Montclair have a special affinity for the district that is better captured by the criterion Caring Reputation of the School. The mean score for each group in the category of residential longevity was 1.16 for those who Grew Up in the community and 1.41 for those New to the community (based on the 4-point Likert Scale of 1 – Very Important, 2 – Important, 3 – Somewhat Important, and 4 – Least Important) which indicates a high regard of importance for the criterion by both groups, but a difference that is significant. This discussion serves to validate the issue of preference versus selection of a criterion.

There was also significant difference by residential longevity/history in Montclair with respect to the criterion, Location. Location emerges throughout the choice research (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Cobb & Glass, 1999; Levin, 1999; Naulte & Uchitelle, 1982) mostly as a deterrent for African Americans and/or other ethnic or low-income groups due to the lack of convenience of proximity and distance, and the affordability or availability of transportation to a non-neighborhood school of choice, whether inter-/intra-district, charter, private, or voucher supported. By design, one of the advantages of the Montclair choice program has been the availability of district-provided school bussing. Free bussing is available to all school-aged families based on distance, and may be coupled with the decision to choose a school far enough away from one's home in order to qualify for free bussing. Several reasons may account for the difference among the respondents who grew up in Montclair and those new to Montclair with respect to Location. Assuming that a move to Montclair was an informed choice based on the academic caliber of the school district, it might also be safe to assume that those New To Montclair were less concerned about location of residence or school (mean score of 2.91) based on the availability of district-provided transportation. One parent wrote in that she had moved to Montclair specifically for the availability and convenience of district-offered school bussing and town-offered public transportation. The difference may also be accounted for by those who Grew Up in Montclair (mean score of 2.21) and have family or neighborhood ties to a particular school. Based on the 4-point Likert Scale of 1 – Very Important to 4 – Least Important with a mid point of 2.50, and a predetermined indicator of Very Important / Important set at less than or equal to 2.50, and Somewhat Important/Least Important set at greater than 2.50, the criterion seems to have been

regarded with a lesser degree of importance by those New to Montclair than those who Grew Up in the community. The anecdotal comments by respondents who indicated that they had selected a particular school because they and/or other family members had attended the same school at a time when it was not magnet school of choice or that it was their neighborhood school support this premise. Both this data and other studies corroborate the significance of location as a determining factor for school choice selection.

There was a finding of statistical significance between groups with respect to level of educational attainment (see Tables 29 and 30). There was significant difference between the group of respondents with a Post High School education and the group of respondents with a Graduate Degree with respect to the criterion Word of Mouth. Respondents with a Post High School education were more likely to be influenced by word of mouth when considering a school choice option than respondents with a graduate degree. While this may not have any bearing on this study's finding, there is an example (Bridge & Blackman, 1978) that suggests that parents with higher education level rely more on written materials; and that parents with less education, when informed, rely on conversations with others. Despite the digital divide that permeates our society with respect to information and communication, Fuller (2000) and other proponents of school choice through the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) are making concerted efforts to make sources of information about school choice available to America's most disenfranchised groups who are poor, low-income, and subjected to their neighborhood's failing schools. The finding of significance for the criterion Word of Mouth is consistent again with the culture of choice in Montclair. Community and church

activities, soccer games, elementary orientation tours and meetings, shopping at the local grocery stores, and commuting into New York by train or bus afford the opportunity to be influenced and informed about the schools by word of mouth. This finding has been corroborated by the open-ended comments of parents as well as through the reference to other parents as an essential source of school information.

Significant difference was also found between the group of respondents with a High School education and the group of respondents with a graduate degree with respect to the criterion Opportunities for Parent Involvement. Respondents with a Post High School education were less likely to be influenced by opportunities for parent involvement. Prior research tends to report that parents with higher levels of education and income are more actively involved in their children's school and learning activities. That finding may have more to do with patterns of accessibility and comfort when interacting with the school setting and personnel. This is not to suggest, however, that those with lower education and income levels care less about their children. One of the desired outcomes of school choice design is that of increased parent involvement (Fuller, 2000; Holt, 2000; Vassallo, 2000) especially among lower income and lower educated families who have not had the same level of awareness about or access to other school options for their families.

There was a significant difference between the group of respondents with a Post High School education and the group of respondents described as College Graduate with respect to the criterion Friends Attending/Planning to Attend Same School. Respondents with a Post High School education were more likely to cite as a reason friends who attend or are planning to attend the same school when considering a school choice option than

respondents with a graduate degree. Studies on the relevance of choosing culturally affirming (Dove, 1998; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987) schools as choice options have been documented by several studies. The opportunity for friendships with other children has been cited as a key reason for choosing culturally affirming schools, although it must be noted that the culturally affirming schools under study were also same race (Black or cultural nationalist) schools. For the respondents of this study, culturally affirming experiences have been defined within the framework of diversity, and seen as part of the overall school climate where recognition, respect, appreciation and tolerance of those like or unlike oneself is valued. The finding then suggests that having friends attend the same school also creates the opportunity of developing friendships with those with whom one might feel most comfortable. Isolation from culturally- or racially-affirming friends and friendships has been a major criticism of predominantly White private and suburban schools as experienced by African Americans and other racial groups of color.

No statistical difference was found between the groups of respondents based on level of income. The income levels were not based on a national index of socio-economic status but reflect responses that were collapsed by the researcher into the three income levels of Lower, Middle and Higher. The income categories levels of the majority of respondents seemed to be too similar in range to reflect any real difference. Of the respondents, 82.5% reported incomes in the middle to higher level of socio-economic levels of \$50,000 to more than \$100,000. Only three respondents, two of whom reported growing up in the community and an educational level of college graduate, reported incomes of less than \$25,000.

Overall, the primary purpose for this investigation was to identify the criteria used for school choice selection and preference by parents/caregivers of African American children in one integrated, public magnet school system of choice. While factors that influenced selection from other venues of school choice including charter schools, private schools, and inter-/intra-district voucher projects were reviewed, it was not the intention of the research to compare choice programs. While the focus of the study was also not to specifically examine the political, economic, and social issues surrounding school choice, the study's results are not exempt from such scrutiny. In fact, it was the expectation of the researcher that the study's findings would have broader implications for the public policy agenda of both parent choice and school choice with respect to educational opportunity, equity, and quality.

One over-riding and recurring observation throughout this research study has been the balance between academically-inspired/instructional criteria, and socially-inspired/non-instructional criteria cited by parents/caregivers for school choice selection. Respondents seemed to equally expect academic quality and academic opportunity from all the schools. Their responses and anecdotal comments, however, were also strongly influenced by initial attractions and first impressions about the social (non-instructional) merits of the schools' culture and climate. Parents thoughtfully stated, and deliberately commented about the schools' warmth, and nurturing atmosphere; the sense that the faculty and staff were a family; acknowledgement of their children by the principal and staff during the tours; diverse interactions and ease of communication between Blacks and Whites whether parent to parent, student to student, teacher to student; safe, organized, clean, child-friendly settings and play grounds loaded with fun; sense of equal

opportunity and fair treatment for their child; and friendly teachers who really seemed to care about the children.

Another observation was the generous responsiveness of the parents/caregivers to the survey questions. Several of the respondents expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to be reflective about the process of choosing a school for their children. Parents/caregivers of African American children were very serious and deliberate in their choice selection, and seemed to value the broad and varied spectrum of criteria with some degree of importance. For the respondents, as educational choosers, the entire freedom of choice selection process was a highly personalized experience. The general sense is that for the respondents of this study, school selection is synonymous with entrustment of ones' most precious gift into school communities where they will be academically, socially, and culturally cared for and happy.

Recommendations

Policy Implications

The recommendations from this study will be discussed with respect to their implications for practice and policy at the local, state, and national levels within the parameters of the findings from research investigation. Suggestions for future research will also be prescribed.

The overarching implication of this study at all levels is found in the merits of a quantitative and qualitative investigation exclusively focused and reflective of the perspective of educational choosers who are African American and/or choosers for African American children. Because the social and political context of life in America is one where race and class have social, economic, political, and educational significant, the

study's participants lend a valuable and insightful voice and perspective about school choice decisions. It is a perspective set against the backdrop of a history and legacy of struggle for freedom, civil rights, integration, equality and justice. The opinion of African American choosers and/or educational choosers for African American children about the criteria they find useful and necessary is significant because it addresses school choice not only from the perspective of educational quality but also from the perspective of equal educational opportunity.

Differences emerged based on residential longevity and history between respondents who were grew up in Montclair and those new to Montclair with respect two criteria, Caring Reputation of the School and Location. Generally, these results suggest that the idea of two subpopulations based on longevity and history of residency in the community do exist with a degree of relevance to school choice criteria. It would be useful then for the district to be aware of the residential mobility, as well as the expectations of its residential stakeholders as determined by residential longevity or history for incorporation into the fabric of the various school environments as dictated by those differences. Specifically, future research might explore more deeply the phenomenon of residential longevity with respect to the relationship between years in the community and sense of belonging, familiarity, and ownership, and how that might impact school choice design. This finding also suggests looking into the projection that a changing demographic and aging population might have on the town's ethno-racial composition, the district's magnet program of choice for desegregation purposes, and the racial balance within the schools. As previously cited, in order to maintain racially balanced schools over the last several years, the freedom of choice process had to be

modified from a selection of ones' three top choices to the ranking of all six kindergarten options. The reason for the finding of Location as significant based on residential longevity or history is not clarified by the result but would perhaps lend itself to a future investigation. This finding, however, reiterates the significance of Location as either a contributor or inhibitor of school choice regardless of the choice option. Location is directly tied to issues of convenience, proximity, accessibility, availability, and affordability of transportation. Montclair's quarter of a century commitment to voluntary bussing serves as an example to other educational and governing policy makers at the local, state, and national levels. By design, the plan for district-provided school transportation leveled the playing field by granting access to all school programs regardless of place of residence. Until traditionally failing neighborhood schools are competitively revamped to address the new No Child Left Behind federal mandate, Americans will continue to seek other choice options. The provision of transportation cost in support of school choice options must be factored into the policies and practices of local, state, and national school boards.

The results of this research also supports the need for continuous renewal of the schools, school boards, administrative teams, and teaching staff as caring, responsive, and racially-aware entities. Staff development should be on-going in these areas. Personnel practices should also insure the presence of racially-diverse staff who reflect the student population and mirror society at large.

Significance also emerged among the subpopulations of respondents with respect to level of educational attainment, and the criteria Word of Mouth, Friends Attending/Planning to Attend Same School, and Opportunities for Parent Involvement.

Differences emerged between respondents with a post high school education, and respondents with described as having either a graduate degree and being a college graduate. While the finding does not specifically clarify nor judge why the differences exist with respect to the varying degree of importance of the criteria among these groups, it does caution us to be mindful of the concerns, opinions, and perspective that different subpopulations or constituencies present based on demographic background. The finding of significance between groups with respect to Word of Mouth addresses the theme of information sources, and stresses the importance of providing a broad spectrum of information resources and opportunities to learn about the schools. In addition to the steps for dissemination of information that are annually reviewed and revitalized by Montclair, it is recommended that sources of information begin to mirror the age of information and communication thus utilizing the resources of the electronic community. These could include internet access, web pages, e-mailers, power point orientations, and televised tours, and aired roundtable discussions between schools' current parents, and staff. In addition to bringing sources of information into the home, weekend opportunities for school visitations and conversations might also prove more convenient after the workweek. The findings with respect to Friends Attending Same School, and Opportunities for Parent Involvement again suggests the need to reach out to all groups of parents across all educational levels.

It would behoove policy makers at the local, state, and national levels to recognize the importance of the input from all stakeholders as potential educational choosers when considering school choice options and design. This study's findings of

significance also brings to the fore the importance of recognizing the variations of opinion along a continuum of diversity even within the same ethno-racial groups.

Despite the permeating influence of Montclair's culture of choosing, and its familiarity among the community's residents for access to the public school system, there remains an untapped segment from among Montclair's population of African American choosers. The vast majority of respondents to this study represented the higher levels of educational attainment and income. Of the respondents, 15.9% indicated having a post high school education, and 17.5 percent reported a lower level of income. This researcher targeted African Americans as the study's population because of the strong desire to make visible the voice of even active choosers who have often been omitted from the literature on school choice. The concept of invisibility has also been associated with non-choosers, "those left behind in inferior schools when better-educated and more-affluent families choose to leave" (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994a, p. 15). The implications of the concept of invisibility as educational choosers affects practice and policy at the local, state, and national levels. The implications here for future research are quite salient. The bottom line is that those "same people who are lost in the research will, . . . be lost in the shuffle of educational choice" (p.15). In order to tap into the portion of parents/caregivers of African American children not represented in this study, several alternative measures for data collection need to be considered for future investigations. Missing in part from the study, are those who choose not to choose, and are there fore assigned based on availability of space. The Registrar's Office has described a rush of parents who, as late as the first day of Kindergarten, complete the registration application. One alternative then for data collection, might be for the researcher to be available for

face-to-face interviews with the latecomers in order to collect their valuable opinions about school choice criteria. Collaborations with African American churches, national organizations like the Black Alliance for Educational Options, and the N.A.A.C.P., and local childcare agencies serving lower income, neighborhood based families, represent another strategy to obtain the opinions of those invisible choosers not generally represented.

In conclusion, the policy implications of this research are applicable at the local, state, and national levels. Most importantly, there is much to be learned from the twenty-five year history, and existing practices, and policies of Montclair's choice program with respect to how to insure educational quality, equity, and opportunity. The lessons are replicable, and have far reaching implications for others at the local, state, and national levels.

Future Research

Future research considerations, as a spin-off to this research project, include a spectrum of possibilities. The existing research project might be duplicated at the national level, and include populations from other school districts with similar magnet school programs and ethno-racial populations. Participating districts might be those connected to the Minority Achievement Network. A future qualitative approach might also include personal interviews and focus groups. This approach would provide a deeper and more accurate insight into the respondents' understanding, definition, and interpretation of the formulated criteria used for selection. Triangulation of the data would also be enhanced beyond the written open-ended responses. A longitudinal study tied to indicators of parent satisfaction, and student achievement outcomes is another

consideration. Duplicating the study with other ethno-racial populations of color or with limited English proficiency populations represents another future option. A case study format might lend itself to an examination of the reactions of administrators and teachers to the criteria cited by parents/caregivers. An examination of the role of gender in school choice selection, either that of the students or parents/caregivers completing the survey, or specifically, of who makes the choice within the African American household (mother, father, grandparent, guardian, etc.) also offers other social, political, and economic dimensions to possibly be investigated through further research.

Future researchers might investigate the impact of parent satisfaction or issues of motivation with respect to school choice within Montclair's culture of choosing, or conduct a comparative study with a district less experienced with public school choice design. Given this period in education with increased emphasis on state and national standards, high stakes testing, and the national mandate that no child will be left behind; the economic, social and political issues commanding the nation's and world's attention at this early stage in a new century; and the launching of school choice options that tap the most disenfranchised groups in American, future research possibilities are endless especially with respect to the more socially-, politically-, economically-, and educationally-charged issues of school choice as an impetus for social justice, and equity.

Appreciating and valuing the perspectives and input of all parents and caregivers regardless of socio-economic, ethno-racial, political and educational background can help align practice, policy, and opportunity for quality and equity towards better schools, and improved educational outcomes for all. Consciously or unconsciously, the participants in this study, like so many other caregivers, face the unbridled challenge of raising African

American children in a society where social, educational, and economic needs and opportunities are predicated on race. This researcher remains convinced that the resulting findings of this research investigation into the criteria used for school selection and preference by parents/caregivers of African American children when considering a school choice option as perceived by the respondents of one particular, integrated, magnet school system of choice, have positive implications for local, state, and national policy makers in general, and for African Americans, in particular, as part of the visible community of educational choosers.

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Appendix A
Reliability Analysis

Reliability Analysis

Reliability Coefficients

Number of Cases (N) = 60.0

Number of Items (N) = 16

Scale: Alpha

Alpha = .6107

Appendix B
Letters of Approval

24 May 2002

Adunni S-Anderson
Edgemont Montessori School
20 Edgemont Road
Montclair, NJ 07042

Dear Adunni,

Positively, you have my permission to use my survey instrument with any modification you deem necessary for your own dissertation study.

I must share with you that it is energizing and encouraging to know that the dedication to equal opportunities to education for all students that your study empowers is alive and well. While there have been many advantages to moving westward, I miss that steadfastness about educational equity issues here in Colorado, but am glad that those concerns remain part of my own consciousness as a result of my work and experience in Montclair.

Best wishes on the completion of your study and ultimate dissertation publishing.

Sincerely,



Dr. Suzanne W. Dunshee
Assistant Professor of Elementary Education
School of Professional Studies
Metropolitan State College of Denver
Campus Box 21
P. O. Box 173362
Denver, Colorado 80217-3362
Phone: 303.554.4974
Email: dunshee@mscd.edu

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22 Valley Road
Montclair, NJ 07042
(973) 509-4010



Dr. Michael J. Osnato
Superintendent of Schools

July 31, 2002

Adunni Slackman Anderson
Edgemont Montessori School
20 Edgemont Road
Montclair, NJ 07042

Dear Adunni:

You have my support and permission to conduct the study phase of your dissertation research within the Montclair Public School District. It is my understanding that your research proposal focuses on the criteria used for school choice selection and preference among African American parents/caregivers in an integrated magnet school district such as Montclair.

I look forward to reading the results of your study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Osnato". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael J. Osnato
Superintendent of Schools

Appendix C

Introduction/Solicitation Letter and Note of Thanks


SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
1 8 5 6

Dear Parent/Caregiver of a 2002 Kindergarten Student:

I am a doctoral student in the Executive Ed. D. Program at Seton Hall University, and also an elementary school principal in The Montclair Public School District. I am writing to you to seek your assistance with my dissertation research project which takes a look at an aspect of the school choice process. You have been chosen as a potential participant in this study because you recently engaged in the selection and registration process for placement of a Kindergarten student in one of the elementary magnet schools of choice for September 2002.

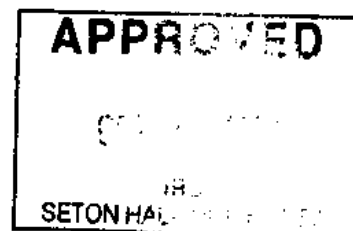
As the family of a newly enrolled Kindergarten student, you have made a very important decision about your child's educational future. You are to be commended for the care that you have taken to select a magnet school that is the right fit for your child.

The purpose of my research is to identify and examine the criteria used for school choice selection and preference by African American parents/caregivers when choosing a school for their child in an integrated magnet system of choice. Specifically, I am interested in "what attracts" and "what matters" to African American families when making their school selection. The study is designed to provide insight into the voice and behavior of African American families around school selection, and about a perspective about school choice that is often overlooked in the literature. The study will provide useful information that will lead to enhanced parent satisfaction, and improved student performance within the district.

I would appreciate your assistance in this investigation process by completing the enclosed Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. The survey consists of three parts, and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete in its entirety. Part II is the questionnaire section which requires that, for each item, you circle the number on the Likert Scale (1-Very important 2-Important 3-Somewhat important 4-Least important) that best represents your response. It is not necessary to sign the survey or to identify your particular school. Once completed, please mail the survey using the enclosed, stamped, self-addressed envelope by November 15, 2002.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice. Completion and return of the survey indicates your understanding of the project and your willingness to participate.

College of Education and Human Services
Executive Ed.D. Program
Tel. 973.275.2728
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685





Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential. Your anonymity will be preserved as no names are included nor requested on any of the forms.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all data will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home, and will be destroyed after three years. To guarantee your anonymity, your name and school are not to be put on the survey. The highest level of confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved at all times as the data will be analyzed and included without reference to specific individuals or schools, and reported as group summaries. All data will be kept confidential, and only the researcher will review the research information.

This study has received approval by the district's Superintendent and poses no risks. There are also no benefits to this study other than the end results, which will be stated in the data analysis about the criteria used by families in the selection of a school of choice.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me directly at 973-509-4162. You may also contact my mentor, Dr. John Collins at Seton Hall University at 973-275-2823. It would be my pleasure to mail a copy of the dissertation abstract to you after completion, if requested.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at (973) 275-2974.

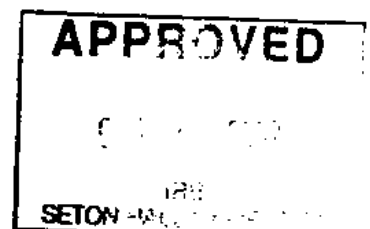
Please accept my sincere appreciation for your assistance with my research. For your convenience, you may use the enclosed, stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. I look forward with anticipation and promise to your immediate response. Thank you again!

Very truly yours,

Adunni Slackman Anderson
Adunni Slackman Anderson

Enclosures

College of Education and Human Services
Executive Ed.D. Program
Tel. 973.275.2728
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685





Dear Parent/Caregiver of a 2002 Kindergarten Student:

A NOTE OF THANKS!

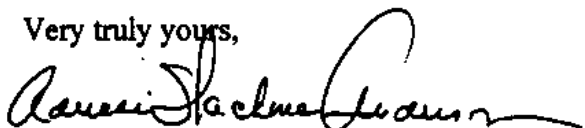
I recently mailed you a letter to seek your assistance with my dissertation research project which takes a look at an aspect of the school choice process within an integrated magnet school system of choice.

If you have already returned the completed survey, *thank you* so very much for your time and assistance. I value your input and know that it will make a difference in the school choice process.

If you have not returned the survey, please accept this letter as a *friendly reminder* to complete and return the Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference. I have enclosed another packet along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience.

Again, I sincerely thank you for your assistance and participation.

Very truly yours,

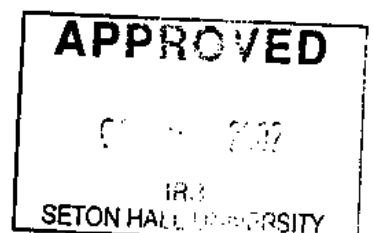


Adunni Slackman Anderson

Enclosures

Adunni Slackman Anderson
Exe. Ed. D. Program – Seton Hall University
Home: P.O. Box 584
South Orange
New Jersey 07079

College of Education and Human Services
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Appendix D

Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference

**Please return the completed Survey
NO LATER THAN NOVEMBER 15, 2002**

Study Survey of School Choice Selection and Preference

This survey is part of a study designed to determine "what attracts" and "what matters" to African American families when choosing a first time school placement (Kindergarten) for their child in an integrated magnet school district of choice. Your participation in responding to the survey questions is voluntary. All responses will be kept secured, anonymous and confidential.

I personally thank you in advance for responding in full to all sections.

Part I: Demographic Information (Please check on the appropriate line.)

1. Gender of your child:

Male _____ Female _____

2. Which one of the following *racial background* categories best describes your child?
Try to choose the best category that fits.

African American _____ Biracial _____ Black of Hispanic Descent _____
Caribbean American _____ African _____ Multiracial _____

3. Family History in Montclair: (Please check all that apply)

___ Grew up in Montclair /Attended Montclair schools

___ New to Montclair [_____ (year)]

___ Previous generations attended Montclair schools

Please specify: _____

4. Please check the level of the last grade or highest educational attainment of the parent/caregiver of the student.

Some high school

High School Graduate

Technical school / Professional School

Some college

College graduate

Graduate degree

5. Please check the level of income range that is closest to your total household income.

Less than \$25,000

\$25,000 - \$49,999

\$50,000 - \$74,999

\$75,000 - \$99,999

\$100,000 and over

6. Please check the steps that you took and/or the sources you used to obtain information about the schools. (Check all that apply.)

Read material about magnets/schools

Attended Elementary Orientation meeting(s)

Toured the school(s)

Spoke personally with central office/school staff

Other (Please specify: _____)

*** * * Please continue to the Survey: Part II * ***

Part II: Some of the criteria used by parents/caregivers when considering the best school choice option have been listed. Review each item, and using the scale below, circle the number that best matches the level of importance the criteria was to you when making your school choice decision. Remember please to only circle one number per line.

1 - Very Important 2 - Important 3 - Somewhat Important 4 - Least Important

a. Magnet School Theme / Program Emphasis

1 2 3 4

b. Overall Perceived School Quality

1 2 3 4

c. Caring Reputation of the School

1 2 3 4

d. Academic Reputation of the School

1 2 3 4

e. Word of Mouth

1 2 3 4

f. Reputation of School Staff

1 2 3 4

g. Size of the Student Population / Building

1 2 3 4

h. Location of School

1 2 3 4

1 – Very Important 2 - Important 3 - Somewhat Important 4– Least Important

i. Overall School Building Atmosphere

1 2 3 4

j. Tied to Family History or Legacy in the Community

1 2 3 4

k. Instructional Approach (e.g. structured class; hands-on; basic skills; interdisciplinary . . .)

1 2 3 4

l. Friends Attending or Planning to Attend Same School

1 2 3 4

m. Siblings Attending School

1 2 3 4

n. Appreciation of Diversity as Exhibited by School Climate

1 2 3 4

o. School Reflects Family Values

1 2 3 4

p. Opportunities for Parent Involvement

1 2 3 4

***** Please continue to the Open-ended Questions: Part III *****

Part III: Open-ended Questions

Please respond as openly and honestly as possible. All responses will be kept in strict confidence.

- a. List any other criteria that you used in your school choice selection that may not have been included on the preceding list.

- b. List **three** things that initially attracted you when making a school choice selection for your child.

- c. List the **one** factor or criterion that **mattered most** to you when making your school choice decision. _____

- d. If applicable, why did you send the first sibling to the school? _____

- e. Please elaborate on “what attracted” and “what mattered” to you when making a school choice selection for your child. Please be specific.
(Attach additional paper as necessary.)

Thank you!

Appendix E

Transcription of Open-ended Responses

Part III: Open-ended Questions

a. List any criteria that you used in your school choice selection that may not have been included on the preceding list.

Respondent 1: We considered our child's learning style and the kind of work environment she said she liked best. Also, since she is more advanced than some other children her age are, we felt a School environment would allow her to continue at her own level.

Respondent 2: Time - I didn't want to pay for before care. Principal - some did not impress me. Positive role models.

Respondent 3: Administrators and faculty who are not only comfortable with, but also who actively encourage intelligent African-American children. Sufficient time would be given to my child; she wouldn't get "lost in the shuffle".

Respondent 4: No response

Respondent 5: No response

Respondent 6: Diversity. Activities for after school and families.

Respondent 7: No response

Respondent 8: Make sure my child gets a good education.

Respondent 9: No response

Respondent 10: Teachers

Respondent 11: No response

Respondent 12: It was very important that my children be bused to school and also that the school is public bus obtainable because I have no car.

Respondent 13: I really liked the fact that students were leading perspective parents around at orientation, rather than parents of children that attended the school.

Respondent 14: Certification of the teachers.

Respondent 15: No response

Respondent 16: Offers gymnastics. Integrated.

Respondent 17: The time frame in which school begins.

Respondent 18: When I saw African-American parents involved with the school and the ease of communication between Black and White parents and staff, I knew I had found a home for my children where I was not wondering about the race card at the beginning of every day.

Respondent 19: No response

Respondent 20: No response

Respondent 21: I grew up very close to Montclair. I was always told Montclair had an excellent school system.

Respondent 22: No response

Respondent 23: Having choices is very important. It allows a child to explore very early in life.

Respondent 24: Playground area was very large and loaded with fun.

Respondent 25: All was covered in the previous questions.

Respondent 26: Knowing school system was very important.

Respondent 27: No response

Respondent 28: No response

Respondent 29: No response

Respondent 30: None, all was included.

Respondent 31: No response

Respondent 32: No response

Respondent 33: No response

Respondent 34: No response

Respondent 35: No response

Respondent 36: All criteria have been listed.

Respondent 37: No response

Respondent 38: No response

Respondent 39: No response

Respondent 40: Diversity in staff population and the student population. Diversity in the selection of books-role models-we must visualize us in reading materials and positions such as you.

Respondent 41: Test scores relative to other magnet schools.

Respondent 42: My daughter loved the school. It has lots of computers. I was attracted by the multi-racial population and academic standing.

Respondent 43: School report cards.

Respondent 44: Very important to us that teaching staff is diverse and African-Americans are well represented to provide role models for our children.

Respondent 45: A mix of race and socio-economic levels was important to our family. When I selected another school 11 years ago, I did so because the school seemed more accepting of all families. Frankly, the other school did not seem to welcome all families. I particularly felt that poorer Black parents were more accepted at the school. This may be a comfort level with the neighborhood or a sense of ownership of the school because it is in a traditionally Black neighborhood. Because I felt that acceptance, I wanted my child to learn tolerance in that environment. At the time we were looking, another school was the hot school and I was completely turned off by the Junior League atmosphere. Because I was not comfortable, I felt my child would not be comfortable. In hindsight, I guess I was more comfortable in the "Black" school. I also realize that most of my White friends are Jewish and I would venture that the school magnet has a larger Jewish population than the other schools. In summary, I guess I picked a school that I as comfortable with as opposed to one that I deemed best for my child. This magnet has been wonderful and I would pick it again by the same criteria. My five- and seven-year-olds are in the same magnet and it was purely a comfort level with a known quantity. My seven-year-old, however, is an artist so the selection has proved good for him. My five-year-old simply has to get on the same bus, as the seven-year-old so there was no selection, just time management.

Respondent 46: No response

Respondent 47: I believe very strongly in the relationship and perception that my wife and I have with the principal.

Respondent 48: Son is academically advanced. Looking for a school that would be a great fit and respectful of his abilities.

Respondent 49: No response

Respondent 50: The perceived quality of the teaching staff.

Respondent 51: The school seemed to be a "good fit" for my child, and it would meet his needs academically and socially.

Respondent 52: Diversity of teaching styles.

Respondent 53: No response

Respondent 54: The energy in the classrooms. The way the teachers spoke to the students.

Respondent 55: School's leadership. I believe that the philosophy of the leadership will have a lasting trickle down effect to teachers and staff. (This includes personality, i.e. if leadership appears personable, open, inviting, comforting, caring, interesting, etc.

Respondent 56: Leadership of the school, principal.

Respondent 57: The presence of African-American role models.

Respondent 58: An African-American principal and a substantial African-American teaching staff.

Respondent 59: Environment.

Respondent 60: Word of mouth about the great music teacher, and the extra curriculum activities.

Respondent 61: Standardized test scores.

Respondent 62: Relatives attending, environment and PTA.

Respondent 63: School curriculum

b. List three things that initially attracted you when making a school choice selection for your child.

Respondent 1: Theme
The quiet environment.
The racial diversity of the school.

Respondent 2: Theme
Principal

Climate

- Respondent 3:** The program theme is my child's fit.
School environment/atmosphere seemed to be what we were looking for.
My child would be able to work at her own pace within program/curriculum parameters.
- Respondent 4:** The school's teachings
Location of School
School size and condition of facilities.
- Respondent 5:** My experience with the staff was positive.
- Respondent 6:** The schools learning/teaching.
Sense of family values.
Communication with families.
- Respondent 7:** Small size of school.
Number of extra staff per class.
Program emphasis.
- Respondent 8:** Gifted
Speech therapy
Mixed surroundings.
- Respondent 9:** Seniority of teaching staff.
Stress of reading or importance of reading as a skill.
Importance of math at school.
- Respondent 10:** Theme.
Size.
Teacher reputation.
- Respondent 11:** Circular
Communication
Small size classes
- Respondent 12:** Diversity.
Location.
Start time.
- Respondent 13:** Whether the principal and staff acknowledged my child at orientation.
The feeling that the faculty and staff were a "family".
The school was very well organized, clean and attractive. The

lighting was also a factor.

- Respondent 14:** Friendliness of the staff.
Display of the students' work along the corridor.
The excellent recommendation that I received about the school from other parents.
- Respondent 15:** No response.
- Respondent 16:** Academics.
Choice of aesthetics.
Location.
- Respondent 17:** School theme.
Teacher/parent involvement.
Academic criteria.
- Respondent 18:** Academic program.
Diverse interactions (students, staff and parents).
Atmosphere of building (child-friendly, things at eye level for little kids).
- Respondent 19:** What's the school's main focus (cultural, family oriented, etc.)?
The curriculum - not staying in one class all day (traveling).
The atmosphere.
- Respondent 20:** Reputation of the school system.
- Respondent 21:** Son attended the school.
We enjoyed a positive experience.
- Respondent 22:** Diversity.
Teaching method.
School culture.
- Respondent 23:** Changing classes during the day.
Teaches the children to grasp timing.
They learn how to get to the next class, hence they learn how important time is.
- Respondent 24:** Class size.
Diversity.
Programs available.
- Respondent 25:** Friendly teachers.
Nice Principal.
Good location/safe.

- Respondent 26: Magnet system for young age.
School quality.
Academic
- Respondent 27: No response.
- Respondent 28: Legacy of school.
Improvement year after year.
My kid can take an example - raise the bar of expectations.
- Respondent 29: The principal at the time.
International theme.
Size of school.
- Respondent 30: The astuteness of the students during orientation.
Library - reading program.
Emphasis on different cultures.
- Respondent 31: Academic focus.
Diversity study.
Location.
- Respondent 32: The school curriculum.
Appreciation of diversity as exhibited by school climate.
Location of the school.
- Respondent 33: Diversity displayed at the school.
The focus on teaching about cultural differences.
Location.
- Respondent 34: No response.
- Respondent 35: Location.
Magnet school.
Reputation.
- Respondent 36: Heard great things about the principal.
Size of student population.
Location.
- Respondent 37: Location or commute to school.
Environment.
Surroundings.
- Respondent 38: Location.

Family involvement.
Some caring.

Respondent 39: Separate auditorium.
Separate cafeteria.
Separate gym.

Respondent 40: Curriculum.
Size of school.

Respondent 41: Emphasis on math and science (the basics of academics).
Inclusion of other programs provided, i.e. art, music, greenhouse
the best of both worlds.
Small size of the school - overall facilities relative to other
magnets.

Respondent 42: No response.

Respondent 43: Diversity within the school overall and individual classrooms.
Hands-on approach to learning with high academic standards.
Academic/theme curriculum and enrichment offerings, options,
and interests in some specific way or another.

Respondent 44: Way the school diversified.
Did they seem vibrant and active, so that our son would not be
seen as a troublemaker, but his energy embraced?
Location (across the street).

Respondent 45: Friendliness of parents (openness) [indication of children'
perspective on race.
Child-friendly - stimulating place for children to be - does it look
happy.
Test scores.

Respondent 46: The school's teaching style is main reason for selection.
The small school size.

Respondent 47: Personality of principal.
Atmosphere of school as I toured.
The scores and success that the school has made public at open
school board meetings.

Respondent 48: Academics.
Principal and staff.
School environment.

Respondent 49: Reputation of school staff.

Academic reputation.
Diversity of children.

Respondent 50: Location/park setting of school.
Small size.
Staff.

Respondent 51: Small size of school.
Magnet theme.
Warm feeling of the school.

Respondent 52: The theme or teaching methodology.
Diversity.

Respondent 53: The representative sent to Headstart to recruit.
School structure.

Respondent 54: The physical beauty of the school.
The class size and teacher ratio.
Diversity of student body.

Respondent 55: What struck me most was the ethnicity of the children in special education classes (i.e., reading resource, etc.). In all the schools I toured, except for this one, there was disproportionate participation by African-American students. As a child observing this has to have a lasting affect on ones' psyche.

Respondent 56: Classroom organization.
My wife's excitement about the school.
Principal's communication with the parents.

Respondent 57: Type of program.
Size of school.
Comfort levels.

Respondent 58: Warm feeling.
Creative environment.
Physically attractive.

Respondent 59: Educational value.
Atmosphere created by the educators.
Reputation of the school.

Respondent 60: Peaceable atmosphere.
Black male teachers - role models and female.
Total students in the whole school.

Respondent 61: Magnet theme of school
Level of parent/PTA involvement.
Facility/separate rooms for each subject, i.e. art, music.

Respondent 62: Word of mouth.
Environment.
PTA.

Respondent 63: School Atmosphere.
Staff/curriculum.
Size.

c. List the one factor or criterion that mattered most to you when making your school choice decision.

Respondent 1: The School theme.

Respondent 2: Academic reputation.

Respondent 3: My child will be happy here; she will continue to "love to learn" here at this school.

Respondent 4: No response.

Respondent 5: My previous experience.

Respondent 6: The teaching style and curriculum of the overall school.

Respondent 7: Teaching approach to the perceived needs of our child.

Respondent 8: Good education.

Respondent 9: The school's theme.

Respondent 10: Teacher's reputation.

Respondent 11: Number of adults per class. My child's class has one head teacher and three assistants daily.

Respondent 12: The school theme.

Respondent 13: What mattered most was the emphasis on the core curriculum.

Respondent 14: The one factor that matters most to me when making my school choice decision was that my child would be safe.

Respondent 15: No response.

Respondent 16: Overall academic excellence.

Respondent 17: Teacher one-on-one involvement with the children.

Respondent 18: All my answers applied to the selection of a school for my fifteen-year-old. The seven- and five-year-old followed because it was the program I knew and the place I felt comfortable. Now if the subsequent children had shown a propensity that I felt could have been better served at another school, I would have switched.

Respondent 19: My child's everyday function when child is in school from beginning to end.

Respondent 20: School theme.

Respondent 21: Reputation of the district.

Respondent 22: School culture.

Respondent 23: Diversity.

Respondent 24: Class size.

Respondent 25: The teachers were friendly and seem really concerned about the children.

Respondent 26: Word of mouth.

Respondent 27: No response.

Respondent 28: Principal's reputation and participation in other organizations in Montclair.

Respondent 29: Diversity and academics.

Respondent 30: Exemplified student discipline during orientation in classroom settings and in all grades.

Respondent 31: Academic focus.

Respondent 32: The school curriculum.

Respondent 33: Focus on teaching about cultural differences.

Respondent 34: No response.

Respondent 35: Magnet.

Respondent 36: The small student population helped in making our decision.

Respondent 37: No response.

Respondent 38: No response.

Respondent 39: Size of school physically and enrollment.

Respondent 40: Choice of kindergarten teachers - not choice but who are the teachers that my child might be with.

Respondent 41: Emphasis on math and science.

Respondent 42: My daughter wanted to go there. She was so happy when she heard that would be her school. I knew it was a good choice academically.

Respondent 43: That my child would receive equal opportunity and fair treatment in regards to his education. This next statement is in no way any reflection on the Montclair school district or the school that we chose because we love the school and are very satisfied with his teacher and we appreciate that we were granted our first choice. We have every confidence and are enthusiastic to be a part of the Montclair school district. However I am very much aware of the long standing, ongoing negative treatment of Black and other minority students of color, male and female. This unequal academic opportunity and treatment that, in some other school districts is the cause for students, especially males, to be targeted for special education based on the color of their skin and some teachers' misconceptions of a particular race or abilities due to ironic ignorance. I strongly disagree with the targeting of Black students who are in academic good standing being labeled as special education or special needs based on being socially misunderstood. To me, social issues and academic achievement are two separate categories. If a student is struggling socially but has academic excellence, he/she should not be ostracized. This is my main concern because I know it goes on in many school districts because I've talked to family and friends in the education field. I've also heard other people's first hand experiences and their determination to protect and stick up for their child in

certain situations that seemed unfounded. At this point, my son is doing great and does not have this problem because of his extraverted personality and ability to get along and fit in with diverse groups of kids and situations. But this is my worst fear and I pray he never has to go through that type of treatment and I hope his friends or any child is made to feel so separated. It's amazing to me how these special needs/education classes contain a heavy percentage of minority students, especially male.

Respondent 44: Watching students/principal/teachers interact.

Respondent 45: Openness of parents. Children get their clues from their parents, so I wanted to know the parents' thoughts about politics, race, education, etc. I found that by third grade, most kids are carbon copies of the parents.

Respondent 46: The School structure.

Respondent 47: The effectiveness of quality, integrated instruction.

Respondent 48: The entire felt like the right choice.

Respondent 49: School size.

Respondent 50: Meeting a teacher at multi-school orientation meeting. She was extremely impressive.

Respondent 51: The overall warm, caring feeling of the school.

Respondent 52: Theme or methodology of teaching the child.

Respondent 53: The ratio of diversity among students, as well as teachers.

Respondent 54: The school seemed cozy and nurturing.

Respondent 55: Appeared to be a caring, supportive environment that emphasizes the individual development of the child. I like the theme which promotes independent thinking.

Respondent 56: Instructional approach.

Respondent 57: School theme.

Respondent 58: The ability to learn and enjoy it.

Respondent 59: Education satisfactory.

Respondent 60: Peaceable, calm, agreeable school atmosphere.

Respondent 61: Our "gut" feeling that this school was the best choice for our daughter. This may sound very abstract, but after participating in two years of open houses, compiling print materials and chatting with tons of parents and teachers. What mattered most to us was our gut feeling - what school best fit our overall criteria, what school could we envision our daughter attending. More importantly, it was how we felt when we entered the school - was the atmosphere bright and welcoming? Were teachers and parents friendly and helpful? And believe it or not, the parent/guide who took us around during open house week was particularly sharp and/or knowledgeable about the school, we made note of that. While it is nice and "cute" to have an elementary student take us around the school, it was not particularly effective because we often had many hard hitting questions that they were not able to address. Similarly, if a parent tour guide appears less than passionate or seems not to know the answers to pertinent questions, we are equally turned off. That said, all those things contribute to our gut feelings, and this year, in making our decision, we followed our gut. The school we selected had a stellar reputation, high test scores, an organized principal, seemingly dedicated teachers, active and involved parents, and a passionate PTA. Luckily, we received our first choice school and our daughter is extremely happy. Interestingly though, we had quite a few things to consider. Our daughter had been attending a theme school for two years, so naturally we were very interested in looking at the magnet. But in talking with her teachers we gained valuable insight into where our daughter might thrive. We learned that our daughter craves change, that she loves an eclectic atmosphere and gets turned off by a continuation of things she has done before - kind of a "been there, done that" attitude. Their fear was that in selecting another theme school for elementary, our daughter would be turned off by the similarities. Based on that information, and our own knowledge of our daughter, we put this magnet at the bottom of our list. Next, we had to deal with the fact that our daughter is extremely outgoing and very arts oriented. That made us look at the gifted and talented arts magnet very heavily. But several things were not attractive to us - the large size of the school being the biggest factor. Further, my husband was concerned that the gifted and talented magnet was the "default school" for those who didn't get their first choice as well as those who never bothered to fill out the school choice application. Based on those factors, we eliminated that school.

We eliminated still another school because we were turned off by the facility and its lack of space for some of the classes our daughter would regard as highly important. The lunchroom was also the multi-purpose room and the art room. There was no art hanging on the walls because the teacher had to move everything out to accommodate some other room configuration. That problem continued with the music room, which was a makeshift room at the end of a hallway - no music, notes or instruments lying around or on the wall - very sterile. Art rooms, music rooms and science rooms, for example, should all appear live in to give parents a sense that the children are "living" that subject when they are there. Once again, our gut told us that the thing we most needed to focus on was balance, picking the school that had the best balance of attractive factors. The school we picked was the science and technology magnet - important to us because our African American daughter should get as much of a jump on science and technology as possible - but also important to us because the school had the right balance for us. Parents passionate and knowledgeable gave us our first peek at the school; the facility had bright, cheery, separate "lived in" rooms; and the school's expectations/standards of excellence gave it the edge for us.

Respondent 62: Cousin attending.

Respondent 63: School atmosphere/curriculum.

d. If applicable, why did you send the first sibling to the school?

Respondent 1: Not applicable.

Respondent 2: Not applicable.

Respondent 3: No response.

Respondent 4: Not applicable.

Respondent 5: The atmosphere and hands-on approach. The passion of the teachers. The theme of the school.

Respondent 6: No response.

Respondent 7: No response.

Respondent 8: No response.

Respondent 9: Same reasons as stated prior.

Respondent 10: Not applicable.

Respondent 11: No response.

Respondent 12: She went to a different school, but was transferred because it was not my first pick. As a matter of fact, it was not even on the list.

Respondent 13: No response.

Respondent 14: I sent my first child to the school because it was highly recommended and I was pleased with it's high level of education.

Respondent 15: No response.

Respondent 16: No response.

Respondent 17: At the time we moved to Montclair the school had a good reputation and the school was close.

Respondent 18: All the reasons listed prior.

Respondent 19: No response.

Respondent 20: My son is the second sibling, my daughter attends the high school.

Respondent 21: My son was a special needs student when we moved to Montclair and the school offered the speech therapy he needed.

Respondent 22: Gifted and talented fit with my daughter's strengths and I knew she'd like the school.

Respondent 23: It was not about the first child for me, it was because I like the program the school offers.

Respondent 24: No response.

Respondent 25: For the same reasons previously listed.

Respondent 26: My wife attended the school and it was her selection for child K-2.

Respondent 27: No response.

Respondent 28: Pre-k special needs program.

- Respondent 29: Same as stated.
- Respondent 30: Not applicable.
- Respondent 31: No response.
- Respondent 32: The school curriculum.
- Respondent 33: The first is our guinea pig. We hope the school works out.
- Respondent 34: Not applicable.
- Respondent 35: Location, availability of bus transportation, reputation.
- Respondent 36: Highly encouraged by friends who had children go to the school.
- Respondent 37: No response.
- Respondent 38: Great location.
- Respondent 39: Not applicable.
- Respondent 40: No response.
- Respondent 41: This is the first child to attend school in Montclair.
- Respondent 42: No response.
- Respondent 43: No response.
- Respondent 44: No response.
- Respondent 45: I have answered to questionnaire based on my school selection 11 years ago. Subsequent children attended because I was a known entity.
- Respondent 46: The School teaching style.
- Respondent 47: Not applicable.
- Respondent 48: No response.
- Respondent 49: Transition from Headstart to the School program was to me the perfect match. Results were positive and successful.
- Respondent 50: The school seemed to fit his learning style.

Respondent 51: No response.

Respondent 52: To try it out.

Respondent 53: We felt that Sophia would benefit from the School program which would enhance her learning qualities.

Respondent 54: I liked the school's philosophy.

Respondent 55: No response.

Respondent 56: Used all the previous guides, then hoped I made the correct choice. I believe I did.

Respondent 57: Type of program.

Respondent 58: Not applicable.

Respondent 59: No response.

Respondent 60: Matched my son's personality traits with that of the school's traits. (Good match)

Respondent 61: No response.

Respondent 62: No response.

Respondent 63: School atmosphere/curriculum.

e. Please elaborate on "what attracted" and "what mattered" to you when making a school choice selection for your child. Please be specific.

Respondent 1: I attended a kindergarten and preschool, and I have many fond memories of my time there. When I began first grade (non-the school environment), I was more advanced than most of the other children. I believe the school's methods allow children to explore and discover on their own, which is exactly what our daughter likes to do.

Respondent 2: I wanted a school with a warm climate. I need to feel secure about my children's safety and happiness while I'm at work. I want my children to be around nice semi-sheltered children, not children who watch violent and sexual television programs. I wanted a genuine and friendly staff who accepts children of all races. I want teachers who teach so my children will learn.

The school is the best.

- Respondent 3: I have read statistics that show a high dropout rate for gifted students because they were not sufficiently-challenged in school. Add this to the often covert racism still practiced by some educators, and the cultural bias too many Black Americans still have against high-achieving Black children, and you understand the immense pressure our children will face. When selecting a school, we needed to make sure that, while we taught her to love herself at home, we would not be undermined at school, and that this pressure would be minimized.
- Respondent 4: When we moved here from Princeton, before we left we met a couple that just recently moved from Montclair and had children that attended the school and recommended the school very highly. So my husband and I came up here before school started and checked it out and we approved.
- Respondent 5: What attracted me the most was the "feeling" I got when I walked in the building for the first time when my oldest child was to attend the school, she is now in 9th grade. I came for the school tour and was taken to the pre-k areas. The classrooms gave the impression that its sole purpose was to nurture and enrich the lives of the children. They appeared to have been put together with such attention to detail; the teachers seemed so passionate about what the magnet theme was. It mattered to me to feel comfortable in the space, which I did right away. It mattered that this be a place that allowed them to discover learning in a safe and wholesome environment. It mattered that the model for learning didn't force them into a pre-set mold but allowed them some room for self-driven learning. It mattered that the environment honors the magic of children.
- Respondent 6: The school is a very diverse school. I value the teaching styles but most of all ALL family types are welcomed.
- Respondent 7: On visiting the school, the school seemed much calmer, the teachers seemed to have the students' attention. Although class size was and still is a major concern, the full-time and part-time assistants were pluses. The school seemed more of what we felt a suburban public school should be than the others. I did have concerns beyond third grade but we felt most comfortable in the school.
- Respondent 8: No response.
- Respondent 9: No response.

Respondent 10: No response.

Respondent 11: No comment.

Respondent 12: I was attracted by the school location and their subject matter. I did not and still do not care for schools that are hung up on what a child does (talents, i.e. dance, sing, etc.). I feel that African-American children need a strong mental background in the world today.

Respondent 13: There were several things that really stood out about the school I chose first, although all the schools have the same core curriculum, some schools conveyed the importance of reading, writing and mathematics better than others. It seemed that the core curriculum was lost in the "themes" at other schools. It also was very evident that some schools were less organized and more chaotic than others. Another important factor is that I am a White, single parent with a biracial child. I wanted to make sure my child went to a school where there was significant parental involvement outside the classroom. I believe that being a single parent is a difficult task and that it takes a "village" to raise a child. It was important for me to know that the children my child was attending a school with are disciplined at home and taught ethics and morals.

Respondent 14: What attracted and what mattered to me when I was making a school choice selection for my child was when I first saw where the school was located. I asked parents (both male and female) what they thought about the school, and basically their response was very positive. They said it was a very good school with good teachers and their child/children learned a lot. What mattered to me is that my child received well-rounded academic instructions from well educated, caring teachers in a diverse, nurturing and safe environment.

Respondent 15: No response.

Respondent 16: My son also has other family members that attended and currently attend the school. They love it. I attended another school and it did not offer as much as the school currently does.

Respondent 17: I believe the most attractive thing that caught my attention was each child had their own choice of school to attend. I believe that any parent should have the right to send their child to any school of their choice.

Respondent 18: So much of the academics are dependent on the child/family happiness with the whole package. When a parent is happy and involved, they are enthusiastic supporters of education. If a parent does not feel included, they give off that "vibe" to the child who then never embraces the school for the academics.

Respondent 19: No response.

Respondent 20: I am a single mother of two, born and raised in New York. My 13-year old attended New York City public schools from first to seventh grades and was reading below grade level with no improvement. I didn't want to lose her in the system and I wanted to ensure she would be given better opportunities.

Respondent 21: What attracted us - the reputation of the school district while growing up in a town near Montclair. Son attended the school in '92 through '97 (special education two years - first and second grades). We had a positive experience. We have two children currently at the school and it's still a great school.

Respondent 22: No response.

Respondent 23: A school that is not limited in its academic programs in that it offers a variety of programs that appeal to kids of different backgrounds. It does not promote an environment where kids are not able to explore different subjects very early in life.

Respondent 24: My child is very active so I thought it would be best for him to attend a school that was more laid back, instead of one that concentrated on academics for the most part. That was the one thing that turned me off about school when I was a child and I wanted my son to have a good school experience.

Respondent 25: No response.

Respondent 26: No response.

Respondent 27: No response.

Respondent 28: No response.

Respondent 29: No response.

Respondent 30: I was very impressed that the students participated in the

Orientation process in a well-mannered, professional, polite way. I was attracted to the diversity in the different cultures, and it mattered a lot that the school has a very strong reading program.

- Respondent 31: I have four children. My sons are in high school but went to the school for elementary school. I have a daughter in another school currently. All schools chosen have been academic based without so much emphasis on extra-curriculum activities. Some of Montclair's schools have too much going on - too busy to focus on the basics. The school met all my academic guidelines and family is the origin of our teachings, which the school reinforces.
- Respondent 32: The overall school curriculum and the appreciation of diversity as exhibited by the school climate.
- Respondent 33: The school's presentation (atmosphere) when we visited. Talked to two other parents we knew, who have children at the school.
- Respondent 34: Not applicable.
- Respondent 35: No response.
- Respondent 36: No response.
- Respondent 37: No response.
- Respondent 38: No response.
- Respondent 39: As far as diversity, we figured any of the schools would have it based on the lottery system. I have to admit it was my first choice because I went there as a kid.
- Respondent 40: No response.
- Respondent 41: Both parents have advanced degrees from Ivy League institutions and therefore put a great emphasis on education, particularly the fundamentals in the early years. We felt that the school we selected emphasized this, as well as provided instruction in non-academic areas such as music and art, etc. that was of a high caliber. The other schools, we felt, may sacrifice one or the other in their attempt to focus on their particular themes. We also got the sense that the parents of the children in the school we selected were like-minded regarding education, and that there would be a lot of additional resources available to the school in community involvement, parent volunteers, etc. We also felt

comfortable with what we heard from friends and teaching staff and administrators. Any incidents that arose periodically were responded to and resolve.

Respondent 42: No response.

Respondent 43: No response.

Respondent 44: I know from personal experience that in order for real diversity to be experienced, there should be no majority in a student body or at least not a White majority. The school is not only 45% White/45% Black, but has a large volume of students so that there are both percentages and a sizable number of African American and "mixed" kids. The principal is a dynamic, young African-American woman. We love her and thought it would be great for our kids to learn from her leadership.

Respondent 45: I do believe that parents choose what they are comfortable with themselves. I have heard all the Johnny the Scientist stories but in truth all these schools have just about the same academic programs. The parents slant the extras. If parents don't like art, you can bet that the art program will be watered down. I certainly felt camaraderie, politically, with the parents I met at the school and this encouraged me to become involved. I became further involved when I realized how crazy some of the parents were, so I needed to help mold the program. I also became over involved in an effort to keep the feelings of inclusion out there. I like when parents are comfortable and included; children also take ownership of education. I am glad I had a chance to reflect on my choice of eleven years ago. I should mention that my godfather attended the school when it was the Black, neighborhood school in the early part of the century. I can't say, however, that I considered that legacy in my decision.

Respondent 46: We moved to Montclair in 1998 mainly because of its cultural diversity and the reputation of the school system. All of the schools seemed excellent, however, we chose the school because of its theme.

Respondent 47: This school enjoys a wonderful reputation as a bastion of learning. The school is orderly, well run and students are cared for as a "whole child".

Respondent 48: The overall diversity of the school, parent involvement,

academics and the administration were the main reasons for our decision.

Respondent 49: Much of what was previously stated determined what attracted and what mattered to me. Know your child, administrators, school history, est. determines what program best fits your child. I am very pleased with the principal, with her level of commitment, dedication and loyalty to the youth at large!!!

Respondent 50: No response.

Respondent 51: No response.

Respondent 52: No response.

Respondent 53: As stated earlier, the teacher played an important role in our choice of the school. We observed her interaction with the parents as well as the children which attended the open meeting at Headstart. Her professionalism validated our concern pertaining to the quality of care (academically, physically and morally) that our child would receive. We desired a school which would mentally/physically challenge as well as strengthen the child to be a well rounded, productive individual like her sister/brother.

Respondent 54: No response.

Respondent 55: No response.

Respondent 56: No response.

Respondent 57: No response.

Respondent 58: No response.

Respondent 59: No response.

Respondent 60: No response.

Respondent 61: No response.

Respondent 62: No response.

Respondent 63: All of the Montclair elementary schools are good schools. The school atmosphere and then curriculum was what attracted me to the school. I had a gut feeling about the school. I wasn't

sure initially about the diversity but later found out that the diversity is definitely there also. I am very happy with my decision. Even more importantly my children are very happy.