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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF SCHOOL CHOICE

by

Duke Jon Bradley III

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ABSTRACT

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF SCHOOL CHOICE

by Duke Jon Bradley III

May 2015

This dissertation explores whether the marketable features of three different charter schools in East Atlanta, Georgia, influenced parents' school selections and whether differences in race, income level, and educational attainment created patterns of interest regarding their selections. The accessible population (N=1865) for this study included parents of elementary and middle school aged children enrolled in three East Atlanta schools. A sample of 150 parents elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in the three schools were randomly selected from the accessible population. One hundred percent of the proposed participants (150) agreed to participate as subjects. Data obtained for this study were analyzed using between-subjects designs and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) statistical procedures. Post hoc analyses were conducted for significant findings. Factors for the designs included race, income level, and educational attainment. The dependent variable included the marketable features of charter schools. Null hypotheses were tested at the .05 probability level. The findings indicated that parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia, rated the importance of the marketable features of charter schools differently based on their race. However, there was no statistically significant difference in participants' rating of the importance of the marketable features of charter schools based on their income level or educational attainment. The findings and implications of the present study contribute

to the knowledge base surrounding school choice. Limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for future research are presented.

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May 2015

DEDICATION

To the memory of Walter Anderson Hall, Jr. and Carrie Bell Hall of Columbus, Georgia.

This dissertation was made possible by the grace of God. I am so grateful to you, Father, for pushing, pulling, and keeping me at your side during this process.

To my family – mom, dad, and Cara, you inspire me. You have kept me driven and motivated to accomplish all of my goals and to bring honor and respect to our family names. Your words of encouragement, your timely reprimands, and your blind faith in my ability have sustained me. I cannot think of any better tribute to you than this dissertation.

To you, mom, in particular – no one in this world drives me to achieve quite like you. At every turn in my life – for every achievement and for every failure, during moments of uncertainty and during moments of personal challenge – you have been there. Your presence has meant more to me than anything. The steady hand of your maternal guidance and the comfort of your unrelenting love has meant the world to me.

To my loving sister – I am half the man that you are a woman. Had I been blessed with your heart, your spirit, and your tenacity, this dissertation would have been completed long before now and with half the difficulty. I am truly blessed to have an angel looking over my shoulder and protecting my heart. You have never failed in those things.

To my father, I thank you for planting the seeds of curiosity, reading, intellect, and achievement within me. I am forever grateful for the subtle power of your influence.

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To my alma mater, Morehouse College, and the tradition of excellence that you require which haunts me, one of my greatest ambitions has been to become a respectable Morehouse Man. My hope is that this dissertation moves me closer to that distinction.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
APS	Atlanta Public Schools
CMO	Charter Management Organization
CREDO	Center for Research on Educational Outcomes
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
KIPP	Knowledge Is Power Program
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NEA	National Education Association
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Within the modern context of education reform, the concept of school choice is featured prominently in the discussion about how best to meet the academic needs of America's children. While the 20-year expansion of charter schools offers innovative school models as alternatives to traditional schools, the question is no longer one of choice, but of equity (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011).

Because the vast majority of charter schools are populated with low-income minority children, new charter school models and ways of facilitating instruction have been created to cater to a specific population of children (Bell, 2009). This is best observed and most commonly seen in the "No Excuses" model utilized by the national management organization Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) (Matthews, 2005). What does it all mean? What are the implications of these approaches? Are they even necessary? Are they based on assumptions that we make about the interests of parents who choose charter schools without regard for certain socio-cultural factors or because of them? The next 20 years of charter school expansion might be better informed by considering that most parents want the same things for their children, and the factors that inspire their choices transcend whatever differences that may exist among them.

This dissertation includes a brief presentation of the research encompassing parents' socio-cultural differences and their impact on school choice. Specifically, the dissertation addresses the following topic: The socio-cultural influences of school choice.

This study is comprised of two general purposes. First, the study explored whether the marketable features of three different charter schools in East Atlanta, Georgia influenced parents' school selections and whether differences or similarities in race, income level, and educational attainment levels created patterns of interest regarding their selections. Second, the study considered the converging dynamics and collective influences of race, income level, and educational attainment - and how they manifest within the decisions that urban parents living in East Atlanta, Georgia make regarding where they send their children to school and why. Ultimately, these inquiries were purposed to reveal whether any one specific or combination of socio-cultural characteristics serve as predictors for parents' choice in schools.

The dissertation is formulated in the following manner: The first section presents an introduction to the content surrounding the research. This section includes subsections discussing the statement of the problem, research questions and hypotheses, definition of terms, delimitations, assumptions, and justification. The following section includes a review of the existing research relevant to the study. The next section specifies the methodology of the study and includes an overview of the study, a description of the research design, and a presentation of the study participants, instrumentation, general procedures involved in conducting the study, limitations, and data analyses. The final section includes a comprehensive list of references used to develop the dissertation and several appendices.

Problem Statement

Never before in history have parents had more educational options for their children than they have today (Cucchiara, 2008). Voucher and charter school advocates,

the federal government's growing specter of interest and involvement in education, and well organized, highly motivated citizen groups have all played a critical, yet different role in the expansion of school choice in America (Elmore, 1991). Ironically, the respective interests of these groups in school choice raise questions about issues that the United States has always grappled with, albeit in other areas. On the matter of school choice, the themes of liberty, equity, race, and economics attach to nearly every modern and historical perspective about it (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002). As a result, we find that the points of contention often debated about school choice are transcendent, and therefore directly linked to the common American experience. Considered as a whole, they assist in extending the narrative about this country's democratic legacy while simultaneously engendering its separatist heritage.

As the debate about school choice has intensified over the past 40 years, we are now faced with a new set of pointed inquiries. As such, the focus of this dissertation hinges on an analysis of the predominant influences of choice. Simply, it is a study about the factors that influence how parents arrive at the decisions of where they will send children to school and whether those results align with certain socio-cultural indicators.

The truth about school choice in America is that its roots are connected to this country's legacy of separatism, which is undeniably connected to matters of race and class (Brantlinger, 2003). Despite the pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* era where segregated public schools were reinforced as a matter of law, America's public schools now remain significantly segregated even several years after *Brown* (Strauss, 2013). Ironically, we see this bear true mostly within schools that are intended to advance educational choice.

Consider that in 2010, the Civil Rights Project of the University of California-Los Angeles detailed some ironic truths about race, segregation, and choice (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010). Their research revealed,

While segregation for blacks among all public schools has been increasing for nearly two decades, black students in charter schools are far more likely than their traditional public school counterparts to be educated in intensely segregated settings. At the national level, 70 percent of black charter school students attend intensely segregated minority charter schools (which enroll 90-100 percent of students from under-represented minority backgrounds), or twice as many as the share of intensely segregated black students in traditional public schools. (pg. 4)

To some, the presumption within these findings is that the greatest beneficiaries of school choice are minority students situated in urban areas. Although charter schools disproportionately serve this specific population of students, middle class families across the United States are exercising their power of choice as well – evidenced by the popularity of socially and economically diverse schools such as Washington D.C.’s E.L. Haynes Charter School, Citizens of the World Prep in Los Angeles, and Upper West Success in New York City. These schools attract children of varying backgrounds, but who also maintain a middle class social distinction - among them being city workers and government officials (Russo, 2013).

The Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and Kirkwood communities of East Atlanta are also home to 3 very different charter schools. Together, they serve as the subordinate focus of this study. School A, School B, and School C are different in many ways, primarily because of the differences in their academic philosophies and organizational

models. However, they are also similar, mostly because of the racial and economic diversity of the students that populate them.

A historical review of East Atlanta, where these schools are located reveals that they have all once experienced *urban flight*, a steady exodus of working class and middle-income white families bound for suburban communities on the outer edges of the metropolitan Atlanta area (Chernoff, 1980). It is believed that their departure contributed to the rapid decline of the communities they left behind, leaving them both socially and economically vulnerable. Also, the once proud public schools in these neighborhoods became abysmally low performing and perpetually failing compared to their statewide counterparts (Hornsby, 1991).

Historians record the downward spiral of these communities as halting following the successful opposition to a construction project in the 1970's (Chernoff, 1980). Consequently, interest in various East Atlanta neighborhoods increased and became the precursor for *gentrification* in the city. Today, these once economically accessible neighborhoods are home to a unique collection of upper middle-class young urban professionals as well as some lesser affluent families who have held over from the 1950's and 60's.

Despite the gentrification of these neighborhoods, there remain difficult aspects of the urban living experience for families to manage. Of most importance, they are charged with negotiating the challenges posed by inadequate public education (Luptan, 1997).

In the past, urban dwelling families demonstrated their faith and commitment to public schools simply by choosing to send their children to them. This kind of

commitment was driven by a theology of sorts - a belief in local control and involvement for all aspects of community development, which included education among other interests (Cucchiara, 2008). Today, the landscape has changed and today's urban parents are approaching their children's education somewhat differently (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). While some parents are burdened with the guilt of abandoning the local public school in favor of other educational options, others remain intensely focused on using the power of school choice to satisfy their needs.

This study examines the educational choices that East Atlanta parents who send their children to 3 different charter schools make, taking into account their respective socio-cultural differences including race, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment. It explores the motivations behind their decisions and the psychology that reinforces their decision making process. Among other things, the study investigates whether there are similarities and differences between parents relative to their choice of schools, and whether those choices are made irrespective of their socio-cultural differences, or pursuant to them. Lastly, it investigates if and which marketable features of charter schools inspire their interest most, and if those interests are based on certain determinants including race, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Three research questions (Q) and 3 hypotheses (H_0) were established to direct the dissertation study. The research questions and null hypotheses are as follows:

Q1. Does the importance of the marketable features of charter schools (location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers, functioning/effective PTA, CMO's reputation, charter

school's reputation, data—test scores, curriculum use, welcoming school and school staff) differ by the race (African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, other) of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia?

H₀1. The importance of the marketable features of charter schools does not differ by the race of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia.

Q2. Does the importance of the marketable features of charter schools (location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers, functioning/effective PTA, CMO's reputation, charter school's reputation, data—test scores, curriculum used, welcoming school and school staff) differ by the income level (\$0 – 29,999; \$30,000 – 59,999; \$60,000 – 99,999; \$100,000 – more) of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia?

H₀2. The importance of the marketable features of charter schools does not differ by the income level of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia.

Q3. Does the importance of the marketable features of charter schools (location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers; functioning/effective PTA; CMO's reputation; charter

school's reputation; data—test scores; curriculum used; welcoming school and school staff) differ by the educational attainment (non high school graduate, GED recipient, high school graduate, college graduate, graduate degree/professional degree) of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia?

H₀₃. The importance of the marketable features of charter schools does not differ by the educational attainment of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms are related to the study and have been established to contribute to the overall understanding of the dissertation.

Bureaucracy - Government characterized by specialization of functions, adherence to fixed rules, and hierarchy of authority (“Bureaucracy,” 2015).

Charter School - A tax-supported school established by a charter between a granting body (as a school board) and an outside group (as of teachers and parents) which operates the school without most local and state educational regulations so as to achieve set goals (“Charter School,” 2015).

Charter Management Organization – A nonprofit that provides services to a network of charter schools.

Gentrification - The process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents (“Gentrification,” 2015).

Marketable Features of Charter Schools - the qualities that parents considered most when choosing a school to enroll their child(ren) (i.e. location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers; functioning/effective PTA; CMO's reputation; charter school's reputation; data—test scores; curriculum used; welcoming school and school staff.)

Parental Involvement - The participation of parents in every area of children's education and development from birth to adulthood (National Parent Teacher Association, 2000).

Public School – A school that gets money from and is controlled by a local government (“Public School,” 2015).

Urban - In, relating to, or characteristic of a city or town (“Urban,” 2015).

Voucher - A government cash grant or tax credit for parents, equal to all or part of the cost of educating their child at an elementary or secondary school of their choice. (“Voucher,” 2015).

Delimitations

The boundaries of the study were designed to narrow its scope and focus. Participants in the final study were selected based on the criteria that they were: 1) parents living in the East Atlanta, Georgia neighborhoods, and 2) parents who send their children to School A, School B, or School C. As a result, the data that guided the utility of this study were determined by these boundaries and other variables of consideration (e.g. race, income level) were only reflected within this population.

Assumptions

The demographic data collected from survey participants (parents of School A, School B, and School C) is assumed to be true, thereby maintaining the integrity of the study and the voracity of the findings presented. The assumption of truthful responses was safeguarded by the guarantee of both the anonymity and confidentiality of participant responses to the research survey. Protocols and procedures for completing the survey were communicated prior to their administration along with clear directions and fidelity disclaimers.

Justification

There is substantial research that addresses the complex nuances of school choice. However, there is little research about the parents and families who are actually choosing. Studies specifically geared toward examining the characteristics that influence parents' choice of charter schools is even more limited.

Research indicates that spanning all socio-cultural categories, factors like academic performance and instructional quality matter most to parents (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Furthermore, the 1992 Carnegie Foundation study found that parents' educational attainment levels can make patterns of choice even more clearly discernable. For example, Schneider and Buckley (2002) found that economically disadvantaged parents maintained a clear preference for schools that were functionally safe, while families of higher social distinction placed value on qualities such as core values and diversity – downplaying the features most important to minority, less affluent families.

As a result, this study was approached with interest and regard for the challenges that a specific group of parents negotiate while attempting to secure quality school options for their children, especially within communities in East Atlanta, Georgia where there are few quality public school options and families with wide ranging socio-

economic stations. This study is also preoccupied with the differences and similarities of those parents, limited to an examination of their race, income level, and educational attainment. These categories are significant because they help draw a contrast between the vast majority of parents and families who overwhelmingly exercise their public school choice options throughout Atlanta and the nation.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Explanations and predictions of people's choices, in everyday life...are often founded on the assumption of human rationality. The definition of rationality has been much debated, but there is a general agreement that rational choices should satisfy some elementary requirements of consistency and coherence (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 453)

Introduction

Chapter II presents a review of the current literature relevant to this dissertation. The information provided in the review of the literature is arranged into five sections. Section I begins with the theoretical foundation and includes an overview of Rational Choice Theory. Following the overview on Rational Choice Theory, is a discussion regarding race, income, and educational attainment as socio-cultural factors and a discussion in reference to school choice. Section II provides a background and history of school choice including its evolution in term and modern interpretations. Section III presents both criticisms and benefits of school choice within public education, respectively, while Section IV addresses parental positions on school choice. Finally, Section V highlights the role and impact of federal and state regulations on school choice. More specifically, Section V details governmental influence on policy decisions in the state of Georgia. Chapter II ends with a brief summary.

Rational Choice Theory

The theoretical basis for this study is rooted in considerations of choice and preference. In general, there is no singular definition for rational choice, but the sense

that it is often used prescribes a process of decision making that is deliberative, consistent, and according to a particular criterion (Nozick, 1993). While this dissertation focuses on parents who have made conscious decisions to send their children to charter schools, more specifically, it is concerned with why parents chose certain schools and whether there are predictable patterns to be gleaned based on distinguishing sociocultural factors including race, income, and educational attainment.

Based on the Rational Choice Theory (RCT), choices can invariably be made in the presence or absence of other options, and those choices are typically preferences of the “highest order” (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). While charter schools are designed and marketed according to their distinguishing characteristics, parents are uniquely positioned to make choices after comparing their options against one another. The rationality of their decisions may correspond with interests or even dislikes, but more importantly, their decisions should satisfy some consistency or coherence.

The Rational Choice Theory, however, also accounts for the error in this approach, particularly when choices are framed or contextualized in a way that might influence a decision (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Although this dissertation does not specifically investigate or question whether certain sociocultural factors inherently influence parents’ decisions when choosing schools, it does explore whether there are consistencies in preference based upon them. Among parents who have already made the conscious choice to enroll their children in a charter school, this dissertation considers whether similarities or differences in race, income, and educational attainment creates a certain context which may lead to predictable choices. Context, as described within RCT acts as a lens through which to observe available options. For purposes of this study, the

socio-cultural factors of race, income, and educational attainment serve in that capacity – each representing alternative perspectives based on their categorical differences.

Race, Income, and Educational Attainment as Socio-Cultural Factors

Modern views about the tradition of sociocultural research are informed by differing opinions about culture (Rieber, 1997). By definition, however, sociocultural theory requires consideration of both social and cultural factors. Considered together, relationships between people and the factors that impact their beliefs in a way that creates a shared set of attitudes or values serves as an entry point for sociocultural research (Nardi, 1996).

More evolved sociocultural theories account for the impact that complex life experiences have on how an individual views or experiences the world in contrast to simply limiting it to a commingling of social and cultural factors (Zanna & Rempel, 1988). While this dissertation is preoccupied with race, income, and educational attainment as factors that impact how parents decide where to send their children to school, it is important to assess the bases upon which race, income, and educational attainment serve as socio-cultural factors.

First, race, income, and educational attainment represent qualities that have the effect of distinguishing or grouping individuals according to certain characteristics and beliefs. These qualities can provide a particular social identity or perpetuate a particular set of cultural norms within the context of their shared traits or common experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the tradition of sociocultural theory, race is considered to be a sociocultural feature although the construct of race unto itself is a complex proposition and difficult to define (Harris, 1995). Nonetheless, the wide-ranging,

somewhat nebulous nature of race is what confirms it as a sociocultural factor. Race allows us to group individuals, in many instances, according to common traits or experiences while also accounting for the different social and cultural experiences that members of a particular race may have.

With regard to income and educational attainment, considered together or independently, both have distinguishing qualities. For example, individuals with access to capital, credit, or particular lived experiences based on wealth or education can create a social context under which to live, and as a result, a certain human behavior. The reciprocal is true as well. Similarly some studies have even shown that more or less access to education leads to a certain way of thinking and experiencing the world. Research of this sort reinforces the notion that common experience can in some instances create a cultural context that influences socialization, worldview, perspective, and interest.

Considering the Activity Theory espoused by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1986), sociocultural research emphasizes the interaction between people and their environments. Ultimately, the goal of the Activity Theory is to understand the unity of consciousness and activity, which, for parents surveyed for this study, involves their collective ratings of charter school marketable features and the conscious act of enrolling their children in a particular charter school. Research conducted for this dissertation categorized parents beyond their existing membership in a particular community. A combination of the aforementioned theories provided a basis for the categorization of parent participants and the theoretical basis for this study. Parent participants were regarded as a group of individuals who had chosen to enroll their children at a particular school and considerations for choosing those schools were examined and parsed based on

the socio-cultural factors of race, income, and educational attainment – primarily because they represent distinguishing characteristics among individuals who otherwise shared a common experience.

School Choice

America's constantly evolving approach to improving public education has always involved the themes of equality, liberty, and efficiency (Elmore, 1987). These themes were initially captured in the writings of Thomas Paine in the 18th century, who argued that the government should take a more assertive role in caring for the needs of the poor by subsidizing their education as a means to social mobility (Paine, 1792). Paine's work now serves as the foundation for the historical debate on school choice, though the motivations of school advocates are widely varied. For several decades afterwards, people representing different social, cultural, and political beliefs have continued to debate and write about school choice – even now, well into the twentieth and twenty-first century (Elmore, 1987). These discussions have led to key legislation that influences the scope and character of education in America today. For example, the 1964 Civil Rights Act initiated school programs that specifically addressed desegregation and equality in America's public schools (Wells, 1996). Since, school choice has been a central feature of the nation's current education reform movement.

The Argument for School Choice

The argument for school choice has had several different spokesmen for several years. Foremost among those were sociologists, politicians, the American conservative establishment, and in many instances, well organized, community-minded parents and families (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). In fact, education reformers (e.g. policy officials,

school leaders, non-profit directors) have generally acknowledged that school choice allows parents an opportunity to have more say in the education of their children than they would have, otherwise (Neild, 2005). While parents are often credited with inspiring some of the most significant modern advances in education, their influences on matters relating to school choice have expanded their rising influence on education policy in recent years. Of course, there are many instances where parents have demanded school options for their children and the extent to which they actually exercise that right impacts and influences education policy (Hartney, 2014).

Despite evidence regarding the positive outcomes that correspond with the power of school choice, one of the issues that often complicate the cause of school choice advocates is the failure to produce a generally accepted application of the term, mutually agreed upon by experts in the field. Consequently, many educators, policy makers, and government officials differ on what the term means in both theory and application. In addition to the lack of clarity for what school choice is, there also appears to be little interest in creating a universally accepted definition because the term resonates differently depending upon a variety of factors (Carey, 2012). The topic has shown that perspective on the issue is largely influenced by race and political affiliation, with white conservatives generally favoring it, and non-white progressives generally standing in opposition to its original premise (Morken & Formicola, 1999). There are several exceptions, however, which adds to the irony of school as a sociological phenomenon in America. Nonetheless, because the well-established positive impacts of school choice seemingly outweigh its complications or negative consequences, it is essential for persons intimately involved with aspects of the modern education reform movement to work

collaboratively to dispel myths, to create a consistent message, and to accurately define school choice in a manner inclusive of its challenges and limitations.

Definition of School Choice

Given the limited understanding of school choice on the landscape of public education, it is essential to establish a concrete definition for the purpose of the current study. School choice represents the means through which parents are provided the opportunity to choose the school their children will attend. As a matter of form, school choice does not give preference to one form of schooling or another; rather, it manifests itself whenever a student attends school outside of the one they would have been assigned to by geographic default (Neild, 2005). The most common options offered by school choice programs are open enrollment laws that allow students to attend other public schools, private schools, charter schools, tax credit and deductions for expenses related to schooling, vouchers, and homeschooling (Noguera, 2003).

Although the term school choice is used to describe two different interests including charter school advocacy and voucher support, school choice from the perspective supported by the aforementioned definition relates most significantly to options made available out of a lack of quality selection among traditional public schools in a particular geographical area. Based on this definition and the corresponding conceptualization of the term, school choice is fundamentally rooted in advocacy and public engagement. It acknowledges the priority and emphasis placed on education by many families while also inspiring the interests of the business community, government officials, philanthropists, and social entrepreneurs. Therefore, when school choice is spoken of – it must inherently involve and acknowledge the necessary collaborations that

exist between the public sector and the private sector, which ultimately engender the power of parents and families to demand school options suitable to their needs (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009). Partnerships of this sort are seen most demonstrably through the growing number of partnerships that exist between schools and organizations like the Walton Family Foundation and the Gates Foundation – both of whom support choice initiatives through the expansion of the quality charter schools nationwide, but especially in Georgia (Rich, 2012).

National organizations like the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA, 2015) have also offered their formal opinion about school choice by articulating three specific beliefs:

- National PTA supports educational choices within public schools and believes that parents should be involved in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of public school choice plans.
- National PTA opposes any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system that diverts public funds to private or sectarian schools.
- National PTA believes home schools and other nonpublic schools should meet the same educational standards as public schools. (“School Choice” section).

Clearly, from the National PTA’s stance, school choice is an issue that cuts across several varied, yet related topics including parent involvement, matters of funding, and performance standards. In essence, their position reinforces the notion that school choice is not monochromatic, but a complex modern educational issue that lacks common understanding. Consequently, when discussing school choice, educators should refrain from doing so as if it is a universally understood term or as if it bears a widely accepted

connotation. Instead, however, it is imperative to consider the notion that evidence on school choice is mixed and insufficient for supporting the claims of either pro-choice or anti-choice groups.

Background and History of School Choice

While many believe that the origins of school choice stem from states in the Jim Crow south organizing to undermine the power of the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, the arrival of school choice into the American socio-political landscape is much more complex (Ball, Bowe, & Gerwitz, 1996). Consider political scientist Alan Wolfe's (2003) assertion that "school choice emerged from the right end of the political spectrum" as an attempt to attack big city, public school bureaucracy (p. 34). Ironically, this summation is somewhat accurate, though incomplete. It is true, for example, that southern states once used choice to avoid the impact of *Brown*. In fact, some states purposed themselves to create "freedom of choice" plans which appeared to give choice to blacks and whites alike, but were essentially designed to keep both groups away from each other and in their previously segregated school environments (Bonastia, 2012). Other accounts of tactics deployed to undermine *Brown* indicate a thoughtful and organized plan of action. Persons possessing political power and public sway over the general public such as Virginia Congressman J. Barrye Wall are often cited as the organizers of such tactics. He was quoted in a local Virginia newspaper as having said:

We are working [on] a scheme in which we will abandon public schools, sell the buildings to our corporation, reopen as privately operated schools with tuition grants from [Virginia] and P.E. county as the basic financial program. Those

wishing to go to integrated schools can take their tuition grants and operate their own schools. To hell with 'em. (Bonastia, 2012, para. 3)

History demonstrates, however, that strategies of this sort were eventually fought off, but had the determined effect of delaying *Brown*'s application. Therefore, one might conclude that, "choice has a history of unlawfully segregating students" (Forman, 2005, p. 1288). Going farther, it may even be surmised that given the history of America's Civil Rights movement, school choice was designed and applied as an instrument intent on resisting what had been pronounced by *Brown* as the law of the land – integration (Bonastia, 2012).

Analysis of this sort, however, is fundamentally flawed because insofar that it overlooks, if not ignores the efforts of blacks, liberals, civil rights organizations, and local control advocates of the 1960's who demanded more say over the neighborhood schools where they enrolled their children (Forman, 2005). The irony is that today, the arguments made by those who advocate for school choice and local control are similar to the arguments made decades earlier by people of different political leanings and social distinctions. Their demands suggested that a public school system that fails to meet the needs of the people they are designed to serve should be challenged. This very same premise reinforces the argument of school choice advocates today. While modern school choice advocates reacquaint themselves with the arguments made by their predecessors several years prior, the modern school choice movement has its origin in two separate, yet, equally compelling issues – vouchers and charter schools.

Vouchers

The voucher education system in the United States emerged out of parental dissatisfaction with traditional public schools due mostly to their poor academic performance (Weiler, 1974). Under this system, the government issues a certificate to parents for the purpose of applying it toward tuition at a private school rather than an assigned public school based on residential location. Conversely, systems that do not offer vouchers continue to be funded by individuals who opt to pay for private school education but are still taxed for public schools. Opponents of school vouchers argue that allowing families the option of both public and private schools undermines the public education system through threatening its funding and enrollment (Wells, 1996).

Although the voucher system experienced its most significant scrutiny in the early 2000's, the concept is not a new one. Nearly forty years before, economist Milton Friedman offered a simple idea. He espoused a notion that empowered low-income families to have greater say in their children's education. Friedman went further by chastising overreaching government involvement in education and declared that a voucher system would widen the range of choices available to low-income families while simultaneously limiting the power of the controlling bureaucracy of local school districts (Friedman & Friedman, 1980).

Friedman's voucher idea was widely unpopular in many circles for several reasons. It was only until fellow sociologist Christopher Jencks produced a voucher model that would require schools to accept students on a random basis rather than for the purpose of maintaining racial and socioeconomic balance did momentum toward implementation increase. However, this initial iteration of the voucher program proved unsuccessful, though – having undergone significant changes that materially altered its

original design to accommodate various stipulations such as teacher salaries and parochial school participation. (Sawhill & Smith, 2000). As a result, by 1976, America's initial voucher program was discontinued.

Because of the disappointing results of Jencks' voucher design, school choice advocates lost momentum until President Ronald Reagan took office in the 1980's (Forman, 2005). Reagan, like many of his Republican cohorts, believed that vouchers and choice was a free market, economic ideal which could be transferred into the field of education for the purpose of creating competition and by default, greater accountability and performance for all public schools (Billett, 1978).

Charter Schools

The other end of the modern debate regarding school choice involves charter schools. The National Education Association (NEA) defines charter schools as "publicly funded elementary or secondary schools that have been freed from some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools, in exchange for some type of accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each charter school's charter" (NEA, 2015). Much like the topic of school choice, there exists much confusion nationwide about what a charter school is and what it is not (Mulholland, 1996). Again, clarity about the matter depends on a variety of factors including geographic location and the controlling interest in a particular area.

Charter schools, first envisioned by University of Massachusetts professor Albert Shanker, were initially created to inspire reform within the American public education landscape (Forman, 2007). In essence, they were intended to create, much like within other aspects of a free market society, real choice for families and students, and

competition among schools. In order for charter schools to thrive under this schema, it was imperative that they not be bound by the standard rules and regulations that govern traditional district schools. However, in exchange for autonomy over matters such as curriculum, finance, and personnel, charter schools are almost uniformly held to a higher standard of performance than their traditional public school counterparts.

Much like the voucher system initially introduced by the social progressives like Friedman and Jencks, charter schools were envisioned as a forward leaning ideal as well. Democrats began supporting charter schools during the 1980's as a way to create innovation in education, not to outright mute the authority or usurp the power of local school districts (Morken & Formicola, 1999). The American conservative political establishment had their reasons for supporting charter schools as well. They believed that the economic privilege enjoyed by America in the 1980's was based on the application of free enterprise principles. They believed further that free enterprise could work in any landscape in which it was applied – including education. However, by the 1980's vouchers remained a primary Republican education priority led by President Ronald Reagan (Kosar, 2011).

Soon, it became evident that charter schools presented promise - not only in performance and autonomy, but as a way to advance the interests of school choice advocates. Through charter schools, parents could leverage their influence with local school districts by organizing themselves, petitioning for, and sending their children to schools that suited their specific needs. In fact, with original charter school legislation passing in 1991, an avenue was created for the opening of community based charter schools nationwide whereby parents played an intricate role in their design,

implementation, and success. Ironically, the spirit that drives community based charter schools today is similar to the vision articulated many years before by “free school” supporters in the 1940’s. It was said of the free school,

The school’s controlling board of people from the neighborhood was thought of as the nucleus of a well-organized, confident, and experienced parent group that could demand to influence significantly the schools in our community and who could move from their experience to demand that the public School Board begin to make the kinds of changes necessary to provide high quality education for all. (Graubard, 1972, p. 275)

While charter schools maintain a fairly significant foothold in many states across the country, their original vision has been marred by politically charged bouts with teachers unions, concerns over selective enrollment practices, and lawsuits on issues ranging from the equitable acceptance and treatment of special education students to school authorization authority (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Despite these challenges, the most intense opposition to charter schools to date involves questions of quality. In fact, although charter schools were intended to be the manifest of innovation in education, generally speaking, charter schools that offer unique designs and conduct their affairs with autonomous operational control have not significantly surpassed traditional district schools in terms of student achievement.

The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (2013b) study out of Stanford University provides the most dispositive research on the topic. The report found that less than 20% of charter schools outperform their traditional public school counterparts and

that many charter schools actually perform worse than their traditional public school counterparts.

Some charter school critics argue further that less managerial oversight for charter schools allows for certain abuses to thrive including financial corruption and conflicts of interest perpetrated by independent school board members and others (Confessore, 2010). Notwithstanding these critiques, there are many schools across the country that showcase the potential benefits of charter schools by performing well above traditional schools, especially with high poverty populations. For example, proponents of charter schools and school choice often tout the success of management organizations like Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and Uncommon Schools (Kowal, Hassel, & Crittendon, 2009). Both are national networks operating some of the highest performing schools in the country despite serving a majority of economically disadvantaged students.

Criticisms and Benefits of School Choice Within Public Education

The progeny of school choice in America is inextricably linked to race, often used as a tool to perpetuate strategic political agendas associated with racial segregation. Although this history does not reflect the complete lineage of school choice as an ideology, it does provide perspective for the motivation behind its emergence into the narrative of public education in America (Chubb, 1995).

Criticisms of School Choice

Public education in America is at a critical junction, primarily because of the expansion of school choice options for families. The dwindling faith in traditional public schools and the influence of interest groups and progressive reformers have all managed to create a new hope for the future of education in this country (Toppo, 2012). As a

result, it appears that parents are better informed and more demonstrably passionate about increasing their voice in the development and implementation of choice options.

There are critics, however, and to many – unrestricted school choice is an unacceptable proposition. In 1996, Willis Hawley of the University of Maryland detailed several negative implications of school choice when he noted:

- School choice will reduce the opportunities for students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds to interact and learn from each other. Choice will fragment student populations into homogenous groups, which does not reflect the heterogeneity of the real world.
- Choice will decrease the number of public school students, eroding support for public school funding through decreased per-pupil allocations or parents who would probably not support tax initiatives aimed at bolstering all public schools. Decreased funding would especially affect children with special needs who require significant revenue expenditures.
- The cost of private schooling may increase because if private schools have access to public monies (vouchers), then they will raise tuition. That is the way the market works.
- Studies have shown that parents do not possess high academic expectations compared to educators and civic leaders. A consequence of school choice will concentrate achievement-oriented parents, leaving the traditional schools with relatively unmotivated parents. (Matheson & McKnight, 1991, para. 24)

While school choice has always had critics, the sharpest criticism relative to this dissertation, however, involves an assumption about parents and families. Opponents of school choice assume that families prefer racially homogenous schools as a priority option. Several studies such as Goldhaber's (1996) *Public and Private High Schools: Is School Choice an Answer to the Productivity Problem?* found that parents are highly sensitive to racial composition. Additionally, in *Why Are Schools Racially Segregated? Implications for School Choice Policies*, Lankford and Wyckoff (2005) also addressed racial composition and reported that when the proportion of minority students in public schools rises, the likelihood of white, college-educated parents transferring their children to private schools increases.

Opponents of school choice argue further that it appeals principally to white parents who want to avoid sending their children to a school with a majority of African American students (Zahirovic-Hebert & Turnbull, 2009). Additionally, because there have been accounts of expressed concern about racism perpetuating in school systems, beliefs that school choice is linked to racial prejudice are not necessarily ill-conceived. The reasoning supporting their position, however, is reinforced by a history in the United States of providing fewer and lesser quality resources to schools serving predominantly African American students. Thus, many white families forthrightly use the percentage of blacks in a school as an indicator of quality (Brantlinger, 2003).

As far as matters of school choice are concerned, most opponents still believe that the ability to choose schools is detrimental to racial integration. In fact, some opponents believe choice theoretically has the potential to be positive but would be difficult to

implement in such a way so as to truly change perceptions and promote a mixture of ethnicities in student populations (Chemerinsky (2005).

Advocates for School Choice

The strongest argument for choice is that it bypasses the primary mechanism that creates stratified schools – residential segregation. By detaching from the common practice of determining school attendance based on residence, it has been argued that school choice may provide options for many families trapped in racially homogenous school districts (Cucchiara, 2008). There is also evidence that suggests relationships among ethnic and racial groups may actually be more positive in chosen schools than in assigned schools. This dynamic might also explain the high rates of parental satisfaction with charter schools, schools of choice.

School choice advocates also maintain that charter schools, in particular, universally maintain a design model that creates the conditions for high levels of student achievement (Morken & Formicola, 1999). Among those include parental involvement and direct hiring autonomy. Although traditional district schools can implement strategies to increase parental involvement, charter schools are able to actually mandate it as a condition for continued enrollment. Next to parents, teachers are the most important factor in school, family, and community partnerships (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). When charter schools are able to waive certain traditional requirements for teachers such as specific certifications and other credentials, they are better positioned to hire personnel who directly align with their select mission, vision, and values. The combination of these influences can significantly impact the success of a school. In fact, when teachers implement parental involvement strategies themselves as a significant component of their

daily practices, both parents and students benefit (Katz & Bauch, 1999). Some noteworthy benefits include improvements in student attendance and achievement scores, increased parent-child interactions, within the home, initiated by parents, and an increase in optimism among parents concerning their ability to assist their children in school-related tasks (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Altogether, they figure prominently in the arguments often made about school choice and the autonomy that often distinguishes choice options from the traditional district schools.

The Role and Impact of Federal and State Regulations on School Choice

Federal Influence on School Choice

Over the period that school choice has significantly influenced public education policy, the federal government has not played a direct role in its proliferation until recent years. Historically, the notion of having an educated citizenry was aligned to a national interest of protecting and reinforcing the strength of the union. Today, the right of the federal government to create policy and influence the national landscape of public education emanates from Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution which granted Congress the power to lay and collect taxes to provide for the general welfare of the United States (Jefferson-Jenkins & Hill, 2015). Through the *general welfare* clause, the federal government reserves the power to initiate educational activity and to join with states in the development of their respective educational policies.

While federal legislation has long been in place, particularly since the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000 (NCLB), federal engagement in the affairs of public education action has not escaped scrutiny. For example, Salisbury, who serves as Director of the Center for

Educational Freedom criticizes the *No Child Left Behind Act* as intrusive. Through the power of NCLB, "...not only are most children still forced to go to government schools, but local and state governments -- the levels of government closest to parents -- have been stripped of control over everything from curricula to teacher qualifications, with that power now resting with the federal government" (Salisbury & McCluskey, 2004).

Salisbury's criticism of the federal government's role in public education is joined by McCluskey and Coulson (2007) in their policy brief, *End It, Don't Mend It: What to Do with No Child Left Behind*, state, "We [further] conclude that NCLB oversteps the federal government's constitutional limits – treading on a responsibility that, by law and tradition, is reserved to the states and the people" (p. 1).

Although the federal government does not directly mandate school choice, select provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act forthrightly creates opportunities for parents and families to exercise choice with regard to school options. More specifically, the law gives parents the opportunity to choose other public schools of their liking and to take advantage of no-cost alternative education support services if their child attends an underperforming school. Under NCLB, parents may also choose to send their children to another public school if there exist substantial safety concerns, thereby jeopardizing the general health and welfare of the child. Finally, and more importantly, No Child Left Behind supports the growth of more independent charter schools while also requiring that states and local school districts provide information to help parents make informed educational choices for their children (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

One of the most relevant sections of NCLB is the section of the Act entitled Credit Enhancement Initiatives to Assist Charter School Facility Acquisition,

Construction and Renovation (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Ironically, this section makes charter schools eligible for categories of Innovative Education State Grants whose broad definition of education activities allows for the development of new, independent projects. These independent projects fuel the development of new, innovative charter school models and school choice options that serve thousands of children in the United States. Furthermore, it serves as the foundation for the creation of state based charter law used to authorize, support, and regulate choice options including charter school growth.

State Regulations on School Choice

School choice in America generally refers to matters relating to vouchers and charter schools. However, many states offer varying perspectives about school choice, and the policies that they enact reflect their differences. In fact, Georgia currently maintains moderately strong charter school law. According to the Center for Education Reform (Consoletti, 2012), approximately 58,000 students were enrolled in the state's 109 public charter schools in 2010.

On the contrary, Georgia's direct neighbor to the west, Alabama, is less progressive on the matter of school choice - providing few school choice options for its residents. Not only does the state lack an open-enrollment policy to facilitate public school choice, Alabama currently represents 1 of 10 states in the country that have yet to pass charter school legislation (Consoletti, 2012).

Ultimately, the power that states leverage in order to create educational policy involves the interpretation of two Constitutional Amendments, the 10th and 14th, respectively (Jefferson-Jenkins & Hill, 2015). First, the 10th Amendment states, "The

powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people” (National Constitution Center, 2015, para. 1). Public education was not mentioned as one of those federal powers, and as a consequence, has historically been delegated to state and local governments. The 14th Amendment has been applied to further advance the federal government’s role in public education which prohibits the denial of equal protection pursuant to the Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause (Jefferson-Jenkins & Hill, 2015). Included within these protections is public education. Therefore, as the United States’ school choice movement has grown over the past several years, states have a legally justifiable interest in how charter schools operate and perform – topics that typically dominate discussions relating to their approval, replication, and in many instances, their denial.

Again, the state of Georgia can be looked to as an example. In the fall of 2012, Georgia voters were given the option to amend the state Constitution which would establish a charter schools commission and provide a third pathway for the creation of start-up charter schools in the state. Ironically, the amendment was necessary to overturn the state Supreme Court's previous decision, which ruled that the state’s former Charter Commission was unconstitutional (Bailey-Covin, 2012). While the amendment was opposed by nearly every local school district in the state, supporters argued that the measure would provide parents with more choices rather in addition to the charter schools allowed by the local boards of education.

Notwithstanding the outcome in Georgia, matters of this sort are becoming commonplace in the United States, particularly as state legislatures and state judicial

systems are now playing increasingly critical roles in the proliferation of school choice. More than ever, states are positioned to determine the outcomes of debates that have historically been resolved at the local level.

Family Positions on School Choice

Nationwide, families are generally split on the issue of school choice. For some, the argument remains consistent with what many reformers have always said on the matter – the categorical application of school choice helps to facilitate racially segregated schools. Others believe that school choice is especially vital, despite its potential for negative, unintended consequences. In fact, there is research that demonstrates that support for school choice is particularly acute, primarily among families living in communities where the traditional public school options are unsatisfactory. The research also shows that these families' perspectives often run parallel with their income level – most glaringly within middle class American households (Zahirovic-Herbert & Turnbull, 2009).

In Izumi, Murray, and Chaney's (2007) book, *Not as Good as You Think: Why the Middle Class Needs School Choice*, the concerns about inadequate district school options in progressive, moderately affluent communities are highlighted. Izumi and his cohorts argue that the factors driving the poor performance of "middle class" public schools, such as financial mismanagement, ineffective collective bargaining agreements, and burdensome administrative regulations, help to ignite the push for school choice among the middle class. These issues are often less significant in choice schools such as charters because charters fundamentally operate with greater organizational autonomy compared to their traditional district school counterparts.

How Families Choose and Why

The debate around charter schools, vouchers, and school choice has persisted for several years – and while the number of parents who exercise their power of choice continues to rise, there is growing research that speaks to a pattern of interest being formulated consistent with the socio-cultural identities of those parents.

In recent years, charter schools across the United States have been lauded for their unique organizational designs – many boasting marketable features ranging from innovative academic models to smaller, more intimate learning environments (Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, & Branch, 2006). The widely accepted explanation for continued interest in these schools is that they maintain freedom from the bureaucratic entanglements and strict regulations often endured by their traditional counterparts. This freedom has been thought to result in a more effective and enriching learning environment for students (Brint, 2006). In that sense, the great optimism for charter schools resembles longstanding free-market economic theories, where choice and competition are believed to produce a natural benefit for the consumer or stakeholder (Zimmer & Buddin, 2006). Research indicates that the first introduction of such free-market theories into public education were signified by Milton Friedman (1962) through his advocacy for vouchers as a way of improving education and creating choice for parents. In the landscape of school choice, the primary stakeholders have always been the families who seek better academic opportunities for their children.

Although improved academic opportunities have shown to be among the primary reasons why parents choose charter schools, it has also been shown that charter schools, on average, do not outperform their district counterparts (American Federation of

Teachers, 2004). Despite this finding, charter schools continue to be attractive options for families. Based on the sum of research on matters involving choice, there is mounting evidence that reveals a “choosing pattern” of sorts emerging among families based largely on, but not limited to, certain socio-cultural distinctions (Schneider & Buckley, 2002).

On this matter, Lareau (1989) reveals that the mindset of parents based on class can actually reveal itself *outside* of the school selection process. Lareau termed the classification of those attitudes as “concerted cultivation.” Simply, Lareau found that the mindsets of middle class families, regardless of race manifested in the kinds of auxiliary activities they enrolled their children in. Lareau also found that middle class parents demonstrated a desire for placing their children in wide-ranging social and academic activities which contributed to the child’s sense of entitlement. On the other hand, lesser affluent families proved more interested in making certain that their children were prepared for the world of work, contributing to a sense of constraint. With regard to school choices, regardless of race or class, parents ultimately wanted to send their children to schools that represented their values – values which were shaped and influenced by socio-cultural distinctions (Lareau, 1989).

Consider further that when only socio-economic status and race were compared while investigating the most important criteria by which to evaluate a school, Schneider and Buckley (2002) produced results showing that affluent white families consider a *variety* of factors, while minority, less advantaged families rely almost exclusively on academic performance. Results of this sort are not indicators of an explicit pattern of choice. They do, however, suggest that parental interests in schools can be based on or determined by race, class, or both. Therefore, with charter schools offering unique

models of design, this dissertation is concerned with whether those patterns of interest are predictable depending on certain socio-cultural characteristics.

There are also additional studies where research revealed that interest among poor, minority families desired teachers with reputations for improving student achievement compared to white families who opted for teachers with reputations for maintaining enjoyable classroom environments (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007). Again, these findings are not conclusive – but they present interesting questions that can be applied to the families who choose charter schools. From this research, we can gain better perspective on how to create schools that serve the specific needs of the families who prefer them.

Summary

School choice is a longstanding feature within the landscape of American public education. Over the past three decades, it has evolved into an issue that has inspired the interest and activism of persons from different backgrounds, cultures, political affiliations, and social perspectives. Although the emergence of the school choice movement in America was precipitated by opposition to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the real champions of school choice have been those who push back against traditional public school failure and the ineffective bureaucracies that enable their failure.

Through vouchers and charter schools, parents and families have been given the choice that they have demanded, but not without struggle. Government officials at the state and federal level have responded to calls for choice, enacting legislation that debunks the one-size-fits-all approach that has long defined American public education. While the school choice debate rages on, parents and families continue to exercise their power of choice – and interesting findings are being revealed about who those parents

are, what motivates their choices, and the extent to which there are emerging patterns of predictability based on certain socio-cultural distinctions such as race, class, and educational attainment.

Chapter II presents a review of the literature significant to this dissertation, including: (a) an introduction and definition of school choice; (b) a background and history of school choice, specifically, its evolution in term and modern interpretations; (c) criticisms and benefits of school choice within public education; (d) parental positions on school choice; and (e) the role and impact of federal and state regulations on school choice, namely, details regarding governmental influence on policy decisions in the state of Georgia. Chapter III will present the methodology used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III presents the methodology used to conduct the study. This study explored whether the marketable features of three different charter schools in East Atlanta, Georgia influenced parents' school selections and whether differences or similarities in race, income level, and educational attainment created patterns of interest regarding their choice. Second, the study considered the converging dynamics and collective influences of race, income level, and educational attainment - and how they manifest within the decisions that urban parents living in East Atlanta, Georgia make regarding where they send their children to school and why. The research methodology used to conduct the study was survey research.

Research Design

The between-subjects factors for the designs used to analyze the data obtained during the study include race (African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, other), income level (\$0- 29,999; \$30,000 – 59,999; \$60,000 – 99,999; \$100,000 – more), and educational attainment (non high school graduate or GED recipient/high school graduate, college graduate, graduate degree/ professional degree).

The dependent variable used for the between-subjects designs include the marketable features of charter schools (location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers, functioning/effective PTA, CMO's reputation, charter school's reputation, data—test scores, curriculum used, welcoming school and school staff). The items were developed to determine the parent

participants' ideas and/or opinion of what marketable features are important to them with regard to choosing a charter school in which to enroll their child. Current research about school choice, where charter schools are described to be mostly populated by low-income families was used to develop the questions pertaining to the marketable features (Sugarman, 2008). Data was obtained using a researcher developed survey questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Participants

Population

The accessible population (N = 1,984) for this study included parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools (School A, School B, or School C) located in East Atlanta, Georgia. The parents surveyed for this study send their children to one of three charter schools that operate in partnership with the city of Atlanta Public School Board.

Atlanta Public Schools. Atlanta Public Schools (APS) is the fifth largest school district in the state of Georgia, serving nearly 50,000 students. The district is comprised of 105 learning sites which includes a combination of elementary, middle, and high schools along with charter schools and other alternative programs (Atlanta Public Schools, 2013).

APS maintains a largely African American student population, representing 78% of all students, followed by Caucasian students who make up 13% of the district's total student enrollment. The district also has a representative population of Asian, Hispanic, American-Indian, and multiracial students. Together, nearly 75% of these students qualify for free and reduced lunch (Atlanta Public Schools, 2013).

Included among APS' 103 learning sites are 13 charter schools which the district authorizes to increase educational options for the children and parents of Atlanta. These schools, considered either as a whole or independently, outperform traditional district schools in most areas of the state's Criterion Referenced Competency Test exam (CRCT) (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

In recent years, the district has worked to improve its national reputation following a scandal where district teachers and administrators, including the former Superintendent of Schools were accused of cheating on the CRCT exam (Washington, 2014). Prior to the scandal, APS had been widely recognized for producing significant academic gains in standardized test scores.

The Atlanta Model

In 2012, APS re-organized according to the "cluster model" – where schools located in certain geographic regions are collectively identified by the high school in which subordinate lower schools would eventually feed into (Atlanta Public Schools, 2012). Although the vast majority of schools represented in each of the district's nine clusters are traditional schools, the district's charters are also given a designated cluster assignment under this model.

Atlanta Public Schools Jackson Cluster. Each charter school included as a subject in this study is a member of the Jackson Cluster. Students within the Jackson Cluster are generally expected to attend Maynard Jackson High School (Atlanta Public Schools, 2012).

Charter Schools in Georgia

As in most states, the idea of school choice in Georgia is generally synonymous with charter schools. In recent years, the state has been embroiled in debate regarding questions of the constitutional authority of entities other than local districts to approve and authorize the launch of schools – namely, public charter schools (Downey, 2011). Several years of legal battles on the matter resulted in a 2013 constitutional amendment which assured that the state could approve charter schools and establish a commission to consider applications for them.

Today, Georgia has 310 charter schools represented among 180 consolidated school districts, with student enrollment within them having increased by significant percentages over the past several years (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). In 2005, charter school enrollment in Georgia was 21,094. By 2013, that number increased to 225,259 students. Comparatively, Atlanta Public Schools services the second highest percentage of charter school students compared to other districts across the state. At 14.6%, only Hall County Georgia, a small, rural, local school district, has a higher percentage of students attending charter schools than APS (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

Nonetheless, Atlanta Public Schools' general commitment to charter schools, and by extension, school choice, remains constant. Detailed in its 2009 strategic plan, the district declared that “enhancing local presence” was among its foremost priorities. Since then, the district has increased its support and advocacy for district charter schools.

Demographic Characteristics of Georgia Charter Schools

While race, income, and educational attainment are the socio-cultural characteristics used to distinguish the parents of each school reflected in this study, the state of Georgia has taken great interest in collecting data in reference to race, especially among charter school attendees. In 2012, the Georgia State Department of Education reported:

The racial and ethnic composition of Georgia charter schools also mirrored that of the non-charter schools. However, charter schools as a whole (conversion, start-ups, and charter system schools) served a higher percent of Hispanic and White students and a lower percentage of Black students than non-charter schools.

(Georgia Department of Education, 2012, p. 6)

This data is telling, insofar as there exists racial balance within Georgia's charter schools when compared to traditional district schools, statewide. This finding is contrary to national findings on the racial composition of charter schools – but similar when considering the relative racial balance found within the three charter schools used as subjects within this study.

School A. School A was founded in 2008 by two local community leaders who were passionate about education and education reform. The pair, also a married couple, had previously spent time developing afterschool programs and providing strategic support to other upstart charter schools in the area - but mainly directed their efforts toward projects in East Atlanta.

The school that they eventually founded together, which today serves over 700 students, was borne out of a vision to create a unique learning community that had as its

foundational tenets, quality, diversity, and community. As the couple refined their vision and evaluated the local public school and social landscape, together, they studied transformational leadership and travelled the world for inspiration.

Following a period of time exploring Europe and parts of Asia together, the couple determined that international education and Chinese language would feature prominently in the design of the school they wanted to create. Years before School A opened its doors and welcomed students, its founders prepared the school's business plan and educational model with the support of the national charter management organization, Imagine Schools.

Having later received approval from both the Atlanta Board of Education and the Georgia State Department of Education in 2007, School A opened and has now emerged as a leader in the Atlanta charter school community for its unique design and high academic results. While diversity remains the school's hallmark, its International Baccalaureate curriculum, single gender classes, and rigorous foreign language requirements distinguish it among many others throughout the city of Atlanta and state of Georgia.

With 647 students attending School A, 58% are eligible for free and reduced lunch and 3% have been identified as having a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. School A's student population consists of 75% African American students, 5% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific, 5% multiracial, and 14% white or Caucasian (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013).

School B. Building off of the strategic collaborations of Atlanta's East Lake Foundation, the Atlanta Board of Education, and various parent and community groups,

School B opened in Atlanta's East Lake neighborhood in the fall of 2000. Originally serving 500 students in grades kindergarten through 5th grade, School B has grown today to serve over 1200 children from pre-kindergarten through 9th grade.

Recognized for being one of the state of Georgia's most successful charter schools, School B's mission is to "...work together as a community of teachers, staff members, families, and volunteers to provide a learning environment that emphasizes high achievement and character development." School B incorporates the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) model with a corresponding emphasis on early literacy. The foundation of School B's instructional approach is that teaching must be broad enough to cultivate the natural, hidden, and inherent talents of every student.

With 930 students attending School B, 63% are eligible for free and reduced lunch and 5% have been identified as having a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. School B's student population consists of 85% African American students, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific, 3% multiracial, and 7% white or Caucasian (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013).

School C. School C is located in the Grant Park community of East Atlanta. Founded in 2002 with strong community support, the school was organized with the hope that it would provide high quality education to a diverse student body. At the time of its launch, charter schools were a relatively new concept in Georgia although many cities across the country had already begun to actively support charters as a new and innovative method to increase school options for parent and families.

Having performed well academically while also proving to be operationally sustainable, the school applied for and was awarded an unprecedented 10-year renewal in 2007 following the expiration of its original 5-year term. School C prides itself on implementing principles espoused by the Coalition of Essential Schools which emphasizes the constructivist approach, where students learn based on the interaction of the experiences and their ideas.

With 407 students, 11% are eligible for free and reduced lunch and 11% have been identified as having a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. School C's student population consist of 17% African American students, 4% Hispanic, 0% Asian/Pacific, 6% multiracial, and 72% white or Caucasian (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013).

Sample

A sample of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in the three aforementioned charter schools located in Atlanta, Georgia was randomly selected from the accessible population to participate in this study. One hundred fifty (150) parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools (School A, School B, or School C) located in East Atlanta, Georgia (100% of the proposed participants) agreed to participate as subjects and completed the Charter School Choice Survey Questionnaire.

Instrumentation

A researcher developed survey questionnaire was used to collect the data for this study (see Appendix A). Development for the instrument was necessary because there were no commercial instruments available that met the requirements of the study. The

survey questionnaire was completed by parent participants to obtain their demographic characteristics as well as the participants' opinions regarding the influential marketable features of charter schools associated with their decision to enroll their child(ren) in a charter school. The two parts of the questionnaire are categorized as follows: (a) Part I: Demographic Information and (b) Part II: Marketable Features of Charter Schools.

Part I, Demographic Information, includes 11 general demographic items. The items required parent participants to respond by placing an "X" in the appropriate spaces or adding the requested information. The items in Part I are associated with the parent participants' gender, race, age, marital status, income level, educational attainment, and children enrolled charter schools.

Part II of the survey questionnaire, Marketable Features of Charter Schools, consists of 10 statements, with corresponding Likert responses, regarding the characteristics that parents believed were most important in their selection of a charter school. Participants were asked to indicate their level of disagreement or agreement with the importance of each item by circling one of six Likert scale responses, ranging from Very Strongly Disagree to Very Strongly Agree. Each of the responses were recoded with a numerical response for ease of reporting the results of the descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (e.g., 1 = Very Strongly Disagree, 2 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree, and 6 = Very Strongly Agree). For example, item number 5 of Part II, Marketable Features of Charter Schools reads:

5. The educational attainment/ <i>training of the administrators and teachers</i> at this school was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
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Figure 1. Example of Survey Questionnaire Item.

Validity

The survey questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of 5 professionals – all of whom have combined experience working in public charter schools throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area and elsewhere. Each professional was familiar with the research methods used in this study, collectively holding advanced degrees in educational leadership, educational policy, or other closely related education-specific disciplines. Together, their past and present work experience includes service as school leaders, teaching, and other specialized duties within charter schools. The panelists were asked to provide appropriate input on the validity of the survey questionnaire. Panelists' recommendations and revisions were used to develop the final instrument.

Each panelist was provided an abstract of the study, the Charter School Choice Survey Questionnaire, and a validity questionnaire form. Percentages were used to summarize panel members' responses. Panelists agreed (100%) that the Charter School Choice Survey Questionnaire was a valid measure of the marketable features of charter schools which influenced parent participant's enrollment decisions.

Procedures

The general procedures established by the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in reference to doctoral student requirements were used to conduct this study. The first step in conducting this study was to seek permission from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendices B) along with the board of each charter school participating in the study (see Appendix C). After receiving approval, a random sample of 150 parents of students enrolled in each of the charter schools was selected to participate in the study.

Table 1

Validity Questionnaire Panel Members

Panelist	Relevant Experience	Academic Credential
Panelist #1	Founder, Ivy Preparatory Academy (Atlanta, GA)	MA, Educational Leadership, Clark-Atlanta University, Ph.D. Educational Leadership and Policy, University of Pennsylvania
Panelist #2	Founder, Utopian Academy of the Arts (Atlanta, GA)	M.Ed., Columbia Teachers College, Ph.D. Candidate Educational Leadership, University of Georgia
Panelist #3	Founding Administrator, Codman Academy (Boston, MA)	M.Ed., Educational Policy, Vanderbilt University, Ph.D., Educational Leadership, University of Georgia
Panelist #4	School Director, The Globe Academy (Atlanta, GA)	MA, Educational Leadership, Simmons College
Panelist #5	Academy Director, Wesley International Academy Atlanta, GA)	MA and Ph.D., Educational Leadership, University of Georgia

Next, principals of the charter schools where the children of the participants are enrolled were informed about the study and asked to allow the researcher to meet with the parent participants regarding the details of the study to distribute research packets to each participant during the school's next scheduled mandatory parent meeting. During the parent meeting, the researcher met with the parents and distributed the research

packets containing the cover letter that explains the details of the study (see Appendix C), the consent form (see Appendix D), and a copy of the survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). Participants were then given time to complete the survey questionnaire and were asked to return it to the researcher after completion prior to leaving the parent meeting. The three weeks of research conducted between all three participating schools took place on each day of the week, during and after school, and on weekends. Finally, participants' responses were organized and coded. The SPSS version 20 was used to analyze the data obtained based on the parent participants' responses.

Data Analysis

Data obtained during the study were analyzed using between subjects designs and related statistical procedures. Three between-subjects designs and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) statistical procedures were used to identify whether the marketable features of charter schools scores differ as a result of the race, income level, or educational attainment of parent participants. MANOVA proved to be the most appropriate statistical model to use for this particular research study because this dissertation involves several correlated dependent variables, and the researcher desired a single, statistical test on this set of variables instead of performing multiple individual tests. Post hoc analyses were conducted for significant findings.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

Chapter IV presents the three hypotheses tested in this dissertation as well as the descriptive and inferential statistical findings associated with each hypothesis. The null hypotheses were tested at the .05 probability level. The descriptive statistical procedures used to analyze the data included frequency distributions, means, standard error of the means, standard deviations, and ranges. MANOVA was the inferential statistical procedure. When necessary, *post hoc* procedures were conducted to test the differences between group means. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the results of the study.

Of the study's 150 respondents, the majority (n= 96) were females. Descriptive analyses also find that just over half of the respondents ranged in age from 36 to 45 years (n=84), slightly less than half had obtained a college degree (n=68), and finally, the majority of respondents (n=92) earned an income over \$60,000. The racial configuration of the parent participants included 66 African Americans, 6 Asian Americans, 58 Caucasians, and 9 Hispanics. Three participants chose not to respond to the question regarding race and 8 participants responded "other" with regard to their race. The vast majority of the 150 participants (n=130) had less than five children enrolled in a charter school and 19 respondents (approximately 13%) had five or more children enrolled in a charter school. Finally, most of the participants (n=130) reported moderate to high levels of involvement in their children's education. Table 2 presents the general demographic information for the 150 parent respondents.

Table 2

Participants' General Demographic and Professional Characteristics (N=150)

Characteristics	Level	n	%
Gender	Male	52	34.7
	Female	96	64.0
	No Response	2	1.3
Race	African American	66	44.0
	Asian American	6	4.0
	Caucasian	58	38.7
	Hispanic	9	6.0
	No Response	3	2.0
	Other	8	5.3
	Under 25	8	5.3
Age	25—35	38	25.3
	36—45	84	56.0
	46—55	17	11.3
	56—65	1	0.7
	66 and Older	0	0
	No Response	2	1.3
Income	\$0 – 29,999	14	9.3
	\$30,000 – 59,999	42	28.0
	\$60,000 – 99,999	52	34.7
	\$100,000 or more	40	26.7
	No Response	2	1.3
	Non-High School Graduate	2	1.3
Educational Attainment	GED Recipient	5	3.3
	High School Graduate	22	14.7
	College Graduate	68	45.3
	Graduate Degree	35	23.3
	Professional Degree	17	11.3
	No Response	1	0.7
	Less than 5	130	86.7
Participants' Number of Children Enrolled In Charter Schools	5 or more	19	12.7
	No Response	1	0.7
	Not Involved	5	3.3
Participants' Parental Involvement Level	Low Involvement	14	9.3
	Moderate Involvement	59	39.3
	High Involvement	71	47.3
	No Response	1	0.7

Marketable Features of Charter Schools: Hypotheses and Findings

The following section describes the results of the testing of each of the three previously outlined hypotheses. The marketable features used throughout this research study included location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers, functioning/effective Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Charter Management Organization's (CMO) reputation, Charter school's reputation, data-test scores, curriculum used, welcoming school and school staff. The sociocultural factors used in the study included race (African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Other), income (under \$29,999; \$30,000—\$59,999; \$60,000—\$99,999; and \$100,000 or more), and educational attainment (non high school graduate, GED recipient, high school graduate, college graduate, graduate degree, and professional degree. Respondents rated the importance of each marketable feature in their school selection decision on a scale of Very Strongly Disagree (1) to Very Strongly Agree (6).

On average, respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the importance of most of the marketable features (see Table 3). Respondents strongly agreed with the importance of curriculum (mean=5.04) and welcoming school environment (mean=5.04), and agreed with the importance of the seven of the remaining eight marketable features: location, facilities, staff education, an effective PTA, the CMO reputation, the school's reputation, and test scores. The importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon marketable feature (mean=3.83).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics, Average Importance of the Marketable Features (N=146)

Marketable Features	Mean	Standard Deviation
Location	4.28	1.18
Facilities	4.40	1.19
Uniforms	3.38	1.44
Staff Education	4.85	1.08
Effective PTA	4.44	1.41
CMO Reputation	4.29	1.50
School Reputation	4.84	1.34
Test Scores	4.64	1.24
Curriculum	5.04	1.24
Welcoming Staff	5.04	1.12

Note. Scale ranges from Very Strongly Disagree (1) to Very Strongly Agree (6).

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁. The importance of the marketable features of charter schools does not differ by the race of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of the participant responses about the importance of each of the marketable features of charter schools on their decision to enroll their children in a particular school, as analyzed by respondent race. Several of the race categories (Asian, Hispanic, and Other) were consolidated into one due to small n's. The three respondents who did not answer the Race question were treated as missing cases and were removed from this particular analysis. As a result, three racial categories were used in this analysis: African American (n=66), Caucasian (n=58), and Asian/Hispanic/Other (n=23). In no instances did the average importance of a particular

marketable feature fall below 3.70 in any of the racial categories. These data suggest that respondents of all races agreed, strongly agreed, or very strongly agreed with the importance of most of the marketable features as factors in their school selection decisions.

Among African American respondents, answers indicated that most parents, on average, agreed or strongly agreed with the importance of nine of the ten marketable features. The importance of having a welcoming school environment (5.02) was the most strongly agreed upon marketable feature in school selection. The importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon marketable feature (3.82) in school selection. On average, Caucasian participants agreed or strongly disagreed with the importance of nine of the ten marketable features. The importance of curriculum was the most strongly agreed upon factor in school selection among Caucasian parents (5.28), while the importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon factor (3.95).

Among the remaining racial category (Asian/Hispanic/Other), on average, respondents agreed on the importance of curriculum (4.65). The importance of school uniforms was again the least agreed upon marketable feature (3.48). Overall, African American and Caucasian respondents more strongly agreed on the importance of the marketable features than did the group of Asian, Hispanic, and Other respondents.

A MANOVA procedure was conducted to determine whether the importance of the marketable features on school selection differed based on respondent race. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the average importance of the marketable features in the school selection process as based on the respondent's race,

$F(20, 244) = 2.252, p = .002$; Wilks' Lambda= 0.713, partial eta squared= .156.

Therefore, the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics, Average Importance of Marketable Features by Race

Variable	Race/Ethnic Groups					
	African American (n=62)		Caucasian (n=57)		Asian/Hispanic/ Other (n=23)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Location	4.10	1.20	4.74	1.09	3.65	.98
Facilities	4.56	1.19	4.51	1.15	3.74	1.14
Uniforms	3.82	1.40	3.95	1.48	3.48	1.47
Staff Education	4.81	1.17	5.07	.90	4.43	1.20
Effective PTA	4.26	1.37	4.66	1.43	4.35	1.56
CMO Reputation	4.24	1.50	4.58	1.45	3.78	1.57
School Reputation	4.62	1.39	5.24	1.17	4.43	1.44
Test Scores	4.81	1.11	4.81	1.12	3.91	1.47
Curriculum	5.00	1.38	5.28	.97	4.65	1.43
Welcoming Staff	5.02	1.15	5.16	.85	4.61	1.56

Note: Scale ranges from Very Strongly Disagree (1) to Very Strongly Agree (6).

Given the overall statistically significant difference in the importance of the marketable features, separate ANOVA analyses were conducted to determine how race affected the average importance of each of the ten marketable features. Table 5 presents the results of the ANOVA analysis. These results reveal that, of the ten marketable features, respondents' race has a statistically significant effect on the level of importance of school location ($p < .000$), facilities ($p < .013$), school reputation ($p < .011$), and test scores ($p < .005$) in school selection.

Finally, Tukey's HSD post hoc analysis was conducted to determine how the racial groups differ from each other in their rating of the level of importance of the four

marketable features (location, facilities, school reputation, and test scores) where there was a statistically significant difference between groups. The following paragraphs outline the results of Tukey's HSD post hoc analysis for each of the four marketable features.

Table 5

ANOVA Results, Average Importance of Marketable Features by Race

Marketable Features	df Between	df Within	F	p
Location	2	139	9.12	.000*
Facilities	2	136	4.49	.013*
Uniforms	2	137	.86	.426
Staff Education	2	139	2.95	.055
Effective PTA	2	140	1.21	.300
CMO Reputation	2	139	2.43	.092
School Reputation	2	139	4.62	.011*
Test Score	2	140	5.57	.005*
Curriculum	2	140	2.20	.115
Welcoming Staff	2	140	1.96	.145

Note: significant at the .05 level.

As indicated in Table 4, African American respondents agreed upon the importance of location (4.10). Caucasian parents agreed more than African American parents on the importance of location (4.74), while Asian/Hispanic/Other parents agreed less (3.65). Tukey's HSD post hoc analysis indicated that the average importance of location on school selection was statistically significantly different between Caucasian and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .001$) and between Caucasian and African American respondents ($p < .007$) but not between African American and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .241$).

Results from Table 4 indicate that African American and Caucasian respondents agreed upon the importance of facilities as a marketable feature (4.56 and 4.51, respectively), while Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents agreed less (3.74). The post hoc results indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in the average importance of facilities between African American and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .014$) and between Caucasian and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .023$). There was no statistically significant difference in the average importance of facilities in school selection between African American and Caucasian respondents ($p < .970$).

Respondents of all races agreed with the importance of school reputation as a factor in school selection (see Table 4). Caucasian respondents strongly agreed (5.24) while African American respondents (4.62) and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents agreed (4.43). Results from the post hoc analysis indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between African American and Caucasian respondents ($p < .031$) and between Caucasian and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .037$) but not between African American and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .829$).

Finally, African American and Caucasian respondents agreed (4.81 each) about the importance of test scores as a school selection factor (see Table 4). Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents exhibited lower levels of agreement (3.85). The post hoc results indicate there was a statistically significant difference between African American and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .006$) and between Caucasian and Asian/Hispanic/Other respondents ($p < .007$). There was no statistically significant difference between African American and Caucasian respondents ($p < .1000$).

Hypothesis 2

H₀2. The importance of the marketable features of charter schools does not differ by the income level of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia.

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics of the participant responses about the importance of each of the marketable features of charter schools on their decision to enroll their children in a particular school, as analyzed by income level. Similar to the data used in the testing of the first hypothesis, the two respondents who did not answer the Income question were treated as missing cases and removed from the analysis. Four income categories were used in this analysis: under \$29,999 (n=14), \$30,000-\$59,999 (n=42), \$60,000-\$99,999 (n=52), and over \$100,000 (n=40). In no instances did the average importance of a particular marketable feature fall below 3.70 across any of the income levels. These data suggest that respondents at all socioeconomic levels agreed, strongly agreed, or very strongly agreed with the importance of most of the marketable features in their school selection decisions.

Respondents who earn under \$29,999 strongly agreed upon the importance of curriculum (5.00) as a marketable feature in school selection. The importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon marketable feature (3.79). Respondents earning between \$30,000-\$59,999 agreed upon the importance of a welcoming staff and school environment (4.93) as a factor in school selection but the importance of location was the least agreed upon marketable feature (3.98).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics, Average Importance of Marketable Features by Income

Variable	Income							
	Under \$29,999 (n=14)		\$30,000— \$59,999 (n=42)		\$60,000— \$99,999 (n=52)		\$100,000 Or More (n=40)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Location	4.64	1.08	3.98	1.03	4.26	1.16	4.46	1.37
Facilities	4.86	1.10	4.33	1.31	4.29	1.12	4.45	1.20
Uniforms	3.79	1.31	4.08	1.44	3.74	1.55	3.70	1.39
Staff Education	4.86	.95	4.88	1.18	4.71	1.04	5.00	1.11
Effective PTA	4.64	1.15	4.43	1.26	4.30	1.57	4.55	1.50
CMO Reputation	4.43	1.16	4.28	1.43	4.20	1.54	4.43	1.66
School Reputation	4.77	1.01	4.75	1.19	4.68	1.50	5.18	1.36
Test Scores	4.93	1.21	4.45	1.34	4.98	1.32	5.00	1.16
Curriculum	5.00	1.04	4.85	1.23	4.42	1.21	5.35	1.23
Welcoming Staff	4.86	1.17	4.93	1.27	5.06	1.11	5.08	1.00

Note. Scale ranges from Very Strongly Disagree (1) to Very Strongly Agree (6).

Similar to respondents earning between \$30,000 and \$59,999, respondents earning between \$60,000 and \$99,999 strongly agreed upon the importance of a welcoming staff and school environment (5.06). The importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon marketable feature (3.74). Finally, respondents earning over \$100,000 strongly agreed upon the importance of curriculum as a marketable feature (5.35) and the importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon factor in school selection (3.74).

A MANOVA procedure was conducted to determine whether the importance of the marketable features varied by income level. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the average importance of the marketable features in

the school selection process as based on the respondent's income level, $F(30, 359) = .877$, $p = .656$; Wilks' Lambda = 0.812, partial eta squared = .067. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_02 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3

H_03 . The importance of the marketable features of charter schools does not differ by the educational attainment of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia.

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics of the participant responses about the importance of each of the marketable features of charter schools on their decision to enroll their children in a particular school, as analyzed by educational attainment. Three of the degree categories (no diploma, high school diploma, and GED) were consolidated into one due to small n's. The one respondent who did not answer the Degree question was removed from the analysis and treated as a missing case. As a result, four degree categories were used in this analysis: no diploma/high school diploma/GED ($n=29$), college graduate ($n=68$), graduate degree ($n=35$), and professional degree ($n=17$). In no instances did the average importance of a particular marketable feature fall below 3.50 across any of the level of educational attainment. These data suggest that respondents at all educational levels agreed, strongly agreed, or very strongly agreed with the importance of most of the marketable features in their school selection decisions.

Respondents without a diploma, or with a high school diploma or GED agreed upon the importance of staff training and education (4.72) as a marketable feature in school selection. The importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon marketable feature (4.03). Respondents with college degrees strongly agreed upon the

importance of a welcoming staff and school environment (5.17) as a factor in school selection but the importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon marketable feature (3.91).

Similar to college graduates, respondents with graduate degrees strongly agreed upon the importance of a welcoming staff and school environment (5.18). The importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon marketable feature (3.58). Finally, respondents with professional degrees strongly agreed upon the importance of curriculum as a marketable feature (5.29) while, again, the importance of school uniforms was the least agreed upon factor in school selection (3.63).

A MANOVA procedure was conducted to determine whether the importance of the marketable features varied by educational attainment. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the average importance of the marketable features in the school selection process, as based on educational attainment, $F(30, 362) = 1.193$, $p = .227$; Wilks' Lambda = .758, partial eta squared = .088. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_03 is accepted.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the three null hypotheses that were tested as well as the descriptive and inferential statistics procedures and findings associated with each hypothesis. The null hypotheses were tested at the .05 probability level.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics, Average Importance of Marketable Features by Educational Attainment

Variable	Educational Attainment							
	No Diploma/ H.S. Diploma/ GED (n=29)		College Graduate (n=68)		Graduate Degree (n=35)		Professional Degree (n=17)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Location	4.14	1.27	4.42	1.12	4.24	.87	4.06	1.75
Facilities	4.38	1.32	4.48	1.07	4.28	1.02	4.31	1.70
Uniforms	4.03	1.30	3.91	1.47	3.58	1.39	3.63	1.75
Staff Education	4.72	1.13	4.91	.95	4.94	.90	4.65	1.73
Effective PTA	4.48	1.21	4.61	1.25	4.42	1.50	3.71	1.99
CMO Reputation	4.31	1.37	4.42	1.35	4.33	1.41	3.76	2.31
School Reputation	4.57	1.32	4.97	1.20	5.00	1.12	4.53	2.10
Test Scores	4.34	1.45	4.58	1.18	4.76	1.06	5.12	1.41
Curriculum	4.69	1.11	5.09	1.12	5.12	1.34	5.29	1.69
Welcoming Staff	4.62	1.29	5.17	.97	5.18	.95	4.65	1.50

Note. Scale ranges from Very Strongly Disagree (1) to Very Strongly Agree (6).

Based on the analyses, the results indicated that parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia, assigned varying levels of importance to the ten marketable features of charter schools. In reference to participants' race, income level, and educational attainment, the statistical findings indicated that parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia did rate the importance of the marketable features of charter schools differently based on their race. However, according to the findings, there was no statistically

significant difference in the participants' rating of the importance of the marketable features of charter schools based on their income level or educational attainment.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Introduction

Chapter V presents a general summary, a summary of the major findings, a discussion, and a presentation of conclusions and along with their implications. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research and practice. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief summary.

This dissertation was comprised of two general purposes. First, the study explored whether the marketable features of three different charter schools in East Atlanta, Georgia influenced parents' school selections and whether differences or similarities in race, income level, and educational attainment levels created patterns of interest regarding their selections. Second, the study offered perspective on the converging dynamics and collective influences of race, income level, and educational attainment - and how they manifest within the decisions that urban parents living in East Atlanta, Georgia make regarding which charter school they send their children to and why. Ultimately, these inquiries were intended to reveal whether any one specific or combination of socio-cultural characteristics serve as predictors for parents' choice in schools. The major findings and implications of the dissertation are discussed based on each research question.

Summary of Major Findings

Marketable Features of Charter Schools and Race

Research question one examined whether the importance of the marketable features of charter schools (location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers; functioning/effective PTA; CMO's reputation; charter school's reputation; data—test scores; curriculum used; welcoming school and school staff) differ by the race (African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, other) of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia.

Based on the results, it appears that race does significantly influence participants' marketable features scores. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Caucasian participants reported that the physical location of the school was more important in their decision to enroll their child(ren) in their current school than African American or Hispanic/Asian participants. Caucasian participants had a significantly higher mean in reference to location than African American as well as Hispanic/Asian American/Other participants. However, there was no significant difference regarding location mean scores between African Americans and Hispanics/Asian Americans/Other participants.

The results also indicated that African American and Caucasian participants reported that the characteristics of the facility (e.g., clean, safe, newly constructed, stand-alone, innovative-Promethean boards in each classroom, etc.) were important in their decision to enroll their child(ren) in their current school. Both African American and Caucasian participants had significantly higher means than Hispanic/Asian

American/Other participants in reference to facilities. However, there was no significant difference regarding facilities mean scores between African Americans and Caucasians.

Significant findings were also obtained in reference to the school's reputation and the parent participants' race. According to the results, Caucasian participants reported that the reputation of the charter school's Charter Management Organization (CMO) was important in their decision to enroll their child(ren) in their current school. Caucasian participants had a significantly higher mean in reference to the school's reputation than African American participants. However, there was no significant difference regarding school reputation mean scores between Caucasians and Hispanic/Asian American/Other participants or between African American and Hispanic/Asian American/Other participants.

The results also revealed significant differences in reference to the test scores and the parent participants' race. African American and Caucasian parent participants reported that data—test scores noting the achievement level of students enrolled in the school was important in their decision to enroll their child(ren) in their current school. Both African American and Caucasian parent participants had significantly higher mean scores with regard to test scores than Hispanic/Asian American/Other participants. However, there was no significant difference regarding test score mean scores between African American and Caucasian participants.

Therefore, the findings suggest that parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia made different decisions regarding whether to enroll their child in their current school

based on the school's marketable features— location, facilities, reputation, and/or test scores depending on the parent participants' race.

Marketable Features of Charter Schools and Income

Research question two examined whether the importance of the marketable features of charter schools (location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers, functioning/effective PTA, CMO's reputation, charter school's reputation, data—test scores, curriculum used, welcoming school and school staff) differ by the income level (\$0 – 29,999; \$30,000 – 59,999; \$60,000 – 99,999; \$100,000 – more) of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia. With regard to income level, no significant findings were obtained in reference to the importance of any of the marketable features. Therefore, based on the results, parent participants' income level does not significantly influence the level of importance assigned to each marketable features, and therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported. The findings suggest that parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia do not make different decisions regarding whether to enroll their child in their current school based on the school's marketable features depending on the parent participants' income level.

Marketable Features of Charter Schools and Educational Attainment

Research question three examined whether the importance of the marketable features of charter schools (location, characteristics of the facility, school uniforms, educational attainment of administration/teachers; functioning/effective PTA; CMO's reputation; charter school's reputation; data—test scores; curriculum used; welcoming

school and school staff) differ by the educational attainment (non high school graduate, GED recipient, high school graduate, college graduate, graduate degree/professional degree) of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia. In terms of educational attainment, no significant findings were obtained in reference to the importance of any of the marketable features. Therefore, based on the results, parent participants' educational attainment does not significantly influence the level of importance assigned to each marketable features score, and therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported. The findings suggest that parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia do not make different decisions regarding whether to enroll their child in their current school based on the school's marketable features depending on the parent participants' educational attainment.

Discussion

Prior to the study, the researcher had several conversations with parents who enrolled their children in three specific charter schools located in East Atlanta, Georgia. The researcher was interested in the features of each school which may have influenced parents' enrollment decisions most – or least. The researcher later became interested in the actual differences of the parents themselves, limited to their race, income, and educational attainment.

The three weeks of research conducted between all three participating schools took place on each day of the week, during and after school, and on weekends. Once the purpose of the study was explained to parents, many often vacillated about what inspired their school selection during verbal discussion, but were confident in their written survey

responses. The researcher also noticed that parents of younger aged children spoke with much more clarity and assuredness than parents of older students.

Conclusions and Implications

Choice is a central feature of modern schooling, and the power of choice manifests significantly among parents who send their children to public charter schools. While most United States charter schools are populated with students who are largely economically disadvantaged, the majority of whom are people of color – by contrast, this study is preoccupied with parents who have chosen to enroll their children in charter schools *and* represent a measure of diversity limited to the socio-cultural distinctions of race, income, and educational attainment.

Goldhaber and Eide (2002) suggest that choice provides more options to both minority and low-income parents, who, using traditional models for school assignment, are more likely to attend low-quality public schools. Goldhaber and Eide's (2002) research implies that low-income minority parents choose charter schools simply because they represent a better option than the traditional schools that their children would otherwise be required to attend based on the limitations of attendance zones and similar regulations. Within this analysis, the specific features of charter schools and the qualities that parents find most alluring about them are often not analyzed, while the interests of Caucasian and middle class parents of all races whose children attend charter schools are almost categorically overlooked. The combination of these two phenomenon leads to the assumption that the most compelling features of charter schools and parents' interests in them are inherently different based on a variety of factors related to their socio-cultural differences. It is worth pointing out, however, that findings from this study indicate that

there are actually few differences in how parents rate the marketable features of charter schools and that the socio-cultural differences among them including race, income, and educational attainment do not create predictable patterns of choice.

In this study, the researcher hypothesized that parents' ratings of the marketable features of three specific charter schools would differ based on race, income, and educational attainment. Although there is an abundance of evidence that low-income minority parents choose charter schools based on a lack of quality options among traditional district schools and little else, there is not much research, however, on what inspires choice among middle class families, high wage earners, well educated parents, Caucasians, Hispanics and whether the factors that inspire their choice can be predicted based on their socio-cultural differences.

Considering the findings from this study, the researcher concluded that based on the marketable features that inspire choice among parents, there is no significant difference given considerations of race with the exception of four specific marketable features—the physical location of the school, the characteristics of the school facility, the reputation of the charter school's CMO, and the test scores noting the achievement level of the students enrolled in the charter school. With regard to educational attainment and income, again, there was no statistically significant difference.

This study has explored whether the marketable features of charter schools create patterns of choice among parents and whether their choices in schools are similar or different based on the socio-cultural factors of race, income, and educational attainment. Although the supporting evidence does not present the complete reasoning for why parents chose specific charter schools limited to their marketable features, the study also

did not produce any discernable or predictable patterns of choice based on their differences – except for race. This is an important finding, especially within the current landscape of public charter schools.

Charter schools, originally created as laboratories for educational innovation, have widely become alternatives to traditional district schools that fail to meet the needs of the communities they serve (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Parents have responded by supporting new schools that address their attendant needs and interests (Fowler, 2003). Research reveals that there are several reasons why parents engage in the process of school choice rather than limit themselves to the schools accessible to them based on attendance zones (Fowler, 2003). While many of the nation's failing traditional district schools are concentrated in high poverty urban communities largely populated by minority students, many charter schools have infiltrated these communities and established themselves accordingly (Brown Center on Education Policy, 2003; Frankenberg & Lee, 2003; Garcia, 2008; Kahlenberg, 2008; Rapp & Eckes, 2007). Predictably, these schools generally lack social and ethnic diversity, and tend to be as segregated as the schools for which they serve as alternatives (Levin, 2001; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). While matters of segregation have long been a part of the American public education discussion, it is important to note that without provisions purposed to prevent segregation, it is likely to be exacerbated because of the charter schools. (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006)

However, the promise of charter schools that maintain diverse student populations like the ones featured in this study is that they serve as a counter narrative to the charter schools often found in urban locales. Even more, they honor the original spirit of school

choice and have the effect of undermining the separatist implications of de facto segregation common in many public schools throughout the nation.

Although the results of this study indicate that regardless of the socio-cultural differences of parents who send their children to certain charter schools, the reasons that they choose them do not necessarily differ on account of income or educational attainment. However, the results of this study indicate that race does matter when it comes to choice preferences. While there can be many conclusions made about parents of varying socio-cultural qualities, it is worth noting that the results of this study offer a different perspective on the possibility of the future of charter schools. In that sense, there is an opportunity for a new prescription for how charter schools are created in this country.

Further research may be required and more expansive studies conducted but parents in this study are not self-segregating by virtue of their participation in the process of school choice. They are not opting out of traditional district schools to coalesce with people more “like themselves”. In fact, they are doing the opposite. They are choosing based on priority interests, and this study suggests that parent preferences in school selection are fairly consistent notwithstanding their differences.

Limitations

The current dissertation study presents limitations relevant to its population, sample, and research questions. The limitation of the study related to the population and sample involve the use of the accessible population. The population obtained to conduct the study consisted of parents of elementary and middle school age charter school

students enrolled in three charter schools located in Atlanta, Georgia. Therefore, generalizations based on the results of the study are limited to this population.

Another limitation of the study is related to the research questions. The research questions developed to address the purpose of the study are specific to this study and include independent and dependent variables directly related to the study. Therefore, results derived from the study based on the specific research questions and independent and dependent variables may not generalize to other studies. One final limitation involved the limited numbers of Asians and Hispanic parents available for this study. Because of the small number of Asian and Hispanic participants, few reliable conclusions could be drawn about them relative to this study. To that end, both groups were collapsed into one category for the purpose of effectively completing the research.

Recommendations for Researchers

The recommendations are referred to as the major factors that should be considered before launching a charter school where there exists wide-ranging socio-cultural distinctions among interested families. School reformers, social entrepreneurs, school districts, and management organizations interested in starting charter schools should consider the wide range of interests of the parents and students they will be serving. School models that use techniques tailored to a particular demographic like the 90/90/90 or “No Excuses” approach become less necessary given the findings of this research. Since parents with backgrounds and certain cultural distinctions have shown to place similar interest in the varying marketable features of charter schools, which have in turn, inspired their choice, schools that cater to a particular group of children based primarily on their social distinctions become less compelling.

The findings and limitations of this study present several potential opportunities for future research. First, future studies may opt to use a larger, representative sample derived from the selected population to increase the generalizability of the findings size. For example, a study that extends beyond 150 participants may yield additional findings from what was produced herein. Second, future studies may also be performed using charter schools of varying geographic locations and regions of the country to determine whether the physical placement of a charter school has any bearing on the central inquiries of this study. Third, future studies may include the results from participant interviews to complement survey data as a means of comparing respondent explanations to research questions limited by the Likert scale design. This additional research method would add more depth and perspective on the question of what factors contributed to parents' selection of their particular charter school. Finally, future studies may include additional factors and dependent variables not used in this study. Other dependent variables that may be considered in future studies include considering whether parents had always enrolled their children in charter schools and whether parents converted to a charter school following a previous traditional school experience.

A review of the literature revealed that some research has been conducted, although limited to certain locales, that almost categorically points to socio-economic status (e.g. race, income, and educational attainment) as influencing school choice (Weiher & Tedin, 2001). For example, it has been shown that lesser educated and economically disadvantaged parents often choose schools based on factors related to “non-educational criteria” such as where the friends of their children attend school or the extent to which there is convenient access to the school based on location (Moe, 2001).

Additional research indicates that school choice preferences are generally derived from a standard research method, like parent surveys designed to gauge the importance of various school characteristics – identical to the method used in this study. Studies using this method reveal that parents, regardless of their socio-cultural differences, believe that academic quality is the foremost important factor to consider when selecting a school (Schneider & Buckley 2002). This study, however, relates to school choice as a general matter – but not to charter school choice, especially among schools that maintain a measure of diversity throughout their parent and student populations.

In this dissertation, it was found that among parents who send their children to three specific charter schools in East Atlanta, Georgia, race was actually shown to reveal preferences in the features of schools that inspired their choice. Although this study did not examine race alone, of the three socio-cultural factors considered, race was the only factor to show patterns of preference. However, studies exploring the impact of race alone on school selection have concluded that:

A common weakness of research into the... racial implications of choice for choosers themselves is that the linkage between respondents' stated preferences and actual racial and ethnic patterns in choice schools tend to be tenuous”

(Weiher and Tedin, 2002 p. 81)

When considering both race and income together, studies have compared school selection decisions between parents of students enrolled in charter schools and parents of students enrolled in traditional district schools (Buckley & Schneider, 2007; Wells, Holme, Lopez, & Cooper, 2000; Hoxby & Murarka, 2007; Crane & Edwards, 2007). These studies have shown that, on average, charter schools do not necessarily maintain

higher percentages of economically challenged minority students than their traditional district school counterparts (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003; Miron & Nelson 2002).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Although this dissertation looks for patterns of choice, it highlights the need to consider more deeply the process for starting charter schools that require social and cultural diversity as a matter of policy and practice. The National Association of Charter School Authorizer's mission is to ensure that "...all children have access to high quality education..." However, effective school choice happens only when there are quality schools from which to choose. There has been much work over the past decade to replicate high performing charter schools, yet few policies governing their approval, development, and launch address matters of diversity (CREDO, 2013a; Mead & Green, 2012). State policies must change to ensure that schools do not perpetuate homogenous, non-diverse school communities like many charter schools in urban areas across the country. There must be a policy environment that creates more great schools – but the measure of greatness must extend beyond traditional metrics of evaluation like standardized test scores and the like. Factors that we have learned make for a culturally rich learning environment should be included in the actual design of schools going forward, and the research from this study suggests that the time may be right for this sort of policy (Mead & Green, 2012). The study has found that the marketable features of schools, the things that matter most to parents in school selection actually transcends their differences – of course, with the exception of race.

There is much more research available on the impact of race on school choice than the other factors examined in this study but in America income and educational

attainment typically align with race (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). As a result, if policy makers were to control for race to ensure that economic and income balance was reflected in school composition, racial balance will likely follow.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

CHARTER SCHOOL CHOICE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**Part I: Demographic Information**

DIRECTIONS: Place an **X** next to the items that best describe you or add the requested information.

1. **Gender:** ___ Male ___ Female

2. **Race:** ___ African American ___ Asian American ___ Caucasian
 ___ Hispanic ___ Native American ___ Other

3. **Age:** ___ < 25 Years ___ 25 – 35 Years ___ 36 – 45 Years
 ___ 46 – 55 Years ___ 56 – 65 Years ___ 66+ Years

4. **Marital Status:** ___ Single ___ Married ___ Living with partner
 ___ Living with child's parent

5. **Income Level:** ___ \$0 - 29,999
 ___ \$30,000 - 59,999
 ___ \$60, 000 – 99,999
 ___ \$100,000 or more

6. **Highest diploma/degree earned (educational attainment):**
 ___ Non-High School Graduate ___ College Graduate
 ___ GED Recipient ___ Graduate Degree
 ___ High School Graduate ___ Professional Degree

7. **How many of your children are enrolled in a charter school?**
 ___ < 5 ___ 5 or more

8. **How would you rate your involvement with your child(ren)'s education?**
 ___ Not Involved ___ Moderate Involvement
 ___ Low Involvement ___ High Involvement

Part II: Marketable Features of Charter Schools

DIRECTIONS: Read the following statements below concerning your ideas and/or opinion of what marketable features influenced your decision to enroll your child(ren) in a charter school. Indicate your level of disagreement or agreement with the item by circling the appropriate response. The six-point Likert scale you will use to indicate your disagreement or agreement is as follows:

VSD = Very Strongly Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

VSA = Very Strongly Agree

As a parent of a child enrolled in a charter school, it is my thinking that:	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
1. The physical <i>location</i> of this school was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
2. The <i>characteristics of the facility</i> (e.g., clean, safe, newly constructed, stand-alone, innovative-Promethean boards in each classroom, etc.) were important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
3. The <i>school uniforms</i> worn by students at this school was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
4. Whether <i>the school and the school staff were welcoming</i> to all parents, students, and community members was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
5. The educational attainment/ <i>training of the administrators and teachers</i> at this school was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
6. Whether parents and educators at the charter school work collaboratively as equal partners and whether there was a <i>functioning/effective PTA</i> at this school was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this charter school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
7. The <i>reputation of this charter school's Charter Management Organization (CMO)</i> was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
8. The <i>curriculum used</i> in this school was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
9. The <i>reputation of this school in the community</i> was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
10. <i>Data—test scores noting the achievement level of students enrolled</i> in this school was important in my decision to enroll my child(ren) in this school.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **14031401**

PROJECT TITLE: **The Socio-Cultural Influences of School Choice**

PROJECT TYPE: **New Project**

RESEARCHER(S): **Duke J. Bradley, III**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education and Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership and School Counseling**

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: **N/A**

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Exempt Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **03/17/2014 to 03/16/2015**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH-RELATED CORRESPONDENCE

DATE

XXXX XXXXX XXX
Decatur, GA. 300XX

XX. XXXXX XXXX
Board Chairman
School A
XXXX XXXXXX Avenue XX
Atlanta, GA 30XXX

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi. Currently, I am working on the completion of my dissertation. I would like to meet with you to discuss my research study entitled "Socio-Cultural Influences of School Choice" and obtain your permission to conduct the study in your school. A copy of my dissertation abstract is enclosed.

The study has been approved by my major professor and doctoral committee. The study will be submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board following your approval. If additional procedures or information is required, I will gladly comply.

Should you have any questions regarding the information in this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (404) 805-6781 or email me at dukejonbradley@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Duke Bradley, III
Doctoral Student

Enclosure:

DATE

XXXX XXXXX XXX
Decatur, GA. 300XX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Board Chairman
School B
XXX XXXX XXXX Blvd.
Atlanta, GA. 30XXX

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi. Currently, I am working on the completion of my dissertation. I would like to meet with you to discuss my research study entitled "Socio-Cultural Influences of School Choice" and obtain your permission to conduct the study in your school. A copy of my dissertation abstract is enclosed.

The study has been approved by my major professor and doctoral committee. The study will be submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board following your approval. If additional procedures or information is required, I will gladly comply.

Should you have any questions regarding the information in this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (404) 805-6781 or email me at dukejonbradley@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Duke Bradley, III
Doctoral Student

Enclosure:

DATE

XXXX XXXXX XXX
Decatur, GA. 300XX

XXXXXXX XXXX
School C
XXX XXXXX Street, SE
Atlanta, GA. 30XXX

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi. Currently, I am working on the completion of my dissertation. I would like to meet with you to discuss my research study entitled "Socio-Cultural Influences of School Choice" and obtain your permission to conduct the study in your school. A copy of my dissertation abstract is enclosed.

The study has been approved by my major professor and doctoral committee. The study will be submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board following your approval. If additional procedures or information is required, I will gladly comply.

Should you have any questions regarding the information in this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (404) 805-6781 or email me at dukejonbradley@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for considering my request.
Sincerely,

Duke Bradley, III
Doctoral Student

Enclosure:

DATE

XXXX XXXXXX Avenue XX
Atlanta, GA 30XXX

Institutional Review Board
The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to inform you that the board of School A gives Duke Bradley, III, University of Southern Mississippi doctoral student, permission to conduct the research study entitled "Socio-Cultural Influences of School Choice" at Wesley International Academy in order to complete the requirements of his dissertation. The board understands that the study has been approved by Mr. Bradley's major professor and doctoral committee. The board also understands that the study will be submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board following the approval of the School A board. The board further understands that if additional procedures or information is required by the board, Mr. Bradley will comply.

Should you have any questions regarding the information in this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact XXXXX XXXX, Chairman School A Board, by email at xxxxx.xxxx@wesleyacademy.org.

Sincerely,

XXXXXX XXXX, Chairman
School A Board

DATE

XXXX XXXX XXXX Blvd
Atlanta, GA. 30XXX

Institutional Review Board
The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to inform you that the board of School B gives Duke Bradley, III, University of Southern Mississippi doctoral student, permission to conduct the research study entitled "Socio-Cultural Influences of School Choice" at Charles Drew Charter School in order to complete the requirements of his dissertation. The board understands that the study has been approved by Mr. Bradley's major professor and doctoral committee. The board also understands that the study will be submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board following the approval of the School B board. The board further understands that if additional procedures or information is required by the board, Mr. Bradley will comply.

Should you have any questions regarding the information in this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX, Ph.D., Chairman School B Board, by email at xxxxxxxxx@atlanta.edisonlearning.com.

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX, Ph.D., Chairman
School B Board

DATE

XXX XXXXX Street, XX
Atlanta, GA. 30XXX

Institutional Review Board
The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to inform you that the board of School C gives Duke Bradley, III, University of Southern Mississippi doctoral student, permission to conduct the research study entitled "Socio-Cultural Influences of School Choice" at School C in order to complete the requirements of his dissertation. The board understands that the study has been approved by Mr. Bradley's major professor and doctoral committee. The board also understands that the study will be submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board following the approval of the School C board. The board further understands that if additional procedures or information is required by the board, Mr. Bradley will comply.

Should you have any questions regarding the information in this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact XXXXXX XXXX, Chairman School C Board, by email at xxxxxxxxx@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

XXXXXXX XXXX, Chairman
School C Board

DATE

2580 Waters Run
Decatur, GA. 30035

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral student enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi. Currently, I am working on completing my dissertation requirement. In order to complete the dissertation, I am conducting a survey regarding the bases upon which parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools in Atlanta, Georgia chose to enroll their child(ren) in a charter school.

You have been selected along with 149 other parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools in Atlanta, Georgia to participate in my study by completing a survey questionnaire regarding your decision to enroll your child(ren) in a charter school. I want you to know that your participation is not only appreciated, but also important to the success of this research project. The completion of the survey should only take 15 to 20 minutes of your time. The information you provide to complete the survey will remain completely confidential. Therefore, your name will not be placed on the survey and will not appear in any report or publication written based on the study.

Please take some time to complete both the AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT form and the CHARTER SCHOOL CHOICE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE. After completing the form and survey, place them in the research packet, and return it to the researcher before leaving the parent meeting.

If you have any questions or require any additional information regarding this request, do not hesitate to contact me at (404) 805-6781. Again, your participation is essential and greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Duke Bradley, III
Doctoral Student

Enclosure:

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) LONG FORM CONSENT

Institution Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects Review (HSR)**Narrative****1. Brief statement of project goals.**

This project will explore the bases upon which parents of school aged children in East Atlanta, Georgia chose to enroll their child(ren) in a particular charter school, and whether their selections varied based upon differences in their respective demographic characteristics or educational attainment. Second, the project will consider the converging dynamics and collective influences of race, income level, and educational attainment - and how they manifest within the decisions that urban parents living in East Atlanta, Georgia make regarding where they send their children to school and why. Ultimately, the project will reveal whether any one specific or combination of socio-cultural characteristics serve as predictors for parents' choice in schools.

2. Protocol:**Describe procedures.**

The general procedures established by the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in reference to doctoral student requirements will be used to conduct this project. The first step in conducting the project will be to seek permission from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) along with the Local Education Agency (LEA) or board of each charter school participating in the project. After receiving approval, a sample of 150 parents of students enrolled in each of the charter schools will be selected to participate in the project. Next, principals of the charter schools where the children of the subjects are enrolled will be informed about the project and asked to allow the researcher to meet with the subjects about the details of the project and distribute research packets to each subject during the school's next mandatory parent meeting. During the parent meeting, the researcher will meet with the parents and distribute the research packets containing the cover letter that explains the details of the project, the consent form, and a copy of the survey questionnaire. Subjects will then be given time to complete the survey questionnaire and will be asked to return it to the researcher after completion prior to leaving the parent meeting. Participants who do not complete the survey questionnaire in person will be asked to complete and submit the survey questionnaire online. Subjects' responses will be organized and coded and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to analyze the data obtained.

Number and age range of subjects.

The project will include 150 subjects. The age range of subjects included in the project will be between approximately 21 and 50 years old.

Describe subject population, criteria for subject selection, and recruitment procedures. From where will subjects be obtained?

The accessible population (N = 1865) for this project will include parents of elementary and middle school age charter school students enrolled in three charter schools (Wesley International Academy, Charles Drew Charter School, and Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School) located in Atlanta, Georgia. A sample of 150 subjects will be selected for this project from the accessible population.

How long will the procedures take? How much time will be required of subjects?

The procedures (i.e., the distribution and collection of the research packet) for the project should take one day at each charter school. The time required for subjects to complete the research packet should be approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Where will the procedures be done? Where will the study be conducted? (For survey research, how will the survey be conducted?)

The procedures will be completed at each of the charter schools during one of the school's mandatory parent meetings. The written survey questionnaires will be distributed by the researcher during each charter school's parent meeting. Time will be allotted for subjects to complete the survey questionnaire by silently reading the questions and providing a written response to each of the questions included in the survey. Participants who do not complete the survey questionnaire in person will be asked to complete and submit the survey questionnaire online.

Name and describe the data gathering tool (attach a copy).

A researcher developed survey, entitled Charter School Choice Survey Questionnaire, was used to collect the data for this project. The survey consists of the following three parts: (a) Part I: Demographic and Background Information; Part II: Marketable Features of Charter Schools.

Please see attached copy of data gathering tool.

Describe any special situations.

There are no special situations associated with the project that would eliminate the need for full disclosure of procedures to subjects.

If data collection is done in class, explain what students who do not participate will be doing.

N/A

Attach letter of approval from any organizations that will be involved with the research project (regardless of the terms or extent of participation).

Please see attached letter of approval from organizations involved with the research project (i.e., the board of directors of Wesley International Academy, Charles Drew Charter School, and Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School.

3. Benefits: Describe the potential benefits to the subject or to others.

The subjects or any organizations involved with the research project will not receive specific benefits as a result of participating in the project.

4. Risks: Describe the possible risks, discomforts, and inconvenience to the subject and the precautions that will be taken to minimize them. This includes physical, psychological, and social risks. Describe appropriate controls, screening methods, debriefing or follow-up procedures designed to prevent residual physical, psychological, or social damage to the subject.

There are no risks, discomforts, or inconveniences associated with subjects' participation in the project.

Describe the conditions under which subjects will be terminated from study before its completion.

Subjects' participation is voluntary. Therefore, subjects may refuse to participate or may discontinue participation in the project without penalty at any time. Incomplete surveys submitted by subjects may result in the elimination of the subjects' responses from the project's final data analysis.

Describe your method for maintaining subject confidentiality or anonymity.

The researcher alone will have knowledge of the subjects' identity. Anonymity of subjects will be maintained by assigning each subject a number (i.e., research packets will be properly number prior to distribution). Signed consent forms and surveys will be kept confidential by the researcher.

How will confidentiality of data be maintained? (Where will data be kept? Who will have access to it?)

Confidentiality of the data will be maintained by the researcher by keeping the data in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. No one except the researcher will have access to the data.

Detail the final disposition of data. (What will be done with questionnaires, inventories, videotapes, and/or audiotapes?)

The completed consent form and survey questionnaires along with the data will be kept secure by the researcher for at least five years.

5. Informed Consent: Please see attached consent (long form).

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