



# UNDERSTANDING PARENTAL CHOICE OF A CHARTER SCHOOL

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education  
in Professional Leadership

by

Shaik M. Ahmed

December, 2012

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

In the name of Allah(s) (God Almighty), the most compassionate and most merciful. All praises and glory due to Allah(s). I bear witness there is no deity worthy of worshiping except Allah(s) and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) – who is the final messenger. There is no doubt it takes a village to raise a child! Allah(s) puts special people in our lives. No one who achieves success does so without the help of others. There are so many people to whom I owe a thank you - two small words that convey the infinite feeling in my heart.

First, I acknowledge my mother. Although she did not progress beyond elementary school, she tried to learn how to read, write and speak English at the age of 70. In sharing with her 16 children and 17 grandchildren, she has always said, “Not knowing is embarrassing; learning is not.” After the passing of my father when I was only ten years of age, my mother raised a family based upon the tenet of unconditional love and care for one another. Within the web of love she created, I was lucky enough to have siblings who supported and helped each other in doing the right thing the right way. While giving her high school graduation speech, my little sister, Tahrin Siddiqua, MD, stated, “Anything worth having, you have to work for.”

My collective “family” is not restricted to my mother’s 16 children and 17 grandchildren; rather, our family consists of our uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, in-laws. With each of them in mind, a singular intention prevails – namely, if I fell short in giving your rights in the process of accomplishing this monumental task, please forgive me. Of course, no spouse can become better without the better half. If I were to mention every name in our family, I would run out of space. Nonetheless, I must mention of two family members in particular – first, my uncle, Mr. Abdul Wahid, CPA, who pushed all of us for

earning higher education. Secondly, I must mention one of my editors, our son, Nabid Ahmed, MD, whose time and thoughts were of immense help. Thank you Allison Laubach Wright for the editing.

I must also praise the bridge that carried me over. When I came from Bangladesh in 1984, and in this long and demanding journey, the Cypress Fairbanks ISD faculty and staff became my surrogate parents. With them, I found a new home away from home, and a new family who inspired me to become an educator in life. I also thank all of the wonderful people at the College of Education at the University of Houston for truly modeling best practices. I will always remember my committee members - Drs. Steven Busch, Wayne Emerson, Angus MacNeil, my methodologist, and Allen Warner, the Chairman, without whom I could not have accomplished this Doctor of Education. Dr. Warner: your time, thoughts, patience and your entire personality are remarkable. Dr. MacNeil: your guidance and instruction has been awesome. Dr. Emerson: you always engaged my thinking processes and went the extra mile for me. Dr. Busch: you are like my older brother – one who listens, gives hopes, and stands by.

Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Dan Houston for his great help from the beginning of this process. I appreciate him so much for all his assistance with data, time, help and support.

## **DEDICATION**

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to the following groups and individuals:

1. Our children of the family: Emran Ahmed Khan, Anira Rashid, Nabid Ahmed, Norma Islam, Maliha Ahmed, Shadid Ali Ahmed, Anisah Khan, Tahmid Ali Ahmed, Heeba Ali Ahmed, Obaid Ali Ahmed, Nafisah Ali Ahmed, Nooha Ali Ahmed, Tawhid Ali Ahmed, Safaa Ali Ahmed, Thayiba Ali Ahmed, Samah Ali Ahmed, Anaya Siddiqua Kabir, Tanzila Ali Ahmed, and more...
2. All Educators.
3. All of those who care to improve the graduation rate among America's high school students.

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Ahmed, Shaik. “ Understanding Parental Choice of A Charter School.” Unpublished Doctor of Education Doctoral Thesis, University of Houston, December, 2012.

### **ABSTRACT**

The overall condition of education within the state of Texas, as well as the nation as a whole, depends greatly upon the efforts and contributions offered by students’ parents. In fact, the overall success of a student hinges critically on the shared network of relationships between parents, students, and the educators. The future of the state of Texas is critically linked to the future of the students. Subsequently, increasing dropout rates have translated to significant and negative societal impacts for all citizens. The education system is wholly responsible for educating the children of our state; yet, public schools continue to struggle in their efforts to increase parental involvement in the school-based lives and activities of the students. Although the factors influencing levels of parental involvement often reside outside the educational system’s locus of control, the increasing number of student dropouts will result in devastating effects on both the citizens and the economy of Texas. In a general sense, this study explored whether the Charter school model in Texas can be transferable to parent involvement best practices in various other systems and districts across the state.

The study explored the various reasons behind parents’ decision-making processes when applying to Charter school institutions. The research methodology utilized in the present study was a survey method designed through a quantitative and qualitative query from parents who elect to enroll their children in specific charter schools (labeled “STAR” schools for purpose of anonymity). Specifically, the research attempted to answer the following questions:



1. What are the important factors that parents consider when deciding to choose a particular school?
2. What are the most important factors that result in parent satisfaction with their child's school?
3. What are the most important factors that result in parent dissatisfaction with their child's school?

This study supports the implication for practice in two areas: (a) improvements at the charter school level, and (b) improvement at the public school level. Although data were collected from the charter school level, the data can be applied to the public school level as well.

A take home conclusion from this study is that, although parents do find certain features more important than others, the data collected show that a majority of parents found all ten of the survey's features, which included convenient location, academic programs, school and class size, quality of teachers, extracurricular activities, parent communication and involvement, discipline and safety, school culture and climate, and special programs, to be important or very important.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Introduction**

The educational success of each individual child is critical to the future success of the United States as a whole. Some of the primary indicators of local, state, and national level educational quality are student dropout rates and graduation rates. The overall graduation rate in Texas has increased moderately over the last decade; however, there are still more than 130,000 Texas students who enter high schools as 9th-graders who will not graduate with their class (Hallman, 2005). The United States Department of Education (2008) ranks the state of Texas as 36th nationally with a 71.9 percent graduation rate. Another estimate, using a formula called the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI), indicates that only 64.5 percent of Texas students graduate within their four-year secondary school period. The dropout rate statistic represents the percentage of 16-through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate). Ultimately, the American education system's inability to stem the tide of student dropouts will eventually result in serious and negative societal impacts on everyone in Texas.

#### **Defining the Student Dropout: Finding Common Ground**

The calculation of dropout rates varies according to how the concept is defined, and by how individual groups interpret such definitions. Studies show that a variety of definitions are used (Hammack, 1986; MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, Borthwick-Duffy, & Hendrick, 1990; Thurlow, Johnson, & Sinclair, 2002). Areas contributing to

definitional confusion are, indeed, multifarious at best; deviant at worse. More simply, there are a great number of definitions being utilized. Unfortunately, there have been recorded cases in which administrators use these different definitions to their advantage, and to the students' detriment.

Furthermore, a variety of different grade levels, and even age ranges, are used to classify and frame the parameters of the definition of a "dropout". For instance, some figures include only tenth- through twelfth-grade within such definitions, which is particularly troubling when one considers the significant recidivism that alters dropout statistics during a students' academic transition from ninth- to tenth-grade. In direct contrast, other school systems do, in fact, include comprehensive data, which span ninth-through twelfth-grade, in order to establish the "dropout" definition.

Another issue contributing to the difficulty associated with outlining a fixed "student dropout" definition, is that some systems use a wide variation with respect to the length of time students are allow to be absent before they are officially considered dropouts. The number of days can range anywhere from 15 to 45 days of unexcused absence. Another administrative tactic – for better or worse – involves school practice that allows for a wide variation in the length of the accounting period, during which dropout rates are calculated.

Some schools also exclude various student groups from overall calculations related to student dropout rates (e.g., those who receive special education services). In addition, some school systems can have significant differences related to the actual programs that count toward school/campus enrollment. Some calculations include



students enrolled in GED programs, night school, or other alternative programs, and some only include those enrolled in traditional day schools.

Moreover, in addition to the definition problems stated above, clerical problems and accounting procedures for students add to the difficulty of obtaining an accurate picture of the dropout rate. This becomes particularly complicated as they transfer in and out of programs. The lack of effective communication and tracking procedures between public and private schools, and within school districts and across districts, leads to misidentification and inaccurate calculations. For students with emotional/behavioral disabilities who change schools often, accurate documentation of exit and entrance into schools over time may be especially challenging (Sinclair, Christenson, Thurlow, & Evelo, 1994).

### **Implications of Inconsistency in Defining and Calculating Dropout**

There have been numerous attempts to identify the best way to calculate the dropout rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). When the definition of dropout and the manner in which it is calculated are not consistent, comparisons are difficult to make, and – if one wants to make a comparison – their interpretations may be faulty. For instance, many states are currently revising their definitions and methods of calculating dropout, which will limit comparability across time. Declines or increases in the longitudinal or cohort dropout rate must be carefully examined to determine whether legitimate comparisons have been made.

Comparing the progress of students with disabilities to their peers without disabilities is especially complicated, because the definition of dropout and calculation differ between the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the National Center

for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data. For example, current OSEP publications (see, for example, US Department of Education, 2001) calculate the dropout rate by dividing the number of students aged 14 and older by the total number of students in the same age group who are known to have left school (i.e., graduated with a standard diploma, received a certificate of completion, reached maximum age for services, died, or dropped out). NCES calculates the dropout rate by dividing the number of 9th-12th grade dropouts by the number of 9th -12th grade students who were enrolled the year before (NCES, 2002). Although both calculations yield an annual or event dropout rate, NCES specifies that counts be conducted on October 1 (i.e., October 1, 1997 – October 1, 1998), while OSEP allows states to choose their twelve-month reporting period.

Researchers continue to argue over how to measure the dropout rate; however, they agree on one point: It is much too high, particularly for Hispanic and black students. According to Gamboa (2007), Hispanics represent the group with the highest dropout rates at 30-35%. Their percentage is 2.5 times higher than that of African-American dropout rates, and 3.5 % times the rate of Whites. Regardless of these dismal statistics, it behooves educators to implement quality, student needs-based systems that can be used to attract students in a similar manner in which businesses attract & retain customers. If innovative strategies and educational approaches are not implemented, student disenfranchisement and dropout rates will continue to soar.

Furthermore, given that such large numbers of America's children are either wading or sinking due to educational inefficiency, educators have a number of possible options to promote students' educational livelihood: (a) they can hold fast to current models of educational reform, which has not resulted in significant change within recent

years; (b) they can adopt a completely novel educational system altogether, such as the formation of Charter school institutions; or (c) they can adopt incremental, systemic educational changes that are modeled after what pragmatically works in education. These three options obviously represent gross possibilities within the complicated world of education. However, the third option is particularly salient, because innovative collaboration is implicit in its implementation. That is, school programs will be implementing what *actually* works and has produced results, regardless of whether such practices are derived from traditional public education or from Charter school institutions.

The educational system's core principle is founded on the notion that both traditional schools & public Charters are jointly responsible for the education of our state's children. Nonetheless, there is a common perception among Charter school parent applicants that such schools offer their children a renewed sense of hope, significant opportunities for future academic success, and a strong environment of high student expectations.

It should be clearly noted here that the purpose of this particular project does not intend to establish the claim that Charter schools in and of themselves are an educational panacea. Some research points to insignificant or negative impacts related to Charter school students outcomes, while other studies suggest positive findings; thus, the effects of such schools remains unclear (Imberman, 2007). In fact, the relatively unique individual campus demographics and structures often make large-scale replication difficult to implement within separate educational systems.

Nevertheless, research shows that many parents cite moral values, discipline, or safety (rather than test scores or academic culture) as primary reasons for sending their children to Charter schools (Weiher & Tedin, 2002). Therefore, rather than identifying systemically-based factors that account the Charter schools' recent success & popularity, this project will examine parents' perception set in order to understand how Charter school applicants' decision-making patterns are related to overall student outcomes and school quality.

### **Need for the Study**

Texas's future is tied to its students' future. According to Booker, Gill, and Zimmer (2010), 30% of students drop out before obtaining a diploma from traditional schools. Due to this astonishing statistic, assessing alternatives to traditional high school is an urgent task (Booker et al., 2010).

The latest study of the state's dropouts from the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University moves beyond merely calculating dropout rates. In fact, such examination serves to enumerate the devastating effects upon both individual citizens and the Texas economy if dropout rates do not improve. Rapoport and Thevenot (2006) state the following:

The small picture: A high school dropout will likely make poverty-level wages of about \$14,500 yearly — about \$7,000 less than a graduate with no college, a gap likely to remain or widen over time. The big picture: dropouts subtracted between \$5 and \$9 billion annually from the gross state product of about \$1.2 trillion, according to the study, which examined probabilities of employment, wages and government aid

received, calculating the economic chasm between those who graduate and those who do not.

Steve Murdock, Texas's first state demographer and a current professor at Rice University, says that a broader view of the statistics paints a terrible picture. Namely, Murdock (2009) states that, by 2040, after more immigrants arrive to the U.S., about 30 percent of the state's work force will be without a high school diploma unless the state takes serious and immediate action. In addition, he states that the "state's public schools have more and more low-income kids and persistently high dropout rates - and unless that changes, the future of Texas will contain more long-term unemployment and poverty - and more folks depending on food stamps, Medicaid and CHIP." (Murdock, 2009) Furthermore, according to Rapoport and Thevenot (2006), the state can also expect higher incarceration rates as a direct corollary of high student dropout rates.

Therefore, it is imperative to study and replicate successful educational models as a means of affecting change to negative educational trends, such as exponentially high student dropout rates. In addition, it is advantageous for the leaders of the STAR charter school system examined in the present study to gain a multifarious understanding of the factors related to the maintenance of their current success, especially with regard to student dropout rates. Given that this study utilizes a participant data set from a large charter school system in Texas, understanding parental factors related to enrollment and student attainment can be used to glean a new understanding of how to alter the current state of education. Please note that the above pseudonym (i.e., "STAR" charter schools) will be used throughout the remainder of the present study, so that the researcher may focus on generalized neutrality with regard to system- and campus-based descriptions.

## **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the various reasons behind parents' decision-making processes when applying to Charter school institutions. Although causal representation within the data was not accounted for, the researcher attempted to isolate specific areas within the locus of control for Charter school leaders and stakeholders. Furthermore, although the research did not address direct links regarding how specific schools address dropout rates, the study participants were drawn from a unique educational environment that has maintained an extremely high record of success with regard to both graduation rates (100%) and dropout rates (0%). The STAR schools are currently the fastest-growing Charter school institution in the state of Texas, and their overall enrollment has been continuously increasing exponentially over the past 10 years. In fact, many applicants are placed on school waiting lists due to STAR's overall popularity, and due to the system's inability to meet the enormous demand for system-wide student applications.

Since the STAR school system examined in this study utilizes an open-enrollment, lottery-based charter school system, this project sought to understand parents' decision-making patterns regarding student enrollment. Identifying a base of understanding with regard to factors affecting parents' decision-making processes is imperative, because it will allow school leaders to determine whether such factors lie within their locus of control. For instance, if there is a correlational relationship between parental decision-making and school quality, this project may lead to the identification of best school practices that attract & retain student enrollment levels.

This project may also allow school administrators, leaders, and teachers to gauge and adjust their practices based on parental feedback. The ultimate intention of this study was for educators to understand what attracts parent applicants in the first place, so they can develop these areas – thus positively affecting both attrition and overall dropout rates. Secondly, it was the researcher’s intention that the results revealed from this project be useful for traditional public school systems by allowing them to gauge their own systemic areas of improvement in order to meet parental needs. Such improvements might, subsequently, be utilized to contribute to the competitive nature of traditional public schools and change parents’ perceptions about public education in general.

### **Research Questions**

The study explored the following questions:

1. What are the important factors that parents consider when deciding to choose a particular school?
2. What are the most important factors that result in parent satisfaction with their child’s school?
3. What are the most important factors that result in parent dissatisfaction with their child’s school?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents research literature related to two specific areas of examination: (a) Charter school quality and efficiency, particularly with regard to their contributions to increasing graduation rates and decreasing student dropout rates, and (b) parental decision-making practices in relation to school choice and Charter schools. Thus, the literature review will be divided into the following sections:

- Part I: Comparisons between Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools
- Part II: Parental Decision Making Patterns & School Choice

This comprehensive review attempts to link together the overall contextual factors of the project's environmental nesting model (i.e., the STAR schools) and factors related to parental school choice decisions. The literature review also highlights the dearth of research related to how both Charter schools and traditional public schools can learn from one another's educational systems for the betterment of public education as a whole.

#### **Comparisons between Charters Schools and Traditional Public Schools**

The current research related to charter schools points to the great difficulties associated with measuring student achievement on standardized tests and clearly identifying value-added qualities, and this has presented a daunting challenge (Bulkley, 1999, 2001; Hill et al., 2001; Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998). The lack of conclusive achievement and accountability research presents an interesting phenomenon, especially since student academic performance is a regularly referenced benefit of charter schools



(Finn et al., 2000; Nathan, 1996). Aside from catering directly to public opinions related to accountability and student success, charter schools – which may be best defined as public-private school hybrids – are often perceived as more accountable simply because their student performance results are directly linked to whether their schools remain open for the long-term (Finn et al. 2000).

One early research study, which drew data from 31 different charter schools, concluded that such schools accounted for marked improvements for both inner-city and rural students (Cheung et al., 1998). Through a combination of surveys and standardized tests, the researchers set out to answer the following three questions:

1. How are charter schools measuring student achievement?
2. What are charter schools doing to meet accountability requirements?
3. Do charter schools have an impact on student achievement?

Upon the conclusion of the project, the researchers concluded that 21 of the 31 sample charter schools improved student performance on two different standardized achievement tests since enrolling in their respective schools (Cheung et al., 1998). However, although their conclusions were presented favorably with regard to charter school effects, the researchers suggested (a) that charter institutions give special consideration to their definition of “accountability for results,” and (b) that the very notion of this term requires more discussion. Interestingly, as an additional recommendation, which served to draw lines of future debate between charter and non-charter school institutions, the researchers (Cheung et al., 1998) state that “it is important to be careful in making comparisons between achievement of charter school students and other public school students.”

Early charter school research findings are also critical in accounting for charter school effectiveness, especially when specifically referencing accountability and achievement between both separate charter systems and non-charter institutions. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education's First Year Report represented the first definitive charter school survey of its kind, which illustrated the student achievement impacts of 90 percent of all charter schools in operation between 1995 and 1996 (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). This comprehensive four-year national study, which utilized an interview protocol within 225 charter schools through 10 different states, found that there was enormous variation among schools in different states (Department of Education, 1997). Thus, the difficulty of accounting for individual student achievement and accountability gains by individual charter schools is inherently difficult simply due to the problem of identifying comparable comparison variables.

To compound this inherent comparison difficulty, other researchers (Cotton, 1996; Green, Forster, & Winters, 2003; Lopez, Wells, & Holme, 2002) note that charter schools tend to have higher representations of students with varied and diverse demographics and backgrounds, and that these institutions tend to enroll few students with special needs. For example, a Hudson Institute survey, which obtains data from students, teachers, and parents from 50 charters in ten states, describes charter schools as "havens for children who had bad educational experiences elsewhere." The study highlights that these schools are, in essence, a piecemeal compilation of unique student demographics (Vanourek et al., 1997). Interestingly, greater than 60 percent of the parents stated that charter schools are better than their children's previous schools in

terms of teaching quality, individual attention from teachers, curriculum, discipline, parent involvement, and overall academic standards.

Even though some studies highlighted significant state-to-state differences between charter schools, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) (2004) conducted analyses with nationwide scope. This research also utilizes the randomized, open-enrollment student lottery methodology employed in the previous study. Furthermore, this research also presents an “apples-to-apples” comparison between charter school students and students in traditional public schools by measuring all students’ performance on their state examinations in both reading and mathematics. The author states that the methodology facilitates a more accurate nationwide data comparison because “this study focuses on fourth graders, a sample of whom were tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2002-03 (Hoxby, 2004). Lastly, the researcher’s methodology closely matched participant charter schools and their students to traditional publics nearest them – thus, providing more comparable student demographics, such as racial, community, and socioeconomic circumstances.

Subsequently, as the result of this particular study revealed, charter schools show a number of advantages over their traditional public school counterparts. Firstly, when compared to the public schools nearest to them, charter students were more 4 percent for likely to demonstrate proficiency in reading, and 2 percent more likely to demonstrate proficiency in mathematics, on their statewide examinations (NBER, 2004). Secondly, when the same schools comparisons were conducted with regard to similar school areas and racial composition, again charter students were 5 percent more likely to be proficient in reading and 3 percent more likely to be proficient in math. Lastly, the research

indicated that students' proficiency "advantage" tended to be more pronounced within charter schools that were "well-established".

Another study, performed in Chicago and Florida, presented evidence that charter schools have a positive effect on high school completion and college attendance (Booker et al., 2010). Study results indicated that charter school students are 7 to 15 percent more likely to earn a high school diploma than traditional high school students. The study also demonstrated that in comparison to traditional school students, charter school students are more motivated and parents are more involved in their child's education (Booker et al., 2010). A separate study illustrated that a majority of parents believe that the charter schools their children attend were better than the traditional public school they previously attended. They feel this way with respect to multiple factors including class size, school size, teacher attentiveness, and quality of instruction and curriculum (Finn & Raub, 2006).

Charter school advocates and charter school researchers alike have made bold efforts to measure and account for positive results that confirm the notion that such schools add significant value to the students and families they serve. There is, however, a wealth of research that attests that charter school student outcomes are mixed at best and detrimental at worst. Foremost among such research, The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) (2009) at Stanford University, which drew from a 70% national coverage of all existing U.S. charter schools at the time, conducted a large-scale analysis of charter school impact on student performance. Specifically, this particular study assumed a formidable task – namely, share data with 16 different charter school states, and link these data into a longitudinal, comprehensive, and methodological framework.

The researchers' strongest claim is that while 17% of the charter school student participants displayed significantly higher math results in comparison with traditional public schools, 37% demonstrated significantly worse results (CREDO, 2009). Thus, such research held that charters may have mixed (or perhaps even lower) performance when compared with their public school counterparts.

As a direct response to the CREDO analyses, Hoxby (2009) fired back by developing a memorandum outlining the major statistical errors present in their research that resulted in a negative bias regarding how charter schools affect student achievement. The crux of the problem, Hoxby asserts, lies in its inaccurate use of matching methods to evaluate charter schools' effects. Namely, the research states, "the achievement of charter school students is measured with much more error than the achievement of the controls, which are not individual students but are group averages of students in the traditional public school" (Hoxby, 2009). Thus, according to the researcher, such unequal matching comparison constitutes an unreliable statistical result, which presents a substantially negative bias rather than a true and fair statistical comparison.

Subsequently, CREDO (2009b) published a paper titled *Fact vs. Fiction: An Analysis of Dr. Hoxby's Misrepresentation of CREDO's Research*, as a direct response to Hoxby's statistical criticism. In their response, CREDO researchers not only claim that Hoxby presents a misrepresentation of the actual models used, but also that the successively derived conclusions are, therefore, completely irrelevant to their initial results. First, the researchers assert that, rather than assuming that a separate relationship of achievement growth and prior achievement is being estimated for charter school students and for the traditional public school students, a single parameter from a pooled

relationship is estimated (CREDO, 2009b). Hence, the researchers state their method involves the mere comparison of the impact of either attending a charter school vs. attending a traditional public school and that Hoxby's claims are simply incorrect (i.e., that CREDO researchers used an absolute magnitude comparison). Secondly, they claim that Hoxby's critique is seriously flawed because it used a model different (i.e., only prior test score and school type) than what CREDO actually employed, which also included other covariates, such as race and free lunch status. Lastly, the authors claim that "her attempt to indicate the magnitude of bias is arbitrary and exaggerated," and that her interpretations of stated statistical models were both capricious as well as inconsistent with interpretations in the current research literature (CREDO, 2009b).

Nelson et al. (2004) also contributed to the charter school research literature by performing a national assessment of the effect of charter schools on student outcomes during 2003. These authors also subscribed to the CREDO notion that students attending charter schools may, in fact, demonstrate lower academic outcomes when compared with regular public schools. Their research indicated a number of salient findings to this end, such as:

1. Charter school students showed lower achievement scores in both 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in reading and mathematics.
2. Again in grades 4 and 8, charter school students showed a lower corresponding percentage of students performing at or above *Basic* and at or above *Proficient* when compared with traditional public schools.

3. When comparing students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, again charter school students in both 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades performed lower than public school students.
4. With regard to gaps in students' achievement, this research indicated that both charter schools and traditional public schools presented similar gaps; yet, charter schools tended to have wider deficits related to achievement in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math achievement.

(Nelson et al., 2004)

However, current charter school research has experienced a shift away from studies, which attempt to solely account for student achievement comparisons, by citing the issues of student selection bias and the limited scope regarding students' overall school success and achievement (Solmon & Goldschmidt, 2004; Ballou et al., 2006; Imberman, 2007). For example, in their study evaluating charter school impacts on the educational attainment in Chicago and Florida, Booker et al. (2008) found that both charter school samples produced substantial positive effects on both high school completion and college attendance. More specifically, the researchers found that those students who attended a charter middle school – then transitioned into a charter high school – were 7 to 15 percentage points more likely to earn a high school diploma (Booker et al., 2008). Furthermore, these same students were 8 to 10 percentage points more likely to attend college.

This research is particularly salient because it was the first of its kind to systematically address the central issue of student self-selection, and the problems inherent in attempting to make school comparisons using unequal, biased student

information. Hence, Booker et al. (2008) utilizes the following three methods to deal with the selection bias problem:

1. Researchers must control for observable differences between students prior to their entering into high school (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, and socioeconomic status).
2. Researchers must focus specifically on students who attended charter schools in their 8<sup>th</sup> grade (and then transitioned into charter high schools) as a basis for comparing charter schools and traditional public schools.
3. Researchers must exploit the location of charter schools to construct statistical instruments to account for why students chose (or did not choose) to attend particular charter schools (e.g. non-selection due to distance of home from school, no busing services provided, etc.).

Within this framework, this particular research is the first of its kind to highlight the finding that charter schools contribute positively to students' likelihood of secondary success, as well as the likelihood that students attending charter schools can increase their odds of attending a two- or four-year post-secondary institution.

The study also demonstrated that in comparison to traditional school students, charter school students are more motivated and parents are more involved in their child's education (Booker et al., 2010).

Research identifies that charter schools' basic purpose is to provide better educational opportunities for students served in their schools (Marsh, et al., 2009). The statistics in the above mentioned studies demonstrate that this ambition has led to positive results. Charter schools are [expanding their scope and] now employing the option of cyber charter or virtual schools as a



means of ensuring that the best opportunities are available to students and that various needs are accommodated. Charter school success has not gone unnoticed. The Los Angeles, CA, Board of Education has approved the hiring of a charter school management group to supervise the operations of their school districts in an attempt to elevate school performance (Maxwell, 2009).

### **Parental Decision Making Patterns & School Choice**

Most research on charter schools highlights whether charter schools outperform regular public schools in terms of academic achievement, but less attention is paid to the potential variation in parental expectations and satisfaction (Buckley & Schneider, 2009). However, currently there have been some changes in educational research related to comparing student achievement between charter and non-charter schools. Researchers are now beginning to include the perceptions and decision-making attributions in emerging studies. Many such studies illustrate that parents who apply to charter school institutions experience higher levels of school satisfaction, which may be due in large part to the perceptions of choice and enablement (Finn et al., 2000; Teske et al., 2000; Imberman, 2007). Furthermore, many parents' perceived satisfaction also relates to various factors in addition to a school's effects upon achievement, such as student exposure to culturally sensitive educational environments, increased individualized instruction, and environments more willing to utilize innovative educational approaches in comparison to traditional public schools (Schnaiberg, 2000).

The literature on parental involvement in child and adolescent education conveys the clear assumption that parental involvement has significant benefits on children's learning (e.g., Chavkin, 1993; eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1989, 1994; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Hobbs, Dokecki, Hoover-Dempsy, Moroney, Shane & Weeks, 1984;

U.S.Department of Education, 1994). More specifically, Fan and Chen (2001) performed a meta-analysis examining the effects of parental involvement on the general student population and concluded that parental involvement positively influenced educational outcomes.

A recent report from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory states, "When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more" (Jeynes, 2007). The report, which is a synthesis of research on parent involvement over the past decade, goes on to find that, according to Henderson and Mapp (2002), regardless of family income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs;
- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- Attend school regularly;
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

However, if parents have a central role in influencing their children's progress in school, research has shown that schools, in turn, have an important part to play in determining levels of parent involvement (Epstein, 2001). Thus, school staff, teachers, and school leaders all share the critical responsibility of functioning as parental “connectors” to ensure and record parents’ level of involvement. Working to include parents is particularly important as students grow older, as well as in schools with high concentrations of poor and minority students (Rutherford et al., 1997).

For the purpose of this study, parental involvement was defined as parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children. This definition is based on the most prominent research and theorizing in this discipline, which is important when conducting a meta-analysis (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). With these facts in mind, the first research question focuses on the degree of association between parental involvement and achievement outcomes among urban studies.

The impacts of parental involvement:

School age children spend 70% of their waking hours (including weekends and holidays) outside of school (Clark, R.M. (1990). *Why Disadvantaged Children Succeed*. Public Welfare (Spring): 17-23).

When Parents Should Get Involved:

The earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects (Cotton, K., Wikeland, K., Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In *Parent Involvement in Education*).

The most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home (Cotton, K., Wikeland, K., Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In *Parent Involvement in Education*).

Impact:

86% of the general public believes that support from parents is the most important way to improve the schools (Rose, Gallup, & Elam, 1997).

Lack of parental involvement is the biggest problem facing public schools (Rose, Gallup, & Elam, 1997). Decades of research show that when parents are involved students have:

- Higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates;
- Better school attendance;
- Increased motivation, better self-esteem;
- Lower rates of suspension;
- Decreased use of drugs and alcohol; and
- Fewer instances of violent behavior.

Family participation in education was twice as predictive of students' academic success as family socioeconomic status. Some of the more intensive programs had effects that were 10 times greater than other factors (Walberg (1984) in his review of 29 studies of school–parent programs).

The more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects (Cotton, K., Wiklund, K., Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In Parent Involvement in Education).

The more parents participate in schooling in a sustained way at every level -- in advocacy, in decision-making and oversight roles, as fund-raisers and boosters, as volunteers and para-professionals, and as home teachers -- the better for student achievement (Williams, D.L. & Chavkin, N.F. (1989). Essential elements of strong parent involvement programs. *Educational Leadership*, 47, 18-20).

The work of Joyce Epstein (2009) thoroughly delineates the critical relationship between parental engagement, families, and schools, and she proposes that specific key

stakeholders *must* share responsibility – namely, family members and campus-level educators. Epstein cites that family instills in students the value of education, academic work, and interest for success. Epstein’s seminal work is particularly pragmatic and concise; nevertheless, the unfortunate reality, which is clearly supported through educational research statistics, is that partnerships between community, family, and schools tend to decline across the grades. Adding to the difficulty of securing exceptional school-parental partnership, economically disadvantaged communities show significantly less parental involvement in school (perhaps due directly to employment-related schedules alone), and parental involvement in general is often perceived in terms of a passive approach (i.e., the false notion that if the school is not contacting the parent(s) or organizing specific events, all must be well).

Epstein (2009) presents six types of involvement and purports that this type of involvement is beneficial to particular outcomes related to students, parents, teachers, and school climate, respectively. With reference to the student outcome of focus within the present study, research clearly demonstrates that for those students whose parents are more involved, they perform better in academic subjects and are less likely to dropout (Stevenson and Baker, 1987; Rood, 1988; Henderson, 1987; Jacob, 1983; Comer, 1984; Walberg, 1984; McCormick, 1989). In short, these parent partnership practices promote holistic practices that can impact students’ attitudes, attendance, and behavior.

Epstein's work, related to the six types of involvement, also offers a sample of practices (or activities) that provide practitioners with a greater sense of accomplishment while working directly with parents. Furthermore, her work also describes the challenges inherent in fostering each type of parent involvement and the expected results of

implementing these practices for students, parents, and teachers. The following is a list that further describes Epstein's framework:

1. **Parenting:** This involves helping all families establish home environments that will be supportive for students learning and academic growth. This may also include parental education or other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy). This particular area also focuses on family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services. Home visits are also encouraged at transition points between pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school.
2. **Communicating:** This area involves the design of effective forms of school-to-home, and home-to-school, communication about school programs and children's progress, which may involve a minimum requirement of an annual parent conference. Given that communication is such a critical item, particularly if there is any hope of building and developing trust between parties, it behooves schools to utilize language translators to families whose native language is one other than English. In terms of periodic communication (or "follow ups"), schools should regularly employ useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and various other communications.
3. **Volunteering:** Epstein suggests that school leaders and teachers actively recruit parents as volunteers within the school community. Although not encouraged to undertake direct classroom instruction, parent volunteers can significantly and positively contribute to the work of teacher, administrators, and school support staff, as well as lend various resources to other families in the process. More

importantly, schools are encouraged to support parents who would like to become an active and respected part of the school community, which can be accomplished through the organization of parent rooms (or centers), which can be utilized for volunteer work, meetings, and family resources. Additionally, the administration of an annual parent survey may help school leaders identify exactly how parents might be most effectively included within the school's daily flow.

4. **Learning at Home:** This area involves providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework, other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. In addition, this area of involvement involves the dissemination of information to families regarding the skills required for students in all subjects at each grade. This information includes topics related to homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork from home.
5. **Decision Making:** This area of parental involvement relates directly, and critically, to the inclusion of parents in school decisions. This may occur through developing parent leaders or representatives, participating in PTA/PTO or other parent organizations (e.g. advisory councils), or committees for parent leadership and participation. In addition, this process may involve the participation of independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.
6. **Collaborating with Community:** This area of involvement relates to identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. School leaders and teachers should also focus on sharing information with students and

families concerning community health, cultural activities, recreational programs, social support, and other services. Finally, this dissemination of information should serve to empower parents and families to engage in community activities that link directly to the learning skills and talents of their child(ren). Some of these activities include summer programs or special educationally-based events.

With regard to the connection between parental involvement, student attendance issues, and the likelihood of eventual student dropout, Sheppard (2009) indicates that those students with good attendance were more apt to complete homework, remain engaged in school curriculum and classes, and perceive their parents as more involved in their schooling. More importantly, the inverse was found to be quite true for those students experiencing significant issues related to absenteeism. Hence, this study also observed a positive correlation between good attendance and achievement. Sheppard (2009) states, “family circumstances and parental interest in and attitude to education accounted for significantly more of the variation in children’s school achievement than school factors.” From these studies, it can be derived that more parental involvement has a positive impact on student attendance and student achievement. Coleman (1966) states, “In fact, most students cited that...they needed more parental involvement before attendance became a significant issue.

Charter school research in Texas schools has demonstrated a number of interesting findings related to both student achievement and – most importantly for this section of the literature review – parental decision making patterns related to school quality.



Research has shown that there are numerous reasons why parents select charter schools for their children; however, some reasons are more significant and stand out. Many parents choose charter schools because no other viable options are available. Additionally, private school may not be a feasible selection due to its higher cost. The family also may be unable to relocate to the suburbs where most high achieving traditional schools are located. Moreover, parents may perceive homeschooling as too relaxed and not a strong alternative, because the home-school approach is often less restrictive, while charter schools offer a more structured approach to learning (Ahmed-Ullah, 2009). Finally, one of the most prominent reasons for parent selection of charter schools over traditional schools is due to dissatisfaction (Marsh, et al., 2009). Parents often become frustrated when they recognize that the traditional school system fails to allow children to reach their full potential (Marsh, et al., 2009). This dissatisfaction, coupled with the reasons highlighted above, that has led a significant number of parents to reject the traditional classroom setting and reach out to the charter school system.

Research has shown that many parents believe charter schools provide better educational opportunities for their children. Researchers with Policy Matters in Ohio find that Ohio students that start kindergarten in a charter school outperform their traditional school student equivalents by an average of 10% (Green, 2003). Additionally, parents feel charter schools are able to do this by utilizing a better educational curriculum compared to traditional schools, providing more of a challenge to the children, granting ample time for slower learners to complete objectives, pre-testing students before beginning new topics, and requiring that students master subjects before advancing to the next level (Ahmed-Ullah, 2009).

A separate study illustrates that a majority of parents believe that the charter schools their children attend are better than the traditional public school they previously attended. They

feel this way with respect to multiple factors including class size, school size, teacher attentiveness, and quality of instruction and curriculum (Finn & Raub, 2006).

Hanushek et al. (2003) find that Texas charters tended to undergo a difficult “start-up” period; however, once these schools became better established (a period of two-to-three years), they were as successful as traditional public schools with regard to average value-added measures in reading and mathematics achievement. Moreover, the researchers illustrate that parent decisions to either enter or exit a particular institution – regardless of whether it be a charter or non-charter school – was more closely related to a clear externality, especially for lower income students (Hanushek, 2004). Stated more clearly, the reasons why some students leave school is more related to external factors, such as changes in housing, family income, structure, or changes to employment status within the family.

Another interesting finding related to Hanushek’s (2004) research findings is that these parent decision-making patterns can have subsequent and cumulative effects on overall school quality and also sustain a students’ academic achievement levels. The adverse effects of student turnover – particularly upon mid-year student entry in charter schools – are especially pronounced for lower income and minority students. Thus, although there may be negative effects upon charter schools students’ achievement due to attrition, this study also suggests that there are significant effects to the school as a whole, due to their open-enrollment student entry processes. A unique research finding of particular relevance is that charter schools that can effectively control patterns for student entry and exit (i.e. attrition), can better regulate student academic performance outcomes.

As a corollary, they may also be able to positively influence parents' perceptions of overall school quality (Imberman, 2007).

Other research has accounted for parents' growing dissatisfaction with both the educational quality and bureaucracy within traditional public school districts and institutions (Jenkins & Dow, 1996). With such disillusion in mind, Professor Frank Smith, of Columbia University Teachers College, presents the notion that charter-schools' present educators, communities, and parents have the unique opportunity to work together in redesigning all schools and creating "client-centered, learning cultures" (Smith, 1997). Namely, Professor Smith favors the Advocacy Center Design process, used by state-appointed Superintendent Laval Wilson, to transform four failing New Jersey schools. Building stronger communities via newly designed institutions may prove more productive than charters' typical "free-the-teacher-and-parent" approach.

### **Brief History of Student Dropout Rates in Texas**

In their 1987 statute, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) first defined a "dropout" as a student in Grades 7-12 who did not hold a high school diploma or the equivalent and who was absent from school for 30 or more consecutive days with no evidence of being enrolled in another public or private school" (TEC §11.205, 1988). As implemented by the State Board of Education (an elected 15 member board that oversees the public education system of Texas in accordance with the Texas Education Code [TEC]), there were students that were granted exclusions from the dropout criteria. Students who returned to school the following semester or school year were excluded from the definition. (Title 19 of the Texas Administrative Code [TAC] §61.64, 1988). The first

Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) dropout records were submitted for students who dropped out during the 1987-88 school year.

The original dropout definition in the 1988-1989 PEIMS Data Standards did not count as dropouts: (a) students who received GED certificates; (b) students who left to enter other educational settings leading to high school diplomas, GED certificates, or college degrees; (c) students who withdrew to enter health care facilities; and (d) students incarcerated in correctional facilities (TEA, 1989). When the age of compulsory attendance was raised from 16 to 17 in 1989, an exemption from the dropout definition was added for students who were at least 17 years old and enrolled in GED preparation programs (TEC §§21.032 and 21.033, 1990).

Beginning with 1992-93 dropout rates, TEA searched dropout data for prior years to identify previously reported dropouts. Because students who return to school after dropping out are more likely to drop out again, repeat dropouts were removed from the dropout count so as not to discourage districts from trying to recover these students. In addition, beginning in 1992-93, a student expelled for committing certain types of criminal actions on school property or at a school-related event was removed from the dropout count if the term of expulsion had not expired.

In 1994-95, the dropout definition itself was removed from state law and SBOE rule. Legislative direction at the time indicated that the intention in deleting the dropout definition from code was to not count students, who otherwise had met all coursework requirements for a diploma but left school without passing the exit-level test, as dropouts. Furthermore, beginning that year, students who withdrew from school to return to their

home countries were not counted as dropouts, even if the districts did not have evidence that the students had reenrolled in school.

Then, in 1999, the legislature added two groups of student classifications to those who were exempt from the overall dropout count. Senate Bill (SB) 1472 exempted students who were at least 16 and enrolled in Job Corps programs (TEC §25.086, 1999). SB 103 exempted all expelled students from the dropout count during the terms of expulsion (TEC §39.051, 1999).

In 2003, the Texas Legislature passed SB 186, which amended the language on the dropout indicator. SB 186 required districts to report dropout data, and the TEA to compute dropout rates, graduation rates, and completion rates consistent with the standards and definitions of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (TEC §39.051(b)(2), 2004). Under the NCES definition, a dropout is a student who is enrolled in public school in Grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and someone who does not graduate, receive a GED, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). Districts began collecting information according to the new dropout definition and procedures in 2005-06. For a description of the changes to the dropout definition and leaver reporting resulting from the adoption of the NCES dropout definition, see Appendix B. This is the fourth graduation, completion, and dropout report to use the new definition.

Finally, in 2009, the legislature passed HB 3, requiring that the TEA exclude six groups of students from dropout and completion rates when evaluating dropout and completion data for accreditation and performance ratings: (1) previous dropouts; (2)

students for whom school districts are not receiving state Foundation School Program (FSP) funds (usually because the students are being served fewer than two hours of instruction per day); (3) students who have been ordered by courts to attend GED programs but have not earned GED certificates; (4) students who are incarcerated in state jails and federal penitentiaries as adults and as persons certified to stand trial as adults; (5) students whose initial enrollment in a school in the United States in Grades 7 through 12 was as unschooled refugees or asylees; and (6) students detained in county detention facilities that are located outside the students' home districts (TEC §39.053, 2009). The exclusions apply beginning with students who attend in 2010-11, which will affect rates calculated in the 2011-12 school year.

### **Charter Schools**

According to Texas Education Agency (TEA), charter schools are primary or secondary schools that are a new type of public school. They receive public money, as well as private donations. The revision of the Texas Education Code in 1995 developed the idea of Charter Schools to promote local initiative. These schools have fewer regulations than other public schools in exchange for accountability in the schools results, in accordance to each schools' charter. The purpose of charter schools is to improve student learning, increase learning opportunities, establish accountability in a new form, create professional development to attract new teachers, and to encourage original learning methods.

### **Charter School Funding**

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), attending charter school is the same as public school; there is no cost for the student. The charter school finance is taken

care of by the Foundation School Program (FSP). Charter schools receive state funds based on the average daily attendance (ADA) of the students. If the schools provide transportation for the students they get additional state funds. To calculate how much funding the charter school collects, changes are made to the ADA based on the number of students in special education, career and technology education, ESL, and other programs.

Charter schools also receive grants based on certain criteria. One source is the Public Charter School Start-Up Grant. Some of the requirements include: a campus charter school approved by its local board of trustees, an open-enrollment charter school permitted by the State Board of Education, an open-enrollment charter school chosen by the commissioner of education, on or before January 12, 2012, and a college, university, or junior college charter school approved by the State Board of Education. Also, they must fit the federal definition of a charter school and never receive a Public School Start-Up Grant.

### **Charter School Funding Formulas**

According to Texas Education Agency (TEA), the funding of charter schools is based on the funding per ADA calculated based on the law since January 1, 2009 plus an additional \$120 per ADA, or funding based on the state wide average formula. The funding of charter schools depends on the first day of works of the charter. Charter schools that were in action on or before September 1, 2001, are referred to as “resident district” charter schools. For the school year 2009–2010, 30 percent of the funding for resident district charters were based on the amount of state aid the sending district earned for each student (calculated using the sending district’s adjusted allotment and enrichment tax rate). The additional 70 percent of state funding for a resident district

charter school is based on the state average formula, which uses a state average adjusted allotment and a state average enrichment tax rate. This is the resident district dependent formula.

Charter schools that began operations after September 1, 2001, are referred to as “statewide average” charter schools. The funding system for statewide average charter schools is based entirely on the statewide average funding per weighted student (calculated using the state average adjusted allotment and state average enrichment tax rate). This is the state average formula.

### **Charter School Teacher Qualification Standards**

According to Texas Education Agency (TEA), under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) all open-enrollment charter school teachers require a bachelors degree and must have great competency in the core academic areas in which they want to teach in order to be highly certified. Special education teachers also need to be certified accordingly. However, the NCLB does not require all charter school teachers to be fully certified. For the Texas Education Code Charter School Certification requirements, teachers need a high school diploma and certification is only required for Special education and bilingual education. For the No Child Left Behind Charter School Highly Qualified requirements teachers are required a bachelor degree in their core academic areas. They must follow the state certification requirements for charter schools and demonstrate competency according to requirements for elementary or secondary teachers.

### **Charter School Salary Scales**

Charter school teacher salary plans are based on the salary schedule for public school teachers in the district, while other charter schools offer lower or higher salaries



according to their charter. Each school has a different salary since teacher salaries vary widely. A study showed that 46 percent of charter schools offer performance-based pay incentives.

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Dropout Rate:** The status dropout rate represents the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate).

**Charter Schools:** A charter school is a state-supported public school operating under a contract issued by a public body, such as a university. Charter schools may include grades K-12, or any combination, and they can have areas of specialization, such as music or technology. They cannot charge tuition, and the students that apply to the facility may not be screened out based on race, religion, sex, or test scores. Charter schools and public schools receive much of their money from their per-pupil allotment from the state. Public schools receive more than \$7,000 per pupil. When a student leaves a public school to attend a charter school, that money follows the student.

**Charter School Applicant:** Given that the parent(s) are the parties responsible for the initiation and completion of student enrollment applications, this title will specifically refer to parents themselves rather than students. In fact, research illustrates that students tend to adopt the decision-making and belief patterns of their parents in general.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study was to examine parental perceptions of STAR school parents within the greater and surrounding area of Houston, TX. The objective of the study was to examine and understand the various reasons why parents select this charter school for their children. In addition, this examination enabled the researcher to more effectively link these decision making patterns to objective, school-based factors (e.g., academics, school safety and security, etc.). Lastly, since this study accessed a Charter school environment, the researcher intends that the result of this study be used to inform other traditional public school districts with regard to school factors important to parents. This chapter includes the methods and procedures utilized in the study, which is organized as follows: (a) research design, (b) the population and sample, (c) data analysis, (d) instrumentation, and (d) procedures.

#### **Research Questions**

The researcher addressed the following questions in this study:

1. What are the important factors that parents consider when deciding to choose a particular school?
2. What are the most important factors that result in parent satisfaction with their child's schools?
3. What are the most important factors that result in parent dissatisfaction with their child's school?

## **Survey Questions Pertaining to the Research Questions**

**Research question one.** What are the important factors that parents consider when deciding to choose a particular school?

This particular research question was measured via the following survey questions and responses:

### **Survey Question # 7**

Thinking about your child's education, how important are the following factors in your decision to choose a school?

- Convenient location
- Academic Programs
- School Size
- Class Size
- Discipline and Safety
- School culture and Climate
- Special Programs (e.g. Special Education, Dyslexia, ESL, and Gifted & Talented)
- The Quality of Teachers
- Extracurricular Activities (e.g. Sports, Clubs, etc.)
- Parent Involvement and Communication
- Recommendations from Other People, Family Members or Friends
- Other (Please Specify)

### Survey Question #8

How satisfied are you with specific features of STAR Schools?

- Convenient Location
- Academic Program
- School Size
- Class Size
- Discipline and Safety
- School Culture and Climate
- Special Programs (e.g. Special Education, Dyslexia, ESL, and Gifted & Talented)
- The Quality of Teachers
- Extracurricular Activities (e.g. Sports, Clubs, etc.)
- Parent Involvement and Communication
- Recommendations from Other People, Family Members or Friends
- Other (Please Specify)

**Research question two.** What are the most important factors that result in parent satisfaction with their child's school?

This particular research question was measured via the following survey questions and responses:

### Survey Question #8

How satisfied are you with specific features of STAR Schools?

- Convenient Location
- Academic Program

- School Size
- Class Size
- Discipline and Safety
- School Culture and Climate
- Special Programs (e.g. Special Education, Dyslexia, ESL, and Gifted & Talented)
- The Quality of Teachers
- Extracurricular Activities (e.g. Sports, Clubs, etc.)
- Parent Involvement and Communication
- Recommendations from Other People, Family Members or Friends
- Other (Please Specify)

#### Survey Question # 9

Thinking about you and your child's experience with STAR Schools, please rate the 5 most important factors that results in your satisfaction with STAR Schools (1: being the most important):

Not Important/Somewhat Important/Important/Very Important

- Convenient Location
- Academic Program
- School Size
- Class Size
- Discipline and Safety
- School Culture and Climate
- Special Programs (e.g. Special Education, Dyslexia, ESL, and Gifted & Talented)

- The Quality of Teachers
- Extracurricular Activities (e.g. Sports, Clubs, etc.)
- Parent Involvement and Communication
- Recommendations from Other People, Family Members or Friends
- Other (Please Specify)

**Research question three.** What are the most important factors that result in parent dissatisfaction with their child's school?

This final research question was measured via the following survey question and responses:

Survey Question #8

How satisfied are you with specific features of STAR Schools?

- Convenient Location
- Academic Program
- School Size
- Class Size
- Discipline and Safety
- School Culture and Climate
- Special Programs (e.g. Special Education, Dyslexia, ESL, and Gifted & Talented)
- The Quality of Teachers
- Extracurricular Activities (e.g. Sports, Clubs, etc.)
- Parent Involvement and Communication
- Recommendations from Other People, Family Members or Friends
- Other (Please Specify)

### Survey Question #10

Thinking about you and your child's experience with STAR Schools, please rate the 5 most important factors that result in your dissatisfaction with STAR Schools (1: being the most important):

Not Important/Somewhat Important/Important/Very Important

- Convenient Location
- Academic Program
- School Size
- Class Size
- Discipline and Safety
- School Culture and Climate
- Special Programs (e.g. Special Education, Dyslexia, ESL, and Gifted & Talented)
- The Quality of Teachers
- Extracurricular Activities (e.g. Sports, Clubs, etc.)
- Parent Involvement and Communication
- Recommendations from Other People, Family Members or Friends
- Other (Please Specify)

### Internet Survey

Western Europe, the United States, Japan, and Australia have many forms of data collection, but the least expensive form is online research. A comparison of participating research agencies was performed, and the results showed that, in most cases, online research is about three-quarters of the overall cost of telephone interviewing.

Moreover, telephone interviewing is approximately three-quarters of the cost of face-to-face interviewing.

In-depth analysis of Internet interviewing illustrates that it bears several similarities to other forms of interviewing. This includes methods such as paper-and-pencil interviewing (PAPI), computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). Internet interviewing can be viewed as an amalgamation or extension of these traditional interview modes. However, internet data collection offers numerous benefits over conventional methods. Despite its lower cost, the internet entertains the option of graphical or animated presentations, such as a visual display of probabilities via pie charts or exploding scales. Furthermore, when comparing Internet surveys to traditional surveys, the response rate to Internet surveys was higher for some subpopulations. The higher response rate is supported by the claim that very busy or people with uncompromising schedules are often more willing to participate in an interview when they can independently select their own time and place. Moreover, Internet surveys allow for dividing interviews into less time consuming sections. By segregating a larger interview into smaller interviews during a longer period of time, the respondent feels less burden and actually might share more information than would otherwise be possible. Additionally, internet surveys are less subject to social desirability bias, because an interviewer is not present while the subject is answering questions. Finally, it is possible for data collection via the Internet to be made available for use rapidly, even in real time.

Paradata, which are also known as the term “process data”, contain information about many aspects of the primary data collection process, including survey duration,



interim status of a case, navigational errors, etc. Paradata can provide surveyors a way to have additional control over, or understanding of, the quality of the primary data collection process.

The climate of survey methodology has been turbulent and in constant flux recently as technological advances have challenged our beliefs about conventional data collection methods. Currently, researchers and investigators have more data collection techniques at their disposal than ever before. Furthermore, the hesitancy to mix all of these data collection modes within a single survey is fading. A few of the data collection measures at our disposal illustrate how the climate is changing in the world of survey methodology, what forces are influencing the changes, and what the possible consequences may be. By the time investigators can fully understand one change, others are already under way due to the rate and nature of change in technology and survey methodology. The state of the climate in the future is in flux and therefore, it is virtually impossible to make reliable predictions about what is to come. This perpetual state of change has existed since the birth of e-mail surveys in the 1980s, and this has lasted through the development of full-fledged Internet surveys in the 1990s and early 2000s, and it will likely continue as the Internet and its related technologies develop.

The extensive progress Internet surveys have made since their inception in the 1980s has been awe inspiring. In the 1990s, a series of changes led to the shift from electronic mail surveys to surveys hosted on the Internet. However, before this significant change occurred, computer technology significantly improved and computers became more widely accessible and utilized for computer-assisted survey information collection (Couper & Nicholls, 1998).

Quite simply, an Internet survey consists of an investigator generating a questionnaire using common programming language (e.g., HTML or others) and then placing it on the Internet via a connected server. This can be accomplished through the automation of complex skip patterns that is similarly applied to computer-assisted personal interviewing (Couper & Nicholls, 1998).

Many advantages surface through employing this type of survey. One of these advantages is that Internet surveys allow for questions or response options to be randomized and for real-time data verification tools to be utilized (Peytchev & Crawford, 2005). Moreover, if errors are found early in the fielding period, Internet surveys allow for corrections to be made easily.

From a respondent's perspective, by applying the method of self-administration rather than interviewer-administered survey methods, the Internet provides the benefit of privacy, which may lead to more candid and honest reporting on sensitive topics or questions (De Leeuw, 2005, 2008). In addition to increased privacy, respondents to Internet surveys have increased control over the timing and pace of the survey. If the survey participant is motivated, they can slow down to be more thorough and take time to think through their responses or consult others.

The design flexibility introduced by Internet survey questionnaires brings numerous advantages and disadvantages. Surveyors have found venues to utilize their creativity in the survey and utilize color, graphics, and other visual features. Comparatively, in mail surveys these visual features were discouraged due to the costs of printing. Surveyors can now incorporate pictures, video, and sound into their Internet surveys. This was not even fathomable with previous survey methods. Internet survey

flexibility, in this regard, is well exemplified by research examining the feasibility and consequences of utilizing animated agent interviewers (Cassell & Miller, 2008; Person, D'Mello, & Olney, 2008).

Despite these striking and attractive features, the Internet has several other advantages and weaknesses that are perhaps best discussed within the framework of the four major sources of survey error: coverage, sampling, measurement, and nonresponse (Groves, 1989).

### **Non-Response**

A meta-analysis was performed on 68 Internet surveys that were reported in 49 studies. In this analysis, Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) reported a mean response rate of 39.6% when Internet surveys were utilized. Another meta-analysis performed in 2007 demonstrated a mean response rate of 32.7% (calculated from Table 1 in Lozar Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, & Vehovar, 2008). However, perhaps more enlightening is that in the analysis by Cook et al. (2000), the mean response rate had a standard deviation of 19.6%. These statistics indicate the high level of variability in response rates to Internet surveys. Due to the variance, it is not uncommon to hear of some Internet surveys with response rates in the single digits while others produce response rates comparable to mail and telephone survey methods (Dillman et al., 2009, pp. 234-236; Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). However, surveyors that use Internet surveys can expect to yield response rates that range 6 to 15 percentage points less compared to other survey modes (Lozar Manfreda et al., 2008).

## **Research Design**

This study utilized a survey-based research design via quantitative responses derived from a sample of parents who elected to register their children in STAR Schools. The primary data utilized in this study consisted of participant responses from a questionnaire developed and distributed by another researcher in a larger, on-going study with the STAR Schools system (Duman, 2012). Although Duman's research sample consisted of 1500 parent survey participants across 13 campuses, the present researcher received data from two campuses within this larger sample – both elementary/middle K-8 schools. Therefore, given that the data sample is considerably smaller, this study does not attempt generalizations of the entire district (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2002). Rather, the key objective of this study was to develop a more thorough understanding of the perspectives and perceptions of the parent study participants within the two sample campus populations.

With regard to the survey design, the questions were quantitative in nature. The survey questions were designed to highlight items that parents value in schools (e.g. convenient location, academic programs, school size, class size, regulations/safety, school culture, staff, recommendations from other individuals, and programs such as ESL, special education, and GT). Through the third section of the parent survey the researcher inquired about parents' satisfaction with STAR Schools in terms of the specific items mentioned above. Parents' views of STAR Schools were also deduced based on the relationship between two answers for the same item in section 2 and 3. This relationship was analyzed for significance.

## **Population and Sample**

As a part of a larger, on-going study, the present study examines parental perceptions of STAR Schools. STAR Schools are managed by a local non-profit organization, which was established in 1999 in Houston, Texas. There are currently 36 campuses that are serving more than 20,000 students (STAR Schools, 2011). According to the STAR Schools (2011) website:

STAR Public Schools are high performing K-12 public charter schools in Texas that focus on math, science, engineering, and computer technologies to provide opportunities for underserved communities. With a college acceptance rate of 100 percent, STAR Public Schools have earned the reputation of providing a distinct and high-quality education. They also have the honor of being part of T-STEM (Texas Science, Technology, and Engineering & Mathematics) field pioneer schools (STAR Schools, 2010).

The ambition of STAR Schools is to develop students and prepare them for the next level of learning, while they are in an atmosphere that is safe, caring, and collaborative. STAR schools employ a learner-centered educational program that has special emphasis on math, science, engineering, and technology (STAR Schools, 2010). STAR's vision is to guide their students from the classroom setting into the world as productive, high achieving, and responsible citizens (STAR Schools, 2010).

This study's sample consisted of parents who desire that their child attend STAR Charter Schools, rather than conventional public schools. For study convenience, the researcher limited the study to two individual STAR campuses (two middle/elementary

schools). Table 3.1 illustrates the overall parent sample demographics and response rates. Once again, the data set utilized within the study represents a small sample of the overall STAR schools population. In particular, Duman (2010) sampled a total of 1500 parents with children currently enrolled within 13 separate campuses in the greater and surrounding Houston area. As mentioned early, the present researcher was granted access to data sets from two separate campuses within this greater sample – both K-8 Schools. During the first stage, all parents were asked to complete an online questionnaire, which was distributed through email. Parents were informed about the study description and the general parameters, and then they were asked to participate in the questionnaire through mail sent by the school administration.

### **Setting Demographics**

**STAR campus A.** The first middle/elementary school campus accessed within this study is comprised of levels K-8, and a total of 592 students. Table 3.1 displays the specific school demographics of this campus, as well as the number of student classified as Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient, At-Risk, and students' mobility. Specifically, the 2010-2011 student population was as follows: African American (16.9%), Hispanic (30.4%), White (19.9%), American Indian (0.2%), Asian (31.9%), Pacific Islander (0.2%), and Two or More Races (0.5%). Overall, the total number of parent surveyed at this particular campus was 310 parents.

Table 3.1

*Student Demographics - Campus A (K-8)*

Category	N	%
African American	100	16.9%
Hispanic	180	30.4%
White	118	19.9%
American Indian	1	0.2%
Asian	189	31.9%
Pacific Islander	1	0.2%
Two or More Races	3	0.5%
Total	592	100.0%
Economically Disadvantaged	391	66.00%
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	83	14.00%
At-Risk	117	19.80%
Mobility	--	--

**STAR campus B.** The second middle/elementary school campus accessed in this study is comprised of levels K-8, and a total of 771 students. Table 3.2 displays the specific school demographics of this campus, as well as the number of student classified as Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient, At-Risk, and students' mobility. African American (8.2%), Hispanic (23.2%), White (24.5%), American Indian (0.3%), Asian (42.9%), and Two or More Races (0.9%). Overall, the total number of parent surveyed at this particular campus was 195 parents.

Table 3.2

*Student Demographics - Campus B (9-12)*

Category	N	%
African American	63	8.2%
Hispanic	179	23.2%
White	189	24.5%
American Indian	2	0.3%
Asian	331	42.9%
Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Two or More Races	7	0.9%
Total	771	100%
Economically Disadvantaged	160	20.8%
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	15	1.9%
At-Risk	355	46%
Mobility	74	10.5%

**Data Analysis Procedures**

This study required the inclusion of various systems-level data and parental survey data. The former data were provided for descriptive purposes—in order to convey the context and culture of the STAR system—but, more notably, to discover whether there is a relationship between parents’ decision-making patterns and school enrollment trends.



The researcher expected that the results would illustrate logical explanations for parents' decision-making patterns.

Acquired quantitative data were analyzed to identify relationships between parents' decision-making patterns within the STAR system. The first objective with regard to data analysis is to examine the archival data gathered through the questionnaire.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

To analyze the interview data, the researcher generated succinct descriptive summary statements from common categories, resembling the ones developed by Giorgi (1975). Survey responses were recognized as units and then compressed into briefer statements that were further condensed into prevailing thematic statements. The process allowed the researcher to arrange common themes and create descriptive summary statements. These summary statements from the participants' perceived patterns and relationships of the qualities that they desire in choosing this public charter school were interpreted. The researcher then analyzed research questions under data categories and themes to establish if there was sufficient and significant data to substantiate the findings and make further implications.

### **Instrumentation**

This study attempted to include excerpts of STAR parent survey responses to make conclusions about parents' school enrollment patterns. The survey instrument represents a customized variation from one initially created by Finn (2002) in the Charter Schools in Action Project. The questionnaire utilized in this study also allowed the researcher to describe trends within a particular population of parents, as well as identify trends in the data.

This survey contained four parts. The first section collected specific information about the parent's child. The second section asked for information about what parent participants generally value in schools. In the third section, participants' viewpoint of STAR Schools was analyzed. Finally, the fourth section gathered demographic information related to the parent participants. The demographic data in the fourth section included multiple variables, such as distance of the home from school, household information, education level, and employment status. The last step involved the administration of the questionnaires to the larger population of STAR parents.

### **Validity and Reliability**

A panel of five experts, consisting of public school superintendents with doctorates, school administrators, and two parents whose children are registered in STAR Schools, evaluated the survey prior to its inclusion in the larger, on-going study within the STAR school system. In addition, the suggestions from the panel of experts were used to enhance the survey instrument. The five experts on the panel are named in Appendix F. In addition, before being distributed within the STAR school system, the survey underwent a pilot test for reliability by 30 parent participants who were selected randomly (Duman, 2012). Parents involved with the pilot study were provided two weeks to complete and return the intended survey questionnaire with feedback for the subsequent questionnaire, which was utilized in making minor survey alterations before its administration within the aforementioned larger, on-going study.

### **Procedures**

Interactions between the researcher and the STAR Schools' Research Coordinator were essential to the progress of the investigation. Sound relationships with the current

campus principals, central office personnel, and staff at Houston campuses prevented hindrances with the access to the setting. Moreover, familiarity with the school system chain of command allowed the researcher to save time and energy by taking actions in an efficient manner.

The first required action before beginning this study was to receive district approval for access to the data set of the larger, on-going survey research project. Consent was also required from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) at the University of Houston. Comprehensive documentation of the research was presented to the District Institutional Review Board (IRB) of STAR Schools. The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) ethically requires submission to the IRB. The IRB serves as an indispensable mechanism to evaluate research studies, before their initiation, to safeguard study participants (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). The IRB is a protective measure designed to prohibit federal fund usage without preceding IRB review, and it is mandatory to ensure that all universities comply with IRB protocol for research purposes (p. 118).

Although the survey data utilized in this study were drawn from an internal and existing district archive, it is important to understand how the survey instrument itself was implemented and how data were collected. First, school administrators sent an informative email to parents through via the “School Reach” program. Therefore, confidential information was not be disclosed from schools. Parents were asked to partake in the online questionnaire by means of email. In order to maximize the sample size, every parent was informed about the study and asked to participate in the

questionnaire via postage mail, which was also distributed by the administration and school office staff as well.

Again, although the present research was not involved in the distribution process, such information was critical as a means of illustrating that all ethical standards for working with human subjects was abided by while working with the school and parents. In addition, each participant's identity was kept anonymous, and all of their responses were kept confidential – even from the present researcher. Before they were allowed to participate, each participant was asked whether they fully appreciate the rationale of the study.

**Internet survey responses and reminders via email.** A week following their official notification of study recruitment, the parents received the actual questionnaire via email (Duman, 2012). Subsequently, the parents later received two separate follow-up messages, which were distributed only to non-respondent study recruits. Next, another reminder was issued to all non-respondents through a phone text message as another method of direct communication.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It may be difficult to utilize research literature that supports various hypotheses, because this study involved a unique focus within a unique educational system. Secondly, the accessibility and gathering of data was a general limitation of the study, especially since this type of study was never before attempted within the STAR Public Schools system. Therefore, mining consistent and reliable data from the past 10 years may be difficult, especially given the tremendous growth of the STAR system. Ultimately, these factors may impact the study's overall methodology. Furthermore, certain school

samples were removed from the study due to collection system changes, or because they have not maintained sufficient data collection processes. In spite of the educational environment, there was no certainty that parental subject participation would take place, and this posed multiple other issues. In conclusion, due to limited parental access, the depth of the study data was limited. For example, it was extremely difficult to include parents who have left the STAR system, even though they would provide revealing and salient data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This study examined parental perceptions and preferences in selecting a school for their children. In investigating this particular population, the researcher sought to determine which qualities and factors of the school were most important to parents. In addition, the researcher wanted to examine whether parents were satisfied with what their individual school had to offer. This chapter presents the results of the data analysis, which was completed solely using descriptive statistical analysis utilizing Microsoft Excel. This chapter also demonstrates which qualities parents seek and desire in their children's schools. Ultimately, understanding such patterns allowed the researcher to identify emergent themes that arose from this particular parent respondent population.

#### STAR School A: Parent Demographics

The following table illustrates the demographics of the STAR School A (STAR School of Innovation) parent survey respondents:

Table 4.1

*STAR School A: Parent Demographic Data (N=310 )*

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage (%)
White/Anglo/Caucasian	78	25%
Black/African-American	33	11%
Hispanic/Mexican/Puerto Rico	48	16%
Asian	117	38%
Native American	0	0
Preferred not to answer	34	10%

Formal Education

Did Not Complete High School	4	1%
High School	28	9%
Associate's Degree	43	14%
Bachelor's Degree	111	36%
Master's Degree	92	30%
Doctorate/Professional Degree	17	6%

#### Total Household Income

Less than \$10,000	0	0%
\$10,000 - \$19,999	4	1%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	5	2%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	14	5%
\$40,000 - \$59,999	35	11%
\$60,000 - \$99,999	61	20%
More than \$100,000	122	39%
Prefer Not to Answer	47	15%

#### Marital Status

Married	150	77%
Separated	4	2%
Divorced	15	8%
Widowed	0	0%
Single-Parent	13	7%

#### Age

15 to 25	4
26-35	54
36-45	164
46-55	52
56 or older	17

#### Proximity to School

0-5 Miles	101
6-10 Miles	91
11-15 Miles	54
16-20 Miles	28
20+ Miles	18
I do not know	2

**STAR school A.** This subgroup of participants was drawn from the STAR School of Innovation, which is a K-8 elementary/middle school campus located in a large metropolitan area in Texas. There were a total of 310 survey respondents drawn from this first campus. The parent participants were categorized by the following independent (i.e., “predictor”) variables: race/ethnicity, level of formal education attained, total household income level, marital status, age, and the proximity of parents’ home from the school campus. The race/ethnicity groups represented by the parent survey respondents at this particular campus were: White/Anglo/Caucasian (N=78, 25%), Black/African American (N=33, 11%), Hispanic/Mexican/Puerto Rican (N=48, 16%), Asian (N= 117, 38%), and Native American (N=0, 0%). Another demographic figure examined was how much formal education parental survey respondents had attained. More specifically, the respondents were able to select from one of the following six categories: (1) Did not complete high school, (2) high school, (3) associates degree, (4) bachelor’s degree, (5) master’s degree, and (6) doctorate/professional degree. 72 percent of respondents obtained an education level of a Bachelor’s degree or above. 14 percent of parent respondents obtained an educational level of Associates degree, while 10 percent of respondents either completed high school graduation or did not complete their high school education. A third demographic figure examined was parental marital status. 77% of the parents were married while only 7% were single and 2% were separated. Another interesting parental demographic figure was the parental total household income. 39% of the parents’ total household income were more than \$100,000.00, and 70% of the parents earned more than \$40,000.00 a year. 15% of the parents preferred not to answer this survey question.



## STAR School B: Parent Demographics

The following table illustrates the demographics of the STAR School of Excellence parent survey respondents:

Table 4.2

### *STAR School B: Parent Demographic Data (N= 195)*

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage (%)
White/Anglo/Caucasian	36	18%
Black/African-American	38	20%
Hispanic/Mexican/Puerto Rico	33	17%
Asian	61	31%
Native American	2	1%
Preferred not to answer	25	13%
Formal Education		
Did Not Complete High School	1	<1%
High School	36	20%
Associate's Degree	33	18%
Bachelor's Degree	70	39%
Master's Degree	29	16%
Doctorate/Professional Degree	10	6%
Total Household Income		
Less than \$10,000	3	2%
\$10,000 - \$19,999	11	6%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	12	7%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	23	13%
\$40,000 - \$59,999	29	17%
\$60,000 - \$99,999	46	26%
More than \$100,000	27	16%
Prefer Not to Answer	23	13%

### Marital Status

Married	150	86%
Separated	3	2%
Divorced	5	3%
Widowed	2	1%
Single-Parent	15	6%

### Age

15 to 25	16
26-35	76
36-45	31
46-55	20
56 or older	52

### Proximity to School

0-5 Miles	56
6-10 Miles	61
11-15 Miles	25
16-20 Miles	20
20+ Miles	6
I do not know	7

**STAR school B.** This subgroup of participants was drawn from the STAR School of Excellence, which is a K-8 elementary/middle school campus located in a large metropolitan area in Texas. There were a total of 195 parent survey respondents drawn from this particular campus. Once again, the parent respondents were categorized by the following independent (i.e., “predictor”) variables: race/ethnicity, level of formal education attained, total household income level, marital status, age, and the proximity of parents’ home from the school campus. The race/ethnicity groups represented by the parent survey respondents at this particular campus were: White/Anglo/Caucasian (N=36, 18%), Black/African American (N=38, 20%), Hispanic/Mexican/Puerto Rican (N=33,

16%), Asian (N= 61, 38%), and Native American (N= 2, 1%). Another demographic figure examined was how much formal education parental survey respondents had attained. More specifically, the respondents were able to select from one of the following six categories: (1) Did not complete high school, (2) high school, (3) associates degree, (4) bachelor's degree, (5) master's degree, and (6) doctorate/professional degree. A total of 179 parents responded to this question. At this school, less than 1 percent did not complete high school; 20% completed high school; and, 18% completed their Associate's degree. Additionally, 61 percent of parent respondents obtained a Bachelor's degree or above (with 39% receiving Bachelor's degrees); 16% had obtained Master's degrees; and, 6 percent obtained Doctorate degrees. A third demographic figure examined was parental marital status. 86% of the parents were married while only 6% were single and 2% were separated. Another interesting parental demographic figure was the parental total household income. 16% of the parents' total household income were more than \$100,000.00, and 59% of the parents earned more than \$40,000.00 a year. 13% of the parents preferred not to answer this survey question.

### **STAR School A Parent Survey Responses: Question #7**

This question was designed to discover which characteristics of a school parents perceived as most important. This study's research question literally asks: Thinking about your child's education, how important are the following factors in your decision to choose a school?

In particular, this question asks parents to examine their perceptions of important school qualities. A qualitative Likert scale was utilized, which asked parents to classify each factor as "very important", "important", "somewhat important", or "not important".

More specifically, the survey asks: On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being “the most” and 1 being “the least”), indicate the extent to which each of the following are important in your decision to choose a school?

Table 4.3

*Factors Affecting School A Parents' Decision to Choose a School*

Factor	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Convenient Location	15	41	77	51
Academic Program	2	2	26	157
School Size	18	40	56	57
Class Size	4	22	64	93
Discipline and Safety	2	0	22	162
School Culture & Climate	4	9	48	120
Special Programs	14	23	50	95
Quality of Teachers	3	0	15	168
Extracurriculars	8	18	69	78
Parent Involvement/Communication	3	17	60	105
Recommendations	4	33	72	73

Table 4.3 shows that 57, 70, 84, 87, and 90 percent of parent respondents classified parent involvement and communication, school culture and climate, academic programs, discipline and safety, and teacher quality as “very important”, respectively. Of

all the parent responses classified as “not important”, school size was most frequently chosen (11%). In a rank order comparison of the 10 factors in the survey (with regard to level of importance), the factors were ranked as follows: Quality of teachers, Discipline and safety, Academic Programs, School Culture and Climate, Parent Involvement and Communication, Class size, Special Programs, Extracurriculars, Convenient Location, and School Size. For every factor, however, a majority of parents indicated that it was either “important” or “very important”.

#### **STAR School B Parent Survey Responses: Question #7**

Parental perceptions were also examined in STAR School B. Once again, the same research question was asked – that is, “Thinking about your child’s education, how important are the following factors in your decision to choose a school?”

The same ten factors were utilized in this question as well in order to help elucidate upon those factors parents perceived as “most important”. And, again, a qualitative Likert scale was utilized, which asked parents to classify each factor as either “very important”, “important”, “somewhat important”, or “not important”.

Table 4.4

*Factors Affecting School B Parents' Decision to Choose a School*

Factor	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Convenient Location	15	98	122	67
Academic Program	1	2	19	285
School Size	16	66	122	101
Class Size	4	23	114	164
Discipline and Safety	1	8	28	257
School Culture & Climate	7	14	91	192
Special Programs	33	51	88	134
Quality of Teachers	0	4	18	285
Extracurriculars	11	53	125	118
Parent Involvement/Communication	0	19	110	176
Recommendations	7	51	140	104

Table 4.4 illustrates that academic programs, quality of teachers, and discipline and safety were classified as very important by 93, 93, and 87 percent of parent respondents, respectively. The top three factors selected by parents are as follows: Academic programs, teacher quality, and discipline and safety. Conversely, the three lowest ranked factors were convenient location, school size, and special programs. Of all of the factors in the survey, special programs obtained the largest percentage of “not important” responses (11%). However, as present in the previous parent respondent

group sample, it should be noted that a majority of parents classified every single factor as either “important” or “very important”.

### **STAR School A Parent Survey Responses: Question #8**

This question was designed to clarify the parents’ level of satisfaction with 10 different school factors. The survey respondents could respond “not satisfied”, “somewhat satisfied”, “satisfied”, or “very satisfied”. This research question literally asks: How satisfied are you with specific features of STAR Schools? The data were collected and the results are represented in the following table:

Table 4.5

#### *School A Parents’ Satisfaction with Specific Features of STAR Schools*

Factor	Not Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Convenient Location	11	27	60	83
Academic Programs	2	13	59	106
School Size	2	12	83	82
Class Size	8	19	81	72
Discipline and Safety	7	9	72	92
School Culture & Climate	5	15	71	89
Special Programs	9	25	73	66
Quality of Teachers	4	21	71	85
Extracurriculars	18	35	75	52
Parent Involvement/Communication	11	26	79	63

As the data from Table 4.5 illustrate, in descending order of satisfaction, academic programs, discipline and safety, and school culture and climate are the three features of STAR Schools that parents are most satisfied with. The three features that parents are the least satisfied with are extracurriculars, parent involvement and communication, and special programs. Of the three, extracurricular activities was the feature that parents were least satisfied with, and ten percent of parents were “not satisfied” with the extracurricular programs at their school.

### **STAR School B Parent Survey Responses: Question #8**

The question utilized in this section of the survey was the same that was utilized in Question #8 at STAR School A. It was designed to clarify the parents’ level of satisfaction with the 10 different factors. The survey respondents could respond “not satisfied”, “somewhat satisfied”, “satisfied”, or “very satisfied”. This research question literally asks: How satisfied are you with specific features of STAR Schools? The data were collected from the parents of STAR School A, and the results are represented in the following table:



Table 4.6

*School B Parents' Satisfaction with Specific Features of STAR Schools*

Factor	Not Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Convenient Location	18	55	121	109
Academic Programs	7	23	116	157
School Size	2	28	154	118
Class Size	18	53	145	85
Discipline and Safety	5	27	106	163
School Culture & Climate	4	23	142	129
Special Programs	14	52	155	77
Quality of Teachers	19	32	126	125
Extracurriculars	27	85	132	58
Parent Involvement/Communication	10	46	144	10

As the results of Table 4.6 demonstrate, the three features that STAR School B parents were most satisfied with were: Discipline and safety, academic programs, and school culture and climate. Conversely, the three programs with the least parental satisfaction were parent involvement, extracurricular, and special programs. Of all the features, parents were least satisfied with extracurriculars most frequently, with 8.9 percent of parents selecting “not satisfied” for that feature. Nevertheless, the majority of parents selected either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” for each feature of STAR Schools.

### STAR School A Parent Satisfaction Responses: Question #9

Data were also gathered from parent respondents on which specific factors result in their satisfaction. In other words, this question indirectly reports on particular areas where schools could focus particular attention in order to contribute to increased levels of parental satisfaction. Data collected from questions such as these were important in that they can inform administrators and school leaders which areas of attention should be prioritized, as well as where to allocate money and resources. The research question asks: Thinking about you and your child's experiences with STAR Schools, please rate the 5 most important factors that result in your satisfaction with STAR Schools. Once again, the responses were rated on a 1-5 Likert scale (with 1 being the "most important"). The results of the distributed survey are illustrated (in descending order of importance) as follows:

Table 4.7

#### *Most Important Ranked Factors for School A Parent Satisfaction*

Rank	School Factor	Number of Responses
1 <sup>st</sup> Most Important	Academic Programs	86
2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Important	Discipline and Safety	48
3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Important	Quality of Teachers	37
4 <sup>th</sup> Most Important	Class Size	26
5 <sup>th</sup> Most Important	Extracurricular Activities	27

The results of Table 4.7 demonstrate that academic programs are the most important factor involved in parental satisfaction. Subsequently, with regard to ordered importance, discipline and safety, quality of teachers, class size, and extracurricular activities were ranked 2 through 5, respectively.

### **STAR School B Parent Satisfaction Responses: Question #9**

The very same question #9 utilized in the survey of STAR School A was also utilized in the survey for STAR School B. Qualitative responses were obtained from parent respondents. This research question specifically asks: Thinking about you and your child's experiences with STAR Schools, please rate the 5 most important factors that result in your satisfaction with STAR Schools. The responses were rated 1-5, with 1 being the most important and the following responses having descending order of importance.

Table 4.8

#### *Most Important Ranked Factors for School B Parent Satisfaction*

Rank	School Factor	Number of Responses
1 <sup>st</sup> Most Important	Academic Programs	202
2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Important	Quality of Teachers	96
3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Important	Discipline and Safety	59
4 <sup>th</sup> Most Important	Parent Communication and Involvement	55
5 <sup>th</sup> Most Important	Extracurricular Activities	39

As Table 4.8 illustrates, academic programs were overwhelmingly selected as the most important factor involved in parental satisfaction for STAR School B. The response rate more than doubled the next most important factor (i.e., quality of teachers), which was selected by 96 parents. Subsequently, again in descending order, discipline and safety, parent communication and involvement, and extracurricular activities were ranked from 3-5, respectively.

#### **STAR School A Parent Dissatisfaction Responses: Question #10**

Although STAR School parents reported high levels of satisfaction with a variety of different school factors, the survey respondents also recorded a number of particular areas of concern as well. For this reason, a specific survey question was designed for the purposes of eliciting factors parents were most dissatisfied with. For instance, survey question #10 asks: Thinking about you and your child's experience with STAR Schools, please rate the 5 factors that result in your dissatisfaction (if there are any) with STAR Schools (1: being the most concerned).

Qualitative data were collected from the responses and converted to quantitative data. Parents were able to choose up to five factors that they were dissatisfied with, and they subsequently ranked those factors from 1 to 5, with 1 being the area/factor of most concern. A summary of the results is shown in the following table:

Table 4.9

*Areas of Ranked Concern that Result in Dissatisfaction for School A Parents*

Rank	School Factor	Number of Responses
1 <sup>st</sup> Most Concerned	Parent Communication and Involvement	20
2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Concerned	Extracurricular Activities	18
3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Concerned	Quality of Teachers	18
4 <sup>th</sup> Most Concerned	Special Programs	10
5 <sup>th</sup> Most Concerned	Convenient Location	11

Table 4.9 demonstrates that the factor which parents found most concerning was parent communication and involvement, with 20 parents selecting this particular item as their most concerning school factor. Additionally, extracurricular activities, quality of teachers, special programs, and convenient location were ranked in descending order of concern. The results of this question are important in further examining what parents perceive as areas of improvement within the STAR School system. In other words, these are the specific school factors that parent respondents feel are weak or lacking in attention.

**STAR School B Parent Dissatisfaction Responses: Question #10**

Again, in order to identify areas of concern, an identical question was asked to STAR School B parent survey respondents. The research question #10 asks: Thinking about you and your child's experience with STAR Schools, please rate the 5 factors that

result in your dissatisfaction (if there are any) with STAR Schools (1: being the most concerned). The results of this question are demonstrated in the following table:

Table 4.10

*Areas of Ranked Concern that Result in Dissatisfaction for School B Parents*

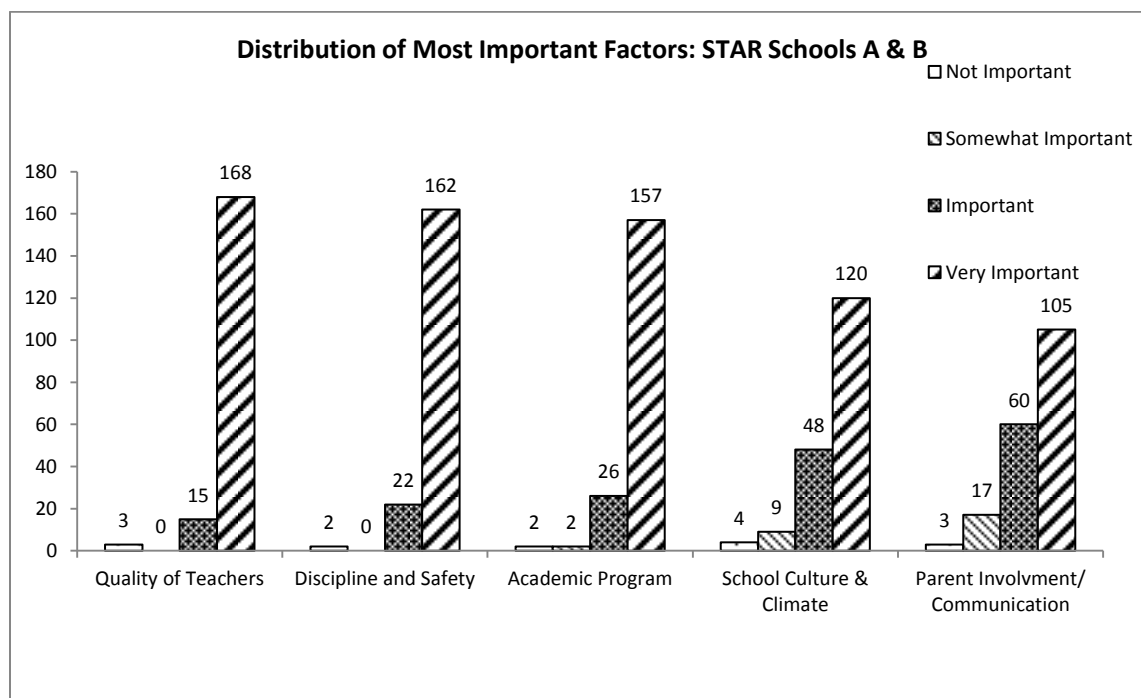
Rank	School Factor	Number of Responses
1 <sup>st</sup> Most Concerned	Extracurricular Activities	47
2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Concerned	Quality of Teachers	45
3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Concerned	Parent Communication and Involvement	28
4 <sup>th</sup> Most Concerned	School Culture and Climate	16
5 <sup>th</sup> Most Concerned	Convenient Location	10

Table 4.10 shows that the five most concerning factors, in descending order of concern, were extracurricular activities, quality of teachers, parent communication and involvement, school culture, and climate, and convenient location. These data were essential information for those school administrators who aim to improve their schools and parent satisfaction.

## Research Question #1 Results

### Most Important Factors Affecting Parents' Decision Making Patterns:

#### STAR Schools A & B

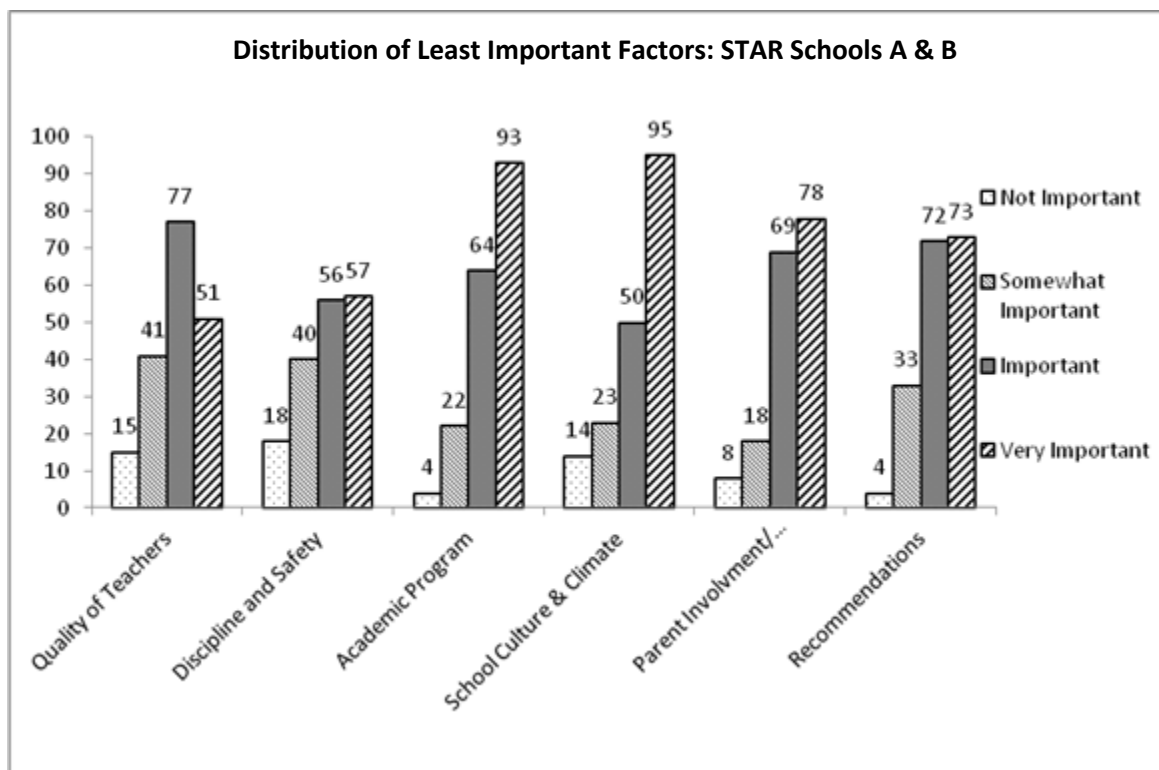


*Figure 1.* Distribution of the most important factors: STAR Schools A & B. This figure illustrates the response distribution for parents' five most important factors in choosing a school.

This figure is a straightforward depiction of what is most important to parents when selecting a school for their children. This table indicates that an ideal school for parents is one with strong academic programs and high quality teachers in an environment that is safe, disciplined, and culturally sensitive for all students.

## Least Important Factors Affecting Parents' Decision Making Patterns: STAR

### Schools A & B



*Figure 2.* Distribution of the least important factors: STAR Schools A & B. This figure illustrates the response distribution for parents' least important factors in choosing a school.

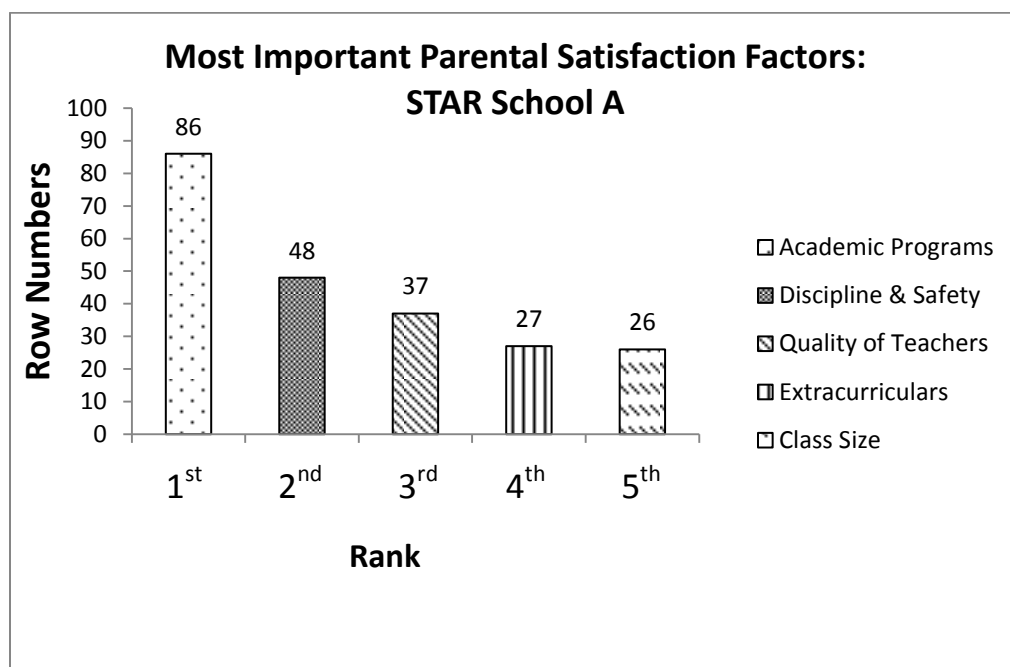
This table exemplifies the data for the least important factors for parents in selecting a school for their children. It is important to note that these five factors were less important relative to the other factors in the survey. Thus, identifying these factors as the least important factors could be deceiving. In reality, these five factors were considered to be quite important by parents. The graph of the data exemplifies that the majority of parents found that convenient location, school size, class size, special programs, and extracurriculars to be either important or very important. In other words,



parents want their children's school to implement and provide the best resources for all factors and programs to the best of their ability.

A previous study illustrated similarly that a majority of parents believe that the charter schools their children attend were better than the traditional public school they previously attended. They feel this way with respect to multiple factors including class size, school size, teacher attentiveness, and quality of instruction and curriculum (Finn & Raub, 2006).

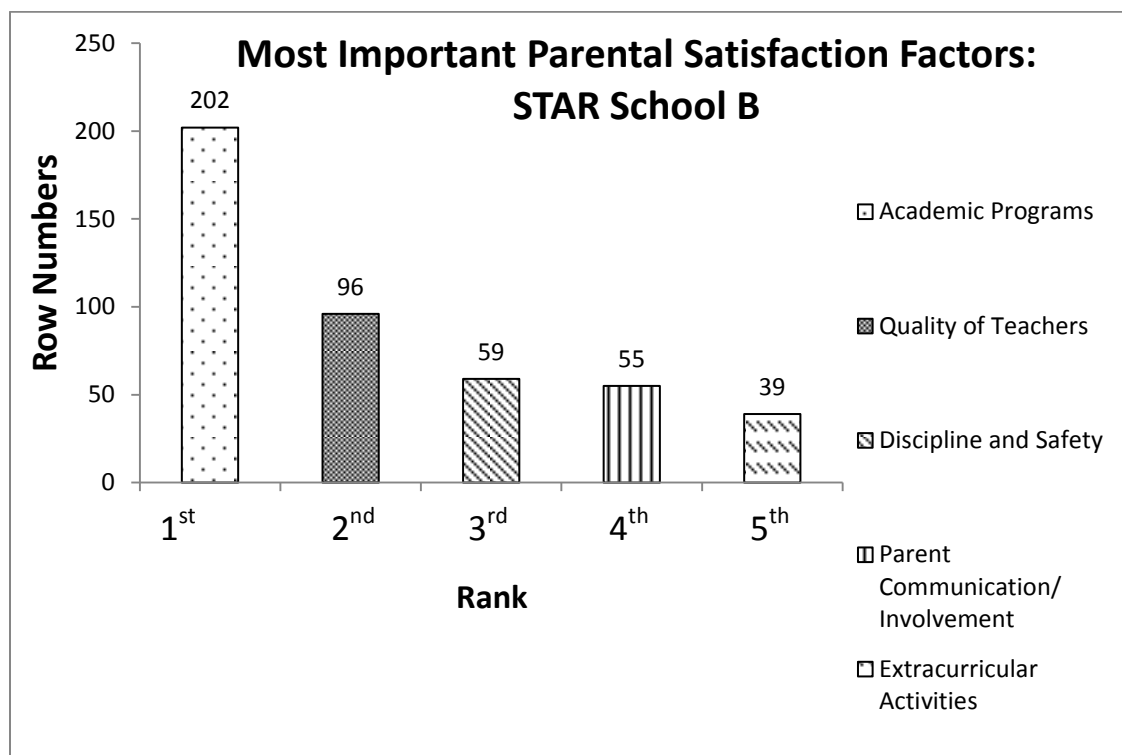
### Research Question #2 Results



*Figure 3.* Most important parental satisfaction factors: STAR school A. This figure illustrates the number of STAR School A parent responses with regard to their top five most important school factors.

The data table demonstrates that STAR School A parents are most satisfied with academic programs, discipline/safety, quality of teachers, class size, and extracurriculars,

in descending order respectively. Academic programs were overwhelmingly the favorite, with nearly double the number of parent respondents as the next most important school feature.



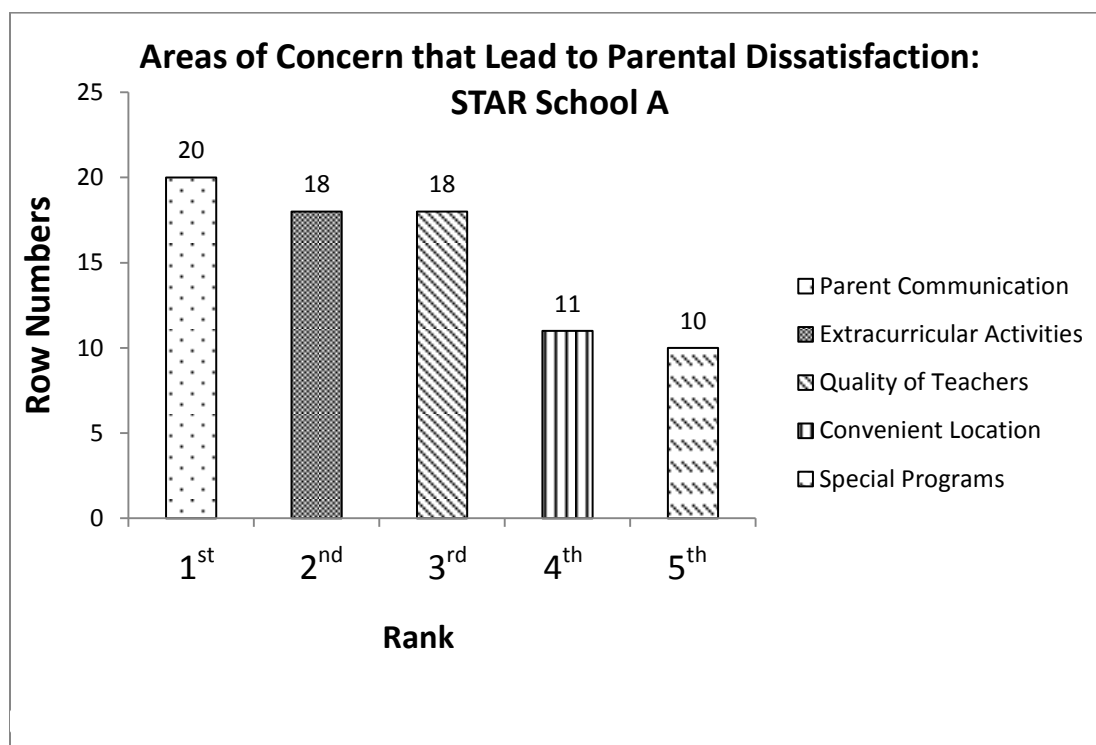
*Figure 4.* Most important parental satisfaction factors: STAR school B. This figure illustrates the number of STAR School B parent responses with regard to their top five most important school factors.

For STAR school B parents, academic programs, teacher quality, discipline/safety, parent communication/involvement, and extracurriculars were considered the most important factors that would lead to their satisfaction. With this in mind, 86% of the general public believes that support from parents is the most important way to improve the schools (Rose, Gallup, & Elam, 1997). Yet, based on this study's findings, only STAR School B parents ranked parental support in their top five features.

While comparing data from STAR School A and STAR School B, there were four features that were selected in the top five by both schools' parents: academic programs, teacher quality, discipline and safety, and extracurricular.

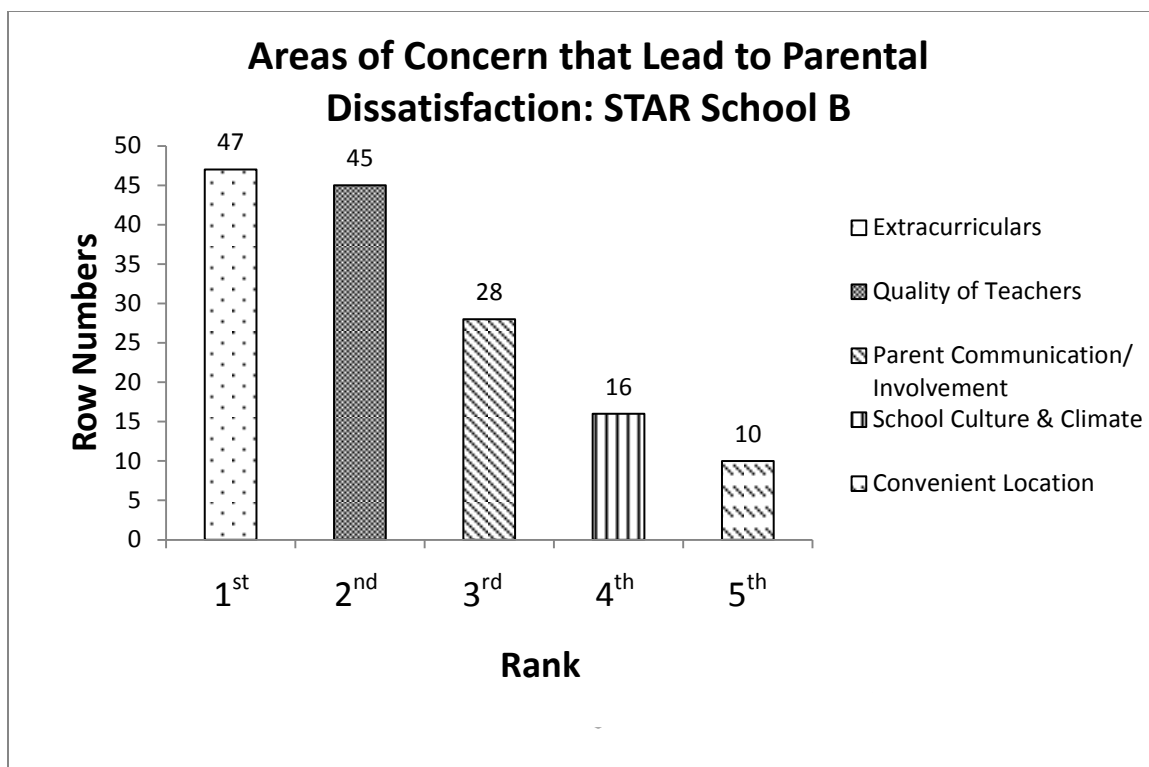
This particular finding is significant because it reveals that, despite the fact that they are from different schools, and have different cultural and social makeups, they each place high importance on similar features. Thus, this particular finding can demonstrate to school administrators that parents from different family and economic backgrounds are, in essence, looking for the same school features for their children. Namely, all parents desire that schools provide a solid academic education with high quality teachers in an environment that is safe and disciplined. In addition, parents are also looking for an institution with a variety of extracurriculars that will allow their child or children to flourish and grow from activities outside the classroom setting.

### Research Question #3 Results



*Figure 5.* Areas of concern that lead to parental dissatisfaction: STAR School A. This figure illustrates the number of STAR School A parent responses with regard to the top ranked school elements that led to their overall dissatisfaction.

Star School A parents are concerned, in descending order, with extracurricular activities, parent communication and involvement, quality of teachers, special programs, and convenient location. We will see in the following graph, that there are similar parental concerns at both STAR schools.



*Figure 6.* Areas of concern that lead to parental dissatisfaction: STAR School B. This figure illustrates the number of STAR School B parent responses with regard to the top ranked school elements that led to their overall dissatisfaction.

As displayed in descending order, this figure displays parents' dissatisfaction with STAR School B's extracurriculars, teacher quality, parent communication and involvement, school culture and climate, and convenient location. With these very important data, STAR School B administrators can now target specific areas of their school that need improvement, particularly according to their own children's parents.

Both schools' parents have similar concerns – that is, both groups selected extracurricular, teacher quality, convenient location, and parental communication and involvement in their top five most concerning factors. This pattern informs us that the factors parents are concerned about are not isolated issues; rather, they represent common

points of interest among all parent stakeholders. In addition, these factors may be more prevalent than the current administration believes.

In reference to other studies, STAR School parents' concerns about parent communication and involvement are significant. A previous study demonstrated that, in comparison to traditional school students, charter school students are more motivated and parents are more involved in their child's education (Booker et al., 2010). The literature on parental involvement in child and adolescent education clearly conveys the assumption that parental involvement has significant benefits on children's learning (e.g., Chavkin, 1993; eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1989, 1994; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Hobbs, Doeckei, Hoover-Dempsey, Moroney, Shane & Weeks, 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). More specifically, Fan and Chen (2001) performed a meta-analysis examining the effects of parental involvement on the general student population and concluded that parental involvement positively influenced educational outcomes.

Through the survey instrument employed, STAR School parents stated that they are unsatisfied with their current involvement and would like to be more involved in their child's education. Whether these parents understand the positive correlation between their involvement and education outcomes is not clarified in this study. However, STAR School parents reflect the sentiments of the parents in Booker's case (Booker et al., 2010), and want to be a part of their children's educational process.

For both STAR School A and B, it will be difficult to address the dissatisfaction with the school's location; that is, unless STAR schools plan to build another school in a more accessible location or implement alternative forms of transportation that will ease this particular parental burden. As stated earlier, it is difficult to find someone who

spends more time with a child other than their parents or guardians. Therefore, it behooves administrators and school leaders to take these data seriously, and to utilize it to implement positive changes in areas of concern. Anything less would be considered a disservice to both the students under their charge and the parents they serve.

### **Summary**

In terms of demographics, Asian was the race/ethnicity of most parent respondents, with Caucasians, Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans following in descending fashion. The most common age range among all parent respondents was 36-45 years of age, and greater than 60 percent of parent respondents completed at least a bachelor's degree or higher level of education.

The results obtained from STAR School A showed that a majority of parents felt that parent involvement and communication, school culture and climate, academic programs, discipline and safety, and teacher quality were very important factors. Also, parents were most satisfied with their school's academic programs, discipline and safety, and school culture and climate, which are listed in descending order of satisfaction. The three features that parents were least satisfied with were extracurricular, parent involvement and communication, and special programs. Additionally, the results demonstrated that academic programs are the most important factor involved in parental satisfaction. Lastly, the factor that parents found most concerning were extracurricular activities, with 18 parents selecting this item as their most concerning factor.

STAR School B results illustrated that academic programs, quality of teachers, and discipline and safety were classified as very important factors when selecting a school by nearly 90% of parents. Of all of the factors in the survey, special programs

obtained the largest percentage of “not important” responses, at 11%, when choosing a school. Overall, the three features that parents are the least satisfied with are extracurricular, parent involvement and communication, and special programs.

Academic programs were overwhelmingly selected as the most important factor involved in parental satisfaction for STAR School B. Extracurricular activities were selected as the parents’ most concerning factor as well.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

The present study advances the understanding of charter schools and what parents are satisfied and dissatisfied with. In the preceding chapter, detailed analyses of the data were reported. Chapter Five will include the following sections: (a) Findings; (b) Research Question #1 Discussion; (c) Research Question #2 Discussion; (d) Research Question #3 Discussion; (e) Implications for Practice; (f) Implications for Research; and, (g) Final Conclusions. In addition, this chapter will present and discuss recommendations on how this study on charter schools is applicable to public schools and how their administrators can learn from charter school parents and their survey responses. In the findings section, the researcher will discuss, analyze, and explain the results of each research question. The implications and recommendations section will (a) allow the researcher to understand how the results might be applied to public schools, and (b) to generate ideas to recommend to public school administration.

Few people take the time to understand the sentiments of our children's parents. However, their opinions can guide our school administrations and help them identify areas of weaknesses that can be improved upon. Nobody spends more time with children than their parents or guardians, and for this reason they have many valid and valuable opinions on what is satisfactory and unsatisfactory in relation to a child's education. School administrators want what is best for their school's children, and, provided they listen to what parents have to say, they can initiate and create significant and positive change to their schools.

This study is also important – particularly to STAR School administrators – because it demonstrated the features of their schools that parents believe are satisfactory and concerning. The ten features that were included in the survey were analyzed using qualitative measures and will be analyzed in detail below.

## **Findings**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the most important and least important factors that parents consider when deciding to choose a particular school?
2. What are the most important factors that result in parent satisfaction with their child's school?
3. What are the most important factors that result in parent dissatisfaction with their child's school?

**Research question one findings.** As mentioned above, parents consider a wide number of variables when selecting an individual school for their children to attend. The findings within the present study demonstrated that strong academic programs and the presence of high-quality teachers in a safe, disciplined and culturally-sensitive environment is critical to parents decisions. Additionally, most of the parent participants cited convenient location, school size, class size, special programs, and extracurriculars as either important or very important to such a decision. In short, parents essentially want their children's school to implement and provide the best possible resources for all factors to their children.

**Research question two findings.** Another interesting finding is that STAR School A and B parents cited many similar preferences. For instance, STAR School A parents were most satisfied with academic programs, discipline/safety, quality of teachers, class size, and extracurriculars, (in descending order) respectively. Moreover,

schools' academic programs were overwhelmingly cited as most important – with nearly double the number of parent respondents as the next most important school feature. For STAR school B parents, academic programs, teacher quality, discipline/safety, parent communication/involvement, and extracurriculars were considered the most important factors that would lead to their satisfaction.

Once again, research from Rose, Gallup & Elam (1997) illustrates that the general public believes that support from parents is the most critical factor in improving our nation's schools. Interestingly, however, this study's findings show that only STAR School B parents ranked parental support within their top five features. And, while comparing data from STAR School A and STAR School B, there were four features that were selected in the top five by both schools' parents – namely, academic programs, teacher quality, discipline and safety, and extracurriculars.

This particular finding is significant in that shows that parents – despite being from different schools and having a different cultural and social makeup – place high importance on similar features. One would hope that school administrators would observe the particular finding that parents from different family and economic backgrounds are, in essence, interested in the same things in schools for their children. Specifically, the majority of parents want schools to facilitate and execute a solid academic education by high quality teachers in an environment that is safe and disciplined. In addition, parents seek school institutions that possess a variety of extracurriculars, which will ultimately allow their children to flourish and grow within activities external to the traditional classroom setting.

**Research question three findings.** The findings for this particular question show that Star School A parents are concerned with the following: extracurricular activities, parent communication and involvement, quality of teachers, special programs, and convenient location. Conversely, STAR School B parents were concerned with extracurriculars, teacher quality, parent communication and involvement, school culture and climate, and convenient location. Through the focused utilization of such information, STAR School administrators can more effectively target specific areas of their school that need improvement according to their own children's parents. It should also be noted and emphasized that extracurriculars, teacher quality, convenient location, and parental communication and involvement were the top five most concerning factors for both STAR School A and STAR School B. Therefore, the factors that parents are concerned with are not isolated issues; rather, they are very clear and specific, and they may be more serious issues than the current administration currently believes.

STAR School parents clearly stated, through their survey responses, that they are unsatisfied with their current involvement and would like to be more involved in their child's education. Whether these parents understand the positive correlation between their involvement and education outcomes is not elucidated in this study. Nonetheless, STAR School parents reflect the sentiments of the parents in Booker's case (Booker et al., 2010) – that is, they express the desire to be a part of their children's educational process.

Lastly, unless the STAR school system constructed another school in a more accessible location, or implemented an alternative (and more convenience) system of

transportation, it will be difficult to address the dissatisfaction with the school's location. Therefore, this study will not elucidate on this particular finding.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The data demonstrate that parents desire the best for their children's in all aspects of the school system. To that end, a school's academic program was found to be the most important factor for parent survey participants in this study. Again, strong academic programs and high quality teachers in an environment that is safe, disciplined, and culturally sensitive for all students are parents' central focus.

Additionally, most parents ranked "parent involvement" in their top five factors when deciding on a school for their children. The level of parent involvement may be associated with the overall demographics of the survey sample, and the findings are quite striking. In STAR School A, for instance, 74% of parents earned greater than \$60,000 in salary, and 72% of them at least have a bachelor's degree. In STAR school B, 51% of parents held a bachelor's degree and 42% earned greater than \$60,000 in salary.

The high income levels and educational backgrounds of these parents are not typically found in most traditional public school systems. One of the main goals of charter schools is to combat dropout rates that have been increasing in the public school system. However, indirectly, this study brings to light the variance in demographics between STAR School A and B parents and the public school system as a whole. Thus, based on the demographics exemplified above, if charter schools are, in fact, utilizing random selection and open-enrollment, students that fall under the poverty line are not

applying to charter schools. This issue should be addressed because if charter schools are reducing dropout rates in their school system, then parents who fall below the poverty line should know that charter schools are available for their children at no additional cost to them.

### **Review of Parent Demographics**

**STAR School A.** This subgroup of participants was drawn from the STAR School of Innovation, which is a K-8 elementary/middle school campus located in a large metropolitan area in Texas. There were a total of 310 survey respondents drawn from this first campus. The parent participants were categorized by the following independent (i.e., “predictor”) variables: Race/ethnicity, level of formal education attained, total household income level, marital status, age, and the proximity of parents’ home from the school campus. The race/ethnicity groups represented by the parent survey respondents at this particular campus were: White/Anglo/Caucasian (N=78, 25%), Black/African American (N=33, 11%), Hispanic/Mexican/Puerto Rican (N=48, 16%), Asian (N= 117, 38%), and Native American (N=0, 0%). Another demographic figure examined was how much formal education parental survey respondents had attained. More specifically, the respondents were able to select from one of the following six categories: (1) Did not complete high school, (2) high school, (3) associates degree, (4) bachelor’s degree, (5) master’s degree, and (6) doctorate/professional degree. 72 percent of respondents obtained an education level of a Bachelor’s degree or above. 14 percent of parent respondents obtained an educational level of Associates degree, while 10 percent of respondents either completed high school graduation or did not complete their high school education. A third demographic figure examined was parental marital status.

77% of the parents were married while only 7% were single and 2% were separated.

Another interesting parental demographic figure was the parental total household income. 39% of the parents' total household income were more than \$100,000.00, and 70% of the parents earned more than \$40,000.00 a year. 15% of the parents preferred not to answer this survey question.

**STAR School B.** This subgroup of participants was drawn from the STAR School of Excellence, which is a K-8 elementary/middle school campus located in a large metropolitan area in Texas. There were a total of 195 parent survey respondents drawn from this particular campus. Once again, the parent respondents were categorized by the following independent (i.e., “predictor”) variables: Race/ethnicity, level of formal education attained, total household income level, marital status, age, and the proximity of parents' home from the school campus. The race/ethnicity groups represented by the parent survey respondents at this particular campus were: White/Anglo/Caucasian (N=36, 18%), Black/African American (N=38, 20%), Hispanic/Mexican/Puerto Rican (N=33, 16%), Asian (N= 61, 38%), and Native American (N= 2, 1%). Another demographic figure examined was how much formal education parental survey respondents had attained. More specifically, the respondents were able to select from one of the following six categories: (1) Did not complete high school, (2) high school, (3) associates degree, (4) bachelor's degree, (5) master's degree, and (6) doctorate/professional degree. A total of 179 parents responded to this question. At this school, less than 1 percent did not complete high school; 20% completed high school; and, 18% completed their Associate's degree. Additionally, 61% of parent respondents obtained a Bachelor's degree or above (with 39% receiving Bachelor's degrees); 16% had obtained Master's degrees; and, 6%

obtained Doctorate degrees. A third demographic figure examined was parental marital status. 86% of the parents were married while only 6% were single and 2% were separated. Another interesting parental demographic figure was the parental total household income. 16% of the parents' total household income were more than \$100,000.00, and 59% of the parents earned more than \$40,000.00 a year. 13% of the parents preferred not to answer this survey question.

It does not seem that some charter schools serve the original purpose that Texas legislators intended, to improve the graduation rate by offering open-admissions student-centered education. Instead, some charter schools have the privilege of serving students who would have been successful in regular public schools. It is a common known fact that children of wealthy and educated parents tend to perform better in schools (Sirin, 2005). On average, students from wealthy families perform significantly better than students from poor families. Household wealth is associated with IQ and school achievement because wealthier parents have the resources to provide more and better learning opportunities (Duncan, 1994). Meanwhile, disadvantaged students face many challenges to academic success. Children from poorer homes are more subject to chronic stress which is more destructive to learning.

In reality, because some charter schools are able to cherry pick the "better" students to their campus, it leaves more poorly performing students in the public school system. The demographic information collected in the present research indicates that charter schools may not be well regulated by the state. According to the researcher's finding, the STAR school system tends to have admitted wealthier, and therefore statistically better-performing, students from the neighboring public schools. It should be



the other way around. Legislation needs to address potential loopholes in the open admissions lottery process that can be used to target students with fewer disciplinary problems, better grades, and higher family wealth and education.

### **Final Conclusions**

This study has allowed the researcher to take an in-depth look into which particular factors are important in parental decision making in selecting a school for their children. Additionally, this study delved into which features parents are satisfied and dissatisfied with in their respective schools.

The four elements of schools which were found by parents from both STAR School A and B to be most important to their satisfaction were academic programs, teacher quality, discipline and safety, and extracurriculars.

A take home conclusion from this study is that, although parents do find certain features more important than others, the data collected showed that a majority of parents found that all ten of the survey's features (i.e., convenient location, academic programs, school and class size, quality of teachers, extracurricular activities, parent communication and involvement, discipline and safety, school culture and climate, and special programs) to be either "important" or "very important".

Additionally, this research illustrates, through the execution of a survey at two different STAR school locations, that both schools' parents are satisfied with similar features and also have similar concerns. Both groups of parents were satisfied with STAR Schools' academic programs, teacher quality, discipline and safety, and extracurriculars. However, both groups were dissatisfied with teacher quality, convenient

location, parental communication and involvement, and extracurriculars in their top five most concerning factors. These survey results will be useful to the STAR School administration and will help them to hone in on areas of opportunity. Ultimately, I hope that these findings will be beneficial for public school administrations as well. In particular, the intention of this study is to provide information that can help public school administrators to improve upon their own methods and provide children with an overall better educational experience.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study helps support the implication for practice in two areas: (a) improvements at the charter school level, and (b) improvement in the public school level. Although data were collected from the charter school level, these data can be applied to the public school level as well. This study will also benefit current and aspiring administrators, regardless of the school system they work in, who will be able to utilize our conclusions and apply them to their own schools. The idea to keep in mind is that every child counts.

### **Implications for Further Research**

There are several areas that will require further research – namely, future research can expand the present survey in order to allow school administrators to obtain (more in-depth) critical information that could be used to improve schools. In other words, instead of utilizing broad categories like extracurriculars, a researcher could create subcategories like sports activities, music, art, and student organizations in order to examine parental satisfaction of extracurriculars more thoroughly. Thus, in such an approach, school administrators will be able to put forth extra efforts to improve target areas of weakness,

rather than invest energy into other subcategories that parents may already be satisfied with. Ultimately, such a strategy could help administrators utilize school funds more wisely and efficiently.

To advance the targeted research mentioned above, much insight could be gained by asking parents why they were satisfied or dissatisfied by certain features. That way, both research and school personnel could gain a deeper understanding of what specific aspects of schools need to be improved.

Previous research has shown that many parents believe charter schools provide better educational opportunities for their children. Researchers with Policy Matters in Ohio found that Ohio students who start kindergarten in a charter school outperform their traditional school student equivalents by an average of 10% (Green, 2003). Additionally, parents feel charter schools are able to do this by utilizing a better educational curriculum as compared to traditional schools, providing more of a challenge to the children, granting ample time for slower learners to complete objectives, pre-testing students before beginning new topics, and requiring that students master subjects before advancing to the next level (Ahmed-Ullah, 2009).

Nevertheless, it may be beneficial to administrators if a study examined student success post high school graduation at the University level. Such a study would allow administrators to see if their academic programs are preparing students for the next level. Also, the information that would be gathered from such a study could be correlated with data concerning parental emphasis on academic programs. Ultimately, student success at the next level is every administrator's and parent's goal, and this information could highlight deficiencies in a school's academic programs.

Research clearly demonstrates that for those students whose parents are more involved, they perform better in academic subjects and are less likely to dropout (Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Rood, 1988; Henderson, 1987; Jacob, 1983; Comer, 1984; Walberg, 1984; McCormick, 1989). The more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects (Cotton, K., Wikelund, K., Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In *Parent Involvement in Education*). A separate study showed that the more parents participate in schooling, in a sustained way at every level (e.g. in advocacy, in decision-making and oversight roles, as fund-raisers and boosters, as volunteers and para-professionals, and as home teachers) the better the student achievement (Williams, D. L., & Chavkin, N. F., 1989). A qualitative study surrounding the findings of these studies would be very beneficial. By using an interview process, parents of charter school students could be asked to share exactly how intensely they were involved with their children's schools. The data collected would provide detailed information to further our understanding of parent involvement.

The implications for further research are extensive but necessary for the development of school programs. Through all of these potential areas of future research, researchers and school personnel can further their understanding and improve upon the educational experiences delivered to our students in general.

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