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Emancipation: Centering Black Parent Voices in the New Orleans Charter School Experiment

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EMANCIPATION: CENTERING BLACK PARENT VOICES

IN THE NEW ORLEANS CHARTER SCHOOL EXPERIMENT

By

NICOLE MOLIERE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Division of Education and Counseling

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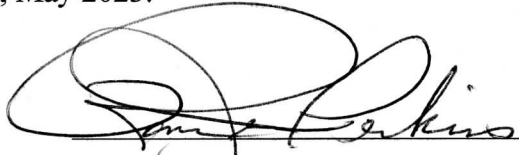
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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

This is to certify
that the Doctoral Dissertation of

NICOLE MOLIERE

has been approved by the examining committee for the dissertation requirement
for the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership in the Division of Education
and Counseling, May 2023.

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Associate Dean of Graduate Programs

DEDICATION

For Tweety. And for me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Ramona Jean-Perkins, professor and chair of my dissertation committee, for her unsinkable optimism, unwavering support, and ti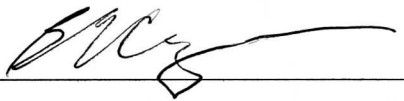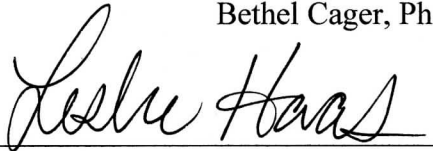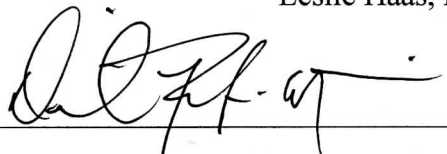reless effort to get me to the finish line. I also extend sincerest thanks to the esteemed members of my committee, Drs. Bethel Cager, Leslie Haas, and David Robinson-Morris, who generously provided direction and expertise at critical points in my journey. Dr. Cager provided inspiration, passion, and reassurance at every turn. Dr. Haas helped me to strive for clear and tight writing. And Dr. Robinson-Morris offered piercing intellectual guidance and hilarious fellowship in equal measure. It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with you all.

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EMANCIPATION: CENTERING BLACK PARENT VOICES

IN THE NEW ORLEANS CHARTER SCHOOL EXPERIMENT

ABSTRACT

by Nicole Moliere

Xavier University of Louisiana

May 2023

Chair: Ramona Jean-Perkins, Ph.D.

This phenomenological study explored Louisiana legislative charter school policies and the extent to which those policies empowered Black public-school parents in the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE). Parent empowerment, the *sharing of power* with parents, has been a missing component both in scholarly literature and in charter school policy and implementation (Ferlazzo, 2011; Hsiao et al., 2018, Murray et al., 2013). Using semi structured interviews, the results of this study yielded three themes related to Black parent empowerment (BPE) and the public-school struggles Black parents face in an all-charter district. Based on the research findings, this study revealed that Black public-school parents strive to be active advocates and actors, rather than passive recipients of decisions made by teachers, administrators, schools, and school systems (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

Keywords: parent empowerment, charter schools, Black parents, public schools

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Louisiana Recovery School District took over dozens of New Orleans's public schools and, in less than two decades, systematically closed or converted all to charter schools (Jewson, 2019). Passed in 1995, Louisiana's initial charter school law ushered in less than a dozen charter schools in New Orleans before the storm; by 2019, New Orleans became the first major city in the United States without any traditional public schools (Jewson, 2019).

While community education advocates continue to call for a return to care, community, solidarity, and personal development in public schooling, the charter schools of New Orleans are mapping a much different course toward market values, managerialism, and educational relationships defined in transactional terms (BE NOLA, 2021; Bouie, 2021; Buras, 2014; Louisiana Weekly, 2021; Lynch, 2017; Thomas, 2015). Charter reform in New Orleans has contributed to school decentralization and privatization and created policies that are diametrically opposed to the role of parents and the community (Perkins, 2022). In addition, charter reforms in New Orleans boast that the movement is on behalf of underserved Black children; however, that same movement excludes the voices of Black parents and disregards the effects of the reforms on the wider Black community (Harris, 2019; Lay, 2022; Thomas, 2015).

Research Problem

K-12 public schools in New Orleans serve predominately Black communities, but there is little critical research that indicates that Black public-school parents in New Orleans feel as though they are empowered stakeholders in the New Orleans charter education reforms (Lay, 2022). This study investigated how Black public-school parents describe their experiences as

stakeholders in the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE). The researcher defined the NOCSE as the post-Hurricane Katrina, wholesale charter school conversion of K-12 education where New Orleans became the first major city in the United States without any traditional public schools.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to frame Black parental educational experiences in an urban landscape with an historical persistence of racism in education; to contextualize the public-school struggles Black parents face; and to suggest ideas for practical educational shifts which may benefit communities of color (Lay, 2022; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Stovall, 2013). By examining Louisiana legislative charter school policies specific to parent participation, the research investigated the extent to which those policies engaged and empowered Black public-school parents in the NOCSE.

Research Question

This study attempted to answer the following research question: RQ1: How do Black public-school parents describe their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE? There are two sub-questions: SQ1: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel empowered? SQ2: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel disempowered?

Figure 1

Research Question and Sub-questions
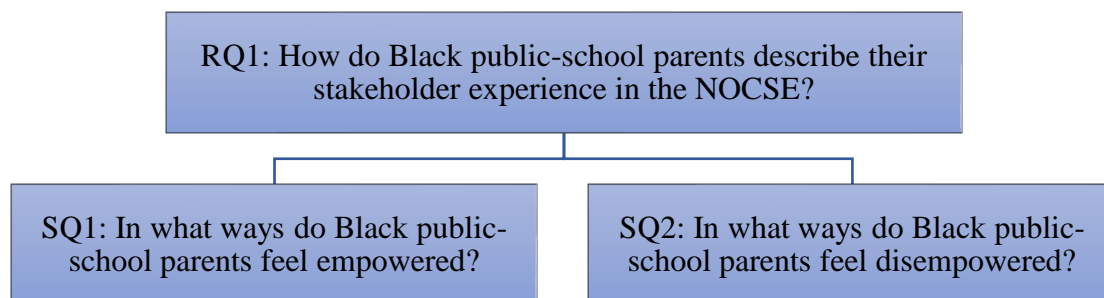
Theoretical Framework

Theories supply understandings of concepts that initially may be hard to grasp: how societies function, how organizations operate, or why people or groups interact in certain ways (Reeves et al., 2008). Critical theories, for instance, approach research by asking how power is related to social, economic, or political characteristics of individuals or groups (Reeves et al., 2008). This study was framed by the three main tenets of Kincheloe's (2008) Theory of Critical Pedagogy. The author stated:

1. Every form of educational practice and every dimension of schooling are politically contested spaces (p. 2); dominant power operates in numerous and hidden ways (p. 9).

2. Critical pedagogy is grounded in a social and educational vision of justice and equality around the purpose of education, particularly:

a. the relationship between community and schooling,

b. the ways that power operates to create purposes for schooling that are not in the best interests of the children who attend them, and

c. the ways schooling affects students from marginalized groups (p. 6).

3. Critical pedagogy is dedicated to the alleviation of human suffering through the elevation of scholarship and transformative action (pp. 11-12).

Critical Pedagogy provides an understanding about the interaction of groups, such as the interaction of Black parents with the schools that educate their children. The theory also examines the role of power in that interaction and investigates how group hierarchies can develop based upon power dynamics.

Definition of Key Terms

Following are the key terms used in this study:

1. *Black parent empowerment (BPE):* Black parent empowerment refers to a state of being characterized by parents who are active advocates and actors focused on self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-determination, rather than passive recipients of decisions made by teachers, administrators, schools, and school systems (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

2. *Charter management organization (CMO)*: Charter management organization refers to a non-profit organization that operates or manages charter schools, through a contract with the charter schools or as the charter holder, linked by centralized support, operations, and oversight (Common Education Data Standards, 2023).

3. *Community*: Community refers to a group of people with a shared or similar-minded perspective that differentiates them from other groups on matters including relationships, culture, values, beliefs, characteristics, goals, and interests (Leipert, 1996).

4. *Disempowered parent*: Disempowered parent refers to a parent lacking confidence in successfully navigating their child's K-12 education and claiming their rights as public school parents (Murray et al., 2013).

5. *Empowered parent*: Empowered parent refers to a parent having confidence in successfully navigating their child's K-12 education and claiming their rights as public school parents (Murray et al., 2013).

6. *Lived experience:* Lived experience refers to a representation of the experiences and choices of a given person, and the knowledge that they gain from these experiences and choices (SAGE, 2008).

7. *New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE)*: New Orleans charter school experiment refers to the post-Hurricane Katrina, wholesale charter school conversion of

K-12 education where New Orleans became the first major city in the United States

without any traditional public schools (Jewson, 2019).

8. *Parent*: For the purposes of this study, parents include biological parents, adoptive

   parents, foster parents, and legal guardians and caregivers such as grandparents, aunts,

   and uncles (Vanderbilt University, 2020).

9. *Phenomenon:* Phenomenon refers to the commonality of a lived experience within a

   particular group, gleaned through interviews with a group of individuals who have first-

   hand knowledge of the event, situation, or experience (Chambers, 2013).

10. *Stakeholder:* Stakeholder refers to any person, group, or organization that can place a

    claim on an organization's attention, resources, or output; it also refers to any person,

    group, or organization affected by that output (Bryson, 2018).

11. *Strategic plan*: Strategic plan refers to a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing

    fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it

    does, and why (Bryson, 2018).

Study Significance

This study endeavored to provide qualitative data for centering Black parents'

experiences in the New Orleans public education landscape. The study also aimed to elucidate

how those experiences can contribute to transformative education and equity. This research

specifically sought to benefit the following:

1. Parents: The study sought to give voice to parents' experiences to counteract the

   intentional exclusion of Black parents in New Orleans public school reform (Buras, 2014;

   Lay, 2022).

2. Community: The study attempted to illustrate how community involvement can become a tool of empowerment for stakeholders most affected by public education policy in the city.

3. Educators: The study provided data to help educators better align their parental involvement, engagement, and empowerment goals with parents' needs in the quest for more just and equitable educational outcomes.

4. Future researchers: The study attempted to contribute to bodies of research that focus on race and class inequities in education, in bottom-up policy feedback, and in creation of a politics of action.

5. Charter management organizations (CMOs) and education policymakers: In accordance with the goals of Louisiana charter school law, the study strove to outline ways to develop policies, procedures, and accountability measures that include parents.

Overview of Methodology

This study attempted to amplify Black parent voices in the NOCSE literature by foregrounding Black public-school parents' own perceptions and viewpoints. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the researcher's methodological strategy. The table outlines the design, sampling strategy, data strategy, and rationale of this phenomenological study.

Table 1

Summary of Methodology

Research Approach	Qualitative
Research Design	Phenomenology
Participants and Sampling	• Six participants (Dukes, 1984) were selected using purposive sampling. Participants are parents of K-12 students in the Orleans Parish school district, who identify as Black or African American, who have at least one student currently enrolled, and who are 18 to 80 years of age.

	• For the purposes of this study, parents included biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and legal guardians and caregivers such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles.
Data Collection Procedure	Interviews and a brief demographic survey
Data Analysis Procedure	1. Arranging the data into themes (qualitative coding) 2. Interpreting the data 3. Developing a composite description of the phenomenon of Black Parent Empowerment (BPE) 4. Presenting the description
Tools and Materials	1. Delve proprietary software for qualitative analysis 2. Microsoft Word for transcription assistance and data visualization
Rationale	• *What* and *how* research questions are a natural methodological fit for a qualitative research approach (Khan, 2014). • Sampling rationale is based on *information power*: the larger information power the sample holds, the lower N is needed (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data collection

The researcher collected data from participants through interviews and a brief demographic survey. Parents were initially contacted by email or by telephone. The researcher then used email to provide participants with information about the nature of the research through a Participant Consent Form. All participants were guaranteed anonymity.

The researcher utilized purposive sampling for participant selection. Purposive sampling uses preselected criteria relevant to a study's research question to choose participants (Gill, 2020). With purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selects subjects who are experienced with the phenomenon being studied, thus choosing participants who are most beneficial to the study and who are information rich (Gill, 2020).

Data analysis

The researcher employed traditional phenomenological strategies to analyze data collected from parents. Phenomenological data analysis involves reading, separating, and arranging collected data into themes that succinctly and accurately describe the study participants' lived experiences (Delve, 2022). Using Creswell's (2008) treatment as a guide, the researcher conducted a phenomenological study, seeking a detailed description of the multiple experiences and perspectives of individuals in a particular setting.

Phenomenology provides robust descriptions of lived experiences using primarily individual interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology is the most appropriate fit for this study because phenomenology provides the essence of the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group, as gleaned through interviews with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of the event, situation, or experience (Chambers, 2013).

Additionally, phenomenology provides an opportunity to discuss how one sets aside their own personal experiences and biases to investigate the lived experiences of the study participants (Chambers, 2013; Creswell, 2007). While no researcher or research design can completely remove bias from a study, phenomenology includes, as a part of the design itself, a discussion of the researcher's history with the phenomenon being studied so that the audience may be informed of possible slants and leanings on the part of the author (Chambers, 2013; Creswell, 2007).

Limitations

This research was subject to limitations. While the researcher assumed participants in this study would answer questions honestly and in detail to provide adequate information to

communicate their lived experience, there was no guarantee that they would do so. To mitigate the possibility that study participants might be reluctant to respond, and to create a shared sense of experience with participants, the researcher stated her experience as a former educator in New Orleans, her status as a native New Orleanian, and her attendance at New Orleans schools from kindergarten to fifth grade (1975-1980).

Delimitations

The primary delimitation of this research was the use of a non-random sample within a specific population of Black New Orleanians. Data collection was limited to April 2023. Results of this study are not replicable or generalizable due to the narrow selection criteria and relatively small size of the participant sample.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed the sample studied was not representative of the total population of Black public-school parents in New Orleans. The researcher also assumed participants in this study would answer questions honestly and in detail.

Scope

Participants in this analysis included only those individuals who matched the selection criteria established for the study. The selection criteria included parents of K-12 students in the Orleans Parish school district, who identified as Black or African American, who had at least one student currently enrolled, and who were between 18 and 80 years of age. For the purposes of this study, parents included biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and legal guardians and caregivers such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. The study was completed in April 2023.

Organization of the Document

Chapter 1 introduces the background, research questions, and methodological approach of the proposed study. An additional four chapters, references, and appendices comprise the remainder of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature and the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 delineates research design, methodology, data collection, procedures followed, and sample selection. The researcher analyzes the data and discusses the findings in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes the summary of results, implications, and recommendations of the study. The research concludes with references and appendices.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative study aimed to frame Black parental educational experiences in an urban landscape with an historical persistence of racism in education. The study attempted to contextualize the public-school struggles Black parents face and suggest practical educational policies that benefit them. A literature review follows, and it examines the history of Louisiana charter school reform and the ways in which Black parents in the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE) were excluded from the process.

Organization of the Chapter

This research attempts to fill the gap in the literature regarding the empowerment of Black public-school parents in a charter school district. The author presents the literature search strategy, the theoretical framework, and the key concepts in the current literature related to parental empowerment in K-12 education. Chapter 2 ends with a summary of the ways in which Black parents have been included and excluded in the formation of the all-charter Orleans Parish school system.

Literature Search Strategy

The strategy began with a library database search that utilized the Xavier University of Louisiana database collection. This search identified journal articles related to Black parent empowerment in K-12 education pertaining to charter schools and school choice. The literature search strategy expanded to include internet sites such as Google Scholar and SAGE Journals. Literature was also obtained from reference books and online presentations.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Critical Pedagogy asserts that schooling, in every aspect, happens in politically contested spaces (Freire, 1978; Freire, 1985; Freire, 2020; Kincheloe, 2008). To be effective, teachers must understand the cultural and educational experiences of students, the political structure of the schools in which they teach, and a wide body of subject matter. Likewise, school administrators must possess a wide range of knowledge about the culture of the groups they serve, about the complex interplay of racism, gender bias, class bias, and other forces, and about the often-conflicting purposes of education. These administrators must also consider a host of other social, economic, and political factors in their schools' communities.

Additionally, the Theory of Critical Pedagogy contends that parents and students must understand that schooling significantly affects the lives of students from marginalized groups (Kincheloe, 2008). Schooling is more than curriculum and policy; schooling is a major influence on social justice, human possibility, and student potential (Bamburg, 1994; Kincheloe, 2008; Wang and Kovach, 1996). Education is not neutral but is in fact filled with hidden power dynamics inherent to democracy and to individuals' participation in it. These hidden power dynamics are also inherent in the suffering brought about by poverty, discrimination, and market-driven economic systems (Giroux, 1988; Labaree, 1997; Lynch, 2014a; Lynch, 2014b). Critical pedagogy encourages the development of students and parents who are acting rather than being acted upon, and these actors are confident in their ability to improve their own lives and communities (Kincheloe, 2008).

Critical pedagogy is important to this research because of the study's focus on understanding the motives, values, and emotions of the marginalized and underrepresented parents in the NOCSE (hooks, 1994; Macedo, 2006). Parents, as much as students, are "living

texts" to be studied and consulted to change the unjust social contexts in which these parents and students live (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 20). In this way, educational researchers may use critical pedagogy to mine first-hand knowledge from marginalized and underrepresented parents and students. Researchers are not trying to *save* them. Instead, researchers strive to learn with parents and students about empowerment (Nieto et al., 2001), about "the larger pursuit of social justice" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 25), and about ways to "expose and confront the dominant power's appropriations of what were supposed to be democratic processes" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 31). In the elucidation of their own stories, parents and students guide researchers in ways to conduct action research which may improve schooling and its effects on the community (Borg & Mayo, 2000; Ledwith, 2001; Vincent, 2006).

Black Parents and the Politics of the NOCSE

The University of New Orleans (2018), the Kaiser Family Foundation (2015), and the Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives (2018) have studied New Orleans residents' attitudes about public schools and about perceptions of education reforms in the city before and after Hurricane Katrina. These studies support the most common narratives of the successes of the NOCSE: schools were brought back online quickly after the storm, test score and graduation rates improved, and polling showed parents desired school choice. Charter school advocates and CMO leaders argued that charters, school choice, and market-based reforms were the only way to swiftly transform the antiquated and - in their words - corrupt Orleans Parish school system (Lay, 2022).

By contrast, Lay (2022) examined subgroup differences in the studies above and noted that despite the positive spin around improved test scores and graduation rates, Black parents' concerns and experiences (1) were underrepresented, (2) conflicted with the views of other

subgroups in significant ways, and (3) were excluded by charter management organizations. The

charter reformers crafted a movement ostensibly to benefit underserved Black students, but this

movement simultaneously excluded the needs and perspectives of Black parents and members of

the community (Bouie, 2021; Thomas, 2015; Lay, 2022). As charter reformers fight to keep the

NOCSE in place, parents experience marginalization, confusion, and dissatisfaction with the

system. Lay (2022) expressed the core problem succinctly:

> …in the years leading up to Hurricane Katrina, there was a slow,
>
> deliberate dismantling of the public schools in New Orleans, and the post-Katrina
>
> reform processes have predictably left Black parents and residents without a voice
>
> and the officials charged with school governance, most of whom are white, with
>
> little accountability. In short, the reforms were made possible only by excluding
>
> and sidelining the experiences and preferences of the residents who interact most
>
> directly and frequently with school authorities, and they have had expected effects
>
> on the character of local democracy in the city (pp. 7-8).

The character of local democracy to which Lay (2022) refers is the lack of accountability,

representation, empowerment, and responsiveness that the NOCSE has created, which has placed

every Black public-school student in a charter school rather than a community school which

might better serve their needs. Black parents have resigned themselves to the NOCSE's version

of school choice, but they continue to express dissatisfaction with their experiences within a

system of education largely designed without their input (Lay, 2022).

Louisiana Charter Reform: A Short History

Post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans is the most cited example of state takeover, charter reform, and school choice success (Strauss, 2018). Yet, significant charter school reform began long before the storm hit the city in 2005 (Lay, 2022).

Before Hurricane Katrina

The charter school movement began before Hurricane Katrina toppled the levees and decimated New Orleans in 2005. Black families, educational advocates, politicians, and community groups had fought for better schools, educational resources, and equal pay for Black teachers throughout Louisiana's post-Civil War and Jim Crow eras (Baker, 1996; Breunlin & Regis, 2006). Civic groups and city leaders, such as civil rights activist and native New Orleanian Oretha Castle Haley, fought for educational equity in the city well into the 1970s after the White political establishment stalled federally mandated integration of schools (Germany, 2007). By the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, however, the state of Louisiana had significantly divested out of public services, including schools, in favor of economic development. New Orleans public schools became more poor, Black, and segregated by the 2000s; still, Black activists continued to push for resources and justice (Morel, 2018).

No amount of Black advocacy and activism, however, could quell the growing state- and national-level movement for charter schools and school privatization. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the exponential growth of charters in the state in the 1990s, and the systematic weakening of teachers' unions in the early 2000s – particularly in urban centers like New Orleans – made the already struggling New Orleans public schools a bull's eye for reformers to malign and ultimately take over (Patashnik, 2008).

In 1997, then-Governor Mike Foster gave the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) the authority to override local districts and to put charter schools in place within failing school districts (Myers, 1996). The passage of Louisiana Act 9 in 2003 created the state takeover district, known as the Recovery School District (RSD). By 2003, both state and local governments had made it easier for charter schools to become a tool for converting failing schools and districts. By May of 2005, the New Orleans school district had been audited by the state superintendent of education and found to be in financial disarray (Lay, 2022). Thus, through the actions of state and local power brokers, and despite the continued efforts of Black advocates, parents, and community leaders, the New Orleans school district was ripe for takeover before Hurricane Katrina destroyed the city. Hurricane Katrina was not the start of charter reform, but it did provide an opportunity for the reforms to blossom.

After Hurricane Katrina

The Louisiana legislature passed Act 35 in November of 2005 which authorized the Recovery School District (RSD) takeover of Orleans Parish public schools after Hurricane Katrina. The RSD takeover and the subsequent establishment of an all-charter school district became a study in how charter reformers stacked the deck against all opponents – including parents. Black parents brought lawsuits on behalf of special needs students, decried the convoluted and confusing enrollment system, and watched as "scandals related to mismanagement and noncompliance with state and federal laws belied the rhetoric" of how the new system of charter schools was better than what came before (Lay, 2022, pp. 44-45).

Charter reformers used various strategies to discourage changes to charter policies and to sustain charter influence. Lay (2022) outlined four specific tactics:

1. By law, a school had to operate as a charter for a minimum of five years. After five years, any changes to the school could only be approved by the RSD.

2. Changes to charter law and governance were only made when forced by judicial decree or threat of lawsuit.

3. Charter reform policy items were kept off public agendas so that there would be no public debate and outcomes could be engineered.

4. All opponents of charter reform were framed by charter reformers and the local media as "defenders of the status quo" and against the needs of New Orleans public school students (p. 45).

Parental concerns about the lack of resources at schools, the lack of community schools, the frustrating and demoralizing enrollment system, and charter reformers' and CMOs' dismissal of documented racial disparities went unheard (Cowen Institute, 2007; Lay, 2022).

By the 2019-2020 school year, one hundred percent of the city's public-school students were attending charter schools (Clark, 2019; Lay, 2022). In 2015, then-governor John Bel Edwards voted in favor of the unification of all schools managed by the RSD and the schools managed by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Edwards authorized two bodies to oversee the two-year unification process: (1) the Unification Advisory Committee which included the superintendents of the OPSB and the RSD and executives of several CMOs and (2) the Unification Task Force which included Black and White residents of the city (Lay, 2022). The unification process – bringing all public charter schools under one governing body – was dominated, however, by White members of the task force who were charter reformers (Lay, 2022). These task force members made the most significant decisions about school governance and accountability (Lay, 2022). The unification task force held meetings where residents could

comment and give opinions, but the ultimate details of the process were made behind closed doors. No public referendum was held, and no locally elected body held sway or had any say (Campbell-Rock, 2022; Lay, 2022).

As of 2023, the unified, one hundred percent charter system of schools in New Orleans is managed by elected Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) members. OPSB monitors school accountability, measures school performance, and manages locations of school facilities. This board does not, however, manage individual schools or CMOs, hire school leaders or personnel, choose school curriculum, manage school operations, or set school budgets (Lay, 2022, p. 55). Thus, the locally elected board mostly authorizes whether applicants will or will not become a charter school (Lay, 2022; New Orleans Tribune, 2022).

Charter Parent Involvement Policy

While there is no direct mention of parent involvement, engagement, or empowerment in charter policy in the state administrative code, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) does mandate that BESE, the state charter authorizer, "engage in an application review process that complies with the latest principles and standards for quality charter school authorizing, as promulgated by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA)" (Louisiana Administrative Code, 2022, para. A2). The NACSA is an organization that advances and advocates for quality charter school authorization and lists as one of its foundational goals responding to the kinds of educational opportunities communities are seeking (NACSA, 2023b).

Considered the gold standard of charter authorization guidance, the NACSA's 2023 Version of Principles and Standards prioritizes maintaining high standards for schools, upholding school autonomy, and protecting student and public interests, which includes supporting "parents and students in being well-informed about the quality of education provided by charter schools"

(2023a, p. 5). Similarly, the NACSA (2023a) holds as standards working "with multiple stakeholders facilitating community engagement efforts designed to identify and act on the kinds of educational opportunities communities desire" (p. 6) and continuously reviewing authorization processes to ensure "the current processes [are] resulting in charter schools that the community wants and needs" (p. 9).

The NACSA also promotes centering communities as a core strategy (NACSA, 2023c). Within this core strategy, the NACSA contends that delivering on community aspirations would (1) produce schools that redefine excellence in ways that capitalize on students' unique strengths, (2) strengthen school-community partnerships, and (3) include parents and the community in codesigning the schools that best fit their neighborhood's students and needs – such as no long bus rides across the city (NACSA, 2023c). Kelli Peterson, Assistant Superintendent of Equity, Inclusion and Opportunities at the Louisiana Department of Education, states, "We've [Black, Brown, Indigenous populations and others] always had voices. We haven't always had people who listened" (NACSA, 2023c, Why We Need section, para. 4).

The state of Louisiana does explicitly mention parent and community engagement in the application for new operator, experienced operator, and virtual charter schools. In Section 1: Educational Program and Capacity, the BESE charter school application for new charter schools states that charter applicants must provide "a description of the way in which stakeholders in the intended community were engaged regarding the proposed charter school" (Louisiana Department of Education, 2023, p. 7). This includes:

1. descriptions of the stakeholders engaged,

2. strategies used to solicit community input regarding the educational and programmatic needs of students and the plan to meet those needs,

3. the method and nature of feedback received from community stakeholders and the process for incorporating that feedback into the submitted application, and

4. the extent to which, if at all, the proposal incorporates community input regarding the educational and programmatic needs of students (Louisiana Department of Education, 2023, p. 7).

Applicants are also required to "provide a narrative description of support for the proposed school from community stakeholders, including a candid analysis of the depth of support and opposition to the school" and to submit documents as evidence of community support (Louisiana Department of Education, 2023, p. 7).

Community Advocates Versus Charter Advocates and CMOs

Community advocates have fought on behalf of parents during the NOCSE (Bouie, 2021; Buras, 2014; Dixson et al., 2015; Lay, 2022). Community leaders, politicians, and scholars are on record as allies with parents to expose the often hidden - but highly effective - tools, strategies, and perspectives of charter reformers that suppress parent empowerment and voice (New Orleans Tribune, 2022). Two of these tools are neoliberal management and the competing purposes of schools (Labaree, 1997; Lynch, 2017; Stout et al., 1994).

Neoliberal Management: Schools as Businesses

Managerialism is a mode of governance which establishes market (for-profit) principles in the management of public sector (non-profit) organizations (Noveck, 2021). Many charter schools operate from this perspective (Sernovitz, 2018). This philosophy seeks to have schools operate like business organizations in the name of greater efficiency and measurable outcomes (Exworthy & Halford, 1999). Public services, such as education, become commodities to be delivered rather than capacity-building public goods. As a result, schools change from being

centers of learning to service-delivery operations (Lynch, 2014a; Lynch 2014b; Lynch, 2017). Rivera (2016) examined how educational privatization can lead to inequitable outcomes, such as the persistence of educational inequities despite increases in educational spending, school finance reforms, and judicial action.

In her 2015 scholarly study, Lynnell Thomas surveyed what she described as the "dubious union between private profit and public interest" (p. 3). Thomas found that post-Katrina New Orleans recovery had become a workshop for the privatization of public services, the incentivization of private-sector industry, and the outsourcing of many public services, including healthcare, education, criminal justice, and humanitarian aid. Thomas concluded that disempowered citizens whose neighborhoods were most impacted by the application of this neoliberal restructuring did not always see the consequences until it was too late.

Bouie (2021) outlined such consequences for the students, parents, and community of New Orleans in the context of the city's blanket charter school conversion. One of the consequences was further entrenchment of stratification by race, class, and educational advantage. Additionally, Bouie (2021) pointed to (1) the destruction of neighborhood schools and support systems for neighborhood development, (2) "no best practices identified to improve student and school performance, (3) no State protocol for Charter Law Compliance, and (4) no student performance improvement" (para. 4). Richardson (2017) echoed Bouie's sentiments in outlining the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)'s opposition to the proliferation of charter schools, the resultant privatization of K-12 education, and the abuse of school choice as a tool for continued segregation and subversion of democratic control of schools.

The Competing Purposes of Schools

There have been differing and often conflicting expectations of the mission and purpose of schooling in the United States for as long as there have been schools in the United States (Center on Education Policy, 2007). Education historian David Labaree (1997) outlined three main purposes: social mobility (schools should prepare students to compete for higher social positions); social efficiency (schools should focus on training workers); and democratic equality (schools should mold citizens). Social justice, the unequal distribution of resources to achieve equal outcomes, has emerged as an additional contemporary competing purpose (Hedges, 2021). Stout et al. (1994) examined "the ways in which major actors with competing value perspectives have tried to impose their perspectives on social policy," particularly in relation to the mission of public schooling (p. 5). The charter reformer and CMO emphasis on educational efficiency is in direct contrast to the social mobility, democratic equality, and social justice foci of parents (Stout et al., 1994).

Black Parents as (Dis)Empowered Stakeholders

Overwhelmingly, the scholarly literature related to Black parent empowerment (BPE) in education is concentrated in three areas: BPE and student achievement; BPE and school discipline; and BPE and educational equity. While the concept of parents as ignored, excluded, or underrepresented stakeholders in education is echoed in the wider scholarly literature, there is scant research around BPE and Black parents as power-sharing stakeholders in New Orleans public schools.

BPE and Student Achievement, Unfair Discipline, and Educational Equity

Research conducted on BPE has a history of focusing on student achievement, including Epstein's (2007) parental involvement typologies, BPE's effects on Black students in STEM,

BPE's effects on educational outcomes for Black sons, BPE's importance relative to the intersections of race, class, gender, and geography, and Black fathers' engagement and its role in their children's academic success (Kim & Bryan, 2017; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; McGee & Spencer, 2015; Posey-Maddox, 2017; Rall, 2021; Reynolds, 2010).

There is copious research about the correlation between BPE and unfair discipline practices in public schools (Yull & Wilson, 2018). For instance, Yull and Wilson (2018) examined Black parents' experiences with challenging the adultification of Black children and their experience of disproportionate and punitive disciplining. The authors delved into the barriers Black parents faced as the parents attempted to redirect the school district away from zero tolerance disciplinary practices that disproportionately targeted Black students.

There is a plethora of research regarding BPE and equity, including studies regarding Black capital, policy mobilization, and organizing for collective action (Johnson et al., 2011; Taysum & Ayanlaja, 2020). Scott (2013) outlined how, in urban education, market values disrupt redistributive equity, advantage some parents over others, and empower for-profit and non-profit educational marketplace organizations instead of parents. McCarthy Foubert (2023) and Yull et al. (2018) examined how even when inclusive school practices welcomed Black parents, Black parents' suggestions, ideas, and aspirations were only taken seriously if they converged with the interests of White parents and school and district leaders.

Relatedly, BPE is prevalent in research regarding advocating for special education students and children with disabilities (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Green et al., 2007; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Kalyanpur & Rao, 1991; Murray et al., 2013; Pinkus, 2005; Van Haren & Fiedler, 2008; Zhang & Bennett, 2003). Gillins (2019), for example, examined narratives from Black parents of sons receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to

elicit their lived experiences. Gillins's study illuminated a deeper understanding of institutional racism embedded in the social constructs and practices within schools and its effect on the parent engagement practices of the participant group of Black parents. Gillins's work assessed how the collective voice of Black parents challenged reformers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to embrace building authentic partnerships with Black families and their communities.

BPE and Education Policy

It is a challenge to find scholarly research specific to New Orleans, but it does exist. Wyatt (2019) contended, among other findings, that parental advocacy and involvement might reduce the disproportionate rate at which Black males are placed in special education in New Orleans. Harris (2019) found that parents in the district did not have the information they needed to make informed or empowering decisions about the programs at charter schools for students with disabilities. Dixson et al. (2015) discussed several cases in New Orleans where historic public high schools were taken over and chartered against the wishes and input of the community. The authors "focus primarily on three high schools as cases that illustrate the methods of dispossession in which the (charter) reformers engage," "the acts of resistance to the reforms launched by community members," and how that resistance was silenced or under-reported (p. 289).

The exclusion of Black parents in education policy is not a phenomenon exclusive to New Orleans. The concept of parents as ignored, excluded, or underrepresented stakeholders in education is echoed in the wider scholarly literature, including Black education in Toronto, London, and South Africa (Budhai & Grant, 2023; Singh et al., 2004; Wilson & Johnson, 2015). Fine (1993) discussed how parents enter the politics of education typically unwelcomed, uninvited to the work of serious educational reform, and without resources or power. Olsen Beal

and Hendry's (2012) qualitative study of a Baton Rouge immersion school assessed how school choice policy operates in complex and contradictory ways to both empower and disempower parents as involved citizens in democratic change. Using qualitative interviews of Black parents in Chicago, Pattillo (2015) examined to what degree the themes of empowerment, agency, and control characterized the experiences of Black parents tasked with getting their children into public schools.

Black Parent Empowerment: What It Is – And What It Is Not

Parent empowerment literature is intertwined with literature on parent involvement and parent engagement (Baker et al., 2016). Often, scholarly articles that mention one of the three terms in their titles, will use one or both of the other terms relatedly, or even interchangeably, within the article (Ferlazzo, 2011; Jeynes, 2013). How the three concepts operate may be conceptually viewed as a progression of cooperation, respect, and power sharing.

> A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth — identifying projects, needs and goals, and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for parent engagement, on the other hand, tends to lead with its ears — listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12).

Extending Ferlazzo's analogy a step further, while the three concepts share similarities, parent empowerment implies not just cooperation or even partnership but also notions of respect, equal standing, shared power, and shared decision-making.

When distinct characterizations or definitions of the terms are provided in the scholarly literature, the constructs of parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent empowerment generally adhere to the following themes:

1. Parent involvement: *Doing to*; one-way communication; demonstrable actions such as attending school events and participating in prescribed activities that the school organizes (Ferlazzo, 2011; Jeynes, 2013).

2. Parent engagement: *Doing with*; two-way communication; engaging families and the community to become partners with the school, *listening* to parents' thoughts, dreams, and worries (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12), and "building a foundation of trust and respect, reaching out to parents beyond the school" (Redding et al., 2004, p. 1).

3. Parent empowerment: *Sharing power*; building upon parent engagement to encourage parents to connect with one another and move toward broader action. This is similar to the work of traditional community organizers or action research. Parents gain greater power within the educational landscape through increases in their feelings of self-efficacy in decision-making, ability to access resources, feelings of mutual respect, and hope for change (Ferlazzo, 2011; Hsiao et al., 2018, Murray et al., 2013).

Zhang and Bennett (2003) state that empowerment endows parents with the ability to achieve desired results for their families and their children. Likewise, Morrow and Malin (2004) define parent empowerment as a family invested with authority. For the purposes of this study, Black parent empowerment (BPE) suggests that parents are not passive recipients of decisions made by teachers, administrators, schools, and school systems. Empowered Black parents are instead active advocates and actors focused on self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-determination (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

The literature review encompassed research on parent involvement, engagement, and empowerment that provides significant background for the proposed study of Black parent empowerment. Scholarly literature has established that Black parents' voices have been excluded

in charter reform. Thus, there is a need for research that will add to the body of literature that focuses on centering and amplifying the voices of Black public-school parents as they navigate their children's educational journey in an all-charter district.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study investigated how Black public-school parents describe their experiences as stakeholders in the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE). There is limited research that indicates that Black public-school parents in New Orleans feel like empowered stakeholders in New Orleans education reform even though K-12 public schools in New Orleans serve predominately Black communities (Lay, 2022). The NOCSE is defined in this analysis as the post-Hurricane Katrina, wholesale charter school conversion of K-12 education where New Orleans became the first major city in the United States without any traditional public schools.

Chapter Organization

The research purpose, research questions, and elements of the research design comprise the first portion of this chapter. The research type, specific method, and rationale for choice of method are reviewed in detail. Research ethics and human subjects' protection follow, including discussions of researcher training and certification, approval by the university Institutional Review Board (IRB), the consent process, and researcher bias. The chapter concludes with descriptions of the participants, sampling, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and study limitations.

Research Purpose

This qualitative study explored the Louisiana legislative charter school act and its strategic plan to engage and empower parents in the NOCSE. The study's purpose was to center Black parental educational experiences, and to contextualize the struggles those parents face.

Additionally, the study aimed to develop suggestions for practical educational policies which might benefit communities of color (Lay, 2022; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Stovall, 2013).

Research Question

This study attempted to answer the following research question: RQ1: How do Black public-school parents describe their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE? SQ1: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel empowered? SQ2: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel disempowered?

Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative, phenomenological research approach to explore the level of inclusion of Black parent voices in the context of the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE). Qualitative research (1) highlights and gives meaning to daily life experiences, (2) allows researchers to deeply explore behaviors, perspectives, and experiences, (3) explores human and social problems, and (4) allows the researcher to build a holistic picture of complex phenomena in a natural setting (Burns & Grove, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; Khan, 2014). Phenomenological research is an approach at understanding and describing the fundamental nature of a phenomenon by investigating people's everyday experiences to gain deeper insights into how people comprehend those experiences (Delve, 2022). *What* and *how* research questions guided this study, making a qualitative approach a sound methodological fit (Khan, 2014).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenology provides robust descriptions of lived experiences. With disciplinary origins in philosophy, psychology, and education, phenomenology uses strategies of data analysis that assess and marshal significance and meaning in statements and descriptions. Unlike ethnography, phenomenology does not require an

extended amount of time with study participants and does not attempt to describe culture-sharing. A narrative approach is more suited for studying individual stories, and a case-study approach would limit the results to descriptions of one or a few specific cases (Creswell, 2007). The researcher did not aspire to develop a theory from the study; thus, a grounded theoretical approach was inappropriate (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenology gives a researcher an opportunity to 'bracket out' or discuss how one sets aside their own personal experiences and biases to investigate the lived experiences of the study participants. Dukes (1984) describes bracketing as temporarily suspending the consideration of individual details and facts to uncover the essence or structural necessity of a kind of experience. Citing the foundational work of scholar Edmund Husserl, Dukes also notes that causation is irrelevant in phenomenology, as it is caught up in individual details. Instead, the purpose of phenomenological methodology is "to uncover the inherent logic of that experience or phenomenon, the way in which it makes sense to its subjects" (Dukes, 1984, p. 199).

Research Ethics and Human Subjects Protection

The researcher implemented the following:

1. Obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Xavier University of Louisiana

2. Secured written consent from all study participants to take part in the study, including consent to be audio recorded

3. Audio recorded all one-on-one interviews using password-protected devices

4. Informed all participants that their identities will remain confidential

5. Had participants choose a pseudonym

6. Informed participants that they were free to withdraw from all study-related activities with or without cause at any point in the process

7. Informed participants of the researcher's active and up-to-date CITI certification

No compensation of any kind was provided to the study's participants.

Participants and Sampling

Using purposive sampling, the researcher chose six parents for this study. The researcher used word of mouth and social media appeals to identify participants. Participants included only those individuals who matched the selection criteria established for the study. The selection criteria included parents of K-12 students in the Orleans Parish school district, who identified as Black or African American, who had at least one student currently enrolled, and who were between 18 and 80 years of age. For the purposes of this study, parents included biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and legal guardians and caregivers such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

The study was completed in April 2023. A participant overview, including demographic information, and participant profiles are provided in Chapter 4. See Appendix F for the participant demographic information form.

Instrumentation

The researcher engaged the participants in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to gather robust descriptions of parents' perceptions of their experiences. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), "Interviews aim to elicit participants' views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories and so gain access to their experiences, feelings, and social worlds" (p. 155). With the written consent of the participants, the researcher audio-recorded the interviews on a password protected computer or a password protected cell phone. The interview questions were pilot questions. See Appendix B for the interview protocol and Appendix C for the research instrument.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher used a purposive sampling technique. Parents were contacted for interviews by email and by telephone. They were provided with information about the nature of the research and guaranteed anonymity. See Appendix E for the participant recruitment flyer.

The researcher's primary method of data collection for this phenomenological study was semi-structured interviews (Chambers, 2013; Creswell, 2007; Delve, 2022; Khan, 2014). All participants agreed to a single one-on-one semi-structured interview with the possibility of follow-up interviews. With the verbal and written consent of the participants, the researcher audio-recorded the interviews using her password protected cellular telephone or the Zoom video conferencing application on her password protected desktop computer.

Each interview took place either in person or by Zoom video conference. The interview questions were given to the participants before the interview. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher thanked each person for participating. The interview protocol was followed as written and the questions were asked in order, but with flexibility for review or clarification. Participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and were given opportunities to ask any questions of their own.

Member Checking

After the data were collected, the researcher transcribed the interviews, creating Microsoft Word documents and replaying the audio recordings for accuracy. Each participant was given a hard copy or electronic copy of their respective transcript and was asked to read the transcript through for accuracy and approval (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2008).

Researcher's Role

A former educator and a current Educational Leadership doctoral candidate in the Division of Education and Counseling at Xavier University of Louisiana, the researcher completed an alternative teacher certification program at Xavier University of Louisiana. The researcher ensured that the protocol, instrument, and ethical concerns were followed to contribute to data validity and reliability. Rapport was developed with study participants through the researcher's experience as an educator in Orleans Parish public schools, as a native New Orleanian, and as a product of Orleans Parish public schools from 1975 to 1980.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher used traditional phenomenological strategies to analyze data collected from parents: reading, separating, and arranging collected data into themes that succinctly and accurately described the study participants' lived experiences (Delve, 2022). Once member checking was completed, the researcher employed Delve software and in vivo coding during the first coding cycle which resulted in several codes. In vivo coding is used to retrieve, categorize, and organize code labels from participants' own words in the transcripts, capturing the rich data necessary to answer the research question (Delve, 2022). The researcher performed a second pass to eliminate codes which received few responses or were unrelated to the research question. Then, the researcher established a final set of codes.

The researcher then further organized the final in vivo codes using pattern coding. Per Saldana (2016), pattern coding is "a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts" (p. 236), or grouping similarly coded data under main themes to describe larger patterns that appear. The researcher created theme labels and descriptions to aid comprehension.

Delimitations

The investigation used a non-random sample with a specific population of Black New Orleanians. All of the data was collected in April 2023. The phenomenological results of this study are not replicable or generalizable due to the narrow selection criteria and small size of the participant sample.

Summary

Through a phenomenological approach, the researcher examined the lived realities of Black parents in the NOCSE as it pertains to parent empowerment. A phenomenological approach provided an opportunity to assemble robust, descriptive insights into the ways in which Black parents feel empowered or disempowered as it relates to charter school reforms. This chapter explained the design, methodology, instrument, and ethical considerations of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study explored the extent to which Louisiana legislative charter school policies empowered Black public-school parents in the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE). While parent empowerment in K-12 education typically refers to *sharing power* with parents (Ferlazzo, 2011; Hsiao et al., 2018, Murray et al., 2013), the literature on parent participation trends more toward *doing to* or *doing with* parents - parent involvement or parent engagement, respectively (Ferlazzo, 2011; Jeynes, 2013).

This study attempted to answer the following research question: RQ1: How do Black public-school parents describe their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE? SQ1: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel empowered? SQ2: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel disempowered? The nine individual interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended in nature (see Appendix C). The researcher formulated the interview questions to correspond to the research question.

This chapter describes pertinent demographics of the Orleans Parish public school system. The chapter also includes descriptions and profiles of the participants. The chapter ends with the data analysis process, coding, and resultant themes.

Site Description

The Orleans Parish school district, known as NOLA-PS as of February 2022, is an urban district consisting of 70 district-authorized charter schools that service approximately 44,000 students (NOLA-PS, 2022). Of those 44,000 students, 86% are economically disadvantaged, and 7% have limited English proficiency. About 77% of the students are Black, 15% are Other, and

8% are White. Approximately 15% of the district's students are identified as having disabilities, and about 12% are identified as gifted.

NOLA-PS (2022) reports that 35 charter management organizations (CMOs) and one contractor operate the district's charter schools. Two thirds of the CMOs operate one school each. The other third operates between two and eight schools. Per district policy, one CMO can only have up to 15% of the district's total student enrollment.

Louisiana law mandates that CMO boards of directors must include at least one member who is an alumnus of the school or a parent or guardian of a current student. The boards of directors must also be representative of the New Orleans community in terms of race and gender (New Schools for New Orleans, 2023).

Participant Descriptions and Profiles

Using purposive sampling, six Black parents with children actively enrolled in Orleans Parish were chosen to describe their experiences navigating the charter school system of New Orleans. The participants described their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE and the ways in which they felt empowered and disempowered.

The participants were between the ages of 18 and 80, and all participants were the biological parents of their children. All but one of the participants were from the central and southeastern regions of Louisiana, with the outlier participant hailing from a large urban area in the Midwest. The participants chose or were assigned pseudonyms. Table 2 provides demographic information on participants, including an overview of participants' gender, age, number of children in NOLA-PS, occupation, and whether and when the participant was a student in Orleans Parish public schools. Background information on each participant follows.

Table 2

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	# of children in K-12 NOLA PS	Occupation	Orleans Parish Schools Attendee	Orleans Parish Schools Attendance Years
Curley	F	36	1	Cosmetologist	Yes	1998-2004
Latifah	F	44	1	University Librarian	Yes	1984-1997
Leslie	F	36	5	K-12 SPED Educator	Yes	1994-2005
Roger	M	37	1	Barber	Yes	1998-2004
Samantha	F	40	1	Homemaker	No	None
Trapper	F	43	3	Gerontologist	No	None

Curley's Background

Curley is an entrepreneur in the health and beauty industry. She is a native New Orleanian and attended Orleans Parish schools as a child. Curley is married and has four children. Two of her children are toddler twins. Her oldest son is in pre-kindergarten. Her oldest daughter attends a public charter elementary school in the Algiers, New Orleans, neighborhood near Curley's business establishment. Curley works on the west bank of the city, but her family lives on the east bank in the Seventh Ward. Curley has been married to Roger for nine years and has decided with her husband to raise their family in New Orleans. Curley graduated from Warren Easton Senior High School in 2004.

Latifah's Background

Latifah is a midcareer library science professional at an Historically Black College or University (HBCU). She is a native New Orleanian and is divorced with four sons. Latifah's

older three sons all attended NOLA-PS schools and have graduated high school. Her youngest

son attended a public charter elementary and middle school from third grade to eighth grade and

is currently a student at a selective, but public creative arts school. This son attends the creative

arts school under the full day option, meaning he receives both art instruction and academic

instruction at the school. Some students attend the school part-time in the afternoons, receiving

their academic instruction at a different public charter high school in the morning. Latifah and

her sons are Muslim. Latifah attended Orleans Parish public schools her entire K-12 student

career, and she graduated from John McDonogh Senior High School in 1997. Latifah lives with

her youngest son in New Orleans East.

Leslie's Background

Leslie is a veteran, midcareer special education (SPED) educator at a west bank K-8

charter school in the Algiers, New Orleans, neighborhood. Leslie has five sons, and the oldest

son attends a NOLA-PS charter high school located on the east bank in the Gentilly, New

Orleans, neighborhood. The high school is associated with one of the city's public HBCUs.

Leslie's other four sons all attend a K-12 public charter in the Uptown area of New Orleans.

Leslie attended Orleans Parish schools her entire K-12 student career, and she graduated from

Warren Easton Senior High School in 2005. Leslie has served on her sons' charter school board

of directors.

Roger's Background

Roger is a native New Orleanian, a barber, and an entrepreneur. He attended Orleans

Parish public schools his entire K-12 student career. Roger is married to Curley, and they have

four children. Roger's youngest children are toddler twins, his oldest son is in pre-kindergarten,

and his oldest daughter attends a public charter elementary school near his wife's business

establishment. Roger works on the west bank, but his family lives on the east bank in the Seventh Ward. Roger and Curley have been married for nine years. Roger graduated from Warren Easton Senior High School in 2004.

Samantha's Background

Samantha is a stay-at-home mother of two children. One child is a toddler, and the other child attends a public charter elementary school in the Algiers, New Orleans, neighborhood. Samantha is from central Louisiana. She did not attend Orleans Parish public schools as a child, but her husband and many of his family members did. Samantha and her family live on the west bank of New Orleans.

Trapper's Background

Trapper is a midcareer gerontologist associated with a local university. She has three children, all of whom attend NOLA-PS charter schools on the east bank. Two of the children attend a public charter elementary school, and the oldest child attends a public charter high school. Trapper is from a large, urban area in the Midwest. She did not attend Orleans Parish public schools. Trapper has served on the board of directors of her children's schools.

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Coding and Thematic Analysis

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To generate codes and themes, the researcher used a phase approach to thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2012). In phase one, the researcher familiarized herself with the data, listening to each recording and reading the transcript of each recording at least twice. Phase two involved generating the initial codes. Codes are labels for features of the data that are potentially relevant to any research questions, staying near to the participants' meanings and the content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Codes are shorthand for researchers, mirroring the

participants' language or reflecting the researcher's theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

In phase three, the researcher constructed potential themes from the collection of codes. Themes are areas of similarity, overlap, or clustering between codes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Like codes, themes aim to answer research questions. The potential themes were then reviewed in phase four, making sure there was enough data to support each theme. The researcher named and defined the final themes in phase five, and she produced the presentation of the themes in phase six.

The researcher employed in vivo coding during the first coding cycle which resulted in thirty initial codes. In vivo coding was used to retrieve, categorize, and organize code labels from participants' own words in the transcripts, capturing the rich data necessary to answer the research question. In a second pass, five of the initial codes received five or fewer responses each. Two of those five codes were omitted as they were unrelated to the research question. The remaining three codes were combined into other codes. The researcher further combined the remaining codes that were related. Nine codes were included in the final count. The researcher created code labels, descriptions, and parameters to aid comprehension. Resultant codes from the two coding cycles are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Codes Generated from Data Analysis, where F = frequency

Code	*F*	Description	Parameters
Innovation	13	Parent perspectives on school innovation and curriculum	At student, school, and district level
Children's Needs	58	Parent perspectives on the district's ability to meet students' and families' needs	Refers to academic, social, physical, and

			psychosocial needs
Cultural Issues	9	Parent perspectives on respect for Black parents and families	Teacher-parent relationship
Empowerment Strategies	94	How parents empower and advocate for themselves	At individual, school, and district level
Involvement, Engagement, and Empowerment	42	Levels of parent participation	Refers to one-way and two-way communication with parents, and power sharing
Parent Devaluation	120	Ways parents feel diminished as stakeholders and the effect on parent confidence	At individual, school, and district levels
Enrollment and Choice Issues	48	Parent experiences with enrollment, school quality, scheduling, and school commutes	At family level
Communication	40	Effectiveness of the flow of information from school to parent	At school and CMO level
Positive Experiences	49	Positive instances of effective school leadership and parent inclusion	At school level

The researcher then further organized the in vivo codes using pattern coding after the second cycle resulting in three themes. Per Saldana (2016), pattern coding is "a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts" (p. 236). Pattern coding groups similarly coded data under main themes to describe larger patterns that appear. Braun and Clarke (2012) contend that, unlike codes, themes are constructed by the researcher rather than discovered. Table 4 offers the generated themes and the codes they comprise.

Table 4

Code Condensing and Theme Development

Theme	Description	Codes
Nobody knows my name: Enduring the frustration of poor communication	Parents describe their dissatisfaction with ineffective, inadequate, and culturally	1. Positive experiences 2. Communication

	insensitive communication from teachers, schools, and the district.	3. Cultural issues
40 acres and a school: Making the district deliver on promises	Parents describe their desires and demands for equity, innovation, "choice," and meeting their children's academic, social, safety, and psychosocial needs.	1. Children's needs 2. Innovation 3. Enrollment and choice issues
Praying with their legs: Getting results through action	Parents describe situations and conditions in which they feel empowered, disempowered, devalued or confident in their attempts to navigate the NOCSE.	1. Parent devaluation 2. Involvement, engagement, and empowerment 3. Empowerment strategies

The theme descriptions that follow answer the investigation's research question: How do Black public-school parents describe their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE? Additionally, an analysis of each theme describes the ways in which Black public-school parents feel empowered and disempowered within that stakeholder experience.

Theme 1. *Nobody Knows My Name***: Enduring the Frustration of Poor Communication**

Each of the six parents spoke passionately about the frustration of poor communication from teachers, administrators, and CMOs in general. Parents expressed disconnects in communication around subjects such as scheduling school events, learning their student had a new teacher, understanding what students are learning in class, and getting resolutions to inquiries. Samantha spoke about how difficult it has been to engage deeply with her son's school. She stated:

Out of last-minute notices or late notices that come, maybe the day before or, you know, a few days before, that doesn't always give you time to make adjustments or arrangements as a parent or a family to be able to attend certain things or have things prepared already when those things do come up.

Samantha went on to speak about how reaching out to parents more effectively would improve her ability to communicate with her son about classroom work. She said:

I like to have conversations with him about what he's doing at school and what he's learning, and that doesn't always happen when you're trying to pull some information out of an eight-year-old that could easily be related from an adult to an adult.

Curley reiterated this feeling when speaking about her daughter getting a new teacher late in the year. Curley was shocked to see the new teacher since she had not been informed of the change by the school. She remarked:

I've been told three different reasons why my child got a new teacher. In the third quarter, I was told that it was because they had the resources to get a new teacher to split up the class size. I also was told that it was a behavior issue in my child's class, so they took some kids that were not the behavior issue and gave them to the other teacher to kind of get them back on track for LEAP. And then I was told she [my daughter] was put in an accelerated class. This is three different things, three different meanings, from three different people.

Roger was frustrated with the lack of follow-through communication at school level. He and Curley found it challenging to get a resolution to an issue they had with the school over the course of several months. Both Roger and Curley diligently called and called to get answers, but to no avail. He stated:

May be easy to first touch base, but it's a struggle to get completed. But you may not be, uh, getting to the resolve quickly or it may not even have nothing in place for the resolve and not be looking towards resolving… sending out one message and never getting fully

completed, not contacting us personally, sending messages more through children versus talking to us directly.

Additionally, Roger expressed dissatisfaction with a cultural aspect of poor communication: lack of respect for fathers. Roger felt left out and overlooked by school staff who, he felt, prioritized communicating with his wife, Curley. He said:

> No, I don't feel valued, especially as a father… But I feel as though most times fathers, no matter if their name is first on the list as the number one contact or things of that nature, is a stigma that we get placed second in the contact. We may play the stereotype in our children's lives to where we'll have to get the information second hand from a spouse. I've had incidences where I call and I'm concerned and I try to talk and then instead of getting the call back to me, the call goes to my wife and so [I feel] disrespected because I'm the one that reached out to speak and talk, and to schedule and to have something done and then turn around and they go immediately to my spouse…That's me and that's other males that I know that's active in their children's lives.

Like Roger, Latifah spoke at length about the cultural disconnect in communication as well. Latifah found that teachers who were not familiar with New Orleans culture were often challenged when communicating with families. She asserted:

> It was very difficult sometimes for some of the teachers that are used to being in an authority position when they speak to other Black parents, so to have Black parents that come in from a strong position that wants to know what's the curriculum, how is it going to be taught? You know, sometimes that was a little bit…uncomfortable for them.

Latifah continued:

As long as you [the parent] come into the classroom and you say oh, he's fine, I have no

problem out of him, that was the parent's main concern, whether or not their child was

being disruptive in class, whereas with me if my child made an 88 on the test, I'm coming

to the class because I want to know why they have a B, they have an 88. That means it's

twelve percent of that information that they didn't get. So I need to know what that twelve

is. So having that standard of excellence sometimes, most times I would have to interact

with the teachers in the way where I raised their standard of what to expect from Black

children, because what I expected from my child, you can't tell me my child has a C

average in your class and oh, he's doing fine. No, he's not. Not based off what I expect.

So it was a lot of that sometimes.

Five of the six participants noted at least one instance of effective communication, mostly

having to do with applications such as ClassDojo – classroom management software that keeps

students and parents connected to the classroom community. But Leslie noted that at her younger

sons' school, school leaders did a great job communicating with parents overall. She said:

I think that it's specific to the schools because the school, like I said, that they're at now,

they do a lot of, they provide a lot of opportunities for parents to be involved in the

academics, you know, of the school and of their students. So I feel, you know, included

as a parent. I feel like, you know, I can call. I can go up there at any time, you know?

They'll accommodate me if there's any questions that I have. They give a lot of

information, you know, about academics and where, you know, my child is with reading

math or whatever the subject, and they also provide a lot of information about, you know,

how they can grow.

Theme 2. *40 Acres and a School***: Making the District Deliver on Promises**

All participants were passionate about their appeals for school choice options, safety, equity, and innovation. Participants also described their demands for meeting their children's academic and psychosocial needs. However, the parents expressed the challenge of getting schools, CMOs, and the district at large to deliver on stated goals related to these demands and appeals.

Several participants spoke about the struggle to have their child attend a neighborhood school. Often, the child was placed in a school miles away – sometimes across town – even when there was a school within walking distance or less than a mile away. Curley spoke about her experience:

> We literally lived one mile away from [her daughter's current school] and she was placed at [a different school miles away]. Because which is off of Elysian Fields. Across the river. It was my third choice of school, with [her daughter's current school] being the first, literally one mile away from our domicile address. And I had to fight the next school year to get her to get her moved and when I brought up my concerns about her being four [years old] all the way across the river I was told that there was a school bus that could pick her up. I didn't have to necessarily drop her off every day.

Curley continued:

> So this meant she would be on the bus with four-year-olds. She may be on a bus with 13-year-olds. At 6:00 o'clock in the morning. School didn't let in till 7:45. My child had to be on the school bus for 5:57. There was no way I was doing that to my four-year-old. Absolutely no way.

Trapper echoed this sentiment. She recounted her experience with bussing and inconvenient and unsafe schedules:

> I currently don't have an automobile. My child needs to be close. If you send my child on a bus an hour away, what's your plan to get them back if they're sick? That's not how communities work. If you build a community around the school, then the school will support the community. But if you send my child an hour away, one, that's not my community, and two, you've just stressed me out as a parent every time there's a phone call because I have to get to my child.

Participants also expressed concern about equity and leadership of schools. Trapper went on to speak about how the cost of bussing – the district's second largest expense – prevented CMOs from investing more into academics. From Trapper's point of view, this was an equity issue:

> Nobody can see this gentrification, this imbalance of equality, this...What are we doing?! And then you tell me that the head of the school is a business major and not an education major?! I really have a problem because…unless you're telling me he teaches finance, he doesn't need to be head of the school.

Samantha, Roger, and Latifah expressed concerns about the curriculum in their children's schools. Samantha stated, "I'm not confident in their curriculum or their approach to implementing that curriculum," and Roger communicated, "I think that even when it's voiced, the lesson plan doesn't accommodate the child. They have to just go along." Latifah challenged the district to dare to be innovative around curriculum. She stated:

I would just tell them to branch out to do something controversial, to do something different because, an example of that is, it is known, it's common fact now, like, just common fact, that Christopher Columbus did not discover America. There were already people here. Yet that is still being taught. It's still being indoctrinated into the curriculum to, in my opinion, maintain that white, you know, I don't want to say supremacy, but that…white excellence mentality. And I think for me that would be most critical to have a sound curriculum based off actual facts. Teach actual facts.

Latifah's youngest son attended a public charter elementary and middle school, and he is currently a student at a creative arts school, a school Latifah says excels at giving students permission to be themselves. Latifah noted:

On the first day of school, children are given the option of, OK, we understand this is your government name, but what is it that you want to be called? We understand that this is your gender, but what are your preferred pronouns? The children at [her son's school] are given a lot of autonomy. Academically, they still have the whole "school starts at 8". You still have to be present, you know, 144 days out the school year. You still have to have so many credits, so they're still following those guidelines, but socially they're given a lot more autonomy than any [other school] I've experienced with my other children in high school.

Latifah also remarked, "You can still maintain a certain amount of confidence in being rooted in who you are," when talking about how the creative arts school nurtured her son's individual and unique identity. Samantha expressed a desire to see this at her son's charter school as well. She said:

[School] is about academics, yes, but I also feel like there's a big gap between the approach to taking on a whole child and fostering and developing them in other ways, and not just academics. I understand that is the sole purpose, but we're also taking into account the whole individual that needs to be addressed as an individual.

Similarly, Roger was passionate in his view that students be given options in high school that better reflected individuals' desires for post-secondary lives outside of college and white-collar professions. He stated:

I think that college is a great thing, but I think that we all are aware that college isn't for everybody and that it can't be for everybody because we need people in different fields and different things in life as well… Guidance counselors probably actually really [need to be] guiding and having more meetings with children to see where their strong suits are… Then [students] would come out and know that they have a career and a path that would give them the proper funds in order to feel like a functioning working person in the society and not be devalued.

Theme 3. *Praying with Our Legs*: Getting Results Through Action

Overwhelmingly, participants described circumstances in which they felt devalued as stakeholders in their children's educational journey in the NOCSE. Participants also noted situations that illustrate the difference between parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent empowerment. Parents were most passionate, however, when illustrating strategies they used to get results for their children.

Trapper, Roger, Samantha, Curley, and Leslie all described occurrences of feeling devalued as an educational stakeholder. The following are several examples of participants' perspectives:

- *Trapper*, describing the process to enroll her children in Orleans Parish after moving there from the Midwest: "I was totally not feeling empowered nor heard from my complaints or questions and everybody thought it was me."

- *Samantha*, speaking about the overall experience of having children in the district: "There's no role that I really feel like I have an active participation in. I don't feel like I have much authority over anything."

- *Roger*, reflecting on his overall experience: "I don't feel like we have anything to do with pretty much anything…this is what it is, and you got to get with it. I'm just along for the ride."

- *Curley*, answering whether she felt like a valued stakeholder: "Not at all."

- *Leslie*, reflecting on getting answers to a behavioral issue with her son: "So I really just felt like my voice wasn't heard."

Participants also shared situations that illustrate the one-way, two-way, and power-sharing characteristics of parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent empowerment, respectively. Curley, for instance, expressed her frustration at being *spoken to* but not *spoken with*:

We definitely get a six-page newsletter every week, but in that newsletter it's telling you about dress down day. Yes, you know, it'll tell you school closings. You know, meet the teacher week. But it's not on the level of the things of importance.

Trapper, Samantha, and Leslie shared concerns around the lack of parent engagement. Trapper noted, "It's really funny how they [the school board] set up a great calendar and then there's nothing." Samantha echoed this, saying, "Not a lot of people are going to actively go to a website, and I just think some face-to-face interaction is even better than just providing that document of information." Leslie, by contrast, described what it is like when parent engagement is a priority at a charter school. She said:

> I would say the leadership from the school, the amount of parent engagement, the extracurricular activities, just the whole, you know, the whole charter school experience has been great at this school, which is why they [her four younger sons] are all there.

Leslie and Samantha communicated what parent empowerment, sharing power and building an educational experience together, might look like. Leslie said:

> I think surveys can be the first step in getting, you know, real time feedback from parents and their thoughts on, like, how, you know, their child's particular school can be better. Like, one of the changes was how do you feel about your child having a four-day week at school instead of a five-day week? I think all of those would be great things to make them [parents] feel, you know, empowered, to make them feel like they have a voice, you know, and they can make a change, you know, in their child's education.

Samantha reiterated Leslie's notion of parents collaborating with schools to build an educational experience that centers families, stating, "I would like to see a system where parents are co-creating education for their kids."

Finally, the study participants practiced eight strategies for getting results for their children in the NOCSE. These strategies include:

1. *Getting on CMOs' boards of directors*: Trapper and Leslie both hold or have held seats on their children's charter school board.

2. *Asserting your presence*: Trapper stated, "If you're present, the kids get what they need." Latifah agreed, saying, " So as a parent, you have to assert your presence in a respectful way, but you have to assert your presence, otherwise you will just get lost in the shuffle. Knowing the extent that I can be a decision maker came from me making my presence known as a parent. So I've always felt empowered in the decision-making."

3. *Voting with your feet*: Trapper remarked, that while she understands that everyone does not have this privilege, "I think the only way I feel valued in this system is that as an educated person, I could say to go to heck with your system and move my children wherever I want to. Like the fact that there are Catholic schools and other options that aren't connected to NOLA-PS."

4. *Taking grievances to BESE or the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)*: Several of the six participants spoke about having taken or being willing to take educational issues and concerns to the district or the state.

5. *Using personal connections*: Samantha and Latifah used personal contacts to aid them in attempting to get satisfactory outcomes for their children in regard to enrollment and school-site advocacy.

6. *Advocating for family*: Leslie accompanied a family member to a school meeting and used her experience as a SPED educator to advocate for the family member's child.

7. *Being persistent*: All of the participants stressed how important it was to be persistent if you wanted results. When speaking about her gifted daughter, Curley said, "From the

very first day of school, we were there pretty much every week to say that we needed her

to be tested for gifted and talented."

8. *CC-ing everybody*: Several participants spoke about using electronic communication to

the best of their ability to get answers to questions and resolutions to problems. Curley

remarked, "[I go] directly to principals. Mm-hmm. And I'll CC everyone. [If] I feel like

I'm being unanswered, I'll send the e-mail to [CMO employee] as well. I'll CC him. He's,

you know, the person over Inspire Charter, so…I'll CC him in the e-mail as well, and

then we'll get answers!"

Chapter 4 described the Orleans Parish school system and the participants of this study.

The profiles of the participants provided context for their responses and the meaning they

ascribed to their experiences. Chapter 4 provided the data analysis process and the resultant

codes and themes for this study. Chapter 5 synthesizes these results in a discussion of study

implications, recommendations, and areas of future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the study and a summary of the results derived from the data presented in Chapter 4. In addition, the chapter provides a discussion of implications for research, theory, and practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative study explored Louisiana legislative charter school policies and the extent to which those policies empowered Black public-school parents in the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE). Legislators passed Louisiana's initial charter school law in 1995. This law ushered in less than a dozen K-12 charter schools in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina in 2005. By 2019, however, New Orleans became an all-charter district and the first major city in the United States without any traditional K-12 public schools (Jewson, 2019).

Limited critical research exists that indicates that Black public-school parents in New Orleans feel as though they are empowered stakeholders in charter education reforms, despite the fact that K-12 charter schools serve predominantly Black communities (Lay, 2022). This study investigated the lived experiences of Black public-school parents as stakeholders in the school district.

This study's purpose was to frame Black parental educational experiences in an urban landscape with an historical persistence of racism in education and to contextualize the public-school struggles Black parents face. Further, the study aimed to suggest ideas for systemic

educational shifts which may benefit communities of color (Lay, 2022; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Stovall, 2013).

There was one overarching research question: RQ1: How do Black public-school parents describe their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE? There were two sub-questions: SQ1: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel empowered? SQ2: In what ways do Black public-school parents feel disempowered?

The Theory of Critical Pedagogy framed this study. Kincheloe (2008) contends that (1) every dimension of schooling is politically, socially, and psychosocially contested, (2) the purpose of education must be grounded in a social and educational vision of justice and equality, and (3) the elevation of scholarship and transformative action can alleviate human suffering.

The study employed phenomenology to amplify Black parent voices by foregrounding Black public-school parents' own perceptions and viewpoints. The researcher used purposive sampling to select participants. A subject was eligible to participate if they met the following criteria: identified as Black or African American, was the parent of a K-12 student in the Orleans Parish public school district, had at least one student currently enrolled, and was 18 to 80 years of age. The researcher used one-on-one interviews and a brief demographic survey to collect data. Delve qualitative software was used to code the data and construct themes.

Summary of Major Findings

The study yielded three themes related to Black parent empowerment (BPE) and the public-school struggles Black parents face in an all-charter district. The study revealed that Black public-school parents endeavor to confidently advocate and act on behalf of their children, rather than passively accept decisions made by teachers, administrators, schools, and school systems (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

Resultant Themes

Three themes answered the investigation's research question: How do Black public-school parents describe their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE? The three phenomenological themes were:

1. *Nobody knows my name*: Enduring the frustration of poor communication

2. *40 acres and a school*: Making the district deliver on promises

3. *Praying with their legs*: Getting results through action

Additionally, an analysis of each theme describes the ways in which Black public-school parents feel empowered and disempowered within their stakeholder experience.

Nobody Knows My Name: Enduring the Frustration of Poor Communication

In this theme, participants described their dissatisfaction with ineffective, inadequate, and culturally insensitive communication from teachers, schools, and the district. Each of the six parents spoke passionately about the frustration of poor communication from teachers and administrators. Parents expressed dissatisfaction with disconnects in communication around subjects such as school events, learning their child had a new teacher, understanding what students are learning in class, and getting resolutions to inquiries. Samantha, for instance, spoke about the difficulty of deeply engaging with her son's school and how reaching out to parents more effectively would improve their ability to communicate with students about classroom work.

Parents offered copious examples of how the lack of effective communication affected their child and their family. As an example, Curley was shocked to see a new teacher in her daughter's classroom since she had not been informed of the change by the school. Roger spoke about being frustrated with the lack of follow-through communication at school level over the

course of several months when he and Curley desperately needed a resolution to an issue they had with their daughter's school.

Roger and Latifah touched upon two cultural aspects of communication that affected Black parents: the perceived lack of respect for fathers who are active in their children's education and the challenge teachers who are unfamiliar with New Orleans culture face when communicating with strong Black families. Roger resented being communicated with as if he fit the stereotype of "absent Black father." In advocating for her son and asking why he was making B's instead of A's, Latifah found that she often had to raise teachers' awareness about what to expect from Black students.

While the responses from participants regarding communication were overwhelmingly negative, there were also situations where participants described effective communication. These instances of effective communication were rare, but they were impactful. As an example, Leslie described how school leaders did a great job communicating with parents overall at her sons' school, and this contributed to Leslie deciding to fill a seat on the school board of directors. When Black parents were communicated with in a timely fashion about information important to their children's education, they felt confident and valued.

40 Acres and a School: Making the District Deliver on Promises

Participants addressed this theme passionately, particularly about their appeals to schools and the district for better school choice options, safety, equity, and innovation. Participants also described their demands for meeting their children's academic and psychosocial needs. However, the parents expressed the challenge of getting schools, CMOs, and the district at large to deliver on stated goals related to these demands and appeals.

The most repeated frustration from parents in this theme was the struggle to have their child attend a neighborhood school. Roger, Curley, Samantha, and Trapper spoke disappointingly about how their child was placed in a school miles away – sometimes across town – even when there was a school within walking distance or less than a mile away. Relatedly, parents spoke about the long, unsafe, and worrisome bus rides the students had to take at unreasonably early hours in the morning and late in the evening. As Trapper - a parent without a car - stated, "…if you send my child an hour away, one, that's not my community, and two, you've just stressed me out as a parent every time there's a phone call because I have to get to my child."

Parents communicated their feelings of frustration and helplessness on issues of equity, culturally insensitive curricula, educating the whole child, giving students the freedom to express their whole selves, and promoting career paths for students who are not college bound. Such career paths, according to Roger, "would give them the proper funds in order to feel like a functioning working person in the society and not be devalued." Participants felt most confident in the rare instances where schools met their children's psychosocial needs in addition to their academic needs.

Praying with Their Legs: Getting Results Through Action

Within this theme, participants described situations where they felt devalued as stakeholders in their children's educational journey in the NOCSE. Participants also spoke about situations that clearly differentiated the power dynamics of parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent empowerment. Parents communicated with confidence and optimism, however, when illustrating strategies they used to get results for their children.

From behavioral issues to enrollment challenges, and just as an overall experience, five of the six participants expressed not feeling confident, not feeling empowered, not feeling like a valued stakeholder, or feeling "just along for the ride" when it comes to their experience as a Black parent navigating the educational journey of their children in the NOCSE.

Participants were clear that the one-way communication of parent involvement was adequate for school newsletters, but that same communication was unacceptable for "things of importance." Trapper and Samantha welcomed the two-way communication of parent engagement, that is, being *spoken with* rather than *spoken to* (parent involvement), but they reported rarely being invited to engage in it by their children's schools or by the district. However, Leslie and Samantha both described instances of what parent empowerment could look like: "to make them [parents] feel like they have a voice, you know, and they can make a change, you know, in their child's education" and "a system where parents are co-creating education for their kids."

Finally, within this theme, participants reported using eight strategies to exercise more confidence, self-efficacy, and determination when advocating for their children in the NOCSE:

1. Joining schools' boards of directors

2. Asserting their presence

3. Voting with their feet

4. Taking grievances to BESE or OPSB

5. Using personal connections

6. Advocating for family

7. Being persistent

8. "CC-ing everybody"

Using these strategies, parents took their power back and wielded it to the best of their ability to become actors rather than acted upon by teachers, schools, and the district. When they described these instances of standing their ground and asserting their rights, parents communicated feeling more confident and surer of themselves.

The Phenomenon of Black Parent Empowerment (BPE)

Black public-school parents in this study described their stakeholder experience in the NOCSE as highly frustrating and stunningly inadequate. Their list of grievances was long: ineffective communication, cultural insensitivity, innumerable enrollment and school choice barriers, and parent devaluation. Additionally, in the interviews, several parents expressed concern about what they perceived as a disregard for an approach that considers the whole child. Their interview responses indicated that the parents felt most disempowered when they reflected (1) on the issues listed above and (2) on the sinking feeling that they were up against a system that did not value them and sought to diminish them.

In spite of this, these parents had not given up hope. They expressed resilience in the face of the obstacles and a commitment to using all means available to them to procure positive educational outcomes for their children. It was clear that these parents wanted more than one-way communication with schools. Black public-school parents in this study celebrated the few instances of partnership with their child's school. However, these parents also communicated that they wanted transparency, innovation, and the high-quality instruction and schools that the charter management organizations had promised. The parents were willing to do the work of holding the schools and the district accountable. The parents' interview responses indicated that the they felt most empowered when they were treated as partners with schools and when they were - or would be - given the opportunity to co-create education for their children.

This study's results align with Ferlazzo's (2011) analogy of the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement: a school striving for involvement leads with its mouth and tells parents how they can contribute; a school striving for engagement leads with its ears and listens to parents' goals, dreams, and worries. Taken a step further, parent empowerment implies more than cooperation or partnership. Parent empowerment includes notions of equal standing, respect, shared power, shared decision-making, and hope for change (Ferlazzo, 2011; Hsiao et al., 2018, Murray et al., 2013).

Despite great frustration and many defeats, the participants of this study have claimed empowerment and endowed themselves with tools to achieve desired results for their children (Zhang & Bennett, 2003). Certainly, these parents have not yet reached the promised land: they are still vexed, discouraged, and exasperated by the challenges of the NOCSE and the persistent equity and racial issues of the urban space they inhabit. The participants have, however, found ways to keep their hope alive for better outcomes for K-12 public education in New Orleans.

In spite of the considerable challenges of having children in the NOCSE, these parents have invested themselves with authority (Morrow & Malin, 2004). Unwilling to submissively accept the perceived inadequacies, injustices, and inequities of the all-charter district, Black public-school parents are challenging the decisions made by teachers, administrators, schools, CMOs, and the district, and they are drawing on the resources they have to do so with self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-determination (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

As I delved deeper into the thematic analysis of this study, I was struck by the participants' desire to do more than simply communicate grievances. These parents gave credit to charter schools when charters met parents' needs, and this was consistent across the six interviews. Despite my expectations that the interviews might get bogged down in criticism of

charter schools, the interviews with parents were not merely complaint sessions about how New Orleans charter schools fall short. The parents sincerely wanted to work with the charter schools to find solutions to their issues and were happy when charters engaged them in ways that made parents feel like partners.

Though they might not describe it in the language of critical theory, parents were strikingly passionate about the idea that schooling is more than curriculum. Again and again, the parents in this study spoke consistently about how schooling is a major influence on their children's academic potential, human possibility, and chance for a prosperous and fulfilling life. This strikes me as important for two reasons. First, parents in this study seem to be communicating a need for empowerment *organizing*. That is, parents already possess knowledge and intelligence about how important schooling is to their individual families. What they may need is a framework for marshalling and focusing that knowledge to their collective advantage as an *allied group* of significant stakeholders.

Second, from an educational leadership perspective, if parents in general are as informed about their children's human potential as the parents in this study are, then perhaps parents need educational leaders to focus less on *describing* what parents should do and focus more on *creating* organizing frameworks for parents to actually get their needs met. This would involve educational leaders working in partnership with parents to define and prioritize needs, to mobilize, and to collectively resolve those needs. This could potentially help parents to amass and to wield more power as stakeholders in the K-12 educational landscape.

If the existing literature is any guide, then it would be a mistake to expect charter reformers, charter schools, and the major players in the current system to change course and begin to meet parents' needs. The lack of accountability, representation, empowerment, and

responsiveness that the NOCSE has created is well documented (Bouie, 2021; Buras, 2014; Campbell-Rock, 2022; Dixson et al., 2015; Harris, 2019; Lay, 2022; Strauss, 2018; Thomas, 2015; Wyatt, 2019). Parents in this study described the experience of having a child in the NOCSE as highly frustrating and stunningly inadequate most of the time, a result which corresponds with the literature. Based on my own experience as a parent and an educator, the best chance for significant, positive changes in parent empowerment and educational success for Black children is through parents collaborating with community activists and educational leaders to organize for collective action (Johnson et al., 2011; Wilson & Johnson, 2015).

Implications for Theory

This investigation aligns with Kincheloe's Theory of Critical Pedagogy, which asserts that schooling, in every aspect, happens in politically contested spaces (Freire, 1978; Freire, 1985; Freire, 2020; Kincheloe, 2008). If teachers and other educational leaders are to be effective, they must understand the culture of the groups the schools serve and the intersectionality of racism, politics, and a host of other social and economic factors in school communities. Charter school reform and charter school practice in New Orleans is a patent example of schooling in a politically contested space. Parents' interview responses indicate that parents are keenly aware of significant disconnects between what they as stakeholders want and need and what charter reform stakeholders are delivering. This suggests that if charter schools in New Orleans want to better serve Black students, then giving weight and priority to Black parents' concerns as stakeholders would be a critical first step.

Additionally, the Theory of Critical Pedagogy asserts that parents and students should understand that schooling significantly affects the lives of students from marginalized groups and is a major influence on social justice, human possibility, and student potential (Bamburg, 1994;

Kincheloe, 2008; Wang and Kovach, 1996). Few understand this concept better than the participants of this study. In interview response after interview response, Black public-school parents articulated their need, desire, and hope for better services, higher expectations, and wider ranges of post-secondary opportunities for their children in spite of the challenges they faced.

Despite encountering significant obstacles to success in the NOCSE, these parents were committed to developing themselves into actors confident in their ability to improve their own lives and the communities in which they live (Kincheloe, 2008). This study's results suggest that Black public-school parents understand that successfully navigating their children's educational journey in the NOCSE requires persistence, a variety of tools and strategies, and a long-term view.

This investigation extended Kincheloe's notion of "living texts" to parents, and the study employed the parents' own perspectives to examine the social and educational contexts in which these parents live (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 20). By telling their own stories, parents guided this study toward ideas and actions which may improve schooling and its effects on the community (Borg & Mayo, 2000; Ledwith, 2001; Vincent, 2006).

Implications for Practice

This study endeavored to center Black parents' experiences in the New Orleans public education landscape. The phenomenological analysis of those experiences has implications for several groups of stakeholders. Those groups include parents, community advocates, educators, future researchers, and CMOs and charter policymakers:

1. Parents could use the results of this study to conclude that they are not alone in their charter school struggles; to research and reapply strategies and tactics that other parents have used successfully; and to harness their collective power to influence change.

2. Those who advocate for community schools could use data from this study to help identify and recruit parents who are aligned with that goal and may be willing to work on its behalf.

3. This study suggests educators could use the results to adjust their parent involvement, engagement, and empowerment goals to better align with parents in the quest for more just and equitable educational outcomes.

4. Future researchers could benefit from using qualitative data such as the feedback from this study's participants to inform bottom-up education policy studies and the creation of parental organizing frameworks.

5. This study's results suggest that CMOs and charter policymakers must do a better job of understanding, prioritizing, and incorporating Black parents' stakeholder goals and aspirations to deliver on the innovation, school choice, and quality promises of charter school reforms.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following are suggestions for further research based on the findings of this study:

1. Future quantitative studies should involve surveying parents to assess their perceptions of parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent empowerment at schools within and across districts.

2. Parents most often cited the lack of communication or ineffective communication as their primary grievance with schools. It would be interesting to ascertain whether this is unique to NOLA-PS or if this issue is present in districts across the region, state, and nation.

3. A study participant mentioned that school communication chains favor mothers over fathers – even when the father initiated the inquiry. Future studies could investigate sexism in school communication practices.

4. Black parents who want to encourage culturally relevant and systemic changes in the current system are mostly on their own. Future research should investigate the current state of collective or group efforts by parents, community activists, and educational leaders to induce change in charter implementation and policy.

5. Additional research should investigate the constitution of individual school boards and whether they include parent members.

Conclusion

This study focused on Black public-school parents and their experiences in an all-charter school system. Specifically, the study investigated Louisiana legislative charter school policies and the extent to which those policies empowered Black public-school parents in the New Orleans charter school experiment (NOCSE). The study's goal was to center the voices of Black parents and present the meaning of those experiences from the parents' point of view and in their own words.

The study investigated parent empowerment, the sharing of power with parents, and the extent to which parent empowerment was a component of the Black parent experience in the all-charter district. Qualitative coding and thematic analysis of interview data yielded themes that indicate that Black parents (1) experience considerable frustration from poor communication with schools, (2) endeavor despite impediments to make charter schools deliver on their promises, and (3) act to get results for their children in spite of barriers and challenges.

The research findings suggest that despite considerable obstacles, Black public-school parents were committed actors and advocates rather than passive recipients of decisions made by schools and districts. Parents sincerely desired to partner with charter schools to co-create educational solutions for their children and felt most empowered when charters engaged them as partners. In their own words, the study's parents clearly and passionately communicated the role schooling plays as a major influence on their children's possibilities, potential, and future prosperity. Findings from this study could be used to inspire future research in the areas of parent empowerment, critical education studies, charter schools, community organizing, and the effects of charter policy on communities of color.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Consent Letter

Introduction

My name is Nicole Moliere, and I am a doctoral student at Xavier University of Louisiana (XULA).

I am conducting research about Black parents' experiences with New Orleans charter schools. The name of this research is "Emancipation: Centering Black Parent Voices in the New Orleans Charter School Experiment." I am seeking your consent to participate in this research.

Please read this document to learn more about this research and determine if you would like to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary, and I will address your questions or concerns at any point before or during the research.

Eligibility

You may participate in this research if you meet all the following criteria:

1. you are the parent or guardian of K-12 students in the Orleans Parish school district,
2. you identify as Black or African American,
3. you have at least one student currently enrolled, and
4. you are between 18 and 80 years of age.

I hope to include five to ten parents and guardians in this research.

Activities

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Read and sign a two-minute consent form,
2. Complete a three-minute survey,
3. Participate in a 1:1 online interview over Zoom or by phone for 15-30 minutes, and
4. Review your interview transcript via email for 5-10 minutes.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Age, gender and race.
- The ways in which you feel, or have felt, confident in navigating your child's charter school journey.
- The extent you feel included in the way the NOLA charter school system works.
- The extent to which you feel like a valued decisionmaker in the NOLA charter school system.

- What, if any, recommendations you would make to the NOLA charter school system to help parents feel empowered and confident about navigating their child's charter school journey.

All activities and questions are optional: you may skip any part of this research that you do not wish to complete and may stop at any time.

If you need to complete the activities above in a different way than I have described, please let me know, and I will attempt to make other arrangements.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. You can still skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

Benefits

If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

How the Results Will Be Used

I will publish the results in my dissertation. I may also share the results in a presentation or publication. Participants will NOT be identified in the results.

Recording

I would like to audio record your responses with a voice recorder on a cellular telephone, Zoom, or Google Meet during the interview. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

Contact Information

If you have questions, you can contact me at: nmoliere@xula.edu or 682.225.2687.

My dissertation chair's name is Dr. Ramona Jean-Perkins. They work at Xavier University of Louisiana and are supervising me on the research. You can contact them at: rperkins@xula.edu.

If you have questions about your rights in the research or if a problem or injury has occurred during your participation, please contact the Xavier University Institutional Review Board at orsp@xula.edu.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is strictly voluntary. You have the right not to participate or stop participation after you start.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee _____

Pseudonym _____ (to be chosen by interviewee)

Date and Site of Interview _____

Hello, my name is Nicole Moliere, and I will be facilitating this interview. The goal of this project is to investigate how Black public-school parents describe their experiences as stakeholders in the New Orleans charter school experiment. As an educator, I value your opinions and insights. This study will amplify Black parents' voices by addressing critical questions related to ways Black public-school parents feel empowered or disempowered.

You were selected because you are a parent of a K-12 student in the Orleans Parish school district, and you identify as Black or African American. You have at least one student currently enrolled, and you are 18 to 80 years of age. There are up to nine other participants. Prior to today's interview you were given two consent forms (one to sign and return to me and one to keep). The interview will take no longer than 30 minutes and will follow a designed format.

Do you have any questions before we begin? If there are no further questions, let us begin with the first question.

Appendix C: Research Instrument

RQ – How do Black parents describe their NOCSE stakeholder experience?	1. What has your charter school journey felt like? Probe: Mostly positive, mostly negative, or somewhere in between? Why is that?
a. In what ways do Black parents feel empowered?	2. In what ways do you feel, or have you felt, confident in navigating your child's charter school journey? Probe: For instance, think about situations such as getting your child enrolled or making sure the school is a good fit or receiving needed services.
	3. In what ways has the process been a success?
b. In what ways do Black parents feel disempowered?	4. In what ways do you feel, or have you felt, less confident or not confident at all in navigating your child's charter school journey?
	5. In what ways has the process been less than successful? Probe: Can you give me an example?
Participant Recommendations	6. To what extent do you feel included in the way the NOLA charter school system works? Probe: A little, a lot, or somewhere in between? Explain.
	7. To what extent do you feel like a valued decisionmaker in the NOLA charter school system? Probe: Tell me more. Give examples.
	8. What, if any, recommendations would you make to the NOLA charter school system to help parents feel empowered and confident about navigating their child's charter school journey? Explain.
Closing	9. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and assistance today. Again, this interview and its contents are confidential. May I follow up later if necessary? _____ Thanks again!

Appendix D: Researcher CITI Certification

CITI Certification

Completion Date 20-Feb-2021
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 41085532
This is to certify that: **Nicole Moliere**
Has completed the following CITI Program course: **Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research** **(Curriculum Group)** **Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research** **(Course Learner Group)** **1 - Basic Course** **(Stage)**
Under requirements set by: **Xavier University of Louisiana**
Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. **Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wf32d97c0-9661-4c08-8797-e5f78bc04923-41085532.**

Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Flyer

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

"EMANCIPATION: CENTERING BLACK PARENT VOICES IN THE
NEW ORLEANS CHARTER SCHOOL EXPERIMENT"
(DISSERTATION)

YOU ARE ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IF:

- YOU IDENTIFY AS BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN,

- YOU ARE THE PARENT OF A K-12 STUDENT IN THE ORLEANS PARISH PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT,

- YOU HAVE AT LEAST ONE STUDENT CURRENTLY ENROLLED, AND

- YOU ARE BETWEEN 18 AND 80 YEARS OF AGE.

QUESTIONS?

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
NICOLE MOLIERE, MAT
NMOLIERE@XULA.EDU

Appendix F: Participant Demographic Information Form

Name: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____

City, State, & Zip Code: _____

Phone #: _____ Email address: _____

Total # of Children: _____ # of children in K-12 NOLA PS: _____

Student profile:

Student's name	Student's age	Student's current school

Profession (Current Occupation):_____

Did you attend NOLA PS? _____ If so, when? _____

Gender _____

Notes:

Appendix G: IRB Approval Letter

XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
1 Drexel Drive – Box 68
New Orleans, Louisiana 70125-1098
(504) 520-5444 (office) – (504) 520-7901(fax)

TO: Nicole Moliere, MAT, Principal Investigator, with Dr. Ramona Jean-Perkins as mentor.

FROM: Charles Gramlich, PhD, Chair of Institutional Review Board, Xavier University of Louisiana IRB

DATE: March 30, 2023

RE: "Emancipation: Centering Black Parent Voices in the New Orleans Charter School Experiment."

The above-named study poses minimal risk to the participants and is eligible for expedited review. The following actions have been taken regarding this study.

1. The proposed study is approved.
2. The informed consent is approved.
3. The call for participants is approved.
4. The research instrument and protocol are approved.

This study has been approved for one year from the date of this memo. To extend this study for more than one year, a request must be made in writing to the Xavier University IRB at least two weeks prior to March 30, 2024. Any changes to the proposal that might affect the wellbeing of participants must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please inform the Chair of the IRB when all data collection has been completed.

This project is assigned study number #922 in the IRB files. It is very important that you refer to this project number in future correspondence regarding the study.

Reviewed and Approved

Charles Gramlich, PhD, Chair of Institutional Review Board
Xavier University of Louisiana IRB

cc. Kaneisha Bailey Akinpelumi, Associate V.P. for Research and Sponsored Programs