12-1-2008

Relationship between parents' perception of school choice and their knowledge of vouchers, charter schools, Clayton county school choice provisions, and no child left behind.

Janice Brown Sills
Clark Atlanta University

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL CHOICE
AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE LEVEL OF VOUCHERS, CHARTER SCHOOLS,
CLAYTON COUNTY SCHOOL CHOICE PROVISIONS, AND
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Advisor: Dr. Trevor Turner

Dissertation dated December 2008

The purpose of this study was to examine school choice perceptions of parents in Clayton County public school system. The researcher was interested in knowing the belief system from which parents drew conclusions about school choice. The researcher analyzed the relationship between five independent variables: knowledge level of vouchers, knowledge level of charter schools, knowledge level of No Child Left Behind, knowledge level of Clayton County choice and knowledge of No Child Left Behind and two dependent variables: acceptance of school choice and belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education. The study was significant due to a gap regarding research that has been conducted, which provided a better understanding of the motivation underlying parents’ arguments supporting or opposing various school choice initiatives. A quantitative research design was used in the study. A Likert rating scale
survey was distributed to parents of children attending one Title I elementary school in Clayton County, Georgia to determine if a significant relationship existed between the independent and dependent variables.

The researcher found a statistically significant relationship between three independent variables and one dependent variable (Socioeconomic Status, Effectiveness of School Choice to Improve Education and Knowledge level of Charter Schools and Clayton County's School Choice Options, Acceptance of School Choice). A significant relationship also existed between one independent variable and two dependent variables (Knowledge level of Vouchers, Acceptance of School Choice and Effectiveness of School Choice to improve Education). It was recommended that school system personnel provide more information to parents regarding school choice options in Clayton County.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS’ PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL CHOICE
AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE LEVEL OF VOUCHERS, CHARTER SCHOOLS,
CLAYTON COUNTY SCHOOL CHOICE PROVISIONS, AND
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

JANICE BROWN SILLS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DECEMBER 2008
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you Howard for being supportive of my aspirations for more than 22 years. Thank you Alex and Anthony for being such wonderful and understanding sons. I hope my educational journey has served as a model for both of you to persevere and go for the “gold” in life. I would not have survived this process without the spiritual motivation of my parents, Warner and Rachel Brown; my sister, V. Lisa Brown; and my prayer partner, Angela Huff. Thank you to my family and friends, Dr. Deborah Sills and Darianne Brown (sisters-in-law) and Dr. Davine Sparks for helping me manage time and remain on task.

The Educational Leadership Department of Clark Atlanta University is truly dedicated to helping students succeed. Thank you Dr. Turner, committee members, and, most of all, Mrs. Betty Cooke for your encouragement, understanding, and willingness to assist in any way possible in the completion of this project.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A powerful grass-roots movement is slowly gathering force that may transform the politics of American education. Its human face is not white but black; its resources few but its determination strong, and its goal is freedom. Although most black political leaders still actively oppose school choice, their constituents are growing increasingly angry at the public school’s disastrous record of teaching black children. As a result parents are beginning to embrace vouchers, charter schools and other reforms that offer alternatives to dismal public schools (Shokraii, 1996, p. 20).

Michael Williams, a black conservative and former assistant education secretary in the Bush administration said, “The American community looks to choice as the vehicle to reclaim control over the learning of the next generation of American scholars and leaders” (Shokraii, 1996, p. 23).

School choice is easily the most controversial education policy issue of our time. Its supporters, who are mostly, but not entirely, political conservatives, usually advocate school choice as a way to use competition to encourage public schools to improve. Its opponents, who are mostly, but not entirely, political liberals, usually argue against it because they fear that it will increase segregation by race and social class while
transforming the public school system into a dumping ground for the students who are the most difficult to educate (Fowler, 2002). School choice as an educational reform model can serve as a benefit or a demise to public education depending on several factors. Factors include, but are not limited to: who distributes funds to operate schools, who will be allowed to choose, and what information will parents be privy to in order to make a decision about school choice.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 has placed a spotlight on education and brought the idea of school choice to the forefront of the American public. In their search for excellence, parents are beginning to focus their attention toward the effectiveness of their children’s schools. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 mandated if a school fails to make adequate progress two consecutive years, the school will receive technical assistance from the district and must provide public school choice.

Choice has become a key word in public opinion and politics. However, some parents have been limited by their economic status in choosing the kind of education they want for their children. The affluent can afford the high tuition for private schools and the more moderate tuition for parochial schools. Low-income families are constrained to accept the public education system with its state-mandated system of values, according to Byrne (2001). Goldhabar and Eide (2002) contend, in theory, choice provides more options to minority and/or low income parents, who in a traditional school assignment paradigm are more likely to be assigned to a low-quality public school. Reid (2001) states that African-Americans are now emerging as vocal and visible leaders in the school choice movement and parents are listening to their messages. Choice is often perceived
to meet the goals of bringing parents and school faculties together and obtaining high student achievement by forcing schools to improve their performances. Implementation of any school reform means a change in school governance. Fundamentally, there are three categories of school governance. The bureaucratic model of school governance, which is also known as the progressive movement, was enacted to allow educators, instead of politicians, to become the decision makers. This model evolved due to the influx of immigrant students who needed to be educated. Schools would have a system of hierarchy and the schools’ job was to prepare immigrants for the work force. District level administrators were assigned the task of handling problems that faced schools. They established procedures and standards to ensure equality for all schools. In communities where voters elect school board members and sometimes vote on school budgets this is known as the democratic model of school governance. Although the advantage of this method of school governance is that citizens have the opportunity to effect educational policy, often there is low turnout at the voting polls for school elections. Therefore, special interest groups control the votes and forge ahead with their personal agendas. Reinventing Government reforms have wanted to fix these problems by making bureaucracies responsive to the demands of their “customers” (Ruhil, Anirudh, Schneider, Teske, & Jee, 1999).

Proponents of school choice argue that it will increase competition among schools, which in turn will improve quality. The advantage of open enrollment choice plans are that they open the door to substantial school improvement, encourage competition, increase school decentralization, and cause the demise of poor schools and
the growth of good ones (Hsieh & Shen, 2001). Advocates of school choice speak of the market model. Parents are viewed as consumers and have the option to choose the school their children attend and how the educational resources will be allocated. The idea is that schools will be forced to compete for students and funds. Some school choice plans' resources follow students to the school of their choice. The extent to which allocative efficiency is achieved, therefore, depends on how well schools can identify, adapt to, or affect consumer tastes and preferences.

People of color such as John Jackson, National Education Director for the Baltimore based National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and Kaleem Caire, president of Black Alliance for Educational Options, are now emerging as vocal and visible leaders in the school choice movement, and parents are increasingly listening to their message (Reid, 2001). While older parents are suspicious of those who support school choice, Reid paraphrased Vernard Grant, Director of Urban School Services for the Association of Christian Schools International, in saying parents between the ages twenty-five and thirty-five are seeking the best education possible for their children. They seem to be less committed to institutions and systems. Older parents believe school choice plans will continue to protect the best interest of those who attend suburban schools if there is no altering of the politics surrounding school choice. More recently parents have rallied behind the school choice reform model as a desperate effort to change the politics surrounding public education. Choice supporters believe this reform model is not an attack on public education but a means by which schools must demonstrate performance, which is believed to create improvement incentives. Those
who support choice believe the reform model responds to the demands of parents and will make most public schools better. Choice supporters visualize successful approaches to schooling and innovative ideas which lead to student achievement. As urban public school districts struggle to meet the needs of minority and low income students, parents are favoring solutions such as charter schools and vouchers. The review of literature cites various reasons parents sought alternative educational avenues such as the imposing of strict discipline and high standards. Parents want schools to involve them in their children's education. Shokraii (1996) contends that parents were offended by the assumption that they were not interested in their children's education because they are of impoverished circumstances.

Opponents of school choice, especially choice between public and private school systems, highlight the issue of equity. Goldring and Hausman (1999) stated that opponents argued school choice would not liberate the poor in urban school systems because inner-city parents lack the sufficient education and/or initiative to make good decisions.

The ongoing school choice debate is rapidly gaining public notoriety. Where is the voice of the minority parents in the midst of this all? For decades minorities have fought for equality, equity, and opportunity, especially as it relates to educational access. However, society's history from the early 1900s to date indicates a continued struggle. As a result, parents' frustration with our current public school systems has led to a feeling of urgency for change.
In light of the issue with choice, school choice in Georgia has gained momentum since House Bill 1187 was adopted in 2002. The law states that the Georgia Board of Education would allow parents of children attending failing schools (according to the state guidelines) the option to transfer to a public school within the district, thus creating the scurry of parents seeking options for their children.

Literature cites standards, discipline, and parental involvement as the three major reasons parents are driven toward school choice. Discovering families' beliefs of school choice and understanding their knowledge base of available options is important in evaluating the potential of school choice programs to lead to improvements in schooling for minority and low income children.

Vouchers are considered the pioneer of school choice. Dating back to the 1950s, the voucher idea was seen as a way to provide public assistance to private schools and to provide equal opportunity for all. According to Moe (2001), since the early years of progressive reforms, public education or school reform "Has always been a thoroughly governmental system. Elected and appointed officials make decisions about the structure and content of public education and the government agencies under their control" (p. 15). The debate as to whether the government should provide funds to parents for their children's schooling dates back to the era of Milton Friedman's attempt to address parental concerns through the use of vouchers. Friedman's viewpoint aligned with Moe's on the government's monopoly. Friedman (1962) believed the government should indeed subsidize education because of the benefit to society in terms of a better economy and better democracy. His argument was that the government should not monopolize the
school system. He also argued that in the traditional system political authorities made decisions about curricula and values which were imposed on the American public. Friedman contended vouchers would break up the monopoly and parents would not be forced to conform. These ideals evolved from the economic theory of markets. Students were guaranteed to attend schools regardless of their performance level in the government's monopoly, which provided no incentive for schools to produce high-quality education. Friedman suggested that every family be provided with a flat governmental grant with which they could offset the cost for their children's education at the school of their choice. Choice competition would then be the basis of the educational system. Schools would be in competition for parental support. Schools that failed to perform would lose resources and students. Parents who were displeased with the one-size-fits-all would use vouchers. In a competitive system of schools, parents are likely to find something close to what they want because schools will have incentive to diversify and appeal to specialized clienteles in order to attract support (Moe, 2001). Voucher programs are typically consistent throughout the country. Qualified parents receive a portion of their children's tuition to use at a participating public or private school of their choice. The modern voucher programs have become a force in American politics by targeting needy children. Voucher programs provide financial assistance to poor children, enabling them to seek private alternatives to their troubled public schools. Some of the most highlighted publicly funded voucher programs are in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Florida. In Cleveland, Governor George Voinovich and Councilwoman Fannie Lewis urged the legislature to adopt a voucher program for approximately 2,000 inner-
city low-income children. The Cleveland program began in 1996. Cleveland vouchers are available to families living at the poverty level established by the federal government. The nation’s first true attempt to provide assistance to low-income children was in 1990 when the Wisconsin legislature adopted a pilot voucher program in Milwaukee. Milwaukee was very much like any other urban American city. The school-age population was overwhelmingly poor and minority, mainly black, and the school system was clearly not educating them well (Moe, 2001). In 1995, student participation in the voucher program had increased to 15,000 and expanded to include usage in religious schools. There are currently three types of Florida vouchers: *Tax-Credit Scholarships* for low-income families, *McKay Scholarships* for special education students and *Opportunity Scholarships* for students in chronically low-performing schools. The tax-credit allowed Florida corporations to contribute to private nonprofit organizations which assisted families that qualified for free or reduced lunch. The McKay scholarships originated from a former Florida Senate president named John McKay because he had a daughter with learning disabilities and public school did not meet her needs. The third, and most controversial voucher program, is the Opportunity Scholarship. In 2004 the First District Court of Appeal in Tallahassee said the program violates the state constitution forbidding the use of public money in religious institutions. In 2004, approximately 660 students were using the tuition vouchers and approximately 25,000 students used the other two voucher programs. In order to qualify for the program, students’ current public schools would have to receive two failing grades on the state report card during a time frame of four years.
The McKay Scholarships, which provided a means for parents to receive financial assistance for students with learning disabilities, have serviced a little over 12,000 special education students. More than 16,000 students from low-income families used tax-credit scholarships. The scholarships were financed by businesses that donated a portion of their taxes to nonprofit scholarship organizations which gave tuition money to students to attend the school of their choice.

Vouchers in Georgia gained attention in 1993 when a 1961 law was brought to the forefront by the president of Georgia Parents for Better Education, Glen Delk, that would provide funding to parents who tried to avoid desegregation in public schools. The law was deemed to be unconstitutional. As a result, in 1997 the Supreme Court ruled that funding was not available to provide vouchers. There was another attempt to fund vouchers through the HOPE Scholarship bill which would target low-income parents who had children attending poor-performing public schools. This attempt was also unsuccessful. In 2001, tax credits and voucher bills were introduced during the legislative session and action had not been taken as of 2002.

A group of Georgia parents filed a lawsuit in January 2005 (Williams vs. Georgia) claiming the education funding system was unconstitutional and there should be greater parental choice. The plaintiffs (parents), led by Dana Williams, a single father of a first grader in Atlanta Public Schools, said that various government policies have denied low-income parents the right of equal access to high-quality schools. Mr. Williams’ lawsuit originated when he and others were dissatisfied with the schools offered as alternatives when their neighborhood school closed. The lawsuit also argued that parents should be
allowed to choose a school outside their attendance zone in addition to there being more charter schools created.

One of the newest voucher initiatives in Georgia is known as Faith Based Funding. Democrats blocked Governor Sonny Perdue’s Faith & Family Services Amendment during the 2005 legislative session because the wording of Resolution 49 was so broad that it would open the door for public funding of private schools. Faith based funding is still a debate for parents.

*What Is A Charter School?*

A charter school is an autonomous, publicly funded entity that operates on the basis of a contract between the group that organizes the school and a sponsor, usually the local school district or state education agency. The charter school movement has the attention of people from various religious backgrounds, ethnic groups, as well as politicians. Minnesota adopted the first charter school in 1991, followed by California in 1992. According to the literature, as of 2000 there were about 1,700 charter schools with enrollment being close to a million. Charter schools differ from vouchers because vouchers typically require parents to pay a portion of tuition whereas, charter schools do not charge tuition. Charter schools must be granted a charter in order to operate as a school. Charter schools’ existence varies from state to state. Some states authorize charter schools through legislation and others authorize charters through the local school districts. Charter schools typically have full autonomy over finances, legalities, and staff. Parents are attracted to charter schools usually because of the small enrollment. When compared to public schools, charter schools usually have a distinctive curriculum in
addition to a high level of parental participation. Charters can be granted to teachers, community activists, and entrepreneurs. Empowerment and individual freedom are two beliefs that drive the support behind charter schools. Charter schools are viewed by some as progress toward addressing students' social values and parental concerns. Parents are not confined to schools within their attendance zone. Charter school communities are typically unified in their values and beliefs. Parental support for charter schools has risen steadily within the past decade (Fuller, 2000). Upon examination of charter schools in the context of school choice there is an increase in the number of students choosing charter schools as their alternative, according to Fuller.

The first charter school in Minnesota evolved as a result of an economic shift in the rural area of Le Sueur, Minnesota. The abandonment of a very profitable company and the loss of many jobs caused a large segment of middle class people to move out of the area and it became a blue collar community. The public schools also shifted from upscale families to poor families who lacked pride in their schools. As a result the Edvisions Cooperative and Minnesota New Country School were founded. Although there has been a strong movement supporting charter schools it has not yet been determined if charter schools are more effective than traditional public schools. A typical charter is granted for three to five years. If the expectations outlined in the grant are not fulfilled the school loses its charter and closes. It has been noted that 194 of 2,874 charter schools have closed across the United States. Proponents of charter schools believe the competition helps to promote the necessary improvements in public education. Opponents of charter schools contend there has not been a significant
improvement in the academic achievement among elementary aged students and needed finances are being redirected from rural and urban public schools to fund charter schools. Contrary to that statement, preliminary results in Michigan suggest that charter schools have positively impacted student performance on statewide tests. According to the Michigan Association of Public School Academics, nearly half of all charter schools in Michigan doubled or tripled the number of students who received satisfactory scores in one or more subjects on the state-wide exam. On the other hand, in 1999, Texas students enrolled in charter schools had considerably lower performance marks than those attending traditional public schools.

Most research on charter schools assessed parental satisfaction, compared governing regulations from state to state, and described differences between public schools and charter schools. Little research has been conducted on academic achievement among charter school students or parents' perception of charter schools' effectiveness. Some critics of charter schools say that racial segregation needs to be addressed if there is genuine concern about the impact of charter schools on minority students’ achievement by fully investigating the alleged numerous benefits based on evidence, not assumptions. Although there are charter school laws that mandate racial balance there is very little evidence of states having enforced these laws, especially since charter schools, more so than public schools, have the capability of promoting integration due to school district attendance zone freedom.

Legislature for charter schools in Georgia was established in 1993 when Governor Zell Miller signed a law allowing unlimited numbers of public schools to convert to
charter schools. In 1995 Governor Miller signed legislature providing guidelines for renewing or forming a charter by changing the teacher vote to a simple majority instead of the two-thirds vote. In addition, charter schools' length of existence was changed from three to five years before review. Charter school legislature was amended again in 1998 to allow organizations, state or local entities, and private individuals to operate charter schools.

There are two primary types of charter schools:

1. *Conversion charter schools.* An existing traditional public school can become a charter school if the faculty and parents at the school vote to convert the school to a charter school (subject to approval of their charter petition).

2. *Start-up charter schools.* Individuals and organizations can submit a petition to start a new charter school from scratch.

In 1995, the first three charter schools opened their doors in Georgia: Addison Elementary in Cobb County, Ellis Montessori in Chatham County, and Midway Elementary in Forsyth County. Of those three, Addison still exists as a charter. Midway closed in 1998 and Ellis closed in 2003. Of the 79 charter schools that opened between 1995 and 2005, only 49 remain operational as charters. The effectiveness of Georgia charter schools is still not clearly evident due to the lack of available research. However, according to the 2002 Center for Education Reform, the Georgia Department of Education released a report stating 93% of charter school students passed the standardized tests in the core subject areas unlike the traditional public schools’ 85% student population that passed standardized tests in the core subject areas. Georgia
adopted a plan in 2005 which outlined charter school goals and expectations to serve as a support system to more than forty charter schools in nineteen Georgia counties.

Equality and equity in public schools has been the focal point of books, articles, and political conversations across America. In 1954, the Supreme Court passed *Brown vs. Board of Education* in an effort to desegregate southern public schools. In 1955, the court ordered desegregation among the southern states immediately. Southern federal district courts implemented their own interpretation, leaving most schools in a segregated status until the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 threatened to withhold federal funds from any segregated public school. However, as recent as the 1990s, inequality and inequitable situations existed not only in southern states but in those above the Mason-Dixon Line, according to Kozol in *Savage Inequalities*. People in society, especially African Americans, realize the dire need to close the academic achievement gap between Caucasian students and minority students, thus the creation of the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation. The NCLB Act was signed into law January 8, 2002, and shifted the paradigm about American education. President George W. Bush based the reform act on four principles: (a) increased flexibility, (b) options for parents, (c) more accountability, and (d) emphasis on research based best teaching practices. This law was established in an effort to provide access to opportunities for disadvantaged children. The 50 states were allowed to implement strategies for accountability within the parameters of fore mentioned principles to help states measure their progress toward meeting the law’s goals. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the identified benchmarks or standards that each school and student are expected to meet. This includes assessing all students in
grades 3-8 and once in high school every year and analyzing results by student subgroups to close the achievement gap. According to NCLB, all students should be achieving at or above grade level in Reading and Math by the year 2014. Adequate yearly progress serves to inform parents and community members of a school’s strengths and weaknesses. Table 1 shows a sample timeline for a school identified for improvement to implement corrective actions because it failed to meet AYP. The table has three columns: column 1 represents a 5-year timeline, column 2 represents the status of the school in meeting AYP for each of 5 years; and column 3 represents the corrective action taken if a school does not meet AYP.

Table 1

*AYP Timeline – Sample School Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Baseline Data</th>
<th>Corrective Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Fail to make AYP</td>
<td>Technical assistance; public school choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Fail to make AYP</td>
<td>Technical assistance; public school choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>1st year of school improvement</td>
<td>Technical assistance; public school choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>2nd year of school improvement</td>
<td>Technical assistance; public school choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NCLB Act has received favorable and unfavorable reviews since its implementation. States were faced with having to initially implement the law without
detailed guidelines, resulting in various revisions across the nation as years progressed. Articles and books are now surfacing as data collection slowly increases. Some authors believe NCLB punishes rather than helps poor and minority children, strengthens the privatization of schools, and has an even stronger focus on testing and not classroom learning that takes place to nurture a well-rounded student. Supporters of NCLB believe the overarching theme of accountability serves the purpose of closing the achievement gap. While factors such as highly qualified teachers, scientifically based research, increased school district control and flexibility, and expanded options for parents, are very important it is still debatable as to whether or not these factors will mend the ills of public education for poor and minority students. Tackling each factor mentioned above separately, one must recognize that there is a nationwide shortage of certified teachers and demanding highly qualified teachers does not increase the availability of personnel, especially without financial support from the government. Prospective teachers are finding it more and more challenging to enter the field of education and are deterred often based on the lack of increased salaries.

Scientifically based research is defined as research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures that are reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs (NCLB, 2001). To say that a program or practice is proven to be effective there must be reliable evidence such as a study that has been conducted on experimental as well as controlled groups to validate findings. As a result, there is not a sufficient amount of evidence to fully support scientifically based research practices and programs for those who suffer significantly from the achievement
gap, students with disabilities. However, to entice consumers, publishers are displaying the letters SBR (scientifically based research) on their programs and products which may or may not have gone through a scientifically controlled study. In addition, it is critical that authors of research based articles and journals provide information using terminology that teachers can understand and apply in their classes.

The NCLB Act supports increased school district control and flexibility in terms of local decision making on spending federal dollars more than in previous years. It is the belief that community members, educators, and parents are capable of working together in determining the most effective usage of dollars to address local needs. An example would be programs that promote drug-free and safe schools. The stipulation is that in order to have the flexibility the school must demonstrate acceptable levels of student achievement.

Under the NCLB Act parents are provided opportunities to become active participants in their children’s education. Parents receive information about their child’s performance on standardized assessments, as well as knowledge of the school’s and district’s performance as a whole on the assessments. These options are provided as a means of helping parents become aware of their rights and options, especially as it relates to a particular school that is considered to need improvement. In some cases parents have the option to transfer their child to a school with a better performance record. In other cases supplemental services such as free tutoring are available if a child is enrolled in schools that did not achieve AYP. Parental involvement under NCLB is interpreted as the home being a disciplinary site and parents are thought to be an educational resource
by instilling values and discipline in children, helping them to be more prepared for school.

*What Does No Child Left Behind Look Like In Georgia?*

Tracing three years of data from 2004-2006 on Georgia’s public schools kindergarten through twelfth grades since the implementation of guidelines for adequate yearly progress across the state, schools continue to meet the needs of students overall (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Adequate Yearly Progress – Georgia Public Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Number Made AYP</th>
<th>Number Did Not Make AYP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005 – 2006</td>
<td>1,642</td>
<td>429</td>
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<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 – 2004</td>
<td>1,614</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From 2004-2006 the number of Georgia public schools increased from 2030 to 2071. While the number of public schools in Georgia continues to increase the number of students making adequate yearly progress fluctuates.

A closer examination of subgroups reveals disparity among African-Americans, those with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities as compared to other subgroups. Data from the years 2004, 2005, and 2006 shows marginal improvement in meeting the needs of Hispanic students but a decline in meeting the needs of students who are economically disadvantaged and African-American students.
While Asian, Multi-Racial, American Indian, and white students are subgroups achieving the AYP goals, students with disabilities and English Language Learners remain deficient throughout the three years that data has been collected.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine school choice perceptions of parents in Clayton County public school system. The researcher was interested in knowing the belief system from which parents draw conclusions about school choice based on their age, gender, level of education and socioeconomic status. The study intends to inform school system personnel of parents’ knowledge base about vouchers, charter schools, and the No Child Left Behind Act.

Rationale/Background of the Problem

Almost all Americans, liberal or conservative, agree that racial equality can be achieved only by eliminating disparities in the average educational performances of blacks and whites (Peterson & Greene, 1999). Despite this broad consensus, the United States tolerates the isolation of half its African American children in unsafe and underperforming public schools (Foreman, 1999). Fed up with public schools, parents are beginning to throw their support behind school choice (Peterson & Greene, 1999). Linda Darling-Hammond (1999) contend Americans often forget that as late as the 1960s most African Americans were educated in wholly segregated schools funded at rates many times lower than those serving whites, and they were excluded from many higher education institutions entirely. Educational experiences for minority students have continued to be substantially separate and unequal. Jonathan Kozol’s (1991) *Savage*
Inequalities describes the differences between public schools serving students of color in urban settings and their suburban counterparts, which typically spend twice as much per student for populations with fewer special needs. Even within the same school district, schools with high percentages of minorities have fewer books and computers; larger class-size; less experienced teachers; and teachers teaching out-of-field. According to Darling-Hammond (1999) education resources do make a difference, particularly when funds are used to purchase well-qualified teachers, high-quality curricula, and to create personalized learning communities in which children are well known.

Statement of the Problem

School choice has ushered itself into Georgia like a tornado, leaving some schools untouched and others turned upside down. Although the No Child Left Behind Act became a law in January 2002, turmoil has worsened in metropolitan Atlanta school districts due to the evolving interpretation of the federal law. What are parents' perceptions of school choice? Have they been fully informed of their options? According to Sansbury (2002), about 70,000 students in metro Atlanta attend schools that must allow children to transfer out under the new federal law, but fewer than 500 children across the metro area switched during the Fall of 2003.

The law focuses on Title I schools because they receive federal funds due to the high number of children receiving free or reduced lunches. According to Sansbury (2002), Georgia had about 1,060 Title I schools of which 625 did not meet the improvement standard, but only 437 were required to offer transfers that year while the others received a one-year reprieve. What do parents know about educational vouchers,
charter schools and No Child Left Behind and does it affect their perception (acceptance and belief) of school choice? Information is knowledge and knowledge leads to empowerment. How informed are parents about school choice options?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because there is a gap regarding research that has been conducted which provides a better understanding of the motivation underlying parents’ arguments supporting or opposing various school choice initiatives. To date, there has not been a study conducted to show whether there is a relationship between parents’ perceptions of the use of school choice plans to improve the quality of public school education as it relates to parents’ knowledge level of vouchers, charter schools, and the No Child Left Behind Act as it relates to gender, age, educational level, and socioeconomic status. This study can be used by school districts to analyze and address parental concerns in urban public schools. Specifically, this study will serve as a viable resource for school system personnel as they continue to initiate reform and increase student achievement for the growing number of students enrolling in Clayton County schools.

Summary

School choice is the focused agenda of today. New school reform legislature has heightened the awareness level of parents across the nation, and they are beginning to exercise their school choice rights. Are parents making informed decisions and what is their knowledge level? What impacts parents’ acceptance of school choice and their beliefs in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education? An examination of
parents’ perception, which includes their acceptance and beliefs, will serve to inform
school systems’ administrators of the communication that needs to take place in order to
address parents’ concerns in an effort to improve student achievement.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of knowledge and understanding parents had to make informed decisions about school choice options for their children in Clayton County Schools and serve as an informational document for parents and school systems. The study furthered examined the relationship between parents’ knowledge and their (perceptions) acceptance of school choice as well as their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education. The review of related literature focused on school choice, school vouchers, charter schools, and the No Child Left Behind Act. Other viable school choice options such as private schools, home schools, magnet schools, and parochial schools were not explored in this study.

When reflecting on the history of education there is a noticeable change in parents’ perception of school choice options. School choice in recent years has generated a massive debate dividing the American public. Most people are either proponents or opponents of the school reform initiative.

The history of school choice can be traced back as far as the 1950s when Milton Friedman (1962) attempted to address school concerns and liberate parents through the use of vouchers. Jeffrey Henig (1994) studied the evolution of school choice and noted the appearance of school choice during the Progressive Era. The results from the study
indicated that during the 1960s students’ special needs were a big consideration in school choice.

*School Choice*

Teske and Kaplan (2007) conducted a study of 800 low to moderate income (incomes below $50,000) parents in Milwaukee, Washington, DC, and Denver by targeting how they gather information and how well informed and satisfied they were about their school choice. These parents had recently chosen a school for their child(ren). Parents were surveyed via telephone. Ninety percent of those surveyed were women. Parents in the study were asked if they had considered schools outside of their attendance zone and about two-thirds reported they had. The survey was administered in the Fall of 2005. Two hundred parents were surveyed in Denver while 300 parents were surveyed in both Washington, DC and Milwaukee. Seven issues were the focus of the study. How do parents learn they have choices? What do parents value in school? How do parents choose schools? How well informed are parents? What role do children play in the process? How do parents match child and school? How satisfied are parents with the results?

Findings were as follows:

1. Parents rely on multiple sources of information to learn about their options.

   Some sources weigh more heavily than others. Twenty one percent say they learned about choice options by speaking to educators. Twenty two percent learned from other parents. Fourteen percent learned from literature sent
home from the schools. Forty six percent of parents in the study said they spoke to at least five other people about choice options.

2. Forty-five percent of parents value quality in academics. Nineteen percent value a focused curriculum. Eleven percent value location and convenience of the school chosen.

3. Low to moderate income parents do not research several schools but compare only two schools before making a school choice decision.

4. The study found that low-income parents believe they have enough information to make an informed decision about school choice. Seventeen percent said they lacked information to make an informed decision.

5. Fifty-four percent of the participants included their K-12 children in the choosing a school in some way. Findings indicate that seventy nine percent of parents of students in grades 9-12 involved their students in the decision making process.

Results from the study indicate that 61% of participants were mindful of the chosen school’s characteristics as it related to their child’s needs. Forty percent of participants sought out schools with gifted programs for their children. Eighteen percent of participants looked for positive social interactions for their children. Ten percent of the participants wanted their children to attend schools that addressed their child’s disability.

Participants were asked about their level of satisfaction with the choice they made by using a five point rating scale. The findings indicated that 68% of participants were ‘very’ satisfied while 20% were ‘somewhat’ satisfied.
Vernez (2007) conducted a study examining the relationship between participation in the Title I school choice and supplemental educational services options and student achievement. The 2004-2005 study focused on the characteristics of students participating in two options and the related impact on student achievement. The Title I school choice option provided parents the opportunity to transfer their children to another school within the district that was not in the needs improvement stage. The supplemental services option provided parents the opportunity to have their children receive additional academic assistance such as after school services, tutoring and summer programs. Data for the study were gathered from nine large urban school districts. Participants were from Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Palm Beach, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Washington, DC. This sampling was selected because the districts had a large number of students participating in the two choice options. There were six key findings from the study.

1. Of the choice options offered, 24%–28% of eligible students participated from elementary schools and only 5% of high school students who were eligible participated in both options.

2. Of all racial/ethnic groups, African-American children had the highest participation rate in the supplemental services option and a very high school choice rate. Hispanic children participated more in supplemental services than white children, but white children participated more in the school choice option than Hispanic children.
3. The students who participated in the supplemental services options enrolled with a lower achievement rate than students who were eligible but did not enroll for services. Students who chose to transfer had a similar level of academic achievement as those who were eligible and chose not to transfer.

4. Parents who exercised the transfer option moved their children from low achieving schools to above average achieving schools. The transfer schools were also more racially balanced.

5. There were significant gains in seven districts on average in reading and math for students enrolled in supplemental services, which improved students' academic achievement.

6. Although there was a smaller sample size of students who exercised the transfer option than those who chose the supplemental service option the data suggests there was no significant effect on achievement among students who transferred to another school.

The National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) (2006) collected data estimates on parents' perceptions and the use of choice in America's schools. The data collected were from four separate administrations of the survey including 1993, 1996, 1999, and 2003. Data was gathered through phone interviews with 45,000 – 60,000 households. The samples were random digit-dialing using computer assisted technology. Parents surveyed varied in race, socioeconomic status, religion, family type, sex, educational levels, and had children in 1st through 12th grade. They were asked about their perceptions of public school choice availability. Forty four percent of
students enrolled in their attendance zone school had parents who thought that choice was available in their school. Fifty five percent of black students had parents who thought choice was available as oppose to 50% of white students. Twenty eight percent of students enrolled in neighborhood schools had parents who relocated specifically so their children could attend a particular school of choice. Parents of white and Hispanic students were more likely to change residence to have their children attend a particular school of choice as opposed to eighteen percent of parents of black students. In 2003, 64% of students enrolled in chosen schools had parents who were very satisfied with the schools as compared to parents with 54% of students enrolled in their attendance school.

**Vouchers**

Greene (2003) examined whether the existence or threat of competition would cause public schools to improve. The study focused on Florida’s A+ program. The examination consisted of low performing schools highly threatened by voucher competition and low performing schools with low threat of voucher competition. Data gathered were FCAT test scores from 2001-02 and 2002-03 to examine the amount of improvement. Schools were selected based on their level of threat posed by vouchers. Results indicate that low performing schools under pressure from vouchers showed academic improvement. Low performing schools that were eligible for vouchers (highly threatened showed a 9.3 scaled score improvement). Low performing schools that were threatened by voucher competition showed a 6.7 scaled score improvement.

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education reported findings of an evaluation conducted to examine the impact of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (vouchers)
after a two-year implementation period on families who chose to use vouchers and have their children attend private school instead of public school. A random sample of participants in the voucher program were chosen from the 2004 and 2005 years because those years had the largest number of participants. The findings included: (1) no statistically significant difference in test scores between students who participated in the voucher program and those who did not participate in the voucher program and (2) parents who used vouchers to have their children attend private schools were more satisfied with the school and the safety of the school than parents of children who did not exercise the use of vouchers.

Charter Schools

Ethnic minority families are underrepresented in California where one-in-four charter schools serves children of color (Fuller, 2000). Fifty six percent of charter schools' enrollment is white as compared to 46% white enrollment in California's public schools. This is reflective of preexisting segregation (Fuller, 2000). There was a study conducted and published in 1999 that explored whether charter schools were less or more segregated than public schools. Contrary to the under representation of African-Americans previously mentioned, findings in 16 charter school states determined there to be a much higher enrollment of minority children than white children in charter schools. In 2002 it was noted that there were 675,000 students attending charter schools with 50% of the population being ethnic minority groups.

Speakman and Hassel (2005) conducted a study of public revenue for charter schools. The study examined funding in sixteen states as well as the District of
Columbia. A year was spent gathering data about how much revenue charter schools received in 2002-2003 in comparison to funding provided to the district schools in that state. According to the center for Education Reform, collectively the above mentioned enrolled about 84% percent of the nation’s charter students. The study focused on one to three districts in each state and Washington, DC, a total of 27 districts. It was found that charter schools were significantly under funded relative to the district schools in each state. The per-student disparity ranged from 4.8% in New Mexico to 39.5% in South Carolina. The financial gap ranged from $414 in North Carolina to $3,638 less per student in Missouri. Minnesota was the only state in the study where the charter schools received more funding than the district schools.

Lake and Hill (2005) conducted a study through the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) for the purpose of providing basic facts about charter schools. State officials in charge of charter schools were interviewed and asked to gather data that had not ever been compiled. Based on the surveys, the NCSRP had eight major findings about charter schools.

Finding #1: The number of charter schools grew faster in 2004-2005 than the previous four years. A major contributor to the increased numbers is that Iowa, New Hampshire opened charter schools for the first time. States which already had charter schools also experienced an increase in the number of new charter schools that opened during the 2004-2005 school year.

Finding #2: Most states limit the number of charter schools that are allowed to operate in their school districts. Charter school laws that were enacted have incorporated
limits in their statutes as a compromise between the proponents and opponents. As of 2004-2005, 27 states’ laws limited the number of charter schools.

Finding #3: Nationally, charter schools serve a larger proportion of minority and low-income students than traditional public schools, due largely to the disproportionate number of charter school located in urban areas. NCSRP’s survey revealed that charter schools are three times more likely to be located in big city districts and half as likely to be located in small town or rural districts. Data were collected on race, free/reduced lunch and special education for charter schools and were combined with information from the Common Core of Data (NCES) on the school districts that were reported on in the study. Of those reported, 10.4% of public schools were in big cities and 30.5% of charter schools were located in big cities. On the other hand, 45% of public schools were located in rural/small towns and 24% of charter schools were located in rural/small towns.

Finding #4: Charter schools differ in size and grade span from public schools. Proponents of charter schools cite intimate learning environments and options for parents as charter school benefits. The data shows that charter school enrollments are smaller and offer grade configurations that are not offered in public schools. In 2004-2005, the average charter school enrollment was 256 which is about half the size of an average public school. Charter schools are more likely to offer K-8 or K-12 grade spans than public schools in the same district. This reduces the number of times students must transition between schools which creates options for parents.
Finding #5: If a state only allows the school board to approve charter schools then 78% of charter schools are new and about 22% of public schools are converted to charter schools, which keeps the teaching staff intact. If a state allows other sponsors (such as universities, state agencies etc.) to approve charter schools the result is about 6% of public schools are converted and 94% become new charter schools.

Finding #6: Few charters are operated by management organizations. Opponents of charter schools fear that large organizations would shut down small innovative schools because they are capable of operating many schools at once. However, proponents of charter schools hope that educational management organizations (EMO), both for profit and non-profit, would play a major role in increasing the number of charter schools throughout the country. The study indicated that only 10% of charter schools are operated by EMOS. This is an indication that the majority of existing charter schools is operated by local groups, teacher cooperatives, and community-based organizations.

Finding #7: Few states provide facilities funding which limits the number of charter schools that can be opened and operated yearly. NCSRP’s data indicated in 2004-2005, 13 states and the District of Columbia provided funds for charter school facilities. The majority of district operated public schools do not pay for facilities but charter schools must rent, lease, or buy facilities to operate their schools.

Finding #8: Charter schools are diverse because of state policy and legislation. The study found that each state’s charter school law is unique based on that particular state’s preference.
WestEd (2006) conducted a study on student achievement in eight charter high schools. It was found that these eight schools were experiencing success toward closing the achievement gap among high school students. Over 400 high schools from 25 states with a large number of charter schools were considered. The sample was narrowed to 70 schools that served students through twelfth grade and had already graduated a class of seniors so that graduation and college data could be gathered. Also, the high school had to have met Adequate Yearly Progress for at least the past two years. The list of 70 was narrowed to 26 by the selection of those with high academic achievement on standardized testing or a record of increased achievement with low-income or high minority populations. From this group, eight schools were selected based on data collection. Six of the eight high schools studied also served middle/junior high school students in their building. The schools were urban, suburban, and one served a rural population. The enrollment of the charter schools ranged from 120-767. Ninety-two percent of the student population was minority at five high schools; two others had more racially mixed populations and the rural community served a homogenous population. Seventy-five percent of the student population received free/reduced lunch at five high schools, including 100% at one of the high schools. Two schools had a 25% special education population. One charter school was a boarding school, one charter school was operated by a teacher cooperative, and one specialized in performing arts. All of the charter high schools were college preparatory schools. The researcher found that these charter high schools were experiencing success as a result of six significant similarities among each charter high school in the study.
The charter high schools were mission driven and determined to keep students on track for higher education.

The charter high schools were focused on college preparation by providing a rigorous, relevant, and engaging curriculum.

The charter high school teachers taught for mastery for an in-depth understanding of the curriculum.

The charter high schools were provided support from families, community partners, and school personnel.

The charter high school faculties engaged in continuous professional learning to be effective instructors.

The charter high schools had active strong governing boards that resolved challenges in creative ways and empowered administrators and teachers to implement decisions.

No Child Left Behind

DiBiase (2005) examined the manner in which 13 state Departments of Education planned and implemented school reform (restructuring) under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The states surveyed were Tennessee, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Ohio, New York, Nebraska, Michigan, Maryland, Hawaii, Georgia, Colorado, California, and Alabama. Under NCLB, schools that receive federal funding (Title I) and fail to make adequate yearly progress for a period of time are subject to actions for restructuring. The states listed above all had schools that did not make AYP for five consecutive years and were required to have a district plan for restructuring. The
research was based on state official interviews and review of relevant documents. DiBiase found the level of involvement in the restructuring process varied from state to state meaning some states were deeply involved in the district development plans and decision making process. Other states have a more hands off approach and do not have input in the local school districts. Of the 13 states surveyed, seven state education departments have in place an approval process for school restructuring plans, two state education departments collect plans but do not a approve them, one state education department collects plans for some schools, and three state education departments do not collect plans. The researcher cites ambiguity in the language of the legislation as a reason why state and local school systems have such a wide spectrum as it relates to the level of involvement in assuring that the failing schools are redirected toward success.

_Vouchers, Charter Schools, NCLB_

Farkas and Duffett (2006) of the FDR Group conducted a comprehensive and rigorous study of the attitudes of Ohioans: 1,001 randomly selected Ohioans were interviewed by telephone and included 278 parents of students in grades K-12. The sample was augmented so that the views of the 202 African-Americans interviewed could be reliably reported. The telephone survey asked for participants’ views on charter schools, school vouchers, the state of the public schools, teacher quality, and academic standards. The findings were divided into the following categories: the state of education in Ohio, standards and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), charter schools, school vouchers, and teacher quality.
Results of the study indicated that 42% of Ohioans believed a diploma does not guarantee that students have mastered the basic education curriculum; 52% of African-Americans agreed; 69% of Ohioans believed that if the state designated more money for education it would not reach the students and be used elsewhere; 58% of Ohioans and 72% of African-Americans believed that taxpayers are not getting their money’s worth from the public schools; 51% of Ohioans believed students advance based on social promotion and 27% believed students are promoted on merit. Under NCLB, 83% of participants were proponents of the new requirement for tenth graders to pass tests in the major subjects before they can graduate; 62% of participants believed publicizing test results and monitoring poorly performing schools calls attention to problems within the school system while 28% believed these measures cause undue stress for students and educators; 40% of participants thought NCLB will improve student learning and 49% believed NCLB will not be beneficial; 75% of those in the study were in favor of giving flexibility to design curriculum as allowed in charter schools; 89% approved of giving autonomy to get rid of ineffective teachers in charter schools; 71% of participants approved of charter schools having budgetary control; 54% of participants believed if principals could hire their own teachers that schools would improve; 36% of African-American participants believed charter schools should be expanded, and 20% of white participants agreed; 39% of Ohioans surveyed would send their children to charter schools and 54% would not send their children to charter schools; 55% of participants in the study supported vouchers and 37% opposed the use of vouchers; 42% supported state-funded scholarships (vouchers) so students can attend a private school and 51%
opposed vouchers for private schools; 50% of Ohioans believed vouchers would foster 
competition and help public schools while 38% believed it would only leave public 
schools with less money and less-motivated students.

Findings from those studied on teacher quality of the NCLB Act revealed 30% of 
participants believed teachers are doing a good job while 42% believed they could 
improve somewhat, and 23% believed they could greatly improve; 84% of those in the 
study believed 3 teachers should be reward with a financial increase for being of high 
quality, and 77% of the participants believed teachers who serve in tough neighborhoods 
should receive higher salaries.

Summary

Review of the research was conducted in four categories; school choice, vouchers, 
charter schools, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It was determined that parents seek 
information about school choice primarily from other parents. Parents, especially those 
of minority children, exercise their school choice options through supplemental services 
or transfer. Some parents are, and some are not, knowledgeable enough about choice 
options to make informed decisions about their children’s education. Overall, parents 
believe school choice is a reform initiative that will serve to improve public education.
CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework for the study derived from the theory that components outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law by President Bush in 2002, were deemed critical for school improvement. According to Darling-Hammond (1999), education resources do make a difference, particularly when funds are used to purchase well-qualified teachers, high-quality curricula, and to create personalized learning communities in which children are well known. As a result of expanded educational options for parents of children attending low-performing schools, this study sought to examine factors that influenced parents’ decisions about exercising choice options.

The purpose of the study was to determine whether parents’ perceptions of choice was influenced by their knowledge of vouchers, charter schools, No Child Left Behind, in addition to their age, gender, socioeconomic status, and their level of education. Research questions and limitations of the study are explained and a summary of the theoretical framework has been provided.
Definition of Variables

The following definitions are presented as they are used in this study.

*Independent Variables*

*Knowledge Level of Vouchers*—Information or facts gained through study about federal funds that enable public school students to attend schools of their choice, public or private.

*Knowledge Level of Charter Schools*—Information or facts gained through study about sponsored schools that are substantially free of direct administrative control by the government, but are held accountable for achieving certain levels of student performance.

*Knowledge Level of the No Child Left Behind Act*—Information or facts gained through study about education legislature enacted in January 2002 stating that public schools will be held accountable for student academic performance and parents have a right to transfer their child(ren) to schools meeting state standards.

*Knowledge Level of Clayton County's School Choice Provisions*—Information or facts gained through research of Clayton County Schools’ choice options, rules, and regulations as governed by the board of education.

*Demographics*—Participants’ age, gender, socioeconomic status and educational level.

*Dependent Variables*

*Parents' Acceptance of School Choice*—The level to which parents are willing to embrace school reform initiatives such as vouchers, charter schools, and the state regulations which guide the No Child Left Behind legislation.
Parents’ Belief in the Effectiveness of School Choice—The level to which parents value school choice options for the improvement of education for students.

Definition of Terms

*Parent*—One who nurtures and raises a child

*Public School*—An elementary or secondary school in the United States supported by public funds and providing free education for children.

*Title I*—A program that permits a school to use federal funds to upgrade the educational program of the school and to raise academic achievement for all the students. Schools are identified based on having 50% of its students receiving free or reduced price lunch.

**Figure 1. Independent and Dependent Variables**

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<th>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</th>
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Research Questions

The framework for this includes the following research questions:

RQ1: Do demographics (age, gender, socioeconomic status, educational level) influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

RQ2: Does knowledge level of vouchers influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

RQ3: Does knowledge level of charter schools influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

RQ4: Does knowledge level of NCLB influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

RQ5: Does knowledge level of Clayton County’s choice provisions influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is that the parents surveyed have children who attend a Clayton County public school within metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia. The study was based on a convenience sampling which allows the researcher to utilize a unit of participants that are available. It is recommended that a future study be conducted using a random sampling technique. More specifically, participants surveyed have children who attend a Title I school in Clayton County. It is recommended that a future study be conducted with participants who have children in non-Title I schools as well as
participants who have children in other metropolitan Georgia school systems. Another limitation to the study is that answers to all questions are assumed to be honest.

Summary

The theoretical framework included a definition of the independent and dependent variables in addition to other terms used in the study. Research questions which guide the study as well as limitations to the study have been provided. A diagram outlining the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was presented.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The intent of the study was to determine whether a relationship existed between parents' perceptions (acceptance and effectiveness) about school choice options and their knowledge of vouchers, charter schools, and the No Child Left Behind Act in addition to their gender, age, educational level and socioeconomic status. According to Suter (1998) and Vogt (1999), correlation is the extent to which two or more things are related to one another. In a correlation design the variables are not manipulated; instead, the researcher uses measures of association to study their relations. Therefore, a quantitative correlation design was used in this study. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Program for Social Science Base 10.0 (SPSS 10.0) computer program.

The independent variables were knowledge of vouchers (items 1, 2), knowledge of charter schools (items 7, 8), knowledge of the No Child Left Behind Act (items 11, 12), knowledge of Clayton County Schools choice provisions (items 17, 18) and demographics (items 21-25). The dependent variables in this study were parents' acceptance of choice options (items 4, 6, 14, 15, 16, 20) and parents' belief in the effectiveness of choice (items 3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 19).
Description of the Population

The study took place in the state of Georgia, located in the southeast region of the United States. More specifically, parents selected resided in single family as well as multi-family dwellings within an Atlanta Metropolitan Clayton County area and their children attended a Title I Clayton County public school. The study included parents serving as heads-of-household as well as participants who shared child-rearing responsibilities. Participants surveyed were employed in blue-collar positions, white-collar positions, as well as others who were unemployed.

Sampling Procedures

Parents selected had children who attended one Clayton County Title I, public elementary school. Approximately 500 surveys were distributed and 223 completed surveys were received for the purpose of data analysis. The data were a sample of convenience. Convenience sampling is defined as a sampling technique that allows the researcher to select whatever sampling unit is conveniently available (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987).

Working with Human Subjects

All participants were anonymous and information provided was confidential. Participants were provided a copy of data analysis upon request.

Instrumentation

A Likert rating scale provides a series of statements to which participants can indicate degrees of agreement or disagreement (Borden & Abbott, 1999). Incorporating
the Likert scale, the instrument used in this study was a survey. A five-point scale was used on the survey to gather data about parents' knowledge of vouchers, knowledge of charter schools, knowledge of the No Child Left Behind Act and knowledge of school choice options in Clayton County, in addition to their acceptance and belief in the effectiveness of school choice. The survey consisted of five demographic items, five school choice items, and 15 items (relative to the three areas listed above) totaling 25 items. Some items used on the survey were obtained from the National Urban League survey conducted in 2001 entitled State of Black America. Items were also obtained from the 1990 NASSP Bulletin entitled Pros/Cons of Vouchers. The reliability and validity of both of the fore mentioned survey resources were validated in previous studies.

Data Collection and Administrative Procedures

Clayton County Public Schools approved dissemination of the surveys to parents of students in a Title I elementary school. A cover letter to parents (Appendix A) explaining the purpose of gathering data was attached to the survey, and parents were told that completion of the survey was optional, they would remain anonymous and there would be no direct effect on their child whether or not the survey was completed. Surveys were sent home with students (Appendix B). Parents completed the surveys and students brought them back to school and placed them into a drop box. The researcher collected all surveys at the end of a two week period from the school to analyze data.
Statistical Applications

The statistical tools used to analyze data in this study were:

*Pearson's Correlation*—(also known as Pearson $r$) is the most popular measure of correlation. It indicates the magnitude and direction of a relationship between variables (Bordens & Abbott 1999).

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)*—a test of the statistical significance of the difference among the mean scores of two or more groups on one or more variables.

*Frequencies*—the number of individuals in a given class or category.

*Multiple Comparison*—A test used to pinpoint a significant difference between or within groups after conducting an ANOVA

Summary

A quantitative research design was used in the study. A Likert rating scale survey was distributed to parents of children attending a Title I elementary school in Clayton County, Georgia to determine if a significant relationship existed between the independent and dependent variables. Data collected was anonymous and confidential. Statistical tools used were defined for the purpose of data analysis.
CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of the study was to assess parents' knowledge level of vouchers, charter schools, No Child Left Behind, and school choice options in Clayton County. The researcher further examined parents' perceptions of school choice (acceptance of school choice and their belief of the effectiveness of choice to improve education). The data gathered also informed the researcher whether a relationship existed between parents' gender, age, socioeconomic status, educational level, and their perception of school choice. Five hundred surveys were distributed and 223 parents responded to the survey yielding a 44% return rate. Pearson Correlation was used to determine the level of the significance between parents' knowledge level and their acceptance of school choice and belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education. It was also used to determine the level of significance between participants' demographics (age, gender, educational level, socioeconomic status) and their acceptance of school choice and belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for further examination within the groups to determine the area of specific differences. Frequency distributions were obtained to determine the level to which parents were knowledgeable of vouchers, charter schools, Clayton County’s choice provisions, NCLB, in addition to the background knowledge provided from demographic information.
Table 3 (item 1) indicates 115 participants (40 strongly agree and 75 agree) knew vouchers supported private education; 83 participants were undecided and 25 did not know vouchers supported private education because they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 3 (item 2) indicates 151 participants (strongly agree and agree) were knowledgeable of that fact that vouchers were tax dollars (certificates) toward school expenditures; 60 participants were undecided about vouchers being tax dollars and 12 participants did not know that vouchers were tax dollars toward school expenditures (disagree and strongly disagree).

Table 3

Knowledge Level of Vouchers Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 (item 7) showed 99 of those surveyed indicated Clayton County did not have enough charter schools (disagree and strongly disagree); 95 participants were undecided about there being enough charter schools in Clayton County; 29 participants indicated there were enough charter schools in Clayton County (strongly agree and agree).
Table 4

Knowledge Level of Charter Schools Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#7 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 (item 8) indicates that 98 participants surveyed (strongly agree and agree) knew charter schools operated independently under a contract which frees them from some state regulations; 110 participants were undecided about there being enough charter schools in Clayton County. Table 2 indicates 15 participants did not think there were enough charter schools in Clayton County (disagree and strongly disagree).

Table 5 (item 11) indicates 124 participants surveyed understood the NCLB transfer process in Clayton County Schools (agree and strongly agree); 55 of those surveyed were undecided about the transfer process and 44 did not understand the transfer process (disagree and strongly disagree).

Table 5 (item 12) indicates that 146 of those surveyed knew that all ethnic groups in a public school must show adequate yearly progress toward state approved standards under NCLB (agree and strongly agree). Table 3 indicates that 58 participants were undecided and 19 participants did not know that all ethnic groups must show progress according to NCLB (disagree and strongly disagree).
Table 5

*Knowledge Level of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#11 ~ Participant Responses</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 ~ Participant Responses</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 (item 17) shows that 116 participants indicated Clayton County did not offer enough school choice options (strongly disagree and disagree); 63 participants did not know if Clayton County offered enough school choice options while 41 agreed and strongly agreed that Clayton County offered enough choice options.

Table 6 (item 18) shows 50 participants (disagree and strongly disagree) did not know enough about Clayton County's choice options to make an informed decision. Sixty-four participants were undecided about Clayton County's choice options; 109 participants agreed and strongly agreed that they were able to make an informed decision.

Table 6

*Knowledge Level of Clayton County Schools Choice Provisions Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#17 ~ Participant Responses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#18 ~ Participant Responses</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 indicates 26 participants had an annual income between $0-$20,000.

Seventy seven participants had an annual income between $21,000-$39,000; 64 participants had an annual income between $40,000-$59,000, and 56 participants had an annual income of $60,000 or higher.

Table 7

Socioeconomic Status Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0 - $20,000</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000 - $39,000</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - $59,000</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 - Above</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 (item 4) indicates 149 participants agreed and strongly agreed they would accept vouchers as a form of school choice if the president supported it; 55 participants were undecided about accepting vouchers as a school choice reform if the president supported it; 17 participants disagreed and strongly disagreed with accepting vouchers as a school choice reform if the president supported it.

Table 8 (item 6) indicates 110 participants agreed and strongly agreed that charter school should follow the same rules and regulations as public schools; 47 participants were undecided whether charter schools should follow the same rules and regulations as public schools; 63 participants disagreed and strongly disagreed with charter schools following the same rules and regulations as public schools.
Table 8

*Acceptance of School Choice Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#4 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#16 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#20 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 (item 14) indicates 188 participants agreed and strongly agreed that parents should be able to transfer their children to another school within the same district if they currently attend a low performing school; 27 participants were undecided about transferring their children to another school and six participants disagreed that parents should be able to transfer their children to another school within the same district if their children currently attend low performing schools.

Table 8 (item 15) indicates 147 participants stated it would be a loss to our society if neighborhood schools closed due to state standards; 39 participants were undecided about it being a loss to our society if neighborhood school closed; 34 participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that it would be a loss to our society if neighborhood schools closed due to state standards.
Table 8 (item 16) indicates 162 participants agreed and strongly agreed that parents should have the right to enroll their children in any public school of their choice; 14 participants were undecided and 27 participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that parents should have the right to enroll their children in any public school of their choice.

Table 8 (item 20) indicates 177 participants agreed and strongly agreed that parents should control the education of their children; 30 participants were undecided and 14 participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that parents should control the education of their children.

Table 9 (item 3) indicates 135 participants believed (agree and strongly agree) that using vouchers would change education and benefit us all; 64 participants were undecided about the effectiveness of using vouchers and 24 participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that using vouchers would change education and benefit us all.

Table 9 (item 5) indicates 89 participants believed (agree and strongly agree) that using vouchers would solve public school education problems; 69 participants were undecided about the use of vouchers to solve public education problems and 65 participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that the use of vouchers would solve education problems.

Table 9 (item 9) indicates 133 participants believed (agree and strongly agree) that more charter schools on the middle and high school level would increase test scores in the state of Georgia; 74 participants were undecided whether more middle and high charter schools would increase Georgia test scores; 16 participants disagreed and strongly
Table 9

_Belief in the Effectiveness of School Choice to Improve Education Frequencies_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#3 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#19 – Participant Responses</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

disagreed that more charter schools on the middle and high school level would increase Georgia test scores.

Table 9 (item 10) indicates 134 participants believed (agree and strongly agree) charter schools offer an alternative to public school curriculum; 81 participants were undecided about charter schools and a public school alternative; eight participants did not believe (disagree and strongly disagree) that charter schools would offer an alternative to public school curriculum.

Table 9 (item 13) indicates 145 participants believed (agree and strongly agree) that adequate yearly progress (AYP) is a good measure of Georgia public schools’ performance; 48 participants were undecided about AYP being a good measure of Georgia schools’ performance; 30 participants did not believe (disagree and strongly disagree) that AYP was a good measure of Georgia schools’ performance.
Table 9 (item 19) indicates 67 participants believed (agree and strongly agree) school choice would promote segregation; 86 participants were undecided about school choice promoting segregation and 70 participants did not believe school choice would promote segregation (disagree and strongly disagree).

Table 10 displays results of the correlation analysis. All comparisons were tested to the 0.05 level of significance. Notation was made for any correlation significant to the 0.01 level.

Table 10

*Pearson Correlation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Accept Choice</th>
<th>Effect Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Educational Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.149(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KnowVouch</th>
<th></th>
<th>Accept Choice</th>
<th>Effect Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KnowVouch</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.270(***)</td>
<td>.223(***)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KnowCharters</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.271(***)</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KnowNCLP</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KnowCtyChoice</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.189(***)</td>
<td>-.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

RQ1: Do demographics (age, gender, socioeconomic status, educational level) influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

The correlation coefficient for parents’ gender and their acceptance of school choice was .017 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ gender and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation between parents’ gender and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve
education was .039 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ gender and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

The correlation coefficient for parents’ age and their acceptance of school choice was -.026 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ age and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation coefficient for parents’ age and their belief in school choice to improve education was .101 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ age and their belief in school choice to improve education.

The correlation coefficient for parents’ educational level and their acceptance of school choice was -.101 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ educational level and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation coefficient for parents’ educational level and their belief in school choice to improve education was .061 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ educational level and their belief in school choice to improve education.

The correlation coefficient for parents’ socioeconomic level and their acceptance of school choice was -.001 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ socioeconomic level and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation coefficient for parents’ socioeconomic level and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education was .149 and was significant beyond
the .05 level. There was a significant relationship between parents' socioeconomic level and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

RQ2: Does knowledge level of vouchers influence parents' acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

The correlation coefficient for parents' knowledge level of vouchers and their acceptance of school choice was .270 and was significant beyond the accepted level of .01. There was a significant relationship between parents' knowledge level of vouchers and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation coefficient for parents' knowledge level of vouchers and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education was .233 and was significant beyond the accepted level of .01. There was a significant relationship between parents' knowledge level of vouchers and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

RQ3: Does knowledge level of charter schools influence parents' acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

The correlation coefficient for parents' knowledge level of charter school and their acceptance of school choice was -.271 and was significant beyond the accepted level of .01. There was a significant relationship between parents' knowledge level of charter schools and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation coefficient for parents' knowledge level of charter schools and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education was .063 and was not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents' knowledge level of charter schools and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.
RQ4: Does knowledge level of NCLB influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

The correlation coefficient for parents’ knowledge level of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and their acceptance of school choice was .031 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ knowledge level of NCLB and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation coefficient for parents’ knowledge level of NCLB and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education was .100 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ knowledge level of NCLB and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

RQ5: Does knowledge level of Clayton County’s choice provisions influence parents’ acceptance of and belief in the effectiveness of school choice?

The correlation coefficient for parents’ knowledge level of Clayton County’s choice options and their acceptance of school choice was -.189 and was significant beyond the accepted .01 level. There was a significant relationship between parents’ knowledge level of Clayton County’s choice options and their acceptance of school choice. The correlation coefficient for parents’ knowledge level of Clayton County’s choice options and their belief in the effectiveness in school choice to improve education was -.085 and not significant at the .05 level. There was no significant relationship between parents’ knowledge level of Clayton County’s choice options and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.
An analysis of variance was conducted in Table 11 to test the statistical significance of the difference among the mean scores of two or more groups within the socioeconomic category at the .05 level of probability. A .048 level of statistical significance existed between groups in the socioeconomic category.

Table 11

ANOVA - Socioeconomic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EffectChoice</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>60.715</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.238</td>
<td>2.670</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1660.209</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>7.581</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1720.924</td>
<td>222</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four groups of income levels were presented in the socioeconomic demographic section of the survey. A multiple comparison (Table 12) was conducted to determine the specific socioeconomic groups impacted. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level. The socioeconomic group of $21,000-$39,000 and the socioeconomic group of $60,000 and higher had a mean difference of (-1.36688) yielding a statistically significant level of .049.
Table 12

Multiple Comparisons Socioeconomic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Economic Status (I)</th>
<th>Economic Status (J)</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effect Choice</td>
<td>$0-20,000$</td>
<td>$21,000 - $39,000$</td>
<td>$.56194</td>
<td>.62452</td>
<td>.847</td>
<td>-.1976 - 2.3214</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$40,000 - $59,000$</td>
<td>-$0.6611</td>
<td>.64033</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.8701 - 1.7379</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$60,000 - above</td>
<td>-.80495</td>
<td>.65341</td>
<td>.679</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.6458 - 1.0359</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000 - $39,000</td>
<td>$0-20,000$</td>
<td>-.56194</td>
<td>.62452</td>
<td>.847</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.3214 - 1.1976</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$40,000 - $59,000$</td>
<td>-.62804</td>
<td>.46573</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.9402 - .6841</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$60,000 - above</td>
<td>1.36688(*)</td>
<td>.48355</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.7292 - .0045</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - $59,000</td>
<td>$0-20,000$</td>
<td>.06611</td>
<td>.64033</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.7379 - 1.8701</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$21,000 - $39,000$</td>
<td>.62804</td>
<td>.46573</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.6841 - 1.9402</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$60,000 - above</td>
<td>-.73884</td>
<td>.50381</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.2.158 - .6806</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 - above</td>
<td>$0-20,000$</td>
<td>.80495</td>
<td>.65341</td>
<td>.679</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.0359 - 2.6458</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$21,000 - $39,000$</td>
<td>1.36688(*)</td>
<td>.48355</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td></td>
<td>.0045 - 2.7292</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$40,000 - $59,000$</td>
<td>.73884</td>
<td>.50381</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.6806 - 2.1582</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
Table 13 indicated a significant difference in parents’ belief in the effectiveness of school choice was between those in the $21,000-39,000 income level represented by a mean score of 12.1688 and those earning $60,000 and above. Those in the higher level had stronger beliefs in the effectiveness of school choice. As represented by a mean score of 13.5357.

Table 13

*Mean Scores for Belief in the Effectiveness of Choice by SES*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0 - 20,000</td>
<td>12.7308</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.06669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000 - 39,000</td>
<td>12.1688</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2.70673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - 59,000</td>
<td>12.7969</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.48921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 – above</td>
<td>13.5357</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.94781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.7578</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>2.78423</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

This chapter addressed five research questions which guided the study about parents’ perceptions of school choice. The researcher was interested in knowing if knowledge of vouchers, charter schools, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Clayton County’s school choice options, and parents’ demographics (independent variables) influenced their acceptance of school choice and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education (dependent variables). Statistical measures were applied to identify relationships between independent and dependent variables. Answers to the research questions were provided.
CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act became a law in 2001 many parents were confused about its purpose and interpretation as it related to their children who were attending public school. Legislature was not written in layman terms and even educators were unclear of its impact on education. Adults only knew that the law was supposed to improve education for their children. Parents were displeased with the current level of education their children received and interpreted the NCLB law as a means of taking back control of their child’s education and choosing a school wherever they wanted. This meant, in their minds, removing children from schools lacking in resources and highly qualified teachers to schools rich in resources and highly qualified teachers, at the expense of the school system. However, when conversing with parents about what criteria they chose to make decisions about their child’s education, it was discovered that many did not know the rules and regulations governing things such as the use of vouchers, definition of charter schools, and stipulations of NCLB. The researcher conducted the study to determine if knowledge level and demographics impacted parents’ acceptance of school choice and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve their child’s education.

Chapter I provided background information about rules governing charter schools, vouchers, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Viewpoints from those who oppose and
support school choice were shared. The purpose of the study was to examine school choice perceptions of parents in Clayton County. The statement of the problem was to find out how informed parents were about school choice options and did it affect their acceptance and belief in school choice. The study was significant because of a gap regarding research that has been conducted to determine parents’ motives for supporting or opposing school choice options.

Chapter II reviewed previously conducted research that was relevant to school choice, vouchers, charter schools, and NCLB. It was determined that, overall, parents believe school choice is a reform initiative that would improve public education.

Chapter III provided a definition of variables and terms used in the study. Research questions were declared and limitations of the study were provided. A diagram outlining the relationship between independent and dependent variables was presented.

Chapter IV explained that a quantitative correlation design was used in the study. Parents, from a Title I elementary school in Clayton County, were asked, without obligation, to participate by completing an anonymous Likert rating scale survey. A definition of the statistical applications used from the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) computer software program was provided.

Chapter V analyzed the data to answer the research questions used in the study. Tables were used, in addition to paragraphs to further explain data in the study.
Findings

1. There was no significant relationship between parents’ gender and their acceptance of school choice or their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

2. There was no significant relationship between parents’ age and their acceptance of school choice or their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

3. There was no significant relationship between parents’ educational level and their acceptance of school choice or their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

4. There was no significant relationship between parents’ socio-economic level and their acceptance of school choice.

5. There was a significant relationship between parents’ socio-economic level and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

6. There was a significant relationship between parents’ knowledge of vouchers and their acceptance of school choice and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

7. There was a significant relationship between parents’ knowledge of charter schools and their acceptance of school choice. There was no significant relationship between parents’ knowledge of charter schools and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.
8. There was no significant relationship between parents’ knowledge of No Child Left Behind and their acceptance of school choice or their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

9. There was a significant relationship between parents’ knowledge of Clayton County choice options and their acceptance of school choice. There was no significant relationship between parents’ knowledge of Clayton County’s choice options and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education.

Conclusion

Based on findings from the study, the researcher concluded that parents’ knowledge of NCLB does not significantly impact their acceptance of school choice or their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education. However, parents are accepting of the usage of vouchers as a means of school choice and believe in the effectiveness of using vouchers to improve education. Parents believe charter schools are effective in improving education, but their knowledge of charter schools does not impact their acceptance of school choice. Parents’ knowledge about choice options in the Clayton County School System impacts their acceptance of school choice. While parents’ age, gender, marital status, and educational level do not significantly factor into their acceptance of school choice or their belief in the effectiveness in school choice, parents’ socio-economic income level does factor into their belief that school choice is effective in the improvement of education.
Implications

Implications of the study suggest the following:

- Knowledge is the foundation for making informed decisions. As parents become more knowledgeable of choice options it is implied that there is an increase in their belief in school choice and their acceptance of school choice as a vital reform model for school improvement.

- The demographic independent variable indicated that of the categories surveyed (age, gender, educational level, and socio-economic status), parents’ socio-economic status significantly influenced their belief in the effectiveness of choice to improve education. The findings indicated parents of higher income levels valued education and had a stronger desire to ensure their children have access to opportunity. It is implied that parents of low income levels do not believe school choice will improve education. However, there may be other factors influencing low income parents’ belief system and communication is critical between parents and educators for the sake of students’ success. Participants’ gender was included in the study because it has been assumed that mothers, more than fathers, emphasize the importance of education and would deliberately seek school choice as an educational option for their children. The study revealed there was no significant difference between gender and school choice acceptance and beliefs for the population surveyed. This could be due to the fact that 87% of parents who completed the survey were female.
Findings from the study indicated no significant relationship between parents’ age and their acceptance of school choice or their belief in school choice effectiveness. In today’s public schools there are a growing number of grandparents raising grandchildren. There are also a growing number of teenage parents and older parents who waited until their careers were established before having children. It was shared in Chapter I that older people (ages 50-up) who witnessed political movements believed school choice was used as a means of segregation. Middle class young adults on the other hand viewed school choice as a means of healthy competition and access to society’s opportunities. The population surveyed varied in age with 49% between the ages of 35-44. The researcher expected a significant relationship based on the age of those supporting and opposing school choice, but found age to be insignificant possibly because parents of all ages are now desperate for a change in our public schools.

There was a significant relationship between parents’ knowledge level of vouchers and their acceptance of school choice and their belief in the effectiveness of school choice to improve education. More than 50% of parents surveyed indicated that they knew vouchers supported private education and they knew vouchers were tax dollars used toward school expenditures. The use of vouchers in Georgia is limited to students with disabilities. However, the survey implies that parents may be willing to use
vouchers as a means of improving their child’s education if policy changes occur in Georgia.

- The significant relationship between parents’ knowledge level of charter schools and their acceptance of school choice was an indication that parents may be willing to support more charter schools in Clayton County, which currently has only two charter schools in operation. Parents’ knowledge level of charter schools did not significantly influence their belief in the effectiveness of charter schools to improve education. In Chapter I it was noted that there had not been extensive research conducted to determine the effectiveness of charter schools’ performance as related to student achievement. That statement was justified by Lake and Hill (2005) who conducted a study of basic facts about charter schools. There were results about charter schools’ growth, population make-up, size, and school governance, but there was no mention of academic achievement, which should have been a basic fact since charter schools were created to serve as a school reform model to improve academic achievement. This implies that data needs to be gathered to examine student achievement in charter schools and shared with parents.

- Parents’ understanding of the NCLB transfer process and knowledge of the subgroups required to show adequate progress did not significantly impact their belief in or acceptance of school choice. The school serving the population surveyed made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for five out of six
years since the implementation of NCLB. Results may have been more significant if the school surveyed was a low performing school in the “needs improvement” category on the AYP timeline.

- Findings about choice options in Clayton County could be contributed to the fact that choice options are limited. There were only two charter schools in Clayton County which limited transfer options. In addition, supplemental services, such as Sylvan Learning Center, were only offered to middle school students. Parents were accepting of choice options in Clayton County but had no experience from which to make a determination as to whether they believed in the effectiveness of choice to improve education.

Recommendations

School Policy Recommendations

- Policy should include reform which allows parents more choice options.
- Policy should provide distribution of charter schools more equitably according to school district size.

School Administration Recommendations

- School and system administrators and central office employees should conduct a needs assessment to determine parents’ desires for their children’s education as related to school choice options.
- School and system administrators need to provide informal sessions to enlighten parents about AYP, charter schools, and choice options in Clayton County Public Schools.
- Clayton County Board of Education should consider increasing the number of charter schools, in addition to adding magnet schools on the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Recommendations for Future Studies

- This study was limited to one Title I elementary school in Clayton County. It is recommended that a future study that includes an entire school system (elementary, middle, and high) be conducted.

- This study was limited to a school within a system that has limited school choice options. It is recommended that a study be conducted in a system that has a variety of school choice options.

- This study was quantitatively designed. It is recommended that a qualitative study be conducted to allow parents more input about their school choice decisions.

- It is recommended that a study be conducted that examines student achievement as related to choice options and parents’ perception.

Summary

The researcher’s purpose for the study was to create an informative document for parents seeking information to make an informed decision about school choice. In addition, the researcher wanted to enlighten school system administrators of factors that influence parents when they seek choice options for their children. Parents are seeking alternatives to public schools using various factors. While some are making informed decisions, others are not. It appears that most parents are supporters of school choice and
believe it is an effective school reform model. In such a competitive market it is vital for
school systems to listen to parents’ concerns and provide more choice options within
each school system in order to meet the needs of students and satisfy parents. Tax dollars
will leave the public school system as parents withdraw their children and funds will
support private educational institutions, leaving public schools in a state of demise.
Dear Parent:

My name is ______________. I am a graduate student enrolled in the educational leadership doctoral program at ________. My dissertation focuses on the subject of school choice options in Clayton County. I am interested in knowing parents perceptions of charter schools, vouchers, and school choice.

This letter is to request your assistance in gathering data. There is a 25 item survey attached. You will remain anonymous (Do not write your name or your child’s name on the survey) and have the right to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. If you agree to participate in the study, please complete the attached survey indicating whether you strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statements provided and return the survey to your child’s school. It would be very helpful if you please respond to all items on the survey. Parents may examine a copy of the materials related to the study by notifying the researcher at the address listed.

Thank you in advance for your helpful feedback concerning this topic.

Respectfully,

Janice B. Sills
APPENDIX B
SURVEY
Parents’ Perceptions of School Choice Options

Dear Parent:

My name is ____________. I am a graduate student enrolled in the educational leadership doctoral program at ___________. My dissertation focuses on the subject of school choice options in Clayton County. Participation in this study is voluntary, anonymity is assured (do not write your name or your child’s name on the survey) and will not affect your child’s grades or future classroom placements. If you choose to participate, please provide your opinion about school choice options. There are no right or wrong answers and no one will be identified in the study. Please give the completed survey to your child so he/she can return the survey to school. Thank you in advance for affording me the opportunity to generate multiple statistical relationships to help guide school choice research. I may be contacted at ________.

Use the scale below and circle one response for each item.
SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Uncertain; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

1. Vouchers support private education.
   SA   A   U   D   SD

2. Vouchers are (tax monies in the form of) certificates that represent credit toward school expenditures.
   SA   A   U   D   SD

3. The use of vouchers (tax payers’ monies) will change education and benefit us all.
   SA   A   U   D   SD

4. If the National Governors’ Association and the president support parental choice through the use of vouchers then it is worth a try.
   SA   A   U   D   SD

5. Using vouchers to support school choice will solve problems within the public education system.
   SA   A   U   D   SD

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6. Charter schools should follow the same rules and regulations as public schools.  
   SA   A   U   D   SD

7. There are a sufficient number of charter schools in the Clayton County school district.  
   SA   A   U   D   SD

*Use the scale below and circle one response for each item.*  
SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Uncertain; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

8. Charter schools operate under a contract that frees them from some state regulations and permits them to operate independently.  
   SA   A   U   D   SD

9. The creation of more charter schools on the middle and high school levels would increase test scores in the state of Georgia.  
   SA   A   U   D   SD

10. Charter schools offer a productive alternative to public school curriculum.  
    SA   A   U   D   SD

11. I have a clear understanding of the No Child Left Behind transfer process in Clayton County.  
    SA   A   U   D   SD

12. *ALL* ethnic groups in a public school must show adequate progress toward state-approved standards under the No Child Left Behind Act.  
    SA   A   U   D   SD

13. Adequate yearly progress is a good measure of Georgia public schools’ performance.  
    SA   A   U   D   SD

14. Parents should be allowed to send their children to another public school within the same district if they currently attend a low performing school.  
    SA   A   U   D   SD

15. It would be a loss to our society if neighborhood schools were forced to close due to state standards.  
    SA   A   U   D   SD
Appendix B (continued)

16. Parents should have the right to enroll their children in any public school they choose.
   SA  A  U  D  SD

Use the scale below and circle one response for each item.
SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Uncertain; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

17. Clayton County offers a sufficient amount of school choice options.
   SA  A  U  D  SD

18. I know enough about Clayton County choice options to make an informed decision about my child’s education.
   SA  A  U  D  SD

19. School choice will promote segregation.
   SA  A  U  D  SD

20. Parents should control the education of their children.
   SA  A  U  D  SD

Demographics - For research purposes, please check one response for each item as applied to you:

21. Marital Status:
   (a) Married (b) Single (c) Divorced (d) Widow/(er)

22. Gender:
   (a) Male  (b) Female

23. Age:
   (a) Under 25  (b) 25-34  (c) 35-44  (d) 45-Older

24. Highest Educational Level Completed:
   (a) Less Than High School (b) H. S. Diploma/GED
   (c) 1-3 yrs College (d) B.A./B.S. Degree
   (e) Some Graduate Studies (f) Graduate Degree
Appendix B (continued)

25. Socioeconomic Status:
   $0-20,000_____ $21,000-39,000_____ 
   $40,000-59,000_____ $60,000-above_____

Thank you for your patience and cooperation
REFERENCES


WestEd. (2006). *Charter high schools closing the achievement gap*. Washington, DC:

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