

CULMER, SANDRA, Ed.D. An Exploration of the Exercise of Parental Choice and Decision Making Under the Provisions of the *No Child Left Behind* Act. (2011)
Directed by Dr. Carl Lashley. 182 pp.

This study examined the perceptions and experiences the parents of elementary school aged children had regarding expanding schooling options within the public educational system and choosing schools using the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) public school choice provision. The NCLB Act of 2001 was the federal government's effort to improve schools and nurture high standards and academic success for all students. Policies intended to encourage greater parent participation in their children's schooling are emphasized, especially when children attend low-performing Title I schools. Parents may use public school choice provisions to transfer their children from struggling schools and enroll them in public schools that met or exceeded the NCLB proficiency benchmark called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

This study was designed to give insight into parents' experiences in choosing to exercise or not exercise the transfer options in schools that have failed to make AYP.

The specific questions explored were:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of parents/guardians whose children have the opportunity to transfer from an elementary Title I school designated as an underperforming school under NCLB to a presumably higher-performing school?
2. How do parents/guardians describe their children's experiences following the choices that the parents/guardians made to leave one school for another

because of NCLB or not to switch schools and to remain at their current low-performing school?

3. How do parents describe their own experience with the school and school district after enrolling their child in the NCLB choice school or having their child remain in the current low-performing school?

Phenomenological research methodology was used to investigate parents' experiences, view school choice from the parents' perceptions, and capture parents' voices as they describe their experiences. Two major findings emerged from the data. The majority of the parents perceived that the choice option gave them greater influence and control over their child's education. They perceived it transformed the selection of schools from a passive to an active decision making process. The findings suggest that NCLB's transfer policy would benefit from attention to parents' perceptions and experiences to improve implementation and achieve the goals of the law especially for low-income and minority students.

AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXERCISE OF PARENTAL CHOICE
AND DECISION MAKING UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF
THE *NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND* ACT

by

Sandra Culmer

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2011

Approved by

Committee Chair

© 2011 Sandra Culmer

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Cornelius and Hattie DeWitt, and my brother Ward DeWitt. They left behind a legacy of love, encouragement, and support that continues to be my inspiration. This dissertation is also dedicated to my daughter Eryn DeWitt Culmer who will continue to pursue her own dreams, achieve, and reach her highest goals. To my sisters, Ann Williams and Muriel Irvis, this dedication extends to you for the faith, belief, and love that you always share. Thank you for your prayers, guidance, and encouragement.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with sincere gratitude that I thank Dr. Carl Lashley for his guidance, expertise, and words of encouragement through this educational journey. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to each committee member Dr. Carol Mullen, Dr. Craig Peck, and Dr. Rick Reitzug for their direction and mentoring. To Richard Allen, thank you for your assistance and technical expertise. I am grateful to each of you for your partnership and capacity to bring insight and logic to this process. I am sincerely appreciative of the parents who participated in this study and for those who will read about and learn from the parents' experiences and perceptions regarding public school choice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	x
 CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background to the Study.....	4
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Study	9
Definition of Terms.....	12
Deficiencies in Previous Studies.....	15
Significance of the Study	16
Summary and Forecast.....	17
II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE	19
Research Related to the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act of 2001	20
Research Related to Public School Choice Prior to NCLB	26
An Historical Analysis of School Choice	26
Magnet Schools.....	31
Charter Schools.....	32
Vouchers	33
Tax Credits.....	33
Arguments for and against Choice.....	35
Parental Perspectives and Responses to School Choice Prior to NCLB.....	36
Social Class and Race	43
Research Related to the Exercise of Public School Choice under NCLB.....	49
Summary and Forecast.....	52
III. METHODOLOGY	54
Research Design.....	55
Cases	55
Cross-Case Analysis	56
Rationale for the Methodology	57
Data Sources	58
Data Collection	59

IRB Approval.....	62
Research Setting.....	62
Research Participants	65
Selection Criteria	67
Instrumentation	69
Researcher Role and Subjectivities.....	69
Protection of Subjects	71
Data Analysis	72
Individual Case Analysis	72
Cross-Case Analysis	73
Limitations and Transferability.....	74
Summary and Forecast.....	74
 IV. CASES	 76
Case: Precious	77
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	78
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	80
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	80
Case: Mario	84
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	85
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	87
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	87
Case: Tina	88
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	89
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	90
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	91
Case: Lucy	91
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	92
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	93
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	94
Case: Sarah.....	95
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	95
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	96
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	97
Case: Stephanie.....	98
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	99

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	100
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	101
Case: Marie	101
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left</i> <i>Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	102
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	102
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	103
Case: Tracy	104
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left</i> <i>Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	104
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	105
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	106
Case: Rose.....	107
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left</i> <i>Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	108
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	109
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	109
Case: Bernard.....	110
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left</i> <i>Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	110
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	111
Parent's Experience with the School	112
Case: Diane	113
Parent's Experience and Perception of the <i>No Child Left</i> <i>Behind</i> Act's School Choice Option	113
Parent's Perception of Child's Experience	114
Parent's Experience with the Schools.....	115
Summary and Forecast.....	115

V. CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS.....118

Introduction.....	118
Analysis and Themes	118
What are Parents' Experiences and Perceptions of NCLB's Public School Choice Option?	118
What are the Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Experiences Following School Choice under NCLB?	125
What are the Parents' Experiences with Their Children's Schools after Choosing a School?.....	128
Summary and Forecast.....	134

VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	136
Purpose of the Study	136
Methodology	137
Summary of Findings.....	138
Cross-Case Analysis Summary.....	138
Research Question 1: Parents’ Experiences and Perceptions of the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Act’s School Choice Option	138
Research Question 2: Parents’ Perceptions of Their Children’s Experiences	143
Research Question 3: Parents’ Experiences with Their Children’s Schools	146
Cross-Case Emergent Themes	148
Theme 1: Parental Choice in Education.....	148
Theme 2: The Whole Child.....	149
Theme 3: Educational Inequity	149
Theme 4: Failing School	150
Theme 5: Parent Involvement and Control over Schooling Options.....	152
Theme 6: School and School District Neglect.....	152
Theme 7: Cultural Insensitivity	153
Recommendations for Parents, School Districts, Schools, and Federal Government.....	154
Parents.....	155
School Districts and Schools	157
Federal Government.....	160
Recommendations for Future Study	161
Conclusion	163
REFERENCES	165
APPENDIX A. RESEARCH QUESTION AND DATA SOURCE TRIANGULATION	173
APPENDIX B. IRB APPROVAL LETTER	174
APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT FORM	175
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS WHO CHOSE TO KEEP CHILD(REN) IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL.....	177

APPENDIX E.	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS WHO TRANSFERRED THEIR CHILD(REN) TO THE OPT-OUT CHOICE SCHOOL	179
APPENDIX F.	PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE.....	181
APPENDIX G.	MATRIX OF FINDINGS AND SOURCES OF DATA TRIANGULATION	182

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Racial Demographics of Student Population: 2007-08 and 2008-09.....	63
Table 2. Participants' Ethnicity, School Affiliations, and Choice Decisions	119

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the experiences and perceptions the parents of elementary school aged children had regarding expanding schooling options within the public educational system and choosing schools on behalf of their children using the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) public school choice provision. It draws on interview data to discuss the school choices of eleven parents with children who attended one of two Title I public elementary schools designated as schools in need of improvement under NCLB. The study's focus is on the school choice experiences of parents who as active choosers made an affirmative choice to seek out information about available school options and be proactive in choice-making. Active choosers are parents who attended informational meetings, requested materials; conferred with the principal, staff, or other parents; asked questions; expressed interests; or communicated preferences about the school choice options NCLB availed them. The parents choose either to continue their children's attendance in the Title I neighborhood school or transfer their children to an opt-out school designated by the school district.

The study uses a phenomenological approach to allow the parents to describe their school-choice making experiences and their perceptions of the schools and school choice options. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that emphasizes understanding the human experience. The purpose of this study is to gain access to the experiences and

perceptions of parents in order to appreciate and understand the meaning of public school choice under the provisions of NCLB from the parents' perspectives.

The federal government first incorporated public school choice into Title I with the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). The IASA legislation allowed school districts to use Title I dollars to fund intra-district choice programs and gave students in failing schools the option to transfer to better public schools. Since the implementation of choice programs under IASA was voluntary, few districts chose to implement such programs on a large scale. Under the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001, however, districts are required to offer transfer options to all students in a school failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two or more consecutive years. Under NCLB, schools receiving Title I Funds that do not make AYP for two consecutive school years must be identified as low performing and in need of improvement. The NCLB transfer policy is intended to expand the quality of schooling options for students in low performing schools by allowing them to transfer to more positive, higher-performing school environments, which in turn could lead to better student performance. Underlying this policy are the assumptions that there are better school choices available and that a parent could do a better job of choosing his or her own child's school. It is also assumed that the competitive pressures generated by the NCLB transfer policy would create incentives for high poverty low-performing schools to be more effective and improve the curriculum and instruction (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). Ideally, the public school choice provision under NCLB is intended to

improve outcomes for all students thereby reducing and eventually eliminating the achievement gap.

NCLB became Public Law 102-110, “An Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind.” A reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, NCLB was designed to improve the educational experiences of children, especially those attending low-performing Title I schools as identified by NCLB’s testing standards and accountability provisions. The goal of NCLB was to ensure that every child demonstrates proficiency on state-defined educational standards in reading, language arts, mathematics, and science by the end of the 2013-2014 school year (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

Another goal of NCLB was to provide new educational options to low-income parents whose children attended underperforming schools. The school choice provisions of the law allow parents the choice to transfer their children from a low-performing school to a better-performing school based on accountability targets and students’ performance on state tests. Because public school choice is provided as an option for families whose children attend Title I schools that fail to make AYP, it was important to study parents’ experiences with NCLB’s public school choice option and further the understanding of the implementation of choices for parents. The choices that parents made and their ability to navigate themselves and their children through the policies, processes, rules, and requirements of the federal law are at the heart of this study.

Considering the expectations of NCLB toward increased parental choice and differences in parental response to NCLB’s transfer option, it was important to study

parental interpretations of the public school choice provisions. Examining parents' experiences and perceptions is critically important for understanding parental behavior and decisions in the choice of schools under NCLB. Parents/guardians who have had experiences in choosing among schooling options available to them under NCLB and matching their preferences with the selection of a school have insights that federal and state level policymakers should consider as they rewrite ESEA and consider choice reforms. District and school-level administrators can also use the insights of parents to gain knowledge about factors and issues that may precede and to some degree structure how parents themselves respond to the choice process.

Background to the Study

From the outset of the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, many controversial issues have surfaced around its testing requirements, high stakes accountability standards, the identification of schools to determine whether they made adequate yearly progress (AYP), highly qualified teacher mandates, the lack of funding, and the enforcement of legislation that is very complex. Considerable attention has been paid to these issues and they are likely to continue to fuel current educational reform discussions and ideas that President Obama is currently proposing in the NCLB reauthorization.

In contrast, NCLB's mandatory school choice option and parents' experiences with this provision at the elementary school level have not been studied and discussed extensively in the professional literature. Choice programs were considered to be a critical component of NCLB and were mandated for implementation to state education

departments and local school districts. Expanding schooling options for disadvantaged children was based on the belief that there should be more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Essentially, there has been limited knowledge about parents' experiences and perceptions of this policy and whether or not parents perceive that choice through NCLB public school choice provides them with opportunities to expand the quality of schooling options for their children.

In addition to public school choice, the NCLB accountability principle required states to develop a test based system that monitors the performance of all public schools and different subgroups of students, including racial and ethnic minorities, low-income children, English language learners, and students with disabilities. States developed targets in reading and mathematics to determine whether schools made AYP. As stated in the legislation, AYP measured progress toward the goal of having 100% of students in grades 3-8 demonstrate proficient performance in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014 (Sunderman et al., 2005). Other content areas, such as science, were included in this accountability system as well. Disaggregation of the scores into subgroups allowed for monitoring students' progression toward proficiency.

To create incentives for schools to improve all students' test scores, NCLB established a prescriptive series of sanctions for underperforming schools. Any Title I school that failed to make AYP for two consecutive years was identified for the first year of school improvement and was designated as a school in need of improvement or a program improvement (PI) school. Local education officials were required to inform

parents that the school was in improvement status and students in the PI school had the option to transfer to another school. If the school failed to make AYP for three consecutive years, the district had to provide supplemental educational services to students. After the fourth year of failure, the district was required to take corrective action to improve the school, which could include replacing the staff and or implementing a new curriculum. If a school failed to make AYP for five consecutive years reconstructive planning was required and included the implementation of one of the following sanctions: convert to a charter school; take over the management of the school by the state or a private management contractor; replace the school administration and staff (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The accountability model prescribed by NCLB contained more specific sub-policies and procedures for the public school transfer option designed to give more and better educational opportunities to parents whose children attend low-performing or failing schools. According to the federal statute, districts had to provide all students enrolled in an improvement school with the option to transfer to another public school that had not been identified for school improvement and was in good academic standing within the district. It also included the possibility of transferring between districts by requiring, to the extent practical, that local education agencies establish cooperative agreements with other districts in the area if there were no eligible schools for students to transfer to within the district in which they live (NCLB, 2002).

School districts were required to set aside 20% of their Title I allocation for supplemental education services and transportation. In the event that receiving schools

did not have sufficient capacity, the district was required to create additional capacity or provide choices of other schools (Sunderman et al., 2005). If there were extremely limited spaces for eligible choice students, those with the lowest achievement scores and lowest economic status were given priority. Under this provision if school districts were unable to find available space required to offer transfers, students remained at their school site and received supplemental educational services that were to be of high-quality, research-based, and specifically designed to increase students' academic achievement and meet content area standard proficiency goals (NCLB, 2002).

In sum, school choice was expanded in principle under NCLB, and expanded schooling options were intended to help provide parents and students with choices that potentially result in more effective instruction, access to better schools, and improved educational opportunities for students. Assuming the continuation, in one form or another, of school choice and provisions to help families evaluate and improve their children's schools and learning as NCLB is reauthorized under President Obama's administration, we need to learn more from parents about the effect that the public school choice option under NCLB had on them and their children. An examination of parents' experiences, interests, interpretation, and ideas regarding public school choice provisions constitutes a critical research problem for school choice legislation reform. My primary focus for this study was parental school choice rights set forth under NCLB and its adequate yearly progress (AYP) provisions. Understanding the reasons why parents do or do not choose to transfer their children to a higher performing school can be quite insightful and helpful in further informing federal education policies, the NCLB

reauthorization agenda, and public school choice programs. Parents have insights that federal and state policymakers should consider as they rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and move forward public school choice practices under revised federal education legislation.

Statement of the Problem

A perennial theme in American public life is reforming public education (Hickok, 2010). NCLB contains educational reform provisions particularly for underachieving Title I schools serving high-need student populations where academic performance did not reflect the proficiency requirements mandated by NCLB's school accountability standards. In seeking to address the ongoing problems of underachieving schools, NCLB recognized the impact that informed parents had on their children's educational success and included the provision of parental choice in education. Expanding schooling options for disadvantaged children was one of the major principles of NCLB and was based on the belief that there should be more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 9).

Under NCLB's school choice reforms, parents were able to select other public schooling options and transfer their children from an underperforming school that failed to make adequate yearly progress to another public school that was not identified for school improvement. While NCLB assumed that public school choice, by its very nature, was an effective educational intervention and school reform strategy, it was unclear whether parents were actually taking advantage of these opportunities.

Although school districts have offered public school choice to eligible families since NCLB was enacted in 2002, nationally, the overall enrollment of parents into NCLB's choice programs was only 20% of those eligible (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Results from two earlier studies underscore this finding of low transfer rates under NCLB. The Council of Great City Schools surveyed schools in 46 districts and found that nearly 1.2 million students were eligible to transfer in 2003-2004. However, only 44,000, less than 2% of all eligible students, requested transfers (Casserly, 2004). In another survey involving ten states and 53 school districts, the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights found that 1.7% of eligible students requested transfers and moved to a school that was not identified as in need of improvement (Brown, 2004). While expanding schooling options for disadvantaged children is one of the major principles of NCLB, a particular area of concern is parents' low response to the public school choice program under NCLB and factors that impact their decisions to participate in the NCLB choice program.

Research regarding parental choice as it related to the public school choice option under NCLB is limited. Therefore it was important to study the parents' responses to the transfer options and their perceptions and experiences using the NCLB transfer policy as a means of having more and better educational opportunities and increasing access to better schooling options for their children who attend underperforming Title I elementary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions parents had regarding expanding the quality of schooling options within the public educational

system and accessing better schools for their children using the NCLB public school choice provision. In the context of four elementary schools, what are parents' experiences and preferences in the exercise of the NCLB public school choice provision? Specific questions that have been explored are as follows:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of parents/guardians whose children have the opportunity to transfer from an elementary Title I school designated as an underperforming school under NCLB to a presumably higher-performing school that is not identified for school improvement?
2. How do parents/guardians describe their children's experiences following the choices that the parents/guardians made to leave one school for another because of NCLB or not to switch schools and to remain at their current low-performing school?
3. How do parents describe their own experience with the school and school district after enrolling their child in the NCLB choice school or having their child remain in the current low-performing school?

Together, the research questions were designed to guide the inquiry process and provide an overall picture of the perceptions and experiences that parents had with the NCLB public school choice option. Research question number one provided insights, impressions, sentiments and opinions that showed whether parents were satisfied, dissatisfied, or remained neutral about their experiences with school choice under the *No Child Left Behind* Act. Although the primary focus of this study was to understand parents' experiences and perceptions of the NCLB public choice option, research

question two reviewed how parents perceived the effect of the selected public school choice option on their children's achievement and school performance. The third question addressed parents' experiences with the district, the Title I school identified for improvement, and/or the selected receiving school following school choice as another dimension of the study.

The research study was designed specifically to answer these questions for two major groups of the study: (a) those parents who selected to transfer their child(ren) from an underperforming Title I elementary school to a presumably higher-performing school and (b) those parents who choose to have their children remain in their attendance zone Title I school. From each research question, interview questions were developed to ultimately allow parents to describe how they perceive and experience the transfer policy mandated under NCLB. Answers from the interview questions revealed how the parents viewed and interpreted their child's and their experience after either moving to a different school or continuing enrollment in their Title I school identified under NCLB as failing to make AYP for two years.

To achieve the purpose of this study, phenomenological research methodology was the most appropriate approach for exploring the research questions and studying the pertinent issues. A phenomenological methodology was used to elicit stories that describe parents/guardians' experience with public school choice under NCLB. Eleven elementary school parents/guardians with children in Title I schools designated as low performing who were given the option under NCLB to choose a higher performing school were interviewed to share their experiences with the public school choice option. Data from

these interviews, along with documentation from two Title I schools designated as failing to meet AYP for two years and identified for school improvement, and two higher-performing schools designated as opt-out schools for the under-performing Title I schools were compiled. The schools' databases contain information on each school's Title I program status (school wide vs. targeted assistance), the percentage of students receiving free-and reduced-price lunch, and the percentage of students meeting proficiency in reading and mathematics for two consecutive school years (2007-08 and 2008-09).

A multiple case research design was used to explore the experiences and perceptions of parents who elected to transfer to another school under NCLB, as well as parents who elected not to use the transfer option and remain in the Title I school identified for school improvement. These findings were then cross-analyzed to possibly guide educational agencies and policy makers as they contemplate education-reform initiatives and the provision of parental choices in education.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were applied to this research:

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

NCLB is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, Public Law 89-10) that focuses on school reform through accountability. It requires all states to establish a single minimum proficiency rate that would apply to all schools as well as to all subgroups of students within schools. Under NCLB schools and districts are held responsible for demonstrating adequate yearly progress in raising

student achievement and in closing achievement gaps. NCLB uses school choice and supplemental education services as school reform and improvement levers.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The yearly academic gain that students must make under NCLB is referred to as adequate yearly progress (AYP). It is based on the results of students' scores on standardized tests in reading and math administered once a year. Achieving AYP means either that a sufficiently high percentage of students in a school or district meets the state's standards for academic proficiency or that the school or district is demonstrating continuous and substantial academic improvement for all students.

Parents/guardians.

Reference is made to respondents as parents and guardians throughout this study. Both terms reference the persons in the households who were responsible for making decisions about the education of children.

High Performing School.

Schools that have reached their AYP goals as designated by NCLB standards. These schools will be referred to in the study as opt out or receiving schools.

Local Educational Agency (LEA).

An education agency (e.g. district) at the local level that exists primarily to operate schools or to contract for education services. A single school may sometimes be considered an LEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. vii).

School Choice.

This term refers to programs that allow children to choose to attend alternative schools, including choices that are public schools (charter, magnet, intradistrict, interdistrict) or private schools (parochial, vouchers, tax credits). Also referred to as parental choice.

Interdistrict Choice.

This option enables students to transfer to a school in another district different from the one where they live.

Intradistrict Choice.

Students are allowed to transfer to other schools within their home district.

Public School Choice Options.

Under NCLB's choice process, if a school fails to make AYP for two consecutive years, and it is a school that receives Title I funds, its students must be offered public school choice. Students are provided with the option of moving to a better performing public school that is making adequate yearly progress.

Schools in Need of Improvement.

If schools do not make AYP for two consecutive years they are designated as schools in need of improvement and are subject to various sanctions and interventions intended to improve the schools' academic performance. These schools will also be referenced in this study as Program Improvement (PI) schools, low or under performing schools, and neighborhood home schools.

Supplemental Educational Services.

These services are additional sources of academic instruction designed to boost the achievement of students in Title I schools that fail to make AYP for at least three years. Such services may include free after-school tutoring that is provided by a variety of suppliers including private vendors of education services or the school system. All providers must be approved by the state.

Title I.

This term refers to federal aid to education that dates from the 1965 ESEA and directs resources to economically disadvantaged children. Title I provides financial assistance to LEAs and schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.

Deficiencies in Previous Studies

School choice has become an important direction that has significantly impacted education. Educators and researchers need to know more about parents' incentives and motivations to access and use public school choice programs (Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2002). Andre-Bechely (2005) found that there is limited research on parents' understanding of and experiences with the school choice provisions of NCLB.

Researchers have overlooked the parental voice, preferences, and actual experiences in both developing an understanding of the NCLB provisions for school choice and deciding to embrace or reject, whatever the case may be, public school choice for their children under NCLB. Even more crucial, there is a lack of understanding of the reasons why parents reject transferring to other designated opt-out schools when they seriously

consider the choice options of NCLB. One of the goals of NCLB was to reduce the achievement gap plaguing low-income, minority, and limited English proficient students. In light of this goal, the consequences of not identifying the experiences, interests, and needs of parents—particularly low-income and language-minority parents—regarding public school choice become apparent and pose important questions for research.

Missing are rich descriptions that illustrate how parents interpret and respond to the school choice provisions of NCLB and how they self-select their school of choice. This point is borne out by other research. Schneider, Teske, and Marschall (2002) contend that there is also remarkably little evidence in the literature about what happens to those parents left behind in their neighborhood schools who do not choose to transfer, opt out, or exit their zoned neighborhood schools. Limited knowledge about the experiences of these parents in the choice process warrants the need for additional research as part of ongoing educational reform.

Significance of the Study

This study provided a phenomenological examination of parents' experiences and viewpoints about school choice under the provisions of NCLB and parents' reasons for engaging, or not engaging, in transferring their children to a different school when given the option. It sought in part to help remedy the educational and research deficiencies noted above. As such, the researcher assessed how parents who qualify for NCLB's choice provisions described their experiences in choosing to exercise or not exercise transfer options to a presumably higher-performing opt-out school. Parents were asked to focus on both their experiences and their child's experiences and the processes by which

the decision was made to transfer to a higher performing school or remain in a school designated as a PI school. They were encouraged to address the effect that they perceived the transfer policy had on their child. By documenting parents' experiences with and interests in the public school choice provisions of NCLB, this study can be instructive to public legislators and policymakers who are considering school choice opportunities for parents. Information gleaned from this study could serve as an impetus for policy makers to use the experiences and perceptions of parents to direct changes in the orientation and policies of NCLB at the national, state and district levels as this legislation is reformulated and adjusted under President Obama's administration. President Obama has released A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), and many policy makers and educational leaders believe that standards-based accountability, testing, school choice and provisions to help families evaluate and improve their children's schools and learning will remain components of education policy in the United States.

Summary and Forecast

As discussed in Chapter I, it is my intention to explore the experiences and perceptions of parents in choosing schools for their children using the NCLB public school choice provision. Parents' viewpoints regarding public school choice are invariably missing or undervalued in previous studies about NCLB's school choice options. This study examines the perceptions and experiences that different parents have about the NCLB public school choice process including those who chose to use the transfer option, as well as those who chose to remain in the attendance zone school that

was designated as low-performing. I employed a methodology using multiple cases to examine how parents responded to school choice under NCLB and how they describe their experiences and the experiences of their children during and following the process of transferring schools or choosing to remain at their current school. By capturing and documenting the parents' words, experiences, and actions centered on NCLB's public school choice provision, this study provides insight for policy makers and school leaders to consider as public school choice continues to be implemented as an educational reform strategy.

In Chapter II, I have conducted a thorough review of the literature on public school choice. As this study aims to understand more fully the experiences and perceptions of parents under the choice provision of NCLB, the literature review begins by looking at the goals, issues, controversies, challenges, and critiques that surround NCLB's public school choice implementation. A review of the historical development of different school choice reforms and responses to school choice prior to NCLB was also conducted. Another focus includes the impact of social class and race on parents' school choice behaviors and how these dynamics serve to constrain and facilitate parents' experiences in exercising school choice. Finally, I concluded with a review of what the literature reveals about NCLB public school choice participation rates and issues that may contribute to a low response to the transfer option.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

No Child Left Behind follows a long list of federal legislation dedicated to offering opportunity for and access to public school education and to expanding schooling options from which parents can choose. The review of the related literature will provide the reader with increased perspective regarding public school choice under NCLB and issues and challenges that surround the legislation.

The review examines the historical development of school choice reforms and the different public school choice arrangements that have emerged including magnet schools, charter schools, vouchers, intra-district and inter-district choice plans, and tax credits. It includes a review of information that chronicles President Obama's proposed education reform initiatives outlined in *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Given the conflicting ideologies, debates, and disputes surrounding school choice, the review also looks at arguments in favor of and against school choice practices and policies that are noted in the work of numerous researchers. Then it examines the extent to which social class and race shape parents' educational participation and engagement in school choice behaviors. The final section concludes with a summation of the literature research related to the exercise of public school choice under NCLB and research implications for this study.

Research Related to the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001

NCLB's primary purpose was to close the achievement gap and ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach at a minimum proficiency on state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (Abernathy, 2007). To accomplish these goals, NCLB required states to develop a test-based accountability system that monitors the performance of all public schools and different subgroups of students, including racial and ethnic minorities, low-income children, English language learners, and students with disabilities (Sunderman, 2005). States were required to develop targets in reading and mathematics to determine whether schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Although AYP was based on numerous criteria, the chief aim was to measure academic achievement on reading and mathematics tests and to hold schools accountable for helping different subgroups of students reach a single performance level. As stated in the legislation, AYP was used to assess progress toward the goal of having 100% of students demonstrate proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014. NCLB expected schools to make steady improvements on reading and mathematics tests and to improve the performance of traditionally underachieving students.

To create incentives for schools to improve test scores in reading and mathematics, NCLB established a series of sanctions for underperforming schools. A Title I school failing to make AYP for two consecutive years was identified for the first year of school improvement. The local educational agency (LEA) was required to inform parents that the school was in improvement status and to offer all students the option to

transfer to another school. If the school failed to make AYP for three consecutive years, the district had to provide supplemental educational services to students. After the fourth year of failure, the district was required to take corrective action to improve the school, including replacing staff or implementing a new curriculum (Sunderman, 2005).

While the act's goals and aspirations were laudable, a review of the literature documents many issues, controversies, and critiques that surround NCLB's implementation. Among the controversies that surround the legislation were questions over the fairness and usefulness of NCLB's numerous high-stakes accountability policies and procedures, and the disproportionately negative impact policies have on high-poverty schools. One argument asserts that NCLB, with its testing requirements and mandates to disaggregate achievement data by various socioeconomic indicators, in fact exposed the achievement gap both in urban schools and schools in wealthy suburbs (Hickok, 2010). Advocates argued that with disaggregation, the achievement gap was no longer hidden in the schools' averages, and progress on narrowing the achievement gap became an integral part of how the nation measures performance in education. The policymakers behind NCLB believed that the achievement gap between groups of students would decrease if stringent state academic standards were adopted, curricula were aligned to those standards, and teachers taught students using standard curricula. According to Sunderman et al. (2004), policymakers attached sanctions to NCLB to force all schools to be accountable for achieving proficiency on state tests by 2014.

In contrast, critics such as the Harvard Civil Rights Project, along with other advocacy groups have argued that the measures used in the NCLB accountability model

were unfair and painted an unjust portrait of schools. These critics charged that unrealistic assumptions and unattainable demands resulted in large numbers of schools marked as failures (Sunderman, 2005). The increase in the number of failing urban schools led school reform experts such as Darling-Hammond (2004) and Abernathy (2007) to denounce NCLB for accordingly promoting inequity toward populations it was designated to support. They argued that although in principle, NCLB's subgroup rules underscored the need for schools to focus on race in monitoring and eliminating achievement disparities, in practice, these policies have placed predominantly minority schools and racially integrated schools at a disadvantage in meeting their performance goals. Schools with large minority enrollments and racially integrated schools had to meet more achievement targets than predominantly White and racially homogeneous schools (Meier, 2004). Framing the problem of a lack of fairness in these terms, Goodman (2004) also found that in schools enrolling more demographic subgroups, even when students display almost identical test scores to students in schools serving mostly middle-class children, these schools were more likely to miss their proficiency targets under federal rules set by NCLB. The subgroup accountability requirements put disadvantaged schools segregated by race and poverty and multiracial schools at a higher risk of failing AYP, being identified as needing improvement and subjected to stiff federal sanctions.

Other perspectives in the research regarded NCLB as a rigid and one-size-fits all school reform model. Critics argued that the NCLB accountability system imposed a single sanction on schools that have few similarities and major differences. They contend

that NCLB did not make a distinction between schools identified as needing improvement that have adopted effective instructional practices and produced consistent and incremental improvements in student learning over several years and chronically low-performing schools that failed to upgrade the quality of teaching and learning (Sunderman, 2005). Citing the requirement that all schools must cross over a single proficiency bar on state tests, opponents asserted that NCLB did not take into account student differences, as it related to their ability and learning (Woodard, 2009). In concert with this view, Sunderman (2005) suggested that the law was unreasonable in that all schools and groups of students are supposed to arrive at the same high level of achievement within the same number of years and schools and groups starting further behind were required to make even more rapid progress than schools that initially performed better. Critics considered it irresponsible to assert that all students, regardless of their knowledge, skill, and language levels, would reach proficiency in designated academic content areas by 2014 (Woodward, 2009).

Although relatively little work has been published on NCLB mandated assessment results, several studies that measured achievement gap trends associated with the implementation of NCLB showed positive results. Stullich et al. (2007) examined the academic growth of the targeted populations and reported that the achievement gap was narrowing and that African-American and Hispanic scores were narrowing with those of white students. The findings also unveiled an increase in test scores on state assessments since the 2002-2003 school year (Stullich et al., 2007). However, the researchers also used the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to compare achievement

trends and reported that although the two assessments differed, the performance trends demonstrated by NCLB testing results were not reflected on the other national test. Comparisons of results on state tests used for NCLB purposes with state scores on NAEP tests provided evidence of the degree to which states seemed to be reporting greater improvements in student achievement and higher percentages of students proficient or above on state assessment than on NAEP tests. The comparison of data from the NAEP and student scores on state tests indicated conflicting evidence of achievement especially as states redefined test scores that were considered proficient to keep more schools off the NCLB needs-improvement list (Hickok, 2010). The upward trend in reducing the achievement gap and the patterns of increasing changes in student test scores, the gauges NCLB used to measure school improvement, proved to be problematic and remain as debated issues.

In addition to debates about the merits of NCLB's testing and accountability policies and performance results, a review of the related literature showed a lack of evidence from research that either the transfer option or the supplemental educational services provision improved student or school performance. Few researchers have examined the impact of these provisions on student achievement and school performance. There was no body of research that provided clear and consistent evidence documenting the effect of these options on learning outcomes for low-income or minority students. The literature review did show that political controversies and administrative constraints may have undermined the effect of these two policies on closing achievement gaps and improving student learning (Hickok, 2010). For many researchers and educators,

discrepancies remain regarding NCLB's actual effects on student achievement and debates continue as to whether its goals for closing the achievement gap and increasing student proficiency will be attained.

Belying the more pessimistic interpretations of the research findings, some researchers have pointed out that NCLB's focus on results and accountability, choices for parents and scientifically based instructional programs represented an important shift in education policy that was transformative (Hickok, 2010). In this view, there is speculation among NCLB advocates that education-reform policies embraced by President Obama's administration will be rooted in the policies and proposals that can be found in NCLB.

Proposals for a reformed federal education policy are pending currently under President Obama's administration (A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: United States Department of Education, 2010). The initial blueprint for the reauthorization of NCLB released in March, 2010 amends the requirement that students in schools that repeatedly fall short of adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals be offered tutoring and transfers to different schools. Rather the proposed policy includes competitive school improvement funding called Race to the Top Fund (RttT) grants that are contingent on substantial restructuring of schools that continue to perform in the bottom 5% of the state and fail to demonstrate growth or have graduation rates below 60% (Hickok, 2010). To be considered for the funds, states would need to adopt internationally benchmarked standards and assessments; outline policies aimed at recruiting and rewarding effective teachers and principals; build data systems to

measure student success and inform teachers and principals about how to improve their practices; and develop strategies for turning around low-performing schools. Emerging themes in the reform efforts also included charter school creation, school restructuring, and closure of underperforming schools (Hickok, 2010). Assuming that the proposed policies are in line with the sort that were advanced under NCLB, parental choice could continue to play a role under President Obama's proposed education reform arrangements.

Research Related to Public School Choice Prior to NCLB

An Historical Analysis of School Choice

Historically, school choice has been a controversial and widely debated public education reform initiative that moved from a theoretical argument for changes in the public education system to a widespread movement in the 1980s (Bielick & Chapman, 1999). Choice supporters such as Milton Friedman, John Chubb, and Terry Moe sought choice as a means of generating competitiveness among schools in order to increase school quality (Friedman, 1955). Other choice supporters viewed the reform as a way to increase educational opportunity by providing poor parents with options such as private schools that were previously exclusively available to the wealthier. They also saw school choice as a way to mitigate conditions caused by residential segregation (Coons & Sugarman, 1978).

Public school choice primarily allows students to attend any public school within or outside their local school district, a magnet or charter school, a private school or home school. According to Bielick and Chapman (1999), the availability of public school

choice has grown with the number of magnet schools in the United States doubling from the early 1980s to 2000 and the number of public charter schools growing from two schools in 1992 to over 1,400 schools in 1999. Data in Bielick and Chapman's (1999) report show that participation in school choice programs has been increasing since the early 1990s. The percentage of students enrolled in public chosen schools, meaning interdistrict and intradistrict schools of choice, or public magnet or charter schools, increased from 11-14% from 1993 to 1999. Conversely, enrollment in public, assigned schools—meaning schools to which students are assigned based primarily on their residence—decreased from 80% in 1993 to 76% in 1999 (Bielick & Chapman, 2003). One form of school choice—open enrollment—has moved to the forefront of the debate as an option that is available for parents under NCLB.

In examining the origins of the school choice movement, King (2005) found that implementing choice and competition in education was first discussed by Adam Smith. King cites the following excerpt:

The expense of the institutions for education and religion instruction, is likewise, no doubt, beneficial to the whole society, and may, therefore, without injustice, be defrayed by the general contribution of the whole society. This expense, however, might perhaps with equal propriety, and even with some advantage, be defrayed altogether by those who receive the immediate benefit of such education and instruction, or by the voluntary contribution of those who think they have occasion for either the one or the other. (Smith, 1776, as cited in King, 2005, p. 357)

As noted above, school choice has a considerable history and manifests long-standing controversies fueled by both critics and advocates. Advocates for school choice argue that competition among schools is a viable mechanism for improving the educational

system. They stress the revitalization of public education through the creation of private alternatives such as public vouchers for private schools. Conversely, critics argue that choice programs will drain needed support away from schools in most need of public funds.

King's (2005) summary is consistent with Howe, Eisenhart, and Betebenner's (2001) review of the claims and counter claims of advocates and opponents of school choice. Advocates contend that competition gives parents a voice and the power to "vote with their feet" in choosing their children's schools. Additionally, advocates argue that school choice accommodates a diversity of student interests and needs better than the traditional public schools. According to Howe et al. (2001), proponents also tout that school choice reduces inequities by removing attendance boundaries and permitting students to attend schools independent of their neighborhoods and parents' power to influence officials.

In their study, Howe et al. (2001) identify the claims made by critics and detractors of school choice that competition for enrollment destroys cooperation among teachers, schools, and communities and stratifies school achievement with the use of exclusive admissions procedures and high test scores. In this view, broadening the educational options of students could exacerbate inequity rather than mitigate it. Choice critics contend that without free transportation and adequate information many parents will be unable to exercise choice which undermines the stated goals of school choice.

Fuller and Elmore (1996) found that the roots of school choice can also be traced to the Supreme Court's 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*. According to Fuller and Elmore (1996),

Choice first arose as a major strategy in the effort by conservatives to limit the racial desegregation of public schools. The Supreme Court's 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, declared unconstitutional the school systems of 17 states and the District of Columbia, which had mandated separate schools for blacks and whites. In response, southern segregationists interpreted the Supreme Court decision as requiring nothing more than a choice for black students to transfer between two racially separate systems of schooling. This policy, euphemistically known as "freedom of choice," was the dominant southern position. A number of northern cities instituted "open enrollment." A form of choice permitting transfers to schools that had space but in many cases did not provide transportation. Typically a very small proportion of students made such transfers. (p. 5)

Desegregation established the principle of choice and justification of government power to manipulate race to achieve race-conscious outcomes and a beneficial public goal (D'Souza, 1996). However, in urban cities like Milwaukee, under a system of "forced-voluntary" transfers and magnet schools, the burden of desegregation fell disproportionately on black students. School authorities closed or converted to magnet schools those schools with predominantly black enrollments and required a disproportionate percentage of black students to transfer to schools in white attendance areas (Carl, 1996).

In 1990, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program became one of the most controversial and closely watched school reforms of the past decade (Carl, 1996). Milwaukee reformers created alliances to seek improved educational opportunities for black students. The alliances engaged in litigation that led to the development of a

publicly funded K-12 voucher program. The program provided vouchers for one percent of Milwaukee Public School students to attend participating nonsectarian private schools operating in the city. The program targeted low income and/or minority families to achieve racial integration and provide expanded educational options (Carl, 1996). Carl observes that the argument for vouchers and other forms of privatized schooling remains compelling in current political and economic conditions, especially without a national commitment to rebuild urban infrastructures.

Goldring and Hausman's (1999) study corroborates the use of school choice as a tool to achieve racial/ethnic desegregation. In a review of five choice programs, Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option, San Antonio Independent School District's Multilingual Program, Milwaukee's Voucher Plan, and two privately funded programs, Goldring and Hausman report, "The racial/ethnic composition of the choosing population in each of the five choice programs is not dramatically different from the nonchoosing population." They further note, "Yet the fact that heavily minority and low-income families are targeted for choice options in each location (except in Minnesota) suggests that the participation of minority and low-income families should be even higher" (p. 471).

Supporters of school choice argue that it offers the potential of expanding school integration by allowing people to associate in schools without regard to where they live or how much money they have (Stulberg, 2006). Advocates make the link between civil rights and school choice, indirectly or directly invoking the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown*

v. Board of Education of Topeka school desegregation decision (Stulberg, 2006). They argue that school choice can further racial, ethnic, and economic desegregation.

In contrast, critics of school choice argue that choice is likely to produce undesirable outcomes and consequences that include the stratification and segregation of school populations along socio-economic and racial/ethnic divisions (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Murnane, 1986; Wong, 1992). Wong and Walberg (2006) identify research findings on barriers to minority and low income families' involvement in their children's education that include limited family resources and logistical constraints, language barriers, and families' lack of understanding of the educational system. Schneider et al. (2002) contend that public school choice may lead to greater stratification of parents by their involvement and knowledge of schools. They point out that parents who have chosen not to transfer their children to an alternative school may end up in schools that no longer have a body of alert parents and involved students who will pressure school administration and teachers to deliver a quality education.

Magnet Schools

A study conducted by Wong and Walberg (2006) on school choice suggests that magnet schools were formed in response to desegregation decrees to create majority to minority and minority to majority student transfers. The magnet schools usually had distinctive identities in an effort to attract students from racially concentrated neighborhoods. Other special vocational/technical schools followed and offered innovations designed to appeal to students and families from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. With federal court approval, the hope was that magnet

schools would help districts avoid “White flight” and middle class transfers by parents who wanted to avoid seemingly arbitrary “forced bussing” (Wong & Walberg, 2006, p. 4).

Charter Schools

In chronicling the emergence of public school choice plans and initiatives, Wong and Walberg (2006) also note that charter schools gained attention in the mid 1990s. These schools are concentrated in urban areas and are privately governed but publicly funded. Although they are public schools, they operate outside the normal school structure and are less closely regulated than regular public schools. They are chartered for a term, often for five years, and their continuation is in principle determined by whether they can attract sufficient numbers of students, live within their budgets, and maintain reasonable levels of test scores. Charter schools are attended by students who choose them and are funded on a per pupil basis. Wong and Walberg (2006) write that the *No Child Left Behind* Act promotes charter school choice because states and districts may be required to allow families to transfer their children from failing schools to charter schools as a choice option. Rose and Gallup’s (2007) 39th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the public’s attitudes toward public schools show that the percentage of survey respondents favoring charter schools has climbed steadily to 60% in 2007, up 7% from 2006 and 18% since 2000.

Ferraiolo, Hess, Maranto, and Milliman (2004) note that as of January 2003, nearly 2,700 charter schools were operating in 36 states and the District of Columbia, serving over 684,000 students (Center for Education Reform, 2003). Their study shows

that Arizona has the largest charter school sector and the most expansive public choice legislation in the nation. Currently there are more than 450 charter schools in Arizona, enrolling over 73,000 students.

Vouchers

Pipho (1998) notes that vouchers like those in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program were proposed in the 1970s, following the first plan developed by Milton Friedman in 1956. Pipho (1998) asserts that the voucher movement has its advocates and critics. Vouchers are offered as an opportunity to relieve parents of part of the burden of paying private school tuition while paying taxes to support public education. Vouchers are funded privately by citizens or firms or publicly by states and school districts. They can be used to pay all or some of a student's tuition to attend private schools.

Wong and Walberg (2006) specify the state-funded voucher program in Cleveland was challenged on the grounds that over 90% of its students enrolled in sectarian schools. They point out that in June 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that the Cleveland program did not violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which separates the affairs of religious institutions and the government. The U.S. Supreme Court found that students may attend parochial schools if the choice of attendance is that of their parents.

Tax Credits

Wong and Walberg (2006), confirming Pipho's (1998) research on school vouchers, add that tuition tax credits and tax deductions also fall under the heading of choice. These arrangements allow a family to deduct some or all of the payments for

private tuition and other school-related expenses from their state income taxes. Pipho (1998) reports that the idea of tuition tax credits and tax deductions began in earnest in 1996 with Colorado's Amendment 17. Amendment 17 would allow the establishment of an income tax credit beginning in 1999 for parents or legal guardians of children enrolled in public, non-public schools, and non-public home-based educational programs. In accordance with the proposed amendment, five levels of priority would be used in awarding tax credit funds:

- 1) students transferring to private schools from public school districts below the state average in student performance; 2) students transferring from other districts to a private school; 3) low-income students already in private schools; 4) all students in private schools; 5) public school students with other education-related expenses and home-schooled children for materials used in their education (Pipho, 1998).

Pipho shares that opponents to Amendment 17 claimed that it was not a measure to improve education for all children, but rather a measure to reward only those parents who can afford to send their children to private schools. They charged that the five priority levels were attempts to get votes from minorities and the poor. Pipho (1998) found that the critics argued that the private schools would fail to recruit those low on the priority list and most low-income parents would not be able to pay the tuition. Pipho (1998) makes the point that although Amendment 17 did not pass, as a state-level constitutional amendment, it could serve as the foundation for similar amendments or initiatives in other states.

Arguments for and against Choice

Hsieh and Shen (2001) summarize the arguments against and in favor of different forms of school choice. A basic argument for school choice is that it increases competition among schools which in turn improves quality. Advocates for school choice plans contend that they infuse free market competition into a stagnant public school system. For example, proponents of school choice contend that charter schools make it possible for parents to join with teachers and administrators in creating and managing innovative schools that are free from many of the restrictions that public schools face. Hsieh and Shen offer that proponents argue that open enrollment choice plans contribute to school improvement, encourage competition, increase school decentralization, reduce inequities, promote diversity in schools, and cause the demise of poor schools and the growth of good ones. They also contend that vouchers especially benefit low-income families who have the opportunity to improve their lives by becoming consumers of private education services. Proponents see vouchers as a wake-up call for public schools, particularly in the inner cities.

Critics respond that competition for enrollment destroys cooperation among teachers, schools, and communities, and stratifies school achievement. They argue that the choice between public and private school systems results in inequity as higher income families derive more benefit from competitive market choice. Hsieh and Shen (2001) cite the argument that school choice both within the public school system and between the public and private systems could cause social stratification. Critics argue that school choice has the potential to sort students by race, income, or religion, and therefore could

increase both social conflict and economic disparity. Opponents of school choice contend that choice drives the privileged and less privileged further apart, exacerbating school differences and inequalities. They argue that voucher plans siphon money from the poorest public schools and give it to public and private schools in more affluent areas.

This initial review of the literature has examined the legislative routes to school choice. The school choice movement has historical roots deeply embedded in the nation's efforts to desegregate and integrate public schools. Although the move toward school choice gained momentum in the 1990s, it continues as a controversial public education reform. Many criticisms, arguments, and opposing factors have dominated the school choice debate historically and continue as controversial aspects. Given contradicting information about public school choice and the controversial nature of the choice debate, it is likely that some parents may be confused or hold disparate and varying perspectives in their understanding and interpretation of public school choice. Examining parents' perceptions regarding school choice is particularly relevant to fully understand their responses to public school choice options and their decision-making experiences.

Parental Perspectives and Responses to School Choice Prior to NCLB

Although there are many conflicting ideologies in the literature on school choice, an increase in public schooling options from which families can choose has been accompanied by an increase in the use of public school choice (NCES, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics NCES (2006) data indicated that the number of parents who favor school choice increased during the 1990s. Findings in this report showed that parents are taking advantage of increased public school choice opportunities.

According to the NCES (2006) data, the percentage of students enrolled in public, chosen schools increased substantially from 1993 to 1999 while the percentage of students enrolled in public, assigned schools decreased. To meet the demand, the availability of public school choice increased over the past decade with the number of magnet schools nearly doubling from the early 1980s to 2000 (NCES, 2006). In 1992, there were two authorized public charter schools; by 1999, there were more than 1,400.

NCES (2006) data suggest that public, chosen schools are attended by students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, family incomes, community types, and among students with disabilities. According to the NCES (2006) data, the overall trend toward enrollment in chosen public schools between 1993 and 2003 remained apparent when breaking out results by student and household characteristics.

Based on the NCES findings, parents across all demographic classifications who choose their child's school (public or private) expressed higher parent satisfaction with the school than those with children in public, assigned schools. In this study, their satisfaction was based on their perception of qualities such as academic standards, teachers, and order and discipline.

Findings from other studies also show that there is high satisfaction with schools among parents who exercise school choice (Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Martinez & Thomas, 1994). Hausman and Goldring (2000) report that parents perceive that they will be more satisfied in an alternative school to their mandatory assignment school. According to this perspective, these parents are going away from one school more than they are looking for something specific or special in another school.

Martinez and Thomas (1994) report that highly motivating factors for choosers includes parent satisfaction regarding educational quality, learning environment, discipline, and the general atmosphere of the school. According to choice advocates, parents may also be more satisfied simply as the result of having the choice option and making rational, value-based decisions that further enhance their satisfaction. This study also suggests that as a result of investing time and energy in the school choice process, parents may justify their choice and indicate satisfaction that is directly related to the act of choosing.

The NCES (2006) survey data results indicated that parents of students in public self-selected schools were no more involved in their children's schools than parents of students in public assigned schools. This conclusion is not congruent, however, with other research findings. In contrast to the survey results, Hausman and Goldring (2000) found: "Choice parents' involvement, already high in their prior school, increased when their children enrolled in the choice schools in all areas but educational activities at home" (p. 7). Similarly, Smreakar and Goldring (1999) report that parents in magnet schools in their study are more involved in their children's schools than are non-magnet school parents. The study posits that parents may be more involved as a result of being comfortable with and supportive of the school that they have chosen. Parents may have the desire to prove to themselves that they made the right decision through their involvement.

Beyond being involved in the school and its activities, parents may perceive influence in school decision making as an important factor in parental choice. Goldring

and Hausman (1999) found that magnet school parents reported low to moderate levels of influence in school decision making. Parents who choose schools may more likely exert their influence in areas such as curriculum, extended learning opportunities, and school improvement. Biellik and Chapman (1999) concur that parents may feel empowered by having the option to pull their children out of schools they have chosen and may exercise greater influence over school practices and policies because of their ability to leave if the school does not meet their needs.

Hsieh and Shen (2001) synthesized the findings of the underlying reasons and perceptions of parents' school choice and enrollment decisions, citing the National Center for Educational Statistics survey data (2000). The survey grouped parents into four categories including parents who sent their children to an assigned public school, parents who made school choice decisions within the public school system, parents who sent their children to a private religious school, and parents who enrolled their children in a nonreligious private school.

The survey findings reveal that parents who send their children to private religious or secular schools tend to be White with high income and education levels. It is interesting to note that this finding parallels the claim that parental choice stratifies schools socially and economically. Hsieh and Shen (2001) suggest that the survey findings clearly indicate that the choice of private schools increases social stratification, and cultural and ethnic segregation. Another leading indicator of the NCES data reveals that a very high percentage of African American parents exercised choice within the public school system.

A primary finding among the three groups of parents who made explicit choices for their children is their citing of academic improvement as a key reason and motivator for school choice. Given the perceived importance of academic achievement, the percentage was highest for the nonreligious private school group. The data also provide a unique perspective on the role of social issues in motivating parents to opt for school choice. Of the parents who made choices for their children in the public schools, 40% indicated social reasons including a more convenient location, a safer school area, and special activities.

Bosetti (2004), in a study of parents in Alberta, Canada, researched factors that influenced and informed parents' decisions regarding school choice. He found that non-religious private school parents indicated that their reasons for choosing a school centered on smaller class size, shared values and beliefs, teaching style, and strong academic reputation. Bosetti (2004) reports that 50% of public school parents indicated proximity to their home as the most important factor in choosing a school followed by academic reputation, teachers, principal, teaching style, special programs, shared values and beliefs, and smaller class size. According to the findings, private school parents are seeking a school that addresses the individual needs of their children. A primary factor for religious private school parents is that their children are in an environment that shares the religious values and beliefs. By contrast, alternative school parents are seeking a particular type of school experience and are most likely to involve their children in the school selection process. It is also revealing to note that public school parents who send their children to

their designated schools without seeking information want their children in the school close to their home and community.

Bosetti's (2004) study also confirms that satisfaction appears to be higher among parents who actively choose their school. He observes that public school parents and parents of low socio-economic status do not appear to be motivated to exercise their choice options. Within the study, Bosetti questions if the decision to forego exercising choice options is that parents lack awareness and understanding of the available options, that they are generally satisfied with their schools, or that they hold a fundamental belief in the value of public education.

In the study of school choice in the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD), Howe, Eisenhart, and Betebenner (2001) also attributed parents' reasons and motives for exercising choice to academic performance, test scores, and parental satisfaction. Howe, Eisenhart, and Betebenner's (2001) findings are consistent with Hsieh and Shen (2001). Based on BVSD surveys, parents were more satisfied with choice schools than neighborhood schools. They were most satisfied with charter schools which gave parents a greater voice in the operation of the schools and the power to choose the curriculum and methods of instruction. Consistent with other studies, parents who exercised choice were most satisfied with their schools.

According to the study, students requesting open enrollment had higher test scores than their BVSD cohorts and applied disproportionately to schools with higher test scores. This enrollment pattern resulted in skimming, in which other schools lost a disproportionate number of higher performing students. Eisenhart and Betebenner (2001)

assert that stratification by race and income became a prominent feature of the open enrollment pattern in the Boulder Valley School District. This pattern closely resembles the pattern revealed by Hsieh and Shen (2001). In addition, the study reveals that teachers in the neighborhood schools voiced their concern that the choice schools skim off the most involved parents and motivated students. From this perspective, Edwards and Whitty's (1992) study of parental choice in Britain and the United States concludes:

Some parents' exercise of choice may leave others' choice diminished. While the individual parents who exercised school choice tended to boost their children's attainment, the accumulated effects of individual choosing were to increase educational inequalities and social polarization. (p. 103)

Edwards and Whitty (1992) focus their attention on parents' understanding of school choice and their capacity and confidence to make informed and knowledgeable decisions. Their study of public choice in Chicago contrasts parents who did not apply for an option school or who applied with little understanding with other parents who were well connected to networks of information and influence. They describe the latter parents as ready to devote energy to mastering the intricacies of admissions and negotiating the outcomes they want. The study provides evidence to counter the assumption that the cognitively aware and knowledgeable parents were typically middle class or the more highly educated parents. Other researchers, however, have found that parents with higher education and income are more likely to be attuned to educational issues and have a greater understanding of the educational system and school choice programs and processes (Howe, Eisenhart, & Betebenner, 2001; Hsieh & Shen, 2001).

In reviewing parents' reasons for choosing a school, different parents are motivated by different factors. Although this review provides insight into why parents choose different schools, there are points of contrast to the findings in the literature review and parents choosing options under the provisions of NCLB. The research indicates that an increasing number of parents exercise choice. However, under NCLB, in 2006-2007, participation in public school choice was only 2.2% of eligible students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Considering the finding that a sizable majority of parents with children eligible for school choice under NCLB do not exercise their choice options, further study of parents' school choice decisions under NCLB is warranted. Are there self-imposed or system-imposed dispositions, barriers, or constraints that conspire to limit parents' access and use of their choice options under NCLB? What is the disposition of these parents in exercising school choice?

Social Class and Race

Diamond and Gomez (2004) provide a framework of research that examines the extent to which social class and race shape parents' educational participation and how they influence the extent to which parents possess the resources and are afforded the opportunity to engage in school choice behaviors (Baker & Stevenson, 2004; Fehrman, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). The studies suggest that race and social class are important factors in determining how parents seek to customize their children's school experiences through school selection. The research findings indicate that parents' educational orientations are informed by their prior social class and race-

based educational experiences, the educational environments they navigate, and their resources for negotiating these environments (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

A major implication based on the study's findings is that parents from different social class and racial groups often navigate distinct educational terrains. Cooper (2007) suggests that the lack of money, sufficient social capital and adequate information about school choice options for low-income, working-class African American mothers not only hinders their school choice process but also restricts their involvement at their child's school. She contends that school choice-making and parental involvement are socially constructed activities that are influenced by one's gender, race and class. Shapiro (2004) portrays how social class and race influence the extent to which White parents possess the resources and are afforded the opportunity to engage in choice behaviors. According to Shapiro, in the process of seeking educational advantages, White parents re-segregate themselves and their children overwhelmingly in schools and communities that look like them. He purports that most Whites live in homogeneous and financially viable communities during the years they have school-age children, which ensures that they have access to higher-quality education.

Shapiro's (2004) findings suggest that in a sense, school choice exists today in the form of residential location. He contends that residential and community economic segregation carries consequences for school resources, quality, and performance and restricts minority households' access to quality schools. He suggests that federal housing, tax, transportation policies, mortgage discrimination, redlining, predatory lending practices, racism, and white flight reinforce residential segregation. Shapiro concludes

that unequal schooling leads to educational disparities and wide gaps in educational conditions that generally provide competitive educational disadvantages for Blacks, minorities, and the poor.

Diamond and Gomez (2004) concur that affluent White parents also use the presence of other wealthy Whites and the recommendations of like parents as indicators of school quality rather than “objective” measures such as test scores. They observe that more often, parent-to-parent networks forge and are used for getting and giving inside information about schools. Shapiro, Diamond, and Gomez suggest that more racially homogeneous (White) schools and residential segregation further restrict African American families and perpetuate inequality and competitive educational disadvantages.

In this context, working-class and middle-class Black parents possess different resources with which to navigate the educational environment. Accordingly, middle-class Black parents possess resources (e.g., human, financial, social, and cultural capital) that are more highly valued within educational institutions than the resources possessed by working class Black parents. Diamond and Gomez (2004) argue that middle-class parents are more likely than their working-class counterparts to proactively leverage school choice options; select their children’s schools; influence course placement decisions; manage important educational transitions; and seek to compensate for perceived weaknesses in teacher expertise and the quality of schools’ educational programs. Diamond and Gomez found that middle-class African American parents also discussed school selection with family and friends and used social networks to become more knowledgeable about school choice options.

In contrast, Diamond and Gomez (2004) contend that working-class African American parents negotiate more challenging environments and interact with lower quality schools than their middle-class counterparts. According to Diamond and Gomez, there is limited discussion of school selection among working-class parents because parents perceived fewer opportunities to select their children's schools. Furthermore, the lack of economic resources and different conceptions of the quality of their children's school raised concerns about their children's learning and educational environment. Knowledge about the school's low test scores, educational materials, and disciplinary approaches frequently led them to perceive their schools as low quality and lacking educationally. These differences in parents' orientations, resources, and structural locations are reflected in the schools their children ultimately attend.

Pruitt (2004) adds an additional lens in the consideration of how parents and students from different social class and racial groups navigate the educational terrain of school choice. She argues that race and racial hierarchies work with and through forms of lived identity and institutional life to produce and sustain power inequities. She makes the observation that everyday practices in schooling create and enforce racial meanings. She theorizes that Whiteness is co-produced with other colors in schools, usually alongside Black, Asian American, and Latino identities, in symbiotic relation. She posits that where Whiteness grows as a seemingly "natural" signifier for quality, merit, and advantage, the Asian identity runs a close second as a model minority, and African American and Latino identities disintegrate to embody deficit or "lack." She argues that White racism is so institutionalized and embodied in every strata of school life that when students [and their

parents] have what is considered a race-neutral choice about which academic or class track to opt into or school to attend, they often choose by race. She cites evidence that White and Asian children are more likely to be enrolled in AP and honors classes than African American and Latino students, and poor and working-class students of color are most likely to be educated in underfunded schools by under qualified educators. Wells and Crain (1997) confirmed Pruitt's claim agreeing that low income families are more likely to choose schools based on their social and economic status rather than their specific educational offerings. These findings suggest that low income families may not necessarily choose schools with better educational offerings and may make schooling decisions based on other factors such as school proximity, demographics, and a school community that reflects the parents' shared values and beliefs.

While these findings indicate that social class and race may help shape parents' school choice behaviors, Fusarelli (2004) addresses the social and racial implications of NCLB, finding that large schools with diverse populations are at a significant disadvantage under NCLB. His argument is that the more qualifying subgroups that a school has (broken down by ethnicity, special education, English-language learners, and economically disadvantaged), the more chances it has to be labeled as failing under NCLB. He argues that states with homogeneous (White) populations fare well under NCLB, citing that only 8% of the schools in Minnesota failed to make AYP in 2003 (89.4% of Minnesotans are White). He observes that only 15% of schools in Wyoming were listed in need of improvement (92.1% White) and 16% of schools in Connecticut made the "need improvement" list (81.6% White) (Almanac Issue, 2003).

As Fusarelli notes, in general, the fewer the subgroups and more affluent the students, the easier it is to make adequate progress under the law. He concludes that schools serving diverse students are less likely to achieve their growth targets and most likely to experience interventions and sanctions such as mandatory school choice for students. He observes that NCLB sanctions and withdrawal of federal Title I funds fall disproportionately on impoverished schools with students of color most at risk of failure.

Fusarelli (2007) and Hunter and Bartee (2003) report race and social economic status are linked to children's educational outcomes and attainments. Their findings suggest that the negative labels and sanctions incorporated in NCLB are much more likely to be realized in schools with poverty and diverse population. They contend that the accountability requirements arbitrarily single out schools with large minority subgroups for sanctions and exclude them from awards, or statistically disadvantage diverse schools that are more likely to be attended by minority students. In effect, the NCLB act is predisposed to reward racially homogeneous schools and to punish heterogeneous ones. Again, communities with multiple numbers of failing schools may not have access to the same school choices as more affluent communities. Hunter and Bartee conclude that it remains imperative that stakeholders and power brokers carefully consider the racial and nonracial implications of NCLB, especially as the intent of the law is to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students.

Fusarelli (2003) and Hunter and Bartee (2003) argue that studying the socio-cultural and political dynamics of school choice and how these dynamics serve to constrain and facilitate parents' knowledge, experiences, and interest in exercising school

choice is particularly important and useful for amending and implementing revisions to school choice. Coleman, Starzynski, Winnick, Palmer, and Furr (2004) found that Latino parents' expectations regarding their involvement in their children's education is very different in the United States than it is in their native countries, where they are not expected to interact with school officials or be involved directly in educational decisions at the school. In considering the socio-cultural dynamics of school choice, it is plausible to question how ethnicity, different cultural perspectives and beliefs, social class, and race intersect with and shape parents' management of their children's education, including the school choice process.

Research Related to the Exercise of Public School Choice under NCLB

Multiple studies have reported that a sizeable majority of parents with children eligible for school choice under NCLB do not exercise their choice options (Brown, 2004; Davis, 2006; Rose & Gallup, 2006; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). According to a study of NCLB public school choice participation rates by the U.S. Department of Education, African American and White students had above average participation rates while Hispanic, limited English proficiency students, and students with disabilities had relatively low participation rates (Stullich et al., 2007). The Council of Great City Schools surveyed 498 schools in 46 districts and found that nearly 1.2 million students were eligible to transfer in 2003-04 (Casserly, 2004). According to the survey results, only 44,000 students—about 4%—requested transfers and only 17,900 (1.5%) actually moved to a choice school. The 2006 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll reported that only 15% of respondents would transfer their children under choice provisions of NCLB.

Sunderman, Kim, and Orfield (2005) suggested that the availability of other choice options and the lack of good transfer options under NCLB may all factor into parental decisions to forego the NCLB choice program.

Drawing from a survey of Massachusetts public school parents, Howell (2006) observed that during the 2003-04 school year, of the 983,313 students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools 95,458 qualified for NCLB's public school choice provisions and only 298 students—0.3% of the eligible population—seized on the opportunity to transfer to a higher performing school. Howell theorized that if the participation rates in the choice provisions of NCLB are to increase, parents require considerably more attention than they have received and policy makers need to stay carefully attuned to families' knowledge of and interest in the public school choice opportunities they present.

Hess and Finn (2004) contend that participation in the school choice provisions of NCLB could be limited or affected by a number of factors including capacity of highly performing schools to receive additional students; few or no available options for exercising "choice" in many urban districts; the number and type of alternative schools established; late notification by states of schools required to offer choice; and biases in who exercises choice, as some parents lack or receive misleading information and other parents have access to more and better information and are more capable of making informed choice. Timely reporting of NCLB AYP results has been a challenge for school districts as they struggle with notifying parents of their options before the school year begins (Howell, 2006). When AYP results are not released until mid to late summer there

may be a short window of time to notify parents of their choices and market schools appropriately so parents are able to make informed choices. These issues have surfaced in the literature as significant implementation barriers and may continue to contribute to the comparatively low NCLB public school choice participation rates.

As the research showed, there are many reasons offered for the low transfer rates under NCLB. If the NCLB transfer policy is to achieve its goal of increased parental choice, there is a need to further delineate the reasons that parents identify in pursuing or rejecting transferring their children to different schools when they seriously consider the choice options of NCLB. Many of the issues cited in this literature review, including timely school choice notification, the interplay of supply and demand of available alternative choice schools, and difficulties in implementing public choice mandates may contribute to and inform parents' attitudes, understandings, and perceptions about NCLB. These factors may become variables that influence parents to embrace or reject public school choice under NCLB. The choices that parents make about educational opportunities for their children are important, yet confusion exists around how parents make choices among the options and provisions available under *No Child Left Behind*. The NCLB transfer policy would benefit with careful attention to the experiences, perceptions, interests, and needs of parents regarding public school choice.

This review of research on public school choice revealed that there is an absence of a full body of research that correlated with the study of NCLB school choice and the meanings, experiences, and perceptions parents ascribe to public school choice under NCLB. Given the lack of information about parents' perceived interest and knowledge of

the NCLB legislation's provisions for choosing and transferring their children to a different public school, my purpose for this study was to investigate how parents experience school choice and make decisions to place their children in one school over another. My intent was to promote a more informed understanding of parents' experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding public school choice and to help inject greater parental voice and lessons of experience into the implementation of public school choice programs, particularly under NCLB.

Summary and Forecast

The literature review examined the goals and tenets of the *No Child Left Behind* Act and the implementation of public school choice prescribed by NCLB to increase schooling options for low income and minority students. The review also explored the historical and social background of school choice and provided a brief description of public school choice policies and plans prior to the enactment of NCLB. It examined parental perceptions, experiences, and responses to these policies and practices, and investigated if racial or socioeconomic differences appeared in parents' perceptions and experiences with school choice.

One claim made in the literature was that race and social class are important factors in determining how parents seek to customize their children's school experiences through school selection. The research findings suggested that parents' educational orientations are informed by their prior social class and race-based educational experiences, the educational environments they navigate, and their resources for negotiating these environments. According to this review, only a very small percentage of

parents with children eligible for school choice decided to enroll their children in another school, and parents of low socio-economic status did not appear to be motivated to exercise their choice options to transfer schools. These findings raise a number of challenges for achieving the goals of NCLB's public choice provisions to narrow achievement gaps and realize improved educational opportunities for students from poverty in low-performing schools. Little is known in the existing school choice literature about the perceptions and experiences of parents in underperforming public schools who have the option of sending their children to another public school within the district. Given these gaps in the literature, this study is timely and could serve as the impetus for educators and policy makers to understand more thoroughly the interests, perceptions, and experiences of parents faced with public school choice. Increased insight regarding these factors will be especially important as steps are taken to reform educational policy and public school choice options at the national, state, and district levels.

In Chapter III, I have outlined the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis process employed to explore the experiences and perceptions of 11 parents/guardians whose children were eligible under the NCLB public school choice program to transfer schools. The chapter investigates how these parents experience and perceive the policies and practices of NCLB public school choice and gives voice and description to their perceptions and experiences through the individual cases and cross-case analysis guided by the research questions. The findings and patterns derived from the cross-case analysis became the themes that captured the parents' experiences and perceptions of NCLB's school choice provision and the meaning they ascribed to it.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Emerging from the literature review was the need to further study the meanings parents ascribe to public school choice under NCLB. Given the lack of information about parents' perceived interest and knowledge of the NCLB legislation's provisions for choosing and transferring their children to a different school, my purpose for this study was to investigate how parents experience school choice and make decisions to place their child in one school over another. Chapter III describes the study design and methodology of the research that was employed. Having interest in gaining a detailed and rich understanding of parents' experiences and adding their experiences and perceptions to the general knowledge base regarding NCLB, I selected phenomenological methodology using multiple cases to conduct the study. According to Yin (1984), qualitative methods are better suited when analyzing complex social phenomena. A qualitative research design with a phenomenological theoretical framework was advantageous in investigating the phenomena of public school choice as it was experienced and perceived by individual parents.

The rationale for the selected methodology and research design are described in further detail in four sections within this chapter. The design of the study includes the rationale for the research. A description of the data sources, data collection procedures, and IRB approval follows in the second section. The third section presents the research

sites, participants, selection criteria, and instrumentation. In the final section of this chapter the researcher's role, protection of subjects, data analysis, limitations, and transferability of the study's findings are presented.

Research Design

A phenomenological methodology was selected to investigate, capture, and understand the exact words and descriptive accounts of parents/guardians of elementary school children who were given the option of transferring their children to a better-performing school as a result of the Title I school that the children attend as being identified in need of improvement under the NCLB accountability policy.

Phenomenological methodology attempts to explain how events occur (Glesne, 2006).

Phenomenological research is interpretive, concentrates on words and observations to express reality, and attempts to describe people in real situations (Lewis, 2000). Its aim is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Cases

To deepen my insight and understand the experiences and perceptions of parents related to NCLB, I used a multiple case design to conduct an in-depth study of parents' experiences in choosing a school for their children that was either a neighborhood zone school categorized as a Title I school in need of improvement or another public school designated as an opt out school in the study. I purposefully selected multiple cases to show different parent perspectives on the issue of public school choice under NCLB. To accomplish this study each case was treated as a single case and the data from each were

converged to write a composite description that focuses on what the participants experienced with public school choice and how they experienced it. Each case represented a parent who either transferred their children to a higher-performing school or chose not to transfer their children under the choice provisions of NCLB. It was this type of investigation that helped me explore and describe the parents' experiences and explain how these experiences influenced their decision making related to NCLB's public school choice policy. Yin (2003) suggests that the multiple case design uses the logic of replication, in which the researcher replicates the procedures for each case. Yin defines the case research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

Cross-Case Analysis

To compare and contrast findings across the multiple cases, I chose a cross-case analysis approach. The cross-case analysis uncovered commonalities or themes across cases and also disclosed critical distinctions that helped explain parents' experiences with public school choice under NCLB as it was lived and understood by them. Analysis of a number of cases is known to improve the validity of the findings. I understood the significance of having an adequate number of cases to make the data more credible and to be able to conduct cross-case theme analysis with a greater variation of data across cases. Including multiple cases provided more compelling interpretations of results which could possibly stimulate more extensive studies surrounding parent choice programs under NCLB and recommendations applicable to parents, educators, and policy makers.

Rationale for the Methodology

This study investigated the experiences of elementary school parents with children in schools designated as low performing who are given the option under NCLB to choose a higher performing school. As I sought to understand the meaning-making of parents regarding their lived experiences of this phenomenon, I determined that this research problem was best examined using a phenomenological approach. This form of study seeks to understand the meaning of experiences of individuals about the phenomenon in order to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

My interest and intention were to gather data regarding the perceptions and experiences of elementary school parents about the phenomenon of public school choice under NCLB. I interviewed eleven parents in an attempt to understand public school choice in their own terms and perceptions and provide a description of their experiences. The interviews enabled me to explore, gather data, and develop greater understanding of the parents' experiences. The description was intended to be a composite summary that reflects and affirms both the themes that were common to most or all of the parents as well as individual variations or unique themes that give deeper insight for understanding the meaning of their experiences with public school choice.

Phenomenological research is inductive and descriptive as it aims to investigate and describe phenomena that are perceived or experienced. According to Streubert and Carpenter (1999), phenomenology provides the richest and most descriptive data and is an ideal research process for exploring individual's common experiences with a

phenomenon, understanding the phenomenon at a deeper level, and formulating meanings common to all of the individuals. Specifically, phenomenology is the study of human experience from the perspective of those being studied. Using a phenomenological approach, I was afforded the opportunity to examine the personal experiences of parents, gain a deeper meaning and understanding of their cognitive and subjective perspectives regarding their experiences, and describe more fully how they view the phenomenon of school choice under NCLB. The understanding and meaning derived from the interviews and data allowed me to view public school choice from the parents' experiences and perceptions.

Data Sources

According to Patton (2002), using one source of data places limits on the findings, weakening the study and making it vulnerable to errors and inconsistencies. In this view, Patton advocates the use of triangulation of data sources or methods as a technique to facilitate deeper understanding and as a means to increase the validity and reliability of the research and quality of the investigative findings. Patton (2002) argues that triangulation exercises that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks can add to the credibility of a particular account.

The data sources for this study included parent interviews and archival and document analysis using the school district's website and state department of education School Report Cards for selected schools. Public documents from the United States Department of Education provided general information about NCLB. Interviews were conducted with parents or guardians of elementary school students in selected schools

who used the NCLB transfer process and chose placement in schools designated as choice schools, as well as parents or guardians who elected to have their children remain in the Title I attendance zone school. Each respondent was asked to focus on their experience with the choice provisions of NCLB and their decisions regarding school placement for their children. By using a mix of interviews and document analysis, I employed triangulation with multiple sources and cross-validation of data. I compared the experiences and perceptions of parents/guardians from two different points of view—those who chose to transfer their children to another public school with those who chose to have their children remain in the Title I school. I created the Research Question and Data Table as a template to cross-check data sources with the interview and research questions for consistency and alignment. The close alignment of data sources and questions contributed to the generation of data that addressed the focus of the study.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) suggested that data collection in research using multiple cases is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information such as interviews, documents, and observations, and using multiple methods of data collection. In phenomenological research, the interview is the main method of data collection allowing for the exploration of respondents' experiences and perceptions and probing for deeper understanding of the meaning of experiences with a phenomenon as it is lived and understood by others (Kvale, 1996). For the purposes of this study, data collection included interviews and document review and analysis. The primary data collection was accomplished using a semi-structured open-ended interview protocol as recommended by

Yin (1984) to expand the depth of data gathering and allow participants to shape the interview based on their unique experiences. Interviews were conducted with parent participants who experienced public school choice. In total, 11 parents were interviewed individually for approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed for data analysis. A questionnaire was used to obtain relevant background information about each participant.

This study's data were collected in four elementary schools that were selected from a large urban school jurisdiction in the southeast United States. The sample included two Title I schools categorized under NCLB in need of improvement (IP) based on their performance on the state's end-of-grade tests and two non-Title I schools designated as opt-out choice schools that students in the IP schools could choose to attend. The two Title I schools had been identified for improvement in reading or math for two consecutive years, 2008 and 2009, and were required to offer public school choice options for students going into the 2009-2010 school year.

The state's Department of Education and school district websites were used as primary sources to draw data regarding AYP and PI status for each school and obtain relevant background information about each of the schools in the study. Statistics were found and disaggregated by years and schools. I contacted the school district's student placement office to request information pertaining to the number and names of former parents in the two Title I schools that exercised their choice to participate in the NCLB public school option transferring process and enrolled their child in one of the designated opt-out schools. Heightened attention was also given to distinguish between parents who

were active choosers but chose to have their child remain in their attendance zone school and parents who did not seek information to engage in the decision-making process regarding choice of school under NCLB and ended up by default in the attendance zone school. Principals assisted in identifying potential participants who engaged in seeking information about choice options and chose to have their children remain in their Title I attendance zone school. These parents were defined as parents who, for example, attended informational meetings, requested materials; conferred with the principal, staff, or other parents; asked questions; expressed interests; or communicated preferences about the school choice options NCLB availed them.

In order to inform potential participants about the study, I met with parents individually, in small groups, and during formal school meetings, including a PTA and school curriculum night parent meeting. During these introductory meetings, parents received a letter that contained an explanation of the study and an invitation to participate. Some potential parents declined the invitation to meet or decided not to be included in the study. After receiving responses from parents who agreed to participate, appointments for interviews were arranged by telephone or the school principal assisted in negotiating access and making interview arrangements. Prior to each interview, participants signed a consent form (see Appendix C) giving permission to be interviewed and recorded with the assurance that their identity would be protected, and that they would receive a copy of the consent form. Interviews were conducted according to the interviewee's schedule and availability, as suggested by Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (1991). Interview locations included public libraries, respondents' homes, school district

administrative buildings, and classrooms. Interview recordings were transcribed, and after the completion of the data analysis, the tape recordings were destroyed.

IRB Approval

The approval letter of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is provided in Appendix B. The IRB verified that the protocol and instruments met academic standards for research. The school district's Research Review Committee reviewed and approved an application to conduct the research. Once the district approved the research project, the researcher met with the four school principals to share information about the study; answer questions; review the protocol; request their assistance in identifying potential participants; and establish timelines for meeting with parents, acquiring participants, and conducting interviews.

Research Setting

The four elementary schools selected for this research were in an urban school district in the southeast United States. The school district participated in NCLB and operated choice programs through Title I to parents. During the 2007-08 school year, 31.1% of the district's 67 elementary schools made AYP and 68.9% of the elementary schools did not make AYP. Only two (5%) of the Title I schools made AYP for the 2007-2008 school year. During the 2008-09 school year, 70.1% of the district's elementary schools made AYP and 29.9 % of the schools did not make AYP. Over 58% of the Title I elementary schools made AYP for the 2008-2009 school year. The district exited corrective action in 2008/2009. Corrective action is a NCLB sanction that is triggered when a school or district does not make AYP after being in improvement for two years

(U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The two largest minority groups represented in the school district are African American students, at 30.6% and 31% of the total student enrollment and Hispanic students weighing in at 17.3% and 16.9% of the total for 2007 and 2008 respectively (see Table 1).

Table 1

Racial Demographics of Student Population: 2007-08 and 2008-09

Racial Group	2007-08 (%)	2008-09 (%)
African American	30.6	31.0
Caucasian	49.1	49.1
Hispanic	17.3	16.9
Asian	3.0	3.2
American Indian	0.5	0.5

The four schools enrolled students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Two of the schools were chosen primarily because they were Title I schools with a student enrollment from families below the poverty level that was 60% or greater. The first Title I school is an urban school that did not make AYP in the 2007-08 school year but made AYP in 2008-09. In 2008-09 the school was in year three of Title I School Improvement. The second school was one of the lowest performing elementary schools in the district. It did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in either the 2007-08 or 2008-09 school years. In 2008-09 the school was in year five of Title I School Improvement. In 2008-09 the school was in year five of Title I School Improvement. Both schools were designated as priority schools in need of improvement (IP) based on their performance on the state's tests. After year two the schools were under NCLB sanctions and had to offer public

school choice to parents of enrolled students. The students in these schools were provided the option to transfer to another public school designated by the school district that was not identified for school improvement.

In the first school 92.18% of the students received free or reduced lunch. The total number of students in the school was 373, of which 5% were White and 95% of the students were minority, including 82% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 5% other. In the second school 98.88% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The total number of students in this school was 245 of which 1% was White and 99% of the students were minority, including 94% African American, 3% Hispanic, and 2% other. Parents in these two schools had the option of transferring their children or declining school choice and continuing enrollment at the Title I school for the 2009-10 school year. Both schools were situated in low-income communities within the school district and attendance was based on residentially-determined zones.

The other schools were not classified as Title I Schools during the 2007-08 or 2008-09 school years. The two served as the designated, opt-out schools for 2009-2010 to which students attending the underperforming schools could transfer. One of the schools did not make AYP in either the 2007-08 or 2008-09 school years in reading. As it was not a Title I school during the two years, NCLB sanctions did not apply. Beginning in 2010-11, the school was designated as a Title I school with 60% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. The total number of students in the school was 710, of which 37% were White and 63% were minority, including 47% African American, 10% Hispanic, and 6% other. The school was classified as urban and was located in an integrated neighborhood

that included White, African American, and Hispanic families. The second school made AYP for the multiple years. The total number of students in this school is 713, of which 47% were White and 53% were minority, including 36% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 12% other. Forty-five and one-third percent of the children come from economically disadvantaged families. The school was classified as suburban located in a middle class neighborhood within the school district. Neither school was a magnet school. Students who transferred to these two schools were permitted to remain in these schools until they completed the highest grade in the schools. However, the school district was not obligated to provide transportation for the transfer students after the end of the school year in which the original school was no longer identified for school improvement. If the choice opt-out schools entered school improvement status, the students had the option to move again to another school in a subsequent year.

Research Participants

As elementary schools were the focus of inquiry, parents of elementary school children at the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade levels were selected for this study. Parental choice of middle schools and/or high schools will be the task of future studies. The targeted participants were delimited from two sets of criteria. First, parents met eligibility criteria for public school choice within the NCLB legislation and they decided to exercise or not exercise their transfer option for the 2009-10 school year.

In the selection of participants, I employed purposeful sampling. According to Patton (1990), the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information rich cases as those from which one can learn a

great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Purposeful sampling introduced the researcher to potential parent respondents in particular subgroups significant to the study. Potential participants included White, Asian, African American, Multi-racial, Hispanic, and Native American parents, as these are the racial/ethnicity categories included on school registration forms across the district. By purposefully selecting a sample of parents from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds who experienced school choice, I was able to examine the effects of choice on parents from different racial and ethnic groups according to the needs of the study. While it was anticipated that socio-economic status may be a factor in how parents experience school choice and choose schools under NCLB, socio-economic status may not be accurately reflected in the results of this study. Although the population in this study had inherent demographic qualities that are verified as a direct result of the legislative policy surrounding Title I schools and public school choice, participants self-selected to share demographic information including whether their children were participants in the free or reduced school lunch program.

As this study was also directed by a desire to examine a range in variations of parents' experiences with the phenomenon of public school choice, I decided to use a type of purposeful sampling called phenomenal variation as described by Sandelowski (1995). Phenomenal variation is variation of the target phenomenon under study in order to have representative coverage of variables likely to be important in understanding how diverse factors configure as a whole (Sandelowski, 1995). Giorgi (2008) suggested that in seeking variations of the phenomena, consideration should be given to the same

phenomena as it manifests in different individuals. I employed phenomenal variation sampling when I selected a sample of parents who experienced NCLB public school choice and either chose to continue their child's enrollment in a Title I school designated as school in need of improvement or elected to transfer their child to another school designated as a choice opt-out school.

Selection Criteria

Considering the need for adequate data collection and significant interpretation and analysis of the findings, I planned initially to interview 16 to 20 parents. Using the parameters for the sample population, the study was designed to include a group of 8 to 10 parents whose children in grades three, four, or five transferred from one of two Title I program improvement (PI) schools to a designated choice/opt-out school; and a group of 8 to 10 parents who declined the option of transferring their children from the Title I schools and continued their children's enrollment at those schools.

Eleven parents were selected for this study. The participants confirmed that they were notified that their child attended a Title I elementary school that was designated as an Improvement School and the child was eligible to transfer to an opt-out public school under NCLB. The parents also confirmed that they engaged in seeking information to weigh the available public school choices under NCLB and either chose to transfer their children or chose to have their children remain in the Title I school. Five parents transferred their child to the opt-out choice school and six parents choose to have their child remain in the attendance zone Title I school.

Difficulty identifying a significant number of subjects beyond the 11 chosen underscored issues cited in the literature review regarding parental confusion and a lack of information and knowledge about the policy and schooling options. Some potential parents declined to participate, indicating that they did not have or did not seek or want information, or were confused about NCLB school choice options. With the availability of other choice options within the school district, some parents thought that the NCLB transfer option could be used for placement in a magnet school that provided a specialized program or for selecting among different public schools other than the designated opt-out school. Some potential respondents were also reticent about reporting information about themselves and their experiences in making decisions about where to send their children to school and questioned the motives for the research.

There was a lack of standardized reporting and statistical data from the schools and the district that could be used to identify parents who preferred to keep their child in the current school and chose not to exercise their transfer option. While the district's student placement office tracked opt-out students and assisted in identifying opt-out chooser parents as prospective participants, there was no tracking mechanism to cross-check for parents who considered the opt-out option and chose not to transfer to another school. Information provided by principals who were in direct communication with parents was used to identify this group of potential respondents. Principals were asked to identify parents who they would describe as having sought information or help with their school choices and then chose to remain in their attendance zone school.

The 11 participants in this study included nine mothers and two fathers. Five of the participants were African American, four were White, and two were Hispanic. The parents described themselves as the primary educational decision maker with the exception of two respondents who explained that their spouses also shared the decision making role.

Instrumentation

An interviewing protocol (see Appendixes D and E) was used as the data collection instrument to support the phenomenological methodology and ensure that participants answered the same basic questions (Patton, 2002). The interview questions were designed to be open-ended in order to draw on the experiences and perceptions of each participant and allow a more natural conversation. Additional follow-up questions were used as the study progressed and respondents' answers signaled that there may be more to know. To add to the validity and reliability of the data, a faculty advisor and peer researchers assisted in revising, editing, and rethinking interview questions to ensure the questions were measuring what was intended in the study.

Researcher Role and Subjectivities

My role centered primarily on interviewing potential respondents of this study. As a result my goal was to establish a rapport with respondents and display a sincere interest in their views while making an effort to monitor my own subjectivity, attitudes, beliefs interests and needs. Subjectivity is an inevitable fact and a common experience of researchers who look to study and understand others' experiences and perceptions (Glesne, 2006). It is important that I am attuned to the subjectivity that I bring to this

study. I view my inquiry into how parents experience and perceive public school choice through several lenses as a child who transferred schools, a parent, and public school administrator.

First and foremost connected to me, is the personal lens that comes from my experience as an elementary school child in upstate New York. I recall my parents devoting time and energy visiting the schools that my siblings and I attended and negotiating the educational outcomes they wanted for their children. They sought opportunities to enroll their children in schools that they viewed as appealing and aligned with their values and expectations. The purchase of a new home paved the way for my brother, sister and me to transfer from city to county schools. Consequently, my knowledge of changing schools, overcoming apprehensions, adjusting to a new school setting, and forming new relationships with other students, teachers and families was helpful in asking questions about others' experiences.

I also see my personal lens linked with my perspective and belief as a parent that education holds the promise for my own child to achieve her academic goals and life dreams. Having researched and selected both middle and high schools that she attended, I am well aware of the school choice process and bring perspective and insight as a parent who has a strong interest in making the best educational decisions for her child. This insight has been useful in exploring the experiences and perceptions of other parents with school choice decision-making.

Finally, I see my professional lens connected to my personal lenses. As a public school administrator, I am a proponent of building school partnerships with parents and

expanding the options parents have over the choice of schools their children attend. It is my assumption that when teachers and parents work as team members and share decisions in carrying out educational responsibilities student learning is enabled and strengthened. It is also my belief that school choice could provide another incentive for parents to be more involved with children's educational process. My experience and knowledge as a parent and school administrator assisted me in probing and asking questions to attain rich details of the parents' experiences and perceptions regarding public school choice under NCLB. Acknowledging my own subjectivities allows me to bring them into clearer view. I understand that I entered this study with my own values, beliefs and experiences with public school choice. Wilson and Washington (2007) confirm that because total objectivity as a researcher is neither humanly possible nor desirable, a strong reflexive approach is recommended. By acknowledging and understanding my own experiences, feelings, beliefs and preconceptions about the phenomenon school choice, I hope to gain deeper understanding of the parents' assumptions, perceptions, and experiences. It is also important to note that in my administrative role, it is my professional responsibility to work closely with school principals, staff, and parents to improve student achievement. I have been careful to select schools that I do not supervise to diminish the amount of subjectivity and positionality I might bring into my role as researcher.

Protection of Subjects

All individual data, including the identity of participants, was kept confidential. The names of locations and participants were pseudonyms in the research report to

protect anonymity. The name of the school district was also kept confidential and no identifying information was provided that would make the district or the study participants recognizable. After the study was completed, all audiotapes were destroyed after transcription. Transcriptions and all other notes written during the study were locked and stored securely.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected for this study, I selected a method congruent with the phenomenological theoretical framework and underpinnings of this study and created an audit trail by following two iterations/stages.

Individual Case Analysis

Giorgi (2002) suggest that consideration should be given to the same phenomena as it manifests in different individuals. To create each individual case, I relied on the phenomenological methodology developed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Strauss (1987). The essence of the methodology is inductive analysis, description, and subjects' perceptions and experiences with the phenomena as guided by loosely framed questions. I was interested in understanding the meaning of public school choice under NCLB from the point of view and experiences of the participants in the study. All interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded using words, phrases, statements, and other information that referenced participants' experiences, thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes regarding the NCLB policy. These markings were categorized to create topics or categories that best recognized patterns in the data. By sorting and organizing the data by topics, I eventually determined the topical findings in each case that answered the research questions and

wrote a textual description of what each participant in the study experienced with school choice.

Simple matrices were constructed to assist in sifting through the data. Through a process similar to content analysis, I read and studied each interview transcript and used open coding to identify key ideas or statements in each transcript named for the pseudonym of each parent respondent. I categorized the key ideas or statements to create a series of themes or meaning units that appear across the database and characterize the participants' experience with the phenomenon of school choice under the NCLB law. Ely et al. (1991) posit that creating themes or categories triggers the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data and helps the researcher to ask questions, compare across data, change or drop categories, and make a hierarchical order of them. By sorting the data by themes or topics I was able to find which of the themes within each case directly answered the research questions. All themes were summarized and reflected on in relation to the research questions and the context of the study. I integrated the themes for each case into a detailed description of what happened and how school choice under the NCLB law was experienced by each parent and their child.

Cross-Case Analysis

To conduct the cross-case analysis, I compared the ways in which all of the parents/guardians answered the research questions. I returned to the topics found within each case and worked to identify cross-case emerging theme categories or conceptual groupings of similarities and contrasts, experiences, and common voices across the case that conveyed essential meaning of the parents' experiences. I employed a Matrix of

Findings and Data Sources Triangulation Table (see Appendix G) as a means of triangulating the findings in order to extrapolate and report the thematic findings that were anchored in the data. Of the numerous themes that surfaced across the cases, I focused on the most pervasive of the recurrent themes that seemed to explain the parents' and their children's experiences with school districts as well as choice/opt-out schools and neighborhood attendance zone schools and their overall experience with the NCLB transfer policy.

Limitations and Transferability

If the findings of this study can be established in similar research on the experiences and perceptions of parents who access and use public school choice programs, the results are considered transferable. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of parents regarding NCLB's public school choice program specifically in two selected Title I attendance zone schools and two designated choice/opt-out schools in an urban school district in North Carolina. The intent of the study was not to generalize beyond this particular set of respondents, but to offer useful information to those who are concerned about the implementation of NCLB's public school choice options and the associated experiences and perceptions of parents.

Summary and Forecast

This study explored the details and meanings of experiences and perceptions of 11 parents/guardians whose children were eligible and had the opportunity to transfer from an elementary Title I school designated as an underperforming school under NCLB to a presumably higher-performing school that is not identified for school improvement. The

phenomenological methodology provided the opportunity to focus in depth on single cases selected purposefully to fit the study and elicit relevant data on the experiences and perceptions of parents who weighed the available public school choices under NCLB, and either chose to transfer their children or chose to have their children remain in the Title I school. Five parents transferred their child to the opt-out choice school and six parents chose to have their child remain in the attendance zone Title I school. Chapter IV presents the cases of the 11 parents/guardians who experienced public school choice and reveals their answers to the research questions that informed the cross-case analysis.

CHAPTER IV

CASES

The literature review results suggest that the lack of attention to the experiences and perceptions of parents choosing schools is one of the most critical gaps in the current discussions of *No Child Left Behind*. Becoming aware of and more responsive to parents' experiences, perceptions and wishes would benefit policymakers in debating educational reform and determining what to do with the reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind*. This study examined the experiences and perceptions of parents regarding the public school choice policy provided by the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001. This chapter presents a profile of each of the study participants and the data analysis findings in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of parents/guardians whose children have the opportunity to transfer from an elementary Title I school designated as an underperforming school under NCLB to a presumably higher-performing public school that is not identified for school improvement?
2. How do parents/guardians describe their children's experiences following the choices that the parents/guardians made to leave one school for another because of NCLB or not to switch schools and to remain at their current low-performing school?

3. How do parents describe their own experience with the school and school district after enrolling their child in the NCLB choice school or having their child remain in the current low-performing school?

The profiles, presented in case format, include parent responses to the three research questions and a description of what happened and how school choice under the NCLB law was experienced by each parent and child. Examples of respondents' direct quotes are also presented throughout the chapter, in order to give more richness to the findings; however, quotes from the interviews are not included under all research questions due to space constraints.

Case: Precious

Precious was an African-American mother who used the NCLB public school choice policy to transfer her son from a Title I Program Improvement (PI) school and enroll him in a high performing elementary school that was designated as the opt-out choice school. Having recently moved from a neighboring state during the middle of the school year, Precious enrolled her third grade child in the neighborhood school in which students are assigned by attendance zones. Precious reports that her son was in a great school in the previous state, and she was disappointed with the elementary school in her assigned district when the family moved. She began having negative feelings about the school after enrolling her son and attending the school for the remainder of the school year. She expressed the concerns she felt about both the neighborhood and school:

Things changed when we moved from one state to another. Because of the circumstances when we moved we were not in a good school district. We had always been in good schools before and everything was fine. The neighborhood

that we moved into was not one of the best, but we did anyway, just to get ourselves settled. In the process of looking at the school in our area, it had a very bad personal reputation and poor test scores. I heard about teacher and principal turnovers and I wasn't impressed by that. Just the personality of the staff when I went to the school was not warm and welcoming. I learned that I could change schools and I went through the process of doing the reassignment. The school's far away but we researched the school's grades and test scores and visited also. By being far away I was skeptical, but it was more like the atmosphere of the school in the other state. I wanted him to continue to stay motivated and that was one of my main reasons for making the change.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

Precious perceived the NCLB choice policy as a "green light" to transfer to another school and "make a wise decision to get a better learning opportunity in a better school." In her opinion, the lagging test scores and unwelcoming environment that she experienced in the neighborhood school jeopardized her son's continuing success, motivation, and progress in school. She held negative opinions about the attendance zone school's uncomfortable environment and was doubtful about the school's ability to educate her child and prepare him for the next level of schooling. It was clear that Precious used NCLB and the choice policy to address her overriding concern for getting into "a better school" similar to a school that her son attended previously in another state.

In articulating her experience in using the public school choice option, Precious emphasized a nagging concern about having to transfer to a school that was a long distance from her home which also made it more difficult to be involved in her son's school. Although Precious viewed the longer distance to the school as a disadvantage, she considered the opportunity to move to a school with higher achievement levels as a positive experience. She stated, "It's not like I'm griping or complaining because I am

very pleased that he gets to go to a better school and that we have a choice. Yes, the NCLB Act is a great thing. It really is.” Precious was pleased with the opportunities the policy provided her son. As a parent, her interest in NCLB derived from the pointed dissatisfaction she held for the attendance zone school and her opinion that school choice policy gave her child an advantage and an opportunity to transfer out of a school deemed underperforming and in need of improvement and move to a better school.

While Precious viewed her experience with NCLB as positive, she shared that she did not have a good understanding about the policy at first and learned about switching schools from other parents in the community. She admitted not knowing about the availability of school report cards which gave information about the status of the school and offered that she did not know much about the NCLB opportunities. She stated, “Once I found out how to get into the report card, then I had to try to understand it. Then I actually got a letter from the school with more information about the report and school choice.” With regard to the lack of information, Precious offered that she believed schools should be required to do a better job of notifying parents about the status of their schools and communicating with parents about their schooling options. “After not getting the information I needed, I finally went to the reassignment center, they kept me well informed and I didn’t have to bounce around to do a whole lot of extra research.” Interestingly, Precious’s experience regarding a lack of information is not dissimilar to other reports that often the intended beneficiaries of NCLB lack the information to explore new schooling options (Hess & Finn, 2004).

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience

From her point of view, Precious believed that the change in schools was a positive experience for her son, as the relationship between her son and his teacher motivated his confidence and effort again in school. She viewed the change in schools as a benefit and a better learning environment. She described the change as positive with more learning opportunities and improvements in his schoolwork. Particularly, she reported significant improvement in his reading. Her son also enjoyed working with a retired volunteer who came into the classroom to help out and worked with him as a mentor. From her vantage point, Precious observed that her son's first experiences in the neighborhood school seemed to erase his motivation to learn and the environment was a mismatch for him. "I knew something was wrong or missing for him." Reportedly, her son experienced negative attitudes toward teachers and the school. After transferring to the opt-out school, she believed school was more satisfying for him and the change was the kind of "shot in the arm" that was needed to get him back on track.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

In general, Precious described her experience with the neighborhood school as less than positive and "not the same kind of educational treatment that we were getting in our other school in the other state." She described difficulty in maintaining contact with teachers or getting information from the school that she needed. She reported a sense of indifference from individual teachers during parent/teacher conferences. She offered, "Things continued to go downhill and my son completely lost focus." Not surprisingly, Precious came to the conclusion that she needed to make a change in school placement.

Precious described her experience with the opt-out school very differently. Her experience with the receiving opt-out school became in her own words “a world of difference”:

I feel like the school and me are part of a team, shooting emails or leaving messages. The teachers are great team players. I was finally able to join the PTA and I can do volunteer things from home. The cool thing about that is because I can't get there a lot, I send a lot of stuff into the school. If they need paper towels, I donate paper towels. I stay involved some way, shape or form without physically being there.

The rapport and the relationship that she and her son experienced from the staff influenced her positive regard for the school and the NCLB transfer policy. Although Precious spoke positively about her experience with staff after transferring to the school and pursuing new educational opportunities for her child, she was critical of some parental attitudes and behaviors that she experienced as a parent of a transfer student. When communicating about her experiences with other parents at the opt-out school she explained that the majority of the parents were genuine and welcoming but occasionally feelings of being outside the mainstream were amplified by another parent's comment or question.

Because the NCLB children are coming from all areas, some of them being urban areas, some of the parents with children that are living in that district kind of aren't set for the transfer. You could tell that they're not wanting these children in these certain areas to come to these certain schools. Somehow they think the kids would count against the school. But I think that regardless of what race, religion, ethnic background or whatever you are, you should be able to go and learn the same. Sometimes I felt outside the circle with other parents but it didn't matter. I never felt that way with the teachers.

Precious was sensitive to comments that made her feel marginalized, alienated, and “not like a part of the community,” and she admitted that she had concerns initially about how her son, “a Black transfer student,” would be treated or judged by others in the receiving school. Given this concern, she described how she stayed in close communication with the teachers and administration through emails, text messages, phone calls, and teacher-parent meetings. She experienced “a sense of relief” as the teachers were helpful, nurturing, and supportive in welcoming her son to the school, working with her and supporting his academic and motivational turnaround.

Overall, Precious had a positive experience using the NCLB policy. The choice provision appealed to her because she was not satisfied with the assigned attendance zone school. She did not have confidence in the school and preferred to change schools. She held that the choice experience exposed her son to a “world of difference” and an opportunity to get back on track after a difficult transition to a new state and school. There was a quiet resolution in her voice affirming her decision to transfer her child to a better school under NCLB.

Wanting to improve her son’s educational opportunities, Precious felt that she was able to reconcile the dilemma she experienced regarding the distance of the school and the transportation-related aspects that impacted her ability to attend school events. She described ways that she was able to be involved and engaged in the school and educational program. The receiving school made it easy for her to stay well-informed as teachers were accessible and responsive to her requests. Her comments indicated that she had a level of confidence in the ability of the teachers: “If I needed to know more, the

teachers always provided me with information.” Her relationship with certain teachers and staff also made Precious feel happy about her experience as she was optimistic about sustaining effective communication, a positive home/school partnership, and shared advocacy for her son’s academic success. She was pleased that the change resulted in additional resources and services for her son including a volunteer mentor who worked with him in the classroom.

However, Precious did experience some challenging situations that caused some pain, discomfort, and apprehension. Precious experienced difficulty in retrieving information, learning more about NCLB and the public school choice program, and negotiating the process until she contacted the student assignment office for the school district. She did not receive information directly from the school initially and was challenged to find things out on her own by talking informally with other parents. She advocated for more communication and information from the school about schooling options that were available to parents. Another marker event occurred when she felt alienated and not a part of the community by treatment or comments shared by individual parents of the receiving school. She recalled being asked by another parent about her family background and if she knew whether or not her previous school was on the list of schools in need of improvement. She worried about the implications of this experience and became concerned about how her son would be received at the school. She credited the connection and relationship that she experienced with her son’s teachers and the positive treatment of her son at the receiving school by his peers and teachers as relieving this stress and providing reassurance regarding the actual choice she made for her child.

When reflecting on her experience with NCLB, Precious indicated that she preferred that her child attend a different public school and overall she was contented with her decision and the schooling options that NCLB afforded her.

Case: Mario

Mario, a single African-American father from a Title I school designated in need of improvement, enrolled his son in an opt-out school using the NCLB school choice option as his son was entering the fourth grade. He explained that he first had some knowledge about NCLB when his son was a third grade student and the school offered tutoring in order to help him improve his test scores at the end of his third grade year. According to Mario, “The school seemed to put pressure on kids to get them to do better on these tests. It was like the school was judged on how many kids passed the tests.” Mario recalled that he also received information from the school that the class schedule was being changed to allow more time for helping students prepare for the tests. He offered that the testing situation became a negative experience and he became skeptical and concerned about the school’s focus on the test and feared that his son’s school experience was being taken away from him in third grade. He didn’t “just want him to be tested again and again over the long haul.” As a single father, he wanted to provide his son with educational experiences that would promote his success in school and benefit his future.

Up to this point, Mario was unaware that his child attended a school that was designated as in need of improvement and whose students qualified for transfer

opportunities and “free tutoring.” Although he wanted to take advantage of the tutoring he also wanted more information about his child’s school and NCLB.

Parent’s Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act’s School Choice Option

Mario shared his experience of how he researched the NCLB public school choice option after receiving a letter from the school informing him of the school’s status and the schooling options. The letter made reference to the tutoring services for eligible students and included information that the school had to offer students the option of transferring to another school. Mario felt he needed more information about school options and searched the Internet and school website. He met with teachers and asked other parents and his family members for information. He also noted his concern about the school’s emphasis on testing and testing preparation and his son’s difficulty with testing that didn’t allow him the opportunity “to feel good about his learning and be proud of how hard he worked.”

I liked being able to make a choice, not just because of the boundary that we live in. While the school was okay, I didn’t like the testing climate and pressure my son had on him as student who struggled a little bit in school. It made him nervous and actually me too. I remembered him crying and telling me he thought he would have to go to third grade again next year if he didn’t do good on the test. He said he didn’t think he could do it and was afraid that he would forget everything. I needed to consider what would be best for him and I looked into the other school. I looked for more information about the school and my choices on the Internet. I talked with teachers, family and other friends who had children in the school and decided to change the school.

In grappling with the pressures of testing in a school identified as needing improvement, Mario used the transfer policy to take advantage of the opportunity to place

his child in a school that was not underperforming. After becoming more informed about NCLB and the available choices, he felt successful in placing his child “in a better situation and school.”

One irony that Mario realized after transferring his son was that the free tutoring that was available in the home school was not offered in the opt-out choice school. He was concerned that without the additional support his son would suffer academically. With regard to the opt-out school, however, the school directed available resources to meet the needs of the students. Mario was enthusiastic about volunteers who worked with his son in the classroom during the day as well as the use of computer programs in reading and math that were available. There was also a student teacher who was assigned to his son’s from a local university. Mario expressed hope that these resources would make a difference for his son’s progress.

Despite an increase in the distance to the opt-out school, Mario did not consider the longer distance a reason not to transfer schools. He understood that the district would provide bus transportation and would send his son to the closest achieving school that was available. One consideration, however, was information in the letter that stated when the attendance zone school met the target goals, the school district would no longer transport transferred students and parents would have to provide transportation or return to the attendance zone school. In response, Mario commented that “until they stop providing transportation, my son will be in the other school.”

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience

In his view, Mario described his son's personal experiences in the opt-out school as being very positive and considered his son's positive attitude toward school "good evidence." Similarly, he described him having less anxiety about tests and not being afraid that he will fail in school. He attributed the change in his child's experience to the school environment and teachers.

I'm telling you when a teacher gives you her home number and cell phone number and you can call anytime that is what we have experienced here. I haven't observed any barriers that would make his experiences different. You get to know the teachers and they really take an interest in you. That's the difference I see in my son's experience.

Mario gloated over the additional resources including the computer programs, field trips, and volunteers that have benefitted his son's learning efforts. He also identified friendships with other students as a positive experience that "has contributed to his happiness and views about school now." Mario was pleased by his son's experiences as a result of the change in schools.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

It was clear that Mario had a vested interest in promoting his son's success in school. In light of what he perceived as a shift in the school's focus away from teaching and learning to test taking and performance targets, he purported that he became frustrated and concerned about his child's education within the community school. Concomitantly, he felt uninformed about all of his options under NCLB and worked to learn more about choice options and supplemental services. He saw these options as

opportunities to mitigate the difficulty that he and his son were experiencing. While he was not overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the school prior to his son's third grade experience with testing, he saw the opportunity to change schools as a positive experience. Mario expressed satisfaction with his son's attendance in the opt-out choice school. He confirmed that although free tutoring was not available, he appreciated the additional resources and services that the school availed following the transfer. Moreover, he was pleased with the academic environment and care and concern provided by the teachers.

Overall, Mario had a positive experience using the NCLB policy. Unaware initially of the transfer opportunities and supplemental services, the choice provision appealed to him because of factors within the community school that he perceived were disrupting his child's learning opportunities. For Mario, ancillary matters such as school location and transportation arrangements took a back seat to the quality and characteristics of the school when choosing to transfer schools. Mario perceived his decision to transfer his child to a better school under NCLB as a positive experience.

Case: Tina

A White single mother, Tina, felt that she would be more empowered as a parent when she transferred her two children, a son and a daughter, to a higher performing elementary school in the school district as they entered fourth and fifth grades respectively. She acknowledged that although she had a greater voice in selecting the school, she was limited by the bureaucracy in the government and school system in her choice and could not select whatever school she wanted.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

As Tina shared her experiences she acknowledge that although she was pleased that she had an opportunity to transfer her children from a school that was designated as one of the lowest performing elementary schools in the district, she was extremely disappointed that she was unable to place her children in the school that she believed would best meet their needs. By virtue of her interest to move out of the neighborhood school, Tina studied the NCLB transfer policy and the school district's choice plans. She confirmed her experience that she received very little guidance from the school in how to interpret the NCLB provisions and the school's improvement plans. She described the public school choice provisions as "senseless choices."

I appreciate being able to say where my children will go to school but NCLB is senseless in only allowing transfers from one weak school to another. I'm glad that you are doing this study. My children's school was required to offer choice because it has never met its targets. I think there are lots of reasons and barriers why but then the only transfer that is available is to another school that did not meet its targets for the past several years either. While the school has higher achievement than our school it is still struggling and overcrowded. To me it's crazy that additional transfers are made to this school. Parents should have more say in the selection of the school.

It is overwhelmingly clear that Tina's perception of NCLB is less than favorable in that her experience was not positive as she believed there were very small differences in performance levels between the neighborhood school and the designated opt-out school. By limiting the choice to one school, Tina observed that her options dramatically diminished and she felt forced to accept an option that was not appealing or stay in a school that was chronically failing. She attributed part of the school's failure to "its

location in a deprived area and underfunding.” She argued that limiting one receiving school for each sending school was unfair and flawed and parents should be allowed to select any other public school in their district.

Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience

Tina expressed mixed feelings about her children’s experiences. On the upside, the children acclimated to the new school rather quickly as there were fewer discipline problems and “less needy students.” There were more positive role models who encouraged positive choices and achievement. There were individual teachers who took an interest in working closely with the children and her. Conversely, the instructional program often included drilling students with “test prep” class materials and classroom practices and lessons devoid of hands-on learning activities. There was no innovation or time to explore the children’s interests. The teachers had to focus on the lowest level of skills to increase achievement levels. In her perspective the school’s focus on testing standards and achievement targets limited the educational program for her children. Although her daughter qualified for placement in the school’s gifted/talented program, she shared that she did not agree that her children’s education was shaped and advanced the ways she intended after using the transfer option. Similar to the previous school, benchmark testing became the pattern for both grade levels. Her children also complained about having to ride the bus for a longer period and not being able to participate in after school activities and events. These overriding problems continued to color the children’s experiences which Tina described as “pretty disappointing.” As a result, she took

additional steps to support her children's development including using the public library for more reading materials and taking them to museums and book stores.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Tina was not satisfied with the features or characteristics of either school. Although she chose to use school choice because she was reluctant to have her children remain in their home school, she revealed that in her experience NCLB failed to benefit her children. Tina would prefer to place her children in a more affluent school with higher performing students and an expanded offering of curriculum and instruction such as the district's science magnet school. By excluding the magnet school from NCLB's choice offerings, Tina encountered frustration and "felt trapped" without a viable option. In Tina's perspective, the opt-out school that she transferred her children to was only marginally better than her home school. Now that she has experienced how NCLB actually worked, she did not agree that her experience was positive and would not be a strong supporter of NCLB continuing its current mandates. She disagreed that education is being improved under NCLB and supported opening student transfers to other schools and hoped that the law and school policies would change. She held that the policy had done little to improve her children's educational opportunities and her hopes and needs for a better opportunity and new educational options were not honored or met.

Case: Lucy

As Lucy talked she smiled and gave a little chuckle to indicate how happy she was to have had the opportunity to transfer her children to their present school using the NCLB public school choice option. Lucy is White and married with two children, a third

grader and a ninth grader. She was adamant that “using the transfer option was the best decision for helping them get a better education and better grades and have fewer discipline problems.” She understood NCLB and the requirements and the mandates associated with the law.

Parent’s Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act’s School Choice Option

From Lucy’s perspective and experience the process of understanding NCLB was rather daunting at first even though she had access to information by serving on the neighborhood school’s leadership team. As a member of the team, she learned about AYP and performance targets and understood why the school was labeled as “in need of improvement.” She understood the impact of rising reading performance targets and the sanctions that were applied because the school failed to achieve the goals in reading. While she was thoughtful and respectful of the teachers and principal at the school, she also knew the conflict she experienced in wanting the best opportunity for her own children. Before the beginning of the next school year, she applied to transfer her rising third grader to the choice opt-out school. Although Lucy participated in the interview alone, she acknowledged that decisions regarding her children’s education were made by together by both her and her husband.

I visited the school, talked with my husband and then applied with the district and filled out the paperwork. It’s wonderful. The teachers are wonderful. She comes home with so much every day that she has learned. It’s just been a wonderful experience for her and her grades have always been on point. The reason we chose to use the transfer was personal. We needed her to get the support and help she needed and that was sometimes hard in the other school because so many students were struggling. I agree with school choice wholeheartedly and I agree that parents should have that choice of where to send their children to school. I

understand that each district has a limited number of opt-out schools and overcrowding and larger class sizes in some of these schools are problems.

In visiting the school Lucy cued into the atmosphere of the school and classrooms and what the teachers did to create and perpetuate it. She observed that the teachers were personable and used humor to entertain the students, control situations, and motivate learning. The teachers appeared “accepting of their students and willing to work with them.” Her observation confirmed her interest in using the transfer option.

Lucy carefully considered the feasibility and desirability of transferring schools and was very knowledgeable of how the transfer option under NCLB worked. She had a good understanding of the policy and the schools which strengthened her position as an NCLB chooser. It was apparent that her experience with NCLB was favorable. With the support of her husband, she used the policy to transfer her daughter successfully to the opt-out choice school.

Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience

Lucy viewed the school as wonderful and engaging for her daughter. The overall teaching and learning environment was considered stimulating and it kept her daughter motivated and excited to learn. Although her daughter was “a little anxious and apprehensive about changing schools at first” she made a successful transition after meeting her teachers and making several new friends. Lucy attributed driving her to the school during the first few weeks until she was comfortable as another method that they used to make the transition and experience positive. By driving her to and from school on selected days throughout the year her daughter was also able to participate in school

related activities including the drama club and girl scouting. As a result, she established positive relationships with schoolmates, scout leaders, troop members, other teachers, and parents. She continued to describe the change as the best decision and a very positive experience for her daughter.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Lucy was actively involved in the community school having served on the leadership team and as a volunteer in the school's media center. As a result of working so closely in the school she was very knowledgeable of the school's difficulties in achieving the improvement targets required by NCLB and "the powerful sense of pressure and stress" felt by the teachers and principal to make needed gains. The NCLB provisions required testing students and making AYP and resulted in penalties for the school when targets weren't met. She was troubled by the sanctions applied to the school as well as thankful for the opportunity to use the transfer option for her daughter. She experienced conflicting and contradictory thoughts about NCLB. The phenomena of school choice became very real to Lucy as she grappled with her decision to continue her work and membership in the school or leave the school and embark on new educational opportunities that could advance her child's progress and achievement. In the end, she and her husband were pleased by the choice they made and agreed that they supported the intent of NCLB to make educational opportunities better for their children.

Lucy's involvement in her daughter's school continued as she volunteered in the opt-out school's media center and on field trips. In the course of her work as a volunteer, her experiences in the choice school compared favorably to her experiences in the

neighborhood school. Additionally, her experiences convinced her that she made the correct decision in transferring to the opt-out choice school. She remained satisfied with her overall experience with the choice provisions of NCLB.

Case: Sarah

In her case, Sarah, a single White mother of a daughter in third grade, attended the elementary school her daughter currently attends. For the previous generations, the school was a traditional neighborhood school that successfully served students within the community. Today the school is an underperforming Title I school that failed to make AYP and is required to offer supplemental tutoring and student transfers. Sarah explained the school and community's history.

I grew up in this neighborhood which made up the school's attendance zone. I went to the school. I always had a happy childhood and there was a kind of pride in the community. But now the community and school have changed and I looked at other schooling options for my daughter. With regard to NCLB, I considered the benefits of using the transfer option.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

As it turned out, Sarah felt very strongly about transferring out of the school using a public school choice program. She had only superficial knowledge about NCLB and public school choice initially. Given that she was dissatisfied with the school and placed a heavy emphasis on pursuing improved educational opportunities for her child, she focused her efforts on learning more about the NCLB policy and other alternative schools.

Sarah was especially interested in the NCLB public school choice option after learning that she was not selected in the magnet lottery and she was eligible to transfer according to NCLB policy. She learned about NCLB in the information and letter that the school sent regarding public school choice. These facts, in combination, motivated her interest and intention to apply for the transfer and place her child “in a more successful public school.” Although she expressed a stronger commitment to the magnet school placement, she had a working interest in the options availed under NCLB. However, from her perspective she was most excited about schooling options that NCLB did not afford.

Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience

By pursuing other schooling opportunities for her daughter, Sarah hoped to have a positive influence on her educational experience.

Anyway, I thought this would give her a better experience and opportunity. I just felt like a magnet school or a school in a better neighborhood would be better. I mean there are people getting shot around the corner from where I live. It is a dangerous part of town. I would be out of this neighborhood if I could afford to move.

Sarah suggested that as a result of changing her daughter’s school assignment, her daughter seemed to be very happy and more motivated to be in school. She believed her daughter received a better quality of teaching in the opt-out choice school and she was in a safer and more orderly school. In this respect, her daughter no longer came home with complaints that she was threatened or hit by other students. She noted that she made new friends very easily and had even crossed language and cultural barriers in her friendships. While she is pleased that the school’s population was pretty representative of the

district's overall demographics, the distance of the school and the different languages of parents prevented her daughter from inviting others to come over and play. As a single parent Sarah offered that regrettably she did not have the time or resources to provide private transportation for her daughter to visit friends from the school or participate in after school activities. The transportation-related aspects of the NCLB policy denied Sarah's daughter full integration into the school community, limiting her overall experience.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Having attended the community school as a child, Sarah had a broadened perspective about the school and the changes that occurred over the years. Although she was not actively involved in the school as a parent, she had a working knowledge of the school's reputation and its academic status as a school in need of improvement. She surmised about the quality of the school from her lack of communications with the school staff and teachers. She experienced ambivalent feelings from the different replies that she would receive from staff when she did inquire about a school matter or complained about a concern. She also had reservations about her daughter's safety at school. Interest in school choice influenced her plans to transfer her daughter to another public school within the school district. Her preferred public school was a magnet school that incorporated the creative arts. As this option was not available, she chose to use NCLBs public school choice option. She gave the choice school and NCLB high marks.

Interestingly, Sarah acknowledged that she didn't really know a lot about what the school had to offer, but knew she liked where it was located. She commented, "I just had a good feeling about this place and I just went on my instinct and gut feeling." Information about the school's art program also guided her perspective. In her discourse about the school she shared that she heard the school had a good art department and that was important because her daughter is very expressive in art and creativity. Although her knowledge of this school was limited to what she heard and surmised, Sarah obviously preferred the opt-out school. Her own critique of her role in the school as an NCLB chooser parent showed that she continued to have limited involvement in the school.

I'm really not involved with the school or PTA a lot. The rug is always kind of being pulled out from under me. I am always trying to catch up with what's going on and I didn't want to obligate myself to something that I didn't feel like I might not be able to follow through. My mother has Alzheimer's disease and my father recently passed away. I'm not aware of other parent activities at the school.

Overall Sarah described her experience with NCLB as positive. When she was unable to access other alternative schooling options including Montessori and magnet schools, she turned to NCLB. Although she may not have been adequately informed about the opt-out school, she had little difficulty deciding to use the parental choice rights set forth in NCLB.

Case: Stephanie

Stephanie is an African-American divorced mother who chose to have her son and daughter remain in their attendance zone school rather than choose to enroll them in the opt-out choice school that was available as an option under NCLB's public school choice

policy. Stephanie spoke to an allegiance and pride in the community school that influenced her decision to remain in the school and not take advantage of the transfer option under NCLB.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

According to Stephanie there was a strong close community allegiance and loyalty to the school and self determination among community members that made her reluctant to move her children to another school. She shared the perspective that although she was very knowledgeable and understood the choice options available under NCLB as a result of the school failing to make adequate progress in increasing proficiency in students' reading test scores, she preferred the familiar instructional program and social and cultural attributes offered in the neighborhood school.

There is a strong sense of community in our school. Even though NCLB said the school is low functioning and did not meet AYP, I know that it is a great school that is doing very good things for students and parents. I know the amount of resources and services that are directed to help improve student achievement. The school has parent-teacher meetings to inform us what they are doing to raise the scores and get every child on grade level in reading and math. My son is doing exceptionally well in this school and after considering my options with his father and my family I made the decision to keep him here. My daughter who is in the fourth now is in advanced learning classes. She got invited to the National Scholars program at a local university. So I am really pleased with their experiences in the school.

Stephanie took into consideration the educational experiences of her children in making her decision about school selection and placement. A strong sense of community, racial harmony, and social networks also appeared to play a crucial role in informing her parental decision making. She used school information meetings and parent involvement

activities to inform her decision. It appeared that access to services and support available to families in the school added to her attraction to the neighborhood school.

In Stephanie's view and experience, NCLB with its accountability requirements seemed to shift the community's focus away from the attributes that she most highly valued about the school and that made the school a successful learning community. Despite the NCLB labels and sanctions, Stephanie viewed the school as strong enough to make positive changes and improvement in school performance and made the decision to remain at the school. She was very satisfied with her choice of schools and did not appear to be motivated by NCLB to exercise other choice options.

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience

In reviewing her reasons for choosing to remain in the neighborhood school, Stephanie identified the positive school experiences of her children as her primary concern. She determined that their educational experiences were enhanced by attending a school in their community that is close to their home and reflects the community's positive values and beliefs. The school met the academic needs and learning preferences of her children and they did exceptionally well in their scholastic endeavors. She was pleased with her children's social experiences at the school as well as the opportunities that they had to participate in sports and other events with their friends in the neighborhood. According to Stephanie's perspective, her children genuinely like the school and their teachers.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Stephanie valued the neighborhood school and preferred to send her children to their designated home school. She was closely and constantly involved in the school serving on the PTA board, attending meetings, volunteering in the classroom, and recruiting parent volunteers for tutoring. The school was closely identified with the community and varied social services were available to families. She liked “the community feel and friendliness of the school.” Stephanie considered other alternative schools including a science magnet school which was appealing but decided that the neighborhood school remained the best choice. On the question of school satisfaction Stephanie offered, “I’m very satisfied, very satisfied.”

In considering her overall experience with NCLB and public school choice, Stephanie was confident in her decision to stay at the neighborhood school but agreed that parents should carefully consider the available options and provisions of NCLB for their children. She did not oppose the idea of public school choice programs.

Case: Marie

The primary factors for Marie’s decision to have her daughter remain in her neighborhood school was to keep her close to home and ensure that she would benefit from school tutoring and enrichment programs that the school provided. Marie, a single Hispanic mother of a fifth grade daughter, declined to transfer schools under NCLB.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

Marie did not want to disrupt her child's education or lose access to available services provided by the neighborhood school by transferring her to an opt-out choice school. She did not choose a different school as she believed that the available tutoring services under NCLB along with the school's strong instructional program helped improve her daughter's achievement.

When we moved here the school we left wanted to label my daughter as a low-achiever. That was two years ago. She is in fifth grade now and is an A-B Honor Roll student. So, of course, I am happy with our neighborhood school and all of the services and support that the school has provided. I was not interested in changing schools again. The excellent progress my daughter made is the result of the efforts of her teachers and this school. She just blossomed. Though the school is labeled as a priority Title I school because of NCLB it's much better than that.

Marie was appreciative for what the school accomplished in promoting her daughter's academic progress and had no interest in moving her to a "more successful school."

Location and accessibility were also factors that influenced her decision to remain in the neighborhood school.

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience

The school offered Marie's daughter supplemental educational services the first year that she arrived in the school and Marie accepted these free tutoring sessions.

Consequently, her daughter responded very well to the additional support and continued to progress in school. Marie offered that the support services and daily instruction have been very positive experiences for her daughter. As an example, the school arranged for a late bus to take students home following after school tutoring. School officials also

provided her daughter with two sets of textbooks one year to provide a set at home and a set at school when she injured her arm. Additionally, Marie noted that her daughter developed significant and positive relationships with teachers and friends as a part of her school experience. She was able to participate in the school's extracurricular opportunities including the school's science fair and choral productions.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Although she was eligible and able to exercise choice and transfer her daughter to another school, Marie chose to continue her daughter's enrollment in the neighborhood school. She valued the school's close location to home and consistent delivery of instruction and tutorial services that were advantageous to her daughter. The school provided informational sessions about its school improvement efforts for parents with translators available for non-English speakers. At those meetings, school officials described the services and offerings that were available at the neighborhood school. Marie shared that these meetings were helpful because she sometimes thought she missed or did not always get the information from the school that she needed. The meetings assisted her in understanding the school's programs for her daughter. Consequently, her experiences with the school and her decision to not engage in the choice option were perceived as being very positive.

Overall Marie's decision regarding NCLB and public school choice indicated that her priority was to remain in the neighborhood school rather than engage in the choice option and transfer to another school. Many of the services that Marie valued were not

available at designated opt-out choice schools and may have been part of her reluctance to embrace choice under NCLB.

Case: Tracy

Tracy, an African American mother, moved to her community because she wanted her son to be in a mostly African American school. In this regard, Tracy had the educational option that she desired for her son and this factored heavily into her decision to not participate in the NCLB choice program.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

Tracy shared her experience of how she made her decision regarding school selection and placement for her son based on her own personal value preferences and according to her perception of what was in his best interest. In the selection of an elementary school, she chose not to have her son attend the opt-out choice school that was available under NCLB's public school choice policy. She recalled:

I actually moved to this community because I wanted my son to be in an African American school. I came into this district knowing that there was not parent involvement and no PTA at the school and that there was going to be work needed in the school and school system. My son and I knocked door to door in our neighborhood and got parents to actually come out to a PTA meeting. That was the first time they had a PTA and this is the first year that the school made AYP. I wanted us to be here to help and I wanted to be a part of the success because I believed the school could be successful. It's an ongoing process. I moved here from a mostly White community where I attended school. I knew all the privileges, but I didn't want him to have all of those privileges because I feel you appreciate things more when you fight and advocate for them.

In weighing her options, Tracy acknowledged that her school choice was very personal. She offered that other parents may not want or understand the struggle that

Black students go through and may have the misconception that if they attend a majority White school their children will get a better education. Believing as she did, NCLB school choice policy was not a viable option for her. As she experienced school choice, her decisions were motivated by a genuine concern to make a difference for her son, his school, and the community, and not to attend a selective elementary school “with comparative privileges.”

Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience

Tracy conveyed a positive perception of her son’s experiences in the neighborhood school. She revealed that her son was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and he is repeating his grade this year by her choice. She was tremendously enthusiastic about the support and assistance the teachers and staff provided to address his needs. She believed a benefit was having teachers with experiences in the classroom with African American children and African American boys in particular.

Tracy perceived that the partnership between home and school as well as the camaraderie among the teachers resulted in academic gains and enhanced learning for her son. A very significant motivator was the relationship he experienced with each of his teachers. Tracy believed her son “wanted the experience” of attending a mostly African-American school and looked forward to this school assignment. She emphasized that this school experience positively impacted his education and life by reinforcing his perseverance and tolerance for handling challenges.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Acknowledging the choice to attend the neighborhood school was one of the best educational decisions she made on behalf of her son, Tracy professed, "I feel good because I am helping both my son and the school which is in turn is helping our students, our community and the school district. It's working out for all of us. It's a wonderful experience with everybody being on one accord." Establishing relationships with school staff, businesses, community churches, school district departments, and networking with community agencies triggered many positive experiences for Tracy and added confirmation to her success in dramatically altering the picture of the school and community. Churches helped tutor parents and enabled them to help their children with assignments. The organization, One Hundred Black Men, provided tutors and mentors for students. Tracy understood the need for fathering and mentoring for students. She acknowledged the benefit of having positive male Black role models since so many of the students in the school did not have fathers who were present and active in their lives. As a result of her work, many initiatives and efforts remained on track and made a big difference in the school and community.

Tracy contended that there were frustrations that she dealt with and worked to resolve as she continued her support and involvement in the school. In contrast to her positive perception of teachers who were experienced in working with African American children, she complained that she encountered teachers who were insensitive to the needs of minority students and failed to use appropriate approaches and strategies in promoting improved performance and behavior. She explained:

I'm in the school all the time and I was fortunate enough to be able to work from home so I could pop in often and be in and out of classrooms volunteering. I would walk down the hall and hear a teaching yelling at a student and that's not the way to talk to a child . . . any child and especially an African American child. I would use an opportunity to talk with the teacher about what I observed and tell her our children are different. They may be in a home that is dysfunctional with domestic violence or cussing or a stressful environment because of financial difficulties and the school may be the only peace haven that they have. I'd tell her you need to watch your tone and use more positive ways to communicate. I'd talk with the principal about the need to address cultural insensitivity with some of the teachers I knew that some of the teachers just wanted me to go away but I stayed and they left or eventually came around.

Tracy's experiences within the school included her role in building advocacy for students and encouraging more cultural sensitivity, human encouragement, and relations and higher expectations among staff, students, and parents. Tracy understood that these characteristics were crucial to student success and school improvement and she planned to continue helping to "fine-tune" the school and building these traits with everyone there.

One assumption underlying the NCLB transfer option was that there were better educational opportunities available. From Tracy's perspective, by acting on her belief, she was able to move beyond the choice provisions of NCLB to spur improved educational opportunities not only for her son but many others as well.

Case: Rose

For Rose, the answer was a resounding, yes! Her child did remain in the attendance zone school that she, too, attended as a student. Rose, a single White mother, rallied behind the school and chose not to transfer her son to another school under NCLB.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

Rose held academic excellence and support for her child's learning difficulties as the primary goals for her son's education and the reasons she remained in her neighborhood school. She knew and valued the instructional program, special services, and resources of the neighborhood school which she attended when she was an elementary student. She believed the school would be able to accommodate her son's special learning needs. Staying in her neighborhood school was more desirable to Rose than choosing to transfer her child to another public school under the school choice provisions of NCLB. She explained:

This year my son blossomed tremendously but in his first years he experienced developmental delays. I have to be very familiar with and particular about the school he attends and the teachers who teach him. I attended this school also as a student with special needs when I was in second, fourth and fifth grades. I loved the school and the help that I received from the teachers and staff.

Rose shared her experiences at the neighborhood zone school and how she always advocated for her son's special learning needs. Her concerns for his needs spawned from her own childhood experiences as a student with disabilities. She emphatically believed that the neighborhood school was the best placement for her son. Reportedly, it could provide the kind of support, training, services, and resources to meet his needs and ensure his academic growth and progress. In response to the school choice provisions offered under NCLB, Rose stated:

Even under the best circumstances, I can't see any benefit in putting him on a bus and sending him to a school that's far away from me and that has little knowledge

of his background. That would be more worrisome than helpful. This school is working hard to help my son learn.

Rose valued the closeness of the school as well as the instructional support and the capacity of the staff to address his learning needs. From her perspective, allowing choice and transfers as options could be reasonable for others but it was not an option that she intended to pursue.

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience

Rose shared that her son's experiences at his school "have been invaluable." She attributed his success generally to "the talented teachers in the special education program and a well-developed instructional program." She also described how the school has helped with his inappropriate behaviors and excessive distractibility by providing "a good atmosphere for encouraging him to excel and do his best in school." Although Rose recognized small group instruction and resource support as beneficial for her son, she had mixed feelings about him being separated and "alienated from his friends and other students at times." As a person with a disability, she acknowledged the importance of avoiding stigmas and helping others understand differences. Rose added that overall the school has been a good fit and in her opinion it was the most successful in encouraging less-able and less-advantaged kids like her son to reach their full potential.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Rose shared her perspective on her experiences with the school when she professed, "there were plenty of good reasons to be right here." She offered that teachers and staff were very cooperative and supportive in working with her and including her in

making instructional decisions for her son. The school was good at keeping her informed about his progress and school performance.

Rose underscored her decision to remain in the neighborhood school as she shared her experiences and perceptions regarding NCLB and public school choice. According to her assessment, educational choice should be available for parents and parents should make decisions based on their unique circumstances, interests, and beliefs

Case: Bernard

Bernard's approach to school choice was based on his belief that the best fit made other options less desirable. Bernard is an African-American married father with two daughters in grades three and five. He made the decision to have his children remain in their attendance zone school rather than enroll them in the opt-out choice school that was available as an option under NCLB's public school choice policy.

Parent's Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

Bernard concluded that the advantages provided to his daughters by the neighborhood school made it very easy to choose remaining in the school rather than exercising the transfer option that was available under NCLB. He stated, "I think satisfaction plays a huge role. I looked at my options really carefully to see which choice was right." He favored remaining in the neighborhood school because of its location near the home, its positive learning environment, and his daughters' requests. Although the school's test scores had dropped in reading his daughters were excelling in their skills and placed on the school's honor roll. Bernard felt that the neighborhood-home school offered a strong instructional program and school activities for both daughters. He found

the school's methodologies to be "quite sound and supportive." He acknowledged that he didn't know a lot about the other school as the information that he had was limited to what was included in the letter he received from the neighborhood school about his eligibility to change schools. He looked at the other school's website and the school's online NCLB report card with his wife and daughters and observed that the school did not meet its reading targets although it was more successful in its math goals. Bernard believed that the family needed to be included in the decision process. He commented:

I was waiting to hear positive comments from the girls and it was just the opposite. Neither of the girls liked the idea of leaving their school and friends. They were not happy about moving. So, understandably, after a lot pleading to stay in their school, moving became a nonissue for my wife and me. We were confident in the home-school and sensitive to the wishes of the girls.

One of the biggest issues for Bernard in his experience with public school choice was ensuring that he chose the "best fit" in giving his children the educational opportunities they need and deserve. He was enormously confident the neighborhood-home school remained the best option and fit.

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience

Bernard remained quite pleased with what his daughters experienced in the school so far. He attributed their increased academic success to the school's instructional program, supportive teachers, and their involvement as parents. He believed that the close connection and communication between home and school also contributed to the girls' progress. The school was helpful in providing extra help and tutoring in reading and math based on test results. Bernard witnessed positive changes in his children's interest and

motivation for doing their best in school. They received certificates for being on the honor roll and got to attend a school reception to recognize honor roll students. One daughter was a member of the school's art club and was provided time and motivation through the club for her artistic pursuits. The other daughter participated in the math league competition. The fact that both girls were involved in school related activities was also evidence of the positive experiences they shared at the school. Bernard assumed his children's requests to stay in the school were more proof of their positive experiences.

Parent's Experience with the School

Bernard was especially encouraged and pleased by his daughters' successful progress and achievement at school. He commented that both parents stayed in close communication with the teachers and attended parent meetings about the school's programs. They visited in the classrooms during open house and other special events and attended the school dance with their daughters. Bernard commented that Mom was able to attend more school activities because of her work schedule. He liked the opportunities the school made available for extra-curricular activities and special programs like the math competition. He appreciated the regular communication of important information that was in the school newsletter and recorded on phone messages. One exception occurred when he felt the school did not provide enough information about the public school choice option and the opt-out school.

Other than his complaint about the lack of needed information regarding school choice and the assigned opt-out school, Bernard's experience with NCLB and public school choice was substantially favorable. He was able to make an informed decision and

felt comfortable that he chose “the best fit” despite the communication flaw that he experienced with the school.

Case: Diane

“Listen, one or another of these schools may have better scores but they don’t have better teachers,” quoted Diane. A White woman and single mother of one daughter, Diane was pleased she made the decision for her child to remain in her home-school as she entered the fourth grade.

Parent’s Experience and Perception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act’s School Choice Option

It was important to Diane that her third-grade daughter continued advancing in her reading skills and that priority was also at the center and heart of the school’s instructional program and classroom practices. In this regard, Diane’s decision to continue her daughter’s enrollment in the neighborhood school rather than transfer her to an opt-out choice school as a part of the NCLB provisions was readily understandable. From her perspective, skilled and talented teachers in the neighborhood school were at the core of her daughter’s progress and growth.

Diane recalled her surprise and confusion when she received the letter about the school’s failure to improve reading scores on grade level tests and the option to transfer out of the school. In her experience, it made sense “to stay the course” and continue the progress that was made. She viewed transferring to a different school as having “to start all over again and stepping backwards.” From her perspective, there was no incentive or potential benefit to leave the school when her daughter was continuing to make significant progress.

Parent's Perception of Child's Experience

Diane was straightforward in saying there were some problems in the school. She asserted that there were students who would test the rules, behave negatively, and cause problems in the classroom. Some students were physically aggressive toward her daughter and she worked with the teacher and principal to address the issue. She explained:

I have been in the classroom when students don't listen or follow the teacher's direction. I think they test to see how much they can get away with. Things are moving in the right direction since the school started talking about character and positive behavior. Now things are much better and as I said she enjoys school. As she became stronger in reading everything got better.

The biggest area of success was improvement and gains in her daughter's reading ability. According to Diane as her reading ability improved she gained more self-esteem and confidence about herself. She participated in different activities and events in the school including reading contests and the school book fair and completed reading activities to receive a free book. She was selected for recognition as demonstrating good behavior and character during a classroom awards program. Based on these experiences overall, she developed improved attitudes and a more positive disposition about her ability to learn that lead to more success in school.

Parent's Experience with the Schools

Diane believed in the importance of participating in her daughter's education. She visited the classroom and observed her daughter's learning. She perceived her role as a partner with the school in a positive manner and believed that the school supported and

encouraged her involvement. She established positive relationships with the teachers and felt those relationships had a positive effect on her daughter's academic endeavors. Diane acknowledged and affirmed the school's efforts in addressing the social and academic difficulties her daughter experienced previously in school. She was successful in working closely with the teacher and administration in addressing and remedying conditions that were interfering with her daughter's success. In particular, Diane was especially encouraged and affected by her daughter's "positive attitude toward school" as she improved her reading skills and overall school performance. Her overall experience with the school was positive as the school helped her daughter gain skills and confidence. From her perspective, Diane's choice to remain in the neighborhood school best served her daughter's educational, social, and emotional needs. She did not attribute educational benefit to transferring schools under the public school choice provisions of NCLB. She concluded that transferring to a different school could, in fact, reverse gains already made.

Summary and Forecast

In this chapter, the parents'/guardians' experiences and perceptions regarding NCLB's public school choice provisions are presented in case format. The single cases include the responses to the three research questions and a description of what happened and how school choice under the NCLB law was experienced by each parent and child. Although the parent/guardian respondents in this study generally support the idea of having different public school options for their children, the parents' responses suggest that a mixture of factors influenced their choice of schools and informed their decision-

making to have their child remain in the attendance zone school or enroll their child in the designated opt-out school.

Parents who made the decision to remain in the attendance zone school were generally satisfied with their schools. They did not see sufficient benefit or advantage for their children to transfer to another school, and instead preferred the familiar and reliable instructional environment, sense of community, and shared values and beliefs in the current school. It appears there may also be other factors, such as distance from the school, the amount of available resources and extended educational opportunities directed in support of their children's learning.

The academic reputation of the schools was a concern for all parents in the study; however it was the primary concern for parents who transferred their children to the opt-out designated school. Of those parents who selected to opt-out, most of them were not satisfied with the neighborhood school experience for their children and opted for what they perceived to be the higher-quality school in terms of achievement. Interest in higher-achieving schools with higher standardized reading and mathematics achievement test scores were significantly associated with the parents' decision to transfer. They were also seeking a particular type of school experience for their children and considered other factors in the transfer decision such as school discipline, more engaging environments to facilitate deeper learning, and specialized academic or extracurricular programs.

The next chapter describes the cross-case analysis which is framed by the research questions and summarizes the emergent themes or patterns that are revealed in the

parents' experiences and perceptions as they encounter the public school choice mandates of NCLB.

CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

This research study uses multiple cases to investigate parents' experiences and perceptions of *No Child Left Behind* and its public school choice provisions in four public school settings within one school district. This chapter presents the cross-case analysis of the parents' experiences and perceptions for parents who chose to transfer their child to another public school and the parents who chose to have their child remain in the attendance zone school. A coding and labeling process was used across the cases to identify and categorize cross-case emerging themes or patterns that help clarify the perceptions and experiences of the parents and their children with school choice under the NCLB law. Seventeen themes surfaced and are matched to the research questions. Table 2 provides ethnicity, school affiliation, and the public school choice decision for the parent respondents across the four school sites.

Analysis and Themes

What are Parents' Experiences and Perceptions of NCLB's Public School Choice Option?

The primary research question in this study investigated parents' experiences and perceptions of the public school choice options.

Table 2***Participants' Ethnicity, School Affiliations, and Choice Decisions***

Participant/School Site Affiliation(s)	Ethnicity of Participants				Choice Decision
	Black	Hispanic	Other	White	
Precious/ Site 1 to Site 2	X				Transfer
Mario/ Site 1 to Site 2	X				Transfer
Tina/ Site 3 to Site 4				X	Transfer
Lucy/ Site 3 to Site 4				X	Transfer
Sarah/ Site 3 to Site 4				X	Transfer
Stephanie/ Site 3	X				Remain
Marie/ Site 3		X			Remain
Tracy/ Site 3	X				Remain
Rose/ Site 1		X			Remain
Bernard/ Site 1	X				Remain
Diane/ Site 1				X	Remain

The parents' responses to this question point to a divergence in perceptions between the parents who choose to transfer their children to a public school designated as an opt out school and parents who choose to remain in the neighborhood zone school categorized as a Title I school in need of improvement. Yet overwhelmingly, across the aggregate, the parents agreed that extending parents the right to choose their own schools led to a better

match between the parents' preferences and the school they choose for their children. A majority of the parents also agreed the school choice option placed more responsibility on them to be well-informed in making schooling decisions. On the other hand, they found that the level of parental information was low regarding NCLB school choice provisions and the designated opt out choice schools' educational outcomes and available resources. They felt they did not have enough information to make an informed decision. Some parents were confused as to the differences between NCLB mandated choice and other school choice options including magnet schools. Given the lack of available and accurate information that parents experienced, many of the parents were motivated to acquire more information on their own to become better informed.

Formal and informal sources of information. Parents used both formal and informal sources of information including information distributed by the school, district and school websites, newspaper articles, teachers and staff, parents of other children in the same school, friends, and family members. In their experiences, the parents agreed that access to more reliable and accurate information and more efficient methods for gathering and processing important information would have been helpful in the choice process. Even in the absence of accurate information, parents made the effort to match what they wanted and perceived as important with the conditions of the schools in which their children were enrolled.

School dissatisfaction. School dissatisfaction was the most common response from parents who chose to use the policy and transferred their children out of the zoned neighborhood school. Parents reported dissatisfaction with math and reading scores,

teacher quality, safety, and discipline. One parent referred to the over emphasis placed on testing preparation and the school's priority to increase test scores as the reason for transferring schools. He chose to use the policy because his child was struggling academically at the neighborhood school and he was subjected to negative feedback about not testing well and needing remedial classes. Reportedly, the testing environment became counterproductive as his child experienced negative self-esteem, anxiety and distress, and more interpersonal problems with students and teachers. These experiences further compromised his academic progress. Most of the parents who chose to transfer schools perceived the school choice process as a positive experience and believed emphatically that using the option placed their children in improved and safe learning environments.

Limited transfer options. While parents cited academic values, safety, and discipline as the most important reasons for transferring schools, a subset of parents perceived a lack of quality in the school transfer options available under NCLB. They believed they should be provided a wider array of schooling options and be able to select other public schools in the district, not just those schools designated as the opt-out schools. They did not find the available options appealing and were interested in sending their children to magnet schools. They observed that the opt-out choice school was only marginally better in meeting the state testing standards than the neighborhood school. In considering their experience with the choice process, they were dissatisfied with the schooling options and felt constrained in their ability to make the most desirable choice for their children. They held the opinion that the designated choice school remained low

in providing the dimensions of education that they valued. They believed that the magnet school offered a broader choice of educational opportunities, curricular emphases, and school attributes that were more closely aligned with their needs and interests. Given the limited transfer options experienced by these parents, they perceived the NCLB transfer policy as being flawed in achieving its stated goal of increasing access of disadvantaged students to high-performing schools. They were dissatisfied with the school choice provisions under NCLB and perceived their experiences unfavorably relative to other parents who also chose to use the transfer option and viewed their experiences favorably.

An active process. The NCLB school choice process transformed the selection of schools from a passive process to an active decision task for both groups of parents—those who chose to transfer schools and those who decided to remain in the neighborhood school. Respondents across the eleven cases tended to be very aligned in their perceptions that they were more engaged in the decision-making process regarding choice of school. In addition to the academic and safety dimensions of the school, parents who decided to remain in the neighborhood schools cited other attributes of the schools as critically important. They consulted school achievement test scores in their decision-making process and informed their school choice decision by talking with teachers, the principal, and the school counselor through school visits and discussions with other parents. A majority of the parents from both groups indicated that they used school information meetings to inform their decision-making. Most of the parents who selected to remain in schools designated as needing improvement under NCLB indicated that their decision-making was also motivated by different factors including familiarity with the school, a

sense of community without racial and socio-economic isolation, cultural diversity and sensitivity, and shared values and beliefs. They also preferred receiving the services and resources provided in the current school in lieu of changing schools. They maintained that their children were doing well in the environment with successful and meaningful learning experiences that included the supplemental education services mandated by NCLB. They purported that their children benefitted academically by taking advantage of the after-school tutorial program that provided both small group and individual tutoring opportunities.

Necessary resources. Another consideration made by some parents was the capability of the school to provide for students with different learning disabilities or limited proficiency in English. In these cases, parents who decided to remain in the neighborhood school believed that the school performed well in providing the required resources and expertise to successfully accommodate their children's special needs and improve their academic performance. They expressed reluctance to jeopardize the progress their child made by changing schools. The parents were satisfied in exercising their individual choice and belief that the best education for their children remained in the neighborhood school. They did not see sufficient benefit or advantage for their children to use the policy and transfer schools.

Proximity, accessibility, identity, and belongingness. Proximity and accessibility were other factors that were identified as important among parents who chose the neighborhood schools. For these parents, the neighborhood school and community provided a sense of identity and belongingness that contributed to their

children's school performance. They surmised that a move to a new school could deprive their children of sources of stability and continuity that are a part of the community and neighborhood school. The parents also viewed the longer distances between the schools as a disadvantage particularly when the opt-out schools were not in close enough proximity for students to participate in extracurricular programs or after-school activities. The lack of time or resources to arrange or provide transportation for their children was a concern. Moreover, parents also believed the longer distance would undermine their ability to be involved in the school. Given such interest, the parents expressed a close allegiance to the neighborhood school and the community and were reluctant to move their children to other schools. A key factor for them was that the school was close to the home.

Racial composition. Racial composition was another factor of import for some parents who chose the neighborhood school. In this study, two parents claimed that they wanted their children to attend a predominantly African American school. In the selection process, they wanted their children to be part of the majority student population within the school and not be in the minority with others who may hold certain assumptions about their potential to learn and achieve. They expressed concern about their children being ridiculed or ostracized by teachers or children in other schools. They especially valued having excellent teachers who were well briefed on innovative teaching strategies; informed regarding emotional, cultural, economical, and social issues that may impact the school performance of African American children; and committed to helping all students excel academically. According to their perceptions, teachers who possess such qualities

would be able to better connect with their children and subsequently help them to raise their achievement levels. The potential for racial and cultural indifferences added to the parents' fear of moving to a new school under NCLB and shaped their interest in remaining in the neighborhood school.

What are the Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Experiences Following School Choice under NCLB?

The second research question of this study examined parents' perceptions of their children's experiences under NCLB choice. In most of the cases, parents allied in their perception that their children had positive experiences following the public school choices that they made. Although there were conflicting views among the two groups of parents concerning the academic environment and culture of the neighborhood school, both groups linked factors related to academic achievement, community, parent-teacher relations, discipline, safety, respect, and nondiscrimination to positive school experiences on the part of the children. With the exception of two parents who expressed concerns about their child possibly experiencing isolation, estrangement, and inappropriate treatment in the opt-out choice school and another parent who believed the opt-out school was not an appealing or viable option, other parents described their children's experiences as mostly positive. Several parents who transferred schools noted a short term negative effect on their children's performance just preceding or following the transfer as their children experienced uncertainty, anxiety, or stress in response to adjusting to the new setting and coping with change. Reportedly, these experiences did not persist for long as new friendships and positive relationships with teachers and staff formed and their children adjusted to and thrived within the new school environment.

Improved educational outcomes. From the viewpoint of parents who transferred their children to the opt-out choice school, the school's educational setting provided their children with advantages and improvements in comparison to the neighborhood school. In their experience, the neighborhood school provided neither the skills nor the environment they desired for their children. Rather, in the opt-out choice school parents perceived that there were fewer distractions resulting from disciplinary problems and teachers and students were clear about behavioral expectations. The classroom environment was respectful with behavior and academic standards for completing assignments and working cooperatively. With regard to the instructional program, parents shared their children experienced improved instructional practices that included more resources such as computer assisted learning and field trips, interactive and collaborative hands-on activities, and more interdisciplinary and experimental learning. The parents perceived there was less emphasis on test preparation, drill and practice, and learning at the lower levels of the learning taxonomy. As a result, these parent respondents perceived that the opt-out school provided more opportunity for their children to develop critical thinking skills and experience more engagement in the learning process. They perceived that the transfer option allowed more comprehensive and meaningful educational outcomes for their children.

Transportation consequences. In contrast, the parents acknowledged consequences experienced by their children in attending a school that was not within the community. Unless parents were able to provide or arrange transportation, students did not have opportunities to participate in after school activities and some extracurricular

events. Parents pointed out that the bus schedule limited their children's opportunities to completely participate in the school's social culture. Additionally, one parent expressed concerns that his child could experience a loss of bus transportation over the longer term of her education if the neighborhood school met its NCLB targets and the school district discontinued transportation services.

Neighborhood school advantages. The parents who chose to remain in the neighborhood school shared different interpretations and perceptions regarding their children's experiences within the school. They valued the school's focus on developing improved literacy skills by providing additional time and resources for more literacy-based instruction including after-school supplemental tutoring. They viewed the continuity of instruction provided by the school as a positive experience for their children. In contrast, they believed transferring to another school could cause additional disruptions and forfeit their children's right to free supplemental services. They persisted that these experiences would not be in their children's best interests. The parents identified a sense of community, caring, and cooperation among staff that contributed to positive student teacher relationships and a healthy emotional environment for students and families. They believed that the quality of their children's educational experience was reinforced by the community-based nature of the school. They reported that their children acclimated well to the school environment and felt supported and encouraged in their learning efforts. Aside from a positive environment, parents also identified individual teachers who went the extra mile to ensure that their children got what they needed to be successful. Although they acknowledged the presence of some inappropriate

behaviors and disciplinary concerns, they also affirmed the school's efforts to guide students to meet behavioral expectations and manage and instruct students with behavioral difficulties. They valued the cultural diversity of the school and teachers who were knowledgeable and sensitive regarding the learning characteristics and styles of students from culturally diverse backgrounds and with different life experiences. In sum, when choosing to remain in the neighborhood school, parents, on average, were more likely to describe their children's learning experiences as positive and reiterate the perception that their children's educational growth and development were best served within their home schools.

What are the Parents' Experiences with Their Children's Schools after Choosing a School?

This research question explored the parents' experience with their children's school following their choice of schools. Given the complexity of the NCLB public school choice provisions and the diverse interests of parents in choosing a school for their children, it makes sense that parents' attitudes toward and experiences with the policy and their children's schools varied from high to low levels of satisfaction. Parent respondents indicated that they experienced higher levels of satisfaction from choice when they were able to match their preferences for specific needs or approaches with the school. The majority of the parents in this study reported being very satisfied with their school. Parents with a higher sense of satisfaction viewed their child's school as the better choice, the right school or "best fit" for the particular attributes of schools they felt were important.

Satisfaction with the neighborhood school. In reviewing neighborhood school parents' preferences, proximity to their home, attending the school in the community, strong literacy instruction, and having caring and supportive teachers with teaching expertise to meet children's needs added to their level of satisfaction. According to the parents' responses, they believed that the school was providing special opportunities and instruction for their child. They did not see a clear connection between their children's school performance and academic achievement and the designation of low-performing school. Most parents whose children remained in the neighborhood school were basically pleased with their child's school. They were also pleased to have the opportunity to enroll their child in the free tutoring program and receive supplemental services rather than transfer their child to another school. They were convinced that the services helped boost their child's learning and improved performance.

Satisfaction with the opt-out choice school. Considering the preferences of parents who transferred schools, academic excellence, program offerings, and safe environment added to their level of satisfaction. They rejected the low-performing status of the neighborhood school and perceived that the opt-out school provided a more focused academic setting and engaging experiences and activities that increased school performance. According to their perception, the narrowing of the curriculum to provide increased time for reading and mathematics test-based instruction in the neighborhood school was worrisome because their children also needed exposure to critical skills, science, social studies, and the arts to be fully prepared for their future. By contrast, they perceived that teachers in the opt-out school used a wider range of instructional strategies

such as hands-on activities and learning centers. Accordingly, changing schools raised the specter and hope of new learning opportunities for their children. The parents also believed that the location of the opt-out school, in a good area in an established neighborhood, made it a good school. With few exceptions, most parents in both groups responded positively to their experiences in exercising public school choice and placing their children in the preferred public school because of NCLB.

Dissatisfaction with imposed options. While most parents in the study were generally satisfied with their choice and school, other parents experienced less satisfaction when they were not able to match their preferences to the appropriate school for their child. In their experience, the limited choices created under NCLB did not allow them to match their children with the best schools. For these parents, the opt out choice school was considered a poor choice for their children and other alternative schools such as magnet schools were considered more suitable and accommodating. From their response, they were most interested in a specialized school and instructional programs designed to meet the particular needs, talents, and interests of their children. They desired schooling alternatives that NCLB did not furnish. Consequently, the parents' attitudes towards choice under NCLB was less than favorable as they believed the policy only marginally expanded available choices and services for their children. In experiencing school choice, they identified the need for more choice options and opportunities to children.

One parent who transferred from the neighborhood school was less satisfied with his choice when he learned that he had to forfeit his child's right to the free supplemental

services that she received as a student in the Title I school under NCLB. He considered the loss of remedial services and extra time after school as an adverse consequence of his decision to transfer schools. He reported that he assumed initially the receiving school would continue to fund these services. He became concerned that his effort to improve his child's educational program would actually reduce access to services that benefitted her learning. He reemphasized his concern that without continued instructional support his daughter may gradually fall behind in the new school setting. Although he supported the ideal of choice, he took issue with how the transfer process was carried out in the school district with respect to the loss of tutorial support. The requirement to discontinue supplemental services became a complicating factor and served as one more anxiety his child had to navigate as she transferred to another school.

Confusing information and lack of support. One complaint reiterated by many of the parents in this study was the need for more accurate and timely information and support from the school district and schools to help them make appropriate decisions regarding their choice of schools and their child's education. They were dissatisfied with the school district's lack of support. Parents indicated that they felt limited in their capacity to make informed choices and inhibited in their abilities to fully support their children's education. Only a small number of each group of parents agreed that the letter they received about the school choice option provided them with adequate information to make decisions regarding school choice. Without question, most of the parents in this study experienced the need to further inform their school choice decision by researching information on the district or school website, talking with teachers, the principal and the

school counselor, and through consultation with friends, family, neighbors and other parents. In several cases, parents also consulted with their children in the selection process.

Negative encounters and stigmas. Another set of concerns held by several parents was the fear of their child being stigmatized and targeted as a low-performing student. One parent worried that her child would experience negative encounters similar to an event that occurred when she attended a parent meeting at the opt-out school and received inquiries from the receiving school parents about the school that her children attended previously and why she changed schools. She confided that she felt that she was “being screened” regarding her background and her child’s school performance by parents who may have assumed that their school was superior to the neighborhood school. She expressed concerns that her child may encounter similar aspersions, negative attitudes, assumptions, and biases about his school placement. The parents feared that their children would be unfamiliar with the culture of their new school and may be unfairly profiled as a transfer student. They shared concerns that their children may be targeted at the receiving school as underperforming students with the potential to cause discipline problems as well as a decline in the school’s test scores.

Parent involvement changes. Among the experiences shared by parents, attention was directed to their involvement and participation in the school. Some parents stated that they experienced a change in their involvement in school-related activities in the choice school setting. Although they expressed their desire to be involved and engaged in the school, they experienced a decline in their involvement as a result of the

longer distance from the school. They explained that they were unable to volunteer for school activities or have more extensive interactions with teachers and other parents at the school. Instead, they were more likely to complete school activities at home and send requested items to school. The longer distance from the school, lack of transportation, and work schedules fundamentally limited their capacity to be involved in school-related activities. In contrast, some parents with children in the neighborhood school talked about the importance of community and face-to-face interactions with teachers and other parents. Several parents acknowledged that they increased their interaction and involvement with the school community as they worked on behalf of the PTA, talked to other parents and community members about the school, and volunteered for school activities. They reported experiencing high levels of school/community involvement and viewed their involvement in the school as a positive factor in enabling their children's successful school performance.

Bus transportation concerns. Given the longer bus routes, most of the parents who transferred schools were disappointed with the bus transportation assignments. They identified the irony that their children had fewer opportunities to fully participate in school activities and programs after transferring to another school while the underlying goals of NCLB school choice provisions were to expand educational opportunities. In their experience, extracurricular and enrichment activities were often scheduled after school when their children were loading buses to begin the extended commute home. Succumbing to the bus schedule, the children missed the chance to be more fully involved in major parts of their schools' life and culture. Parents also expressed concerns

about their children becoming very tired during the school week as a result of early wake-up times, long bus rides, and late returns home in the evening. They complained that the extended bus route and schedule had the potential to limit their children's school experience and undermine their school performance.

Summary and Forecast

Reflecting back to my original interests, I wanted to examine and understand the experiences and perceptions of parents/guardians regarding the public school choice policy provided by the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001. I also wanted to know how parents perceived the effect of the selected public school choice option on their children's school performance. Using the individual cases, I provided a written description that captured each parent's experience and perceptions and used each case's conclusions to conduct the cross-case analysis by research questions. I used the cross-case analysis to divide the data by research questions across all cases investigated and distilled from the data salient themes directly related to the research questions. The research found the majority of the parent respondents across the school sites agreed that expanding parents' school choice options under NCLB led to higher levels of satisfaction, more empowerment in decision-making, and a better match of their preferences for their children's education. In contrast, the research conveys parents' perceptions that the law's provisions do not accommodate parents' diverse interests in other school choices and program offerings. Additionally, it is important to provide adequate and timely information about NCLB's public school choice provisions. Parents indicated that they had to research school and program information online as well as talk with relatives,

friends, and neighbors to be better prepared for navigating through the school choices. Similarly, the parents' experiences reveal that mechanisms are needed to address unresolved transportation and school access issues to ensure that parents, particularly parents of low socio-economic status, have the capacity to exercise choice, and be involved in their child's school and educational experiences.

Chapter VI reports on the purpose of the study, methodology used to conduct the research, research questions, and the study's findings. Key features of the report include a summary of the cross-case analysis and an analysis of the themes generated by this study that became the overall themes for this chapter. The implications, limitations, and recommendations for future study are presented at the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the study regarding the *No Child Left Behind* Act's public school choice option. The summary includes the purpose of the study, methods used to conduct the research, the research questions, and study findings. Seven recurring themes that emanated from the study's findings are presented and include parental choice in education, the whole child, educational inequity, failing school, parent involvement and control over schooling options, school and school district neglect, and cultural insensitivity. Recommendations for policy and practice follow. The chapter concludes with recommendations for parents, schools, and school districts associated with NCLB and school choice as well as for further research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences parents had regarding expanding the quality of schooling options within the public educational system and accessing better schools for their children at the elementary school level using the NCLB public school choice provision.

Eleven cases focused on the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of parents/guardians whose children have the opportunity to transfer from an elementary Title I school designated

as an underperforming school under NCLB to a presumably higher-performing public school that is not identified for school improvement?

2. How do parents/guardians describe their children's experience following the choices that the parents/guardians made leave one school for another because of NCLB or not to switch schools and to remain in the current low-performing school?
3. How do parents describe their own experience with the school and school district after enrolling their child in the NCLB choice school or having their child remain in the current low-performing school?

Methodology

A phenomenological research design was used to explore the details and meanings of experiences and perceptions of parents/guardians whose children were eligible and had the opportunity to transfer from an elementary Title I school designated as an underperforming school under NCLB to a presumably higher-performing school that is not identified for school improvement. Having interest in gaining a detailed and rich understanding of their experiences and adding their experiences and perspectives to the general knowledge base regarding NCLB, I selected phenomenological methodology using multiple cases to conduct the study. Interviews were conducted to investigate the phenomenon of public school choice through the experiences and perspectives of parents of elementary school children. With parent consent, all interviews were audio recorded, converted to MP3 audio formatting, and transcribed into verbatim records. Within-case analysis was used as the first analysis technique with each case under study. A case write

up that included detailed understandings of the participants' experiences as related to the research questions was developed via individual case analysis. Cross-case analysis followed to find and categorize themes significant to understanding the experiences of the parents.

Summary of Findings

This section provides the findings to the study's research questions. It also includes a summary of the cross-case analysis and the parent/guardians overall perceptions of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's public school choice provision. A cross-case analysis of emergent themes follows the general findings. The major findings of this study shed light on how parents experienced public school choice for two major groups of the study: (a) those parents who selected to transfer their child(ren) from an underperforming Title I elementary school to a presumably higher-performing school; and (b) those parents who choose to have their children remain in their attendance zone Title I school.

Cross-Case Analysis Summary

Research Question 1: Parents' Experiences and Perceptions of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's School Choice Option

Two major findings emerged from the data regarding the experiences and perceptions of parent participants: (a) most parents shared the perception that the NCLB public school choice option gave them greater influence and control over their child's education, and (b) both groups of parents perceived that the choice process transformed the selection of schools from a passive process to an active decision task and placed more responsibility on them to be well-informed in making school decisions.

Greater influence and control over their child's education. The majority of parents in the study agreed that by extending them the right to choose their own schools under NCLB's public school choice provisions, they were more predisposed to engage the school choice process and make schooling decisions to positively impact their children's education. For example, Mario from Site 2 shared this thought:

"I liked being able to make a choice, not just because of the boundary that we live in. I want better for my son and I decided that this change would support his learning and get the best education possible. I needed to consider what would be best for him."

Prior to their experience with NCLB public school choice, most of the parents in this study affirmed that they did not have the knowledge, disposition, or motivation to deviate from enrolling their children in the neighborhood school. The exception was several parents who considered enrolling their children in magnet schools. In using NCLB's public school choice provisions, they indicated that they made decisions about where to send their children to school by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of neighborhood and opt-out school assignments. They perceived that they had more influence and control over their child's education as they engaged in the decision-making process and selected the school placement that was more suitable and accommodating of their child's needs and interests.

Parents who were pleased with their child's current school were not likely to request transfers to higher-performing public schools although their children qualify for NCLB's choice provisions, and conversely parents who were dissatisfied or discontented with the school in their community were likely to participate in the choice program. Most

parents who elected to remain in the home school suggested that the long distances between schools limited their options for switching schools. They expressed an allegiance to the community school and maintained that their children did well in the school environment that embodied and celebrated diversity and promoted mutual trust and respect between students and teachers. They valued institutional and social support, such as immediate access to teachers, counselors, and other community members who were connected to other resources that contributed to their child's academic achievement.

The provision of free tutorial services also created different incentives for parents. The prospect of losing these services when transferring schools got the parents' attention and helped them in their decision to remain in the neighborhood school. Many of the parents regarded the after-school tutoring as a potentially useful tool for advancing their child's achievement and academic progress.

In contrast, parents who preferred to send their children to a different school were dissatisfied with the neighborhood school or wanted the opportunity to pursue an alternative schooling option that NCLB did not afford. In their experience, the neighborhood school classes were not conducive to learning due to discipline problems and emphases on basic skills, testing, and test preparation instruction. Parents saw the NCLB public school choice option as a way to provide their children with a better educational setting and improved learning opportunities. For them, the policy was the green light for transferring their children out of an underperforming school that lacked the resources and expertise needed to advance their children's academic and social progress. Most of the parents who chose to transfer schools perceived the school choice

process as a positive experience and believed emphatically that using the option placed their children in improved and safe learning environments.

Some parents with children who qualify for school transfer appeared most excited about schooling options that NCLB did not afford including magnet and alternative schools. They preferred their child attend an alternative school and felt constrained in making the most desirable schooling choice. They perceived that they had less influence and control over their child's education as a result of the imposed constraints under NCLB. They were dissatisfied with the school choice provisions and complained that the NCLB transfer policy was flawed and schools. Some parents were also disappointed by the transportation challenges and the longer distance commute to the opt-out schools that inhibited their involvement and engagement in school activities and presumably impacted their influence within the school.

The selection of schools transformed from a passive process to an active decision task. Prior to their child's eligibility to transfer schools under NCLB, most parents in the study affirmed that they sent their children to the neighborhood or catchment zone school in which their child was assigned without seeking information about the school's test results, AYP status, class size, or other factors. Although several parents applied for magnet school placement, a majority of the parents acknowledged that their child ended up by default in their attendance zone school as they had not considered or requested transfers to alternative schools. In the parents' perception, NCLB's public school choice provisions became a primary motivator for them to attain additional information for making school placement decisions for their child.

A majority of the parents agreed the school choice option placed more responsibility on them to be well-informed in making schooling decisions. On the other hand, they found that the level of parental information was low regarding NCLB school choice provisions and the designated opt out choice schools' educational outcomes and available resources. Bernard from Site 1 expressed this sentiment:

I think the school needed to provide parents with more information than just the letter. I don't think there was a meeting about the process and I had to find a lot of the specifics and stuff on my own. Maybe the teachers and administrators didn't want to assert their own ideas about students transferring out of the school but more information would have been helpful.

Parents across the sites felt they did not have enough information to make an informed decision. They realized a need for the school district to disseminate more timely and accurate information to parents. Some parents were confused as to the differences between NCLB mandated choice and other school choice options including magnet schools.

Given the lack of available and accurate information that parents experienced, many of the parents were motivated to acquire more information on their own to become better informed. Parents were asked to indicate the kinds of information they used in making their decisions about where to send their child to school. Accordingly, they considered the experiences of their children, researched information on websites, talked with relatives, friends, neighbors, and other parents, and conferred with teachers, principals, and counselors to ensure that they had the information they needed to make sensible decisions. One parent reported that he consulted with his children in the selection

process. Parents used a range of resources to better inform their decisions. Even in the absence of accurate information, parents perceived that they made deliberate efforts to match what they wanted with the conditions of the schools in which their children were enrolled. Some parents' experienced uncertainty and frustration in the decision making task as a result of not having useful and accurate information to help make appropriate decisions about their child's education.

These results are consistent with the findings of Fusarelli (2003), Hess and Finn (2004), and Hunter and Bartee (2003) that participation in the school choice provisions of NCLB could be limited or affected by the lack of information and as parents have access to more and better information they are more capable of making informed choice. Lack of knowledge appeared to be a critical factor in determining parents' influence and control over school choice decisions.

Research Question 2: Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Experiences

Another major finding of this study indicates that both categories of parents are in general agreement regarding their child's experiences in school following the public school choices they made. Overall, parents across the sites were in alignment with regard to their perceptions of their children's experiences in their schools as being positive. Some differences existed in the strength of the perceptions for opt-out parents based upon their children's experiences with bus transportation, distance from home, available school choices, feelings of isolation, and fear of failure at an unfamiliar school. Conversely, differences in perceptions for parents who chose to remain at the low-performing

neighborhood school were based on their children's experiences related to discipline, testing, and a narrowed curriculum geared toward test preparation.

Most parent perceptions of their children's experiences ranked positive.

Although parents who transferred their child to the opt-out choice school were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the bus transportation assignments and limited opportunities for their child to remain after school for extracurricular activities, they gave a strong vote of confidence for the schools' learning environment and their children's learning experiences. They perceived that the school's educational setting and program offerings provided their children with advantages and improvements in comparison to the neighborhood school. According to parents, their children experienced fewer distractions and disciplinary difficulties from other students in the classroom. Parents indicated that their children benefitted from instructional practices that included challenging materials and small instructional groups that moved beyond rote learning, simple memorization, and low-level thinking. They offered that their children experienced more inviting learning activities and received more individual coaching and mentoring from teachers and staff. Several parents reported that their child's anxiety in moving to a new school changed as they saw peers and teachers in a different light from their previous school experiences and began to develop new friendships and relationships. While most parents perceived that teachers and students made concerted efforts to connect with their child, two parents shared concerns about their children feeling isolated and tagged as being a transfer student from another school. While their children did not transfer easily to the

new school setting, the parents' perceptions remained relatively positive regarding their children's experience in the opt-out school.

Notwithstanding parental concerns regarding some student behavioral problems and the school's designated improvement status, the parents who made the decision to remain in the neighborhood school affirmed positive and high regard for their children's learning experiences and educational outcomes. Tracy conveyed her positive regard for her son's school experience in the neighborhood school when she stated:

The test scores don't really tell the whole story about the school. The close connections, personal regard, and communication in this school are keys to very positive results for my son. It's really been beneficial.

According to their perception, although the school was labeled as a low-scoring school, parents felt strongly that the quality of curriculum and instruction and teaching expertise enabled their children to advance in their academic performance and especially in their reading development. They also linked their children's progress to the school's efforts to engage families and build connections between the school and community organizations. After school tutoring was identified as a practice that led to higher levels of school performance in reading and mathematics. Support from teachers who were knowledgeable and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of their students was positively rated by parents as a factor that contributed to their children's positive attitudes, self-confidence, motivation, and behavior. Accordingly, their children experienced a high sense of belonging and connections to the school and community. Several parents expressed feelings of success in helping to promote community and parent involvement

that had a positive impact on improving the quality of the school and contributed to improved student outcomes. As a result, their children reported doing better in school and feeling happy, safe, and stable. The prevailing perception among the parents who remained in the neighborhood school was their children benefitted and experienced positive school outcomes by attending school in their community

Research Question 3: Parents' Experiences with Their Children's Schools

The next major finding of this study relates to parents' experience with the school and school district and satisfaction with the school choice. The study revealed that for both groups of parents, parents' attitudes toward and experiences with the policy and their children's schools varied from high to low levels of satisfaction.

Parents' attitudes toward and experiences with the policy and their children's schools varied. The majority of the parents in this study reported being generally satisfied with their choice and school. Higher levels of parental satisfaction from choice related to the ability of the parent to match their preferences for specific needs or approaches with the school. School choice research confirmed that satisfaction appeared to be higher among parents who actively chose their school (Bosetti, 2004). Parents with a higher sense of satisfaction viewed their child's school as most responsive to the needs and interests of their children and the better choice or best fit for the characteristics they deemed important for their children's schooling experience.

The findings in this study indicate that both categories of parents were in general agreement regarding their preferences and characteristics for choosing schools. Both groups' interests were virtually identical regarding the top three preferred qualities. To all

parents, the quality of teaching or academics, discipline, and safety were among the most important qualities of schools. Moderately important items to both groups included test scores, extracurricular programs, and friends at school. Parents at neighborhood schools extended their priorities to include location, parent involvement, racial/ethnic composition, cultural sensitivity, and support/resources for students with special needs. Parents who transferred to opt-out schools identified other priorities including schools with higher-performing students, more curricular emphases, specialized instructional programs, fewer discipline problems, and school reputation.

The results of this data also indicate that parents were less satisfied with their choice when they felt limited by the available transfer options and constrained in their ability to make the most desirable school choice for their child. Tina, a transfer parent at Site 4, acknowledged her disappointment in the available school choices when she stated:

I appreciate being able to say where my children will go to school but NCLB is senseless in only allowing transfers from one weak school to another. I'm glad that you are doing this study. My children's school was required to offer choice because it has never met its targets. I think there are lots of reasons and barriers why but then the only transfer that is available is to another school that did not meet its targets for the past several years either. While the school has higher achievement than our school it is still struggling and overcrowded. To me it's crazy that additional transfers are made to this school. Parents should have more say in the selection of the school.

Other parents had different perceptions and reservations about the policy but ranked their experience as satisfactory. They reported negative situations that they or their children experienced with the choice process including the lack of useful and accurate information, extended bus schedules, the increased distance between sending and

receiving schools, loss of tutorial support, racial and cultural insensitivity, teacher indifference, and reduced parental involvement in school activities. One persistent complaint focused on school and district communication with parents and delays in receiving information about the choice provisions of NCLB and choice options. Parents found that as a result of the longer distance to the opt-out school their involvement at home in working with their child remained steady, but their involvement at school declined. Some of these obstacles were resolved but others remained as a part of the parents' experience with NCLB school choice provisions.

Cross-Case Emergent Themes

Several themes emerged from the cross-case analysis that provided insight into what parents experienced and perceived regarding public school choice options under NCLB. Seven dominant themes emerged from the data: parental choice in education; the whole child; educational inequity; failing school; parent involvement and control over schooling options; school district neglect; and cultural insensitivity. These themes bring together the different voices, experiences, and perceptions of the parents in this study. They capture the parents' experiences and perceptions of NCLB's school choice provision and the meanings they ascribe to it.

Theme 1: Parental Choice in Education

Most of the parents' experiences with NCLB's public school choice provisions confirmed their support for parental choice in education. They agreed benefits accrued when they were allowed to select the school that matched their interests, biases, and inclinations. Although several parents complained that their choices were limited and

they were not successful in getting exactly the school that they had in mind, they used the NCLB public school choice provision to transfer their child to another school.

Theme 2: The Whole Child

Several parents in this study reported that under the demands of NCLB their children's education was being reduced to numbers and test scores. They shared the perspective that particularly in schools designated as low-performing or failing, the instructional emphasis is often on test preparation and the curriculum in these schools was test driven and not student driven. One parent expressed frustration regarding the anxiety, stress, and pressure that his third-grade child experienced in the test driven school environment as he was pressured and pushed for his best score. Other parents exclaimed that their motivation for transferring to another school was to escape the rote learning, memorization, and low-level thinking that became the curricular focus in schools under NCLB sanctions. In their perspective, there was an overreliance on testing and an absence of innovative learning and higher level thinking skills and processes. Their children experienced less instructional time for the arts, social studies, and history and more time for learning basic reading and mathematics skills. Using the transfer option, the parents were hopeful in attaining more meaningful learning experiences in another school setting that would move their whole child beyond test preparation to a sound education.

Theme 3: Educational Inequity

Based on their school experience, parents revealed that the schools designated as low performing were spending the majority of their children's instructional time on

reading, math, and science. They professed that the school's push to raise test scores narrowed the curriculum. This narrowing of the curriculum was most pronounced in schools with large minority student populations, the population whose access to expanded curricular opportunities has been historically most limited. As parents made public school choice decisions for their children, they complained that there was the potential for students who remained in schools with increased attention on basic skills to be denied curricular choices that more privileged peers receive as a matter of course of study in their schools. One African American parent in this study addressed this concern when she observed that the instructional focus in the school that she recently moved to from another state was too narrow and did not provide the challenging and engaging program of study she experienced in her child's former school. She made the decision to transfer her child to the opt-out school. One interpretation of this complaint was that in the schools' efforts to increase students' proficiency in reading and math skills and close the achievement gap as a part of the NCLB mandate, some parents and their children could experience another educational inequity.

Theme 4: Failing School

Several parents in this study adamantly objected to the conclusion that their children's school, defined by NCLB as in need of improvement, should be judged by test scores, and labeled as a failing school. Although NCLB forced the school to put more emphasis on testing math and reading, the parents opposed the belief that test scores were the only measure of school quality. They reported that their children were doing well in the school environment and the school provided the support, resources, and academic

challenges that benefitted their children's educational attainment. In their perspective, the school was successful in making strides to advance the performance of their children and other students of color, of poverty, with handicaps, and limited English proficiency to become proficient learners. Despite the NCLB labels and sanctions, they held that the school was successful in making positive changes and improvement in school performance. In their experience, there were many things about the school that made it an appealing choice for their children. They spoke eloquently about the school's strong sense of community, racial harmony, social networks, additional academic support, community and business partnerships, information meetings, and parent involvement activities. According to the parents, their children benefitted most when their learning worked in concert with their community and home. They affirmed their commitment and investment in helping the school flourish instead of fail and made the decision to remain in their neighborhood school.

Conversely, it was equally true that other parents who transferred their children from the neighborhood school perceived the school as not performing well and frequently mentioned the school's low test scores as the reason for transferring to another school. These parents cited low academic standards, limited curriculum, safety, and discipline concerns as the most important reasons for moving their children. They were motivated in their school choice decision largely by their dissatisfaction with the neighborhood school's academic environment and low test score performance.

Theme 5: Parent Involvement and Control over Schooling Options

All but one of the parents talked enthusiastically about engaging the public school choice process and making schooling decisions to positively impact their children's education. Several talked about how they invested great effort and interest to increase their knowledge of NCLB and learn about the available schooling options. For them, school choice affected different parental behaviors including information gathering; interaction with other parents, staff, and school officials; and making schooling decisions. Prior to their experience with NCLB public school choice, most of the parents affirmed that they did not have the knowledge, disposition, or motivation to consider alternatives to the neighborhood school. Facing school choice, the parents indicated they had greater incentives to gather more information about the choice process and the schools. A positive aspect of NCLB for these parents was experiencing a sense of empowerment and control in deciding schooling options for their children. While these parents gained a greater sense of empowerment by being involved in the choice process, other parents had a different experience. They felt constrained in making the most desirable schooling choice when the choice process did not enable them to place their child in a magnet school. They perceived that they had less influence and control over their child's education as a result of the imposed constraints under NCLB.

Theme 6: School and School District Neglect

The lack of information and/or support provided by schools and the school district to parents who were interested in learning more about the NCLB public school choice option was perceived as a major problem with most parents. Anecdotally, the parents

agreed that they needed to use multiple resources to become better informed regarding the available options. Most of the parents did not rely only on eligibility letter and list of school options that the district provided in order to gain a better understanding of the public school choice process and schooling options. They gathered additional information from websites and school newsletters and consulted with relatives, friends, neighbors, and school staff. Many of the parents felt neglected and perceived the district's parental notification efforts as lacking and in need of improvement. They contended that outreach activities to better inform parents regarding NCLB public school- choice provisions were essential.

Theme 7: Cultural Insensitivity

Several minority parents contended that they were concerned that their child would be negatively labeled as at-risk transfer students and blamed for jeopardizing or bringing down the opt-out schools standardized test scores following their decision to transfer schools. They talked about adverse experiences that could be injurious to their child's achievement. They believed their child might be viewed as a slow learner, allowed to fall behind, endure disciplinary problems, or be ridiculed, written off, or suspended from classes. They perceived that teachers in the opt-out receiving school may be the least trained to deal with students from diverse backgrounds with different learning styles and interests. They were anxious that some teachers and staff passed sensitive judgments about their child and family. Other parents in the neighborhood school also identified a mismatch in teaching and disciplinary approaches individual teachers followed when interacting with minority children including yelling and speaking in harsh

tones. They observed the need for teachers to build relationships with students and make adjustments in the manner in which they talked to them in order for students to be motivated and engaged in their learning.

One parent corroborated a similar concern when she related an encounter she experienced with parents at a meeting that she attended at the opt-out school. She relayed that she was made to feel unwelcomed and stigmatized when she was asked about the school her child attended previously and the reason she changed school placement. She offered her belief that race, ethnicity, and feelings of superiority may have factored in this encounter. She expressed distrust that her child may experience similar behavior. She identified the need for more cultural sensitivity and positive influences in her child's school experiences.

Recommendations for Parents, School Districts, Schools, and Federal Government

The recommendations in this study are intended to provide guidance and suggestions to improve the experiences of parents who use the NCLB public school choice policy as well as improve the professional practice of educators and policy makers surrounding NCLB choice programs. The recommendations surrounding future research provide suggestions and ideas for studies that could be conducted to scaffold the amount of scholarly work surrounding NCLB. They suggest further areas for qualitative research because of the insight that qualitative research can provide on perceptions and experiences of parents relative to school choice under NCLB.

Parents

Empowerment. The study's findings suggest that public school choice can have a positive impact on the incentives and behaviors of parents. Parents confirmed their support for parental choice in education and they experienced a greater sense of efficacy, empowerment, and control in deciding schooling options for their children. School choice affected a range of parent behavior for the parents in this study including information gathering, interaction with other parents, staff and school officials, and participation in school meetings. It is recommended that parents share their beliefs, understandings, and perceptions about the requirements and expectations of the parent role in making educational decisions for their children publicly and as a function of their membership and participation in varied groups (family, school, church, and community). The public role of parents will be especially important as ESEA and NCLB are reauthorized. As consumers of educational services, the parent perspective should be included in the reauthorization process and public school choice initiatives. Parents' voices have been conspicuously missing from teams of educational reformers historically. As parents become more vocal in their advocacy roles for increased parental involvement and decision-making, they will have increased opportunities to help define educational reform and the quality of education their children acquire. Further investigation could be made into the relationship of school choice and the increased capacity and empowerment of parents to become informed consumers of educational opportunities for their children.

Passive, non-participating parents. The recommendation for increasing parental empowerment is aligned with the efficacy experience of some parents, but not all. This study explored the experiences and perceptions of parents who were stimulated by the act of school choice under NCLB to become more informed and involved in school choice decision-making. It is recommended that future studies explore the experiences and perceptions of another group of parents described as passive parents who are non-participants in the public school choice program and appear not interested in selecting schools for their children under NCLB. They remain in their default neighborhood schools. These parents may not have the time, energy, motivation, or needed information to make decisions regarding available schooling options for their children. They may lack the requisite confidence, knowledge, or skills to help direct their children's learning experiences. They may be disenfranchised and economically challenged struggling with economic and social hardships that impact their ability to assume more active roles in their children's schooling. Educators and policy-makers would benefit from learning more about the experiences and perceptions of these parents in order to understand the social and cultural dynamics that may impact the school choice process and their school choice-making experiences. Schools and school districts should continue outreach efforts to include parents as partners in the process of educating their children, particularly disadvantaged low-income parents who may be less involved in their children's education than families who are better off economically. The influence of demographics on school choice is an important topic for further study.

School Districts and Schools

Notification of transfer options. As parents' ability to choose among school options under NCLB and seek educational opportunities for their children is dependent on them being informed about their choices, school districts and schools should coordinate efforts to increase parents' awareness of choice programs and diversify the communication methods use to inform eligible parents. A review of the findings show that parents perceived a lack of information and/or support from schools and the school district about the NCLB public school choice option and choices outside the immediate neighborhood school. Several parents in this study experienced the need to acquire and assemble school choice information on their own. The importance of improving the information provided to parents has been underscored through the parents' experiences. As NCLB focuses on closing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students, it is recommended that schools operating under NCLB's system of choice take an active and prominent role in educating parents about the law and school choice options that are available to them. The district and local schools are recommended to coordinate efforts and resources to ensure parents receive timely and accurate information to enable informed decision making regarding the exercise of school choice. The school district could offer increased technical assistance to local school officials to improve the communication of information and strengthen the level of awareness for parents. The available options and criteria for transfer should be made more clear and consistent. By making information more readily available and existing options regarding opt-out schools, transportation, and tutorial services clear and well-publicized, schools

and the school district would make it more feasible for parents to make calculated decisions and choose their child's school setting with helpful guidance and support. Ideally, the dissemination of information should be through multiple formats and not simply a letter sent from the school. Using multiple sources to inform parents would also help mitigate the tendency for lower-income families to have more limited access to information

School profile information. It is also recommended that at both the individual building level and district level that information be shared with parents about schools under NCLB sanctions that are labeled as needing improvement or failing to further inform them about the schools' performance in making growth and gains in student achievement as well their AYP failures. The findings of this study revealed that parents questioned the fairness of labeling schools that were making clear progress in student achievement particularly for underperforming students and narrowing gaps in achievement as failing. Some parents who opted to remain in the neighborhood schools acknowledged that although the school was successful in raising student achievement its overall test scores fell below the required performance bar. While some parents rejected the labels and high-stakes tests, others perceived them as reasons to transfer out of the neighborhood school. It is recommended that schools and the school district provide parents with information to help parents more accurately assess the performance of their schools and the contributions to learning that are realized by their children. In this way, schools will be more impactful in notifying parents about instructional emphases approaches, academic achievement goals, and available resources. They will help parents

become more sophisticated consumers of public education who are able to support their children's academic progress in the school that they choose.

Available options. An additional implication for school districts as a direct result of this study is the need to provide eligible families with more than one opt-out school choice. After opting out of the zoned school, parents selected their preferred school from two possible alternatives. An exception occurred when one of the opt out schools was not available as a result of increased enrollment. The choice process became limited to one opt out school. While the opt-out choice process places complex demands on the school district to control, limit, and balance student enrollment across schools, it is recommended that the district establish and provide more than one alternative opt-out school. It should not limit parental choice to one alternative to the zoned neighborhood school. Parents who participated in choice and transferred from the zoned neighborhood school valued the opportunity to choose between two possible opt out schools based on their preferences and perceptions regarding the schools. If true parental empowerment is to occur, parents must perceive that they truly have a choice in selecting more than one opt-out school and are able to match their preferences to the more appropriate school for their child.

Transportation. In addition to the number of opt out schools established, the provision of bus transportation plays an important role in the choice program for parents. NCLB's public school choice provision requires that bus transportation be provided by the district for students who transfer to designated opt out schools. Parents in this study complained that the extended bus routes and schedules had the potential to limit their

children's school experiences and undermine their school performance. It is recommended that the school district and schools work to reduce or lessen extended bus routes, longer commutes and schedules that impact opportunities for children to be fully involved in school activities including after school programs. It is understood that the complex reality of budgetary constraints and economic obstacles make the provision of more user friendly bus transportation routes and schedules very difficult. As transportation services constitute a bridge between families and the opt-out schools their children attend, efforts to reduce bus routes and shorten schedules will have a positive impact on bringing schools and families closer to each other.

Federal Government

Although this study was limited to 11 individual cases, the study's findings may be referenced to better understand parent experiences with and perceptions regarding NCLB and public school choice. More qualitative and quantitative studies representing the perceptions and voices of parents are needed as the reauthorization of NCLB is contemplated and educational reform policy is formulated and implemented. Although parents valued being empowered to make decisions about their children's schooling and education, they voiced concerns over high-stakes testing and its consequences on schools including narrowing of the curriculum and teaching lower level cognitive skills. An ESEA reform alliance that seeks public engagement and opportunities for parental input is recommended. There is the need for additional research to capture specific data from parents relative to public school choice and the practices that are implemented across schools and school districts. Further research should be conducted to examine both

eligible groups of parents' preferences regarding remaining in the neighborhood school and transferring to an opt-out school under the NCLB choice program. This study could provide additional answers to research questions surrounding parents' experiences and perceptions, and further inform educational reform efforts.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study examined parental experiences and perceptions related to school choice in four elementary schools in a large urban school district in a southeastern state. The findings in this study indicated a need to learn more about provisions that the school district and schools need to have in place to enhance the capacity of parents to engage actively in school choice and view themselves as better equipped to exercise choice in selecting a school under NCLB. According to the study's findings, timely access to quality information about choice options and school choice legislation, guidance on how to select a school, and "user friendly" bus transportation arrangement and services are essential foundations to ensure parents have the capacity to exercise elementary school choice on a level playing field. These findings suggest implications for educational policy and practice. Future studies need to investigate how policymakers and educational leaders might become more aware of and responsive to parents' interests, preferences, and dispositions regarding the tools, conditions, assistance, and resources needed to actively engage in public school choice. Parents' experiences and perceptions as they respond to NCLB choice provisions and engage in school choice decision-making processes will need continued examination especially throughout the current discussions and reauthorization of NCLB.

In this study, parents entitled to choice under NCLB appeared to employ different reasons and rationalities in choosing elementary schools for their children. However, quality of education and academic excellence were held as primary goals and factors for school choice for both parent groups. Future research examining quality public education models across the district, state, and nation, which equitably serve all students, particularly socio-economically disadvantaged populations, is essential. The findings in this study indicated that parents perceived that the instructional focus, curriculum, and educational environment in their children's schools have been affected by testing and NCLB's accountability mandates. Many parents in this study shared their belief that the high-stake assessments compromised their children's learning by narrowing the curriculum and frequently requiring rote memorization and low-level thinking in teaching practices. They perceived that the absence of innovative learning and teaching and higher level thinking skills and processes negatively affected their children's educational experiences and opportunities for developing as well-rounded learners. Some parents transferred their children in an effort to escape an educational atmosphere that emphasized test-preparation and test scores and narrowed opportunities for creative thinking, inquiry, and initiative. It is recommended that those charged with developing educational policy, state and local school districts focus on researching, developing, and providing meaningful curriculum and standards in all schools that move beyond academic testing to providing students with critical thinking and problem solving skills, cognitive abilities, and knowledge for a complex and challenging future. Future studies need to investigate changes required in educational policy, practice, and models of

education to improve the quality of public education and elevate student learning outcomes that develop the whole child. Such an approach would contribute to quality education for students and a more positive outlook on their educational experiences by parents and students.

Finally, as the goal of public school choice under NCLB is to provide new educationl options to low-income parents whose children attend underperforming schools, future studies need to investigate how parents choose based on socio-economic status (income and level of education). This type study could investigate how and why parents choose schools and what factors have the most influence on parental decisions. One of the limitations of this study was that socio-economic status may not be accurately reflected in the results as parents representing four schools were selected to participate and the parents' income and level of education were not available to the reseacher. Educational leaders and public education policymakers may benefit from furture research to determine and understand patterns of class-related orientations to the choice provisions for schooling under NCLB.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe how parents who qualify for NCLB's choice provisions navigate the educational landscape and choose to exercise options that are available to them. This descriptive study began with an examination of parents' knowledge of and interest in the school choice provisions of NCLB and then investigated how these parents perceive and experience choosing the schools their children attend. As such, this research is valuable to schools and state and federal

education departments because current literature shows there is little research regarding parents' interest in and understanding of NCLB's public school choice provisions (Hess & Finn, 2004).

Based on the parents in this study, results suggest that parents in both groups are in general agreement that public school choice under NCLB gave them greater influence and control over their child's education. They felt more empowered as they selected the school placement that they perceived was suitable and accommodating of their child's needs and interests. Results from this study support the findings in the literature that satisfaction appears to be higher among parents who actively choose their school. Parents were generally satisfied with their choice of school. The findings of this study also indicate that a significant portion of the parents value and choose their neighborhood school. Since the results of this study suggest that parents viewed public school choice favorably for enhancing satisfaction and empowerment in decision-making and the educational achievement or experiences of their children, future research is needed to determine that there are sufficient support and services in the implementation of public school choice under NCLB to ensure that all parents and especially parents of low socioeconomic status have the capacity to exercise school choice on a level playing field. The findings and recommendations from this research should be useful to parents, district, and state and federal education departments as they plan improvements in the NCLB choice options and transfer provisions for parents and students.

REFERENCES

- Abernathy, S. F. (2007). *No Child Left Behind and the Public Schools*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Andre-Bechely, L. (2005). *Could it be otherwise? Parents and the inequities of public school choice*. New York: Routledge.
- Balfanz, R., Legters, N., West, T., & Weber, L. (2007). Are NCLB's measures, incentives, and improvement strategies the right ones for the nation's low-performing high schools? *American Educational Research*, 44(3), 559–593.
- Beekman, T. (1984). Hand in hand with Sasha: About participant experience. *Kind und Welt*, 11–25.
- Berndtsson, I., Claesson, S., Friberg, F., & Ohlen, J. (2007). Issues about thinking phenomenologically while doing phenomenology. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 38, 256–277.
- Bielick, S., & Chapman, C. (1999). Trends in the use of school choice: 1993 to 1999 Statistical Analysis Report. *National Center for Education Statistics Publication: Report NHES 2003-031*, 1–66.
- Bifulco, R., Ladd, H., & Ross, S. (2009). The effect of public school choice on those left behind: Evidence from Durham, North Carolina. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 84, 130–149.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bomotti, S. (1996). Why do parents choose alternative schools? *Educational Leadership*, 54(2), 30–32.
- Bosetti, L. (2004). Determinants of school choice: Understanding how parents choose elementary schools in Alberta. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4), 387–405.
- Bridge, G. R., & Blackman, J. (1978). A study of alternatives in American education. *Family Choice in Schooling*, 4.

- Brown, C. G. (2004). *Choosing better schools: A Report on Student Transfers Under the No Child Left Behind Act* (Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Bussell, H. (1997). Parental choice of primary school: An Application of Q-methodology. *Service Industries Journal*, 136–148.
- Carl, J. (1996). Unusual Allie: Elite and grass-roots origins of parental choice in Milwaukee. *Teachers College Record*, 98(2), 266–285.
- Casserly, M. (2004). Driving Change. *Education Next*, 4, 25–37.
- Coleman, A., Starzynski, A., Winnick, S., Palmer, S., & Furr, J. (2004). *It takes a parent: Transforming education in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act: Recommendations regarding the vital role of parents and guardians in achieving student and school success*. Washington, DC: Appleseed.
- Coons, J. & Sugarman, S. (1978). *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control*. California: University of California Press.
- Cooper, W.C., School Choice as Motherwork: Valuing African-American Women's Educational Advocacy and Resistance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, (20)5, 491-512.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cullen, J., Jacob, B., & Levitt, S. (2003). The effect of school choice on student outcomes: Evidence from randomized lotteries. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*. Retrieved April 16, 2008, from National Bureau of Economic Research Web Site: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w10113>
- Council of the Great City Schools. (2008). *Recommendations for reauthorizing NCLB by the Council of the Great City Schools*.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). What happens to a dream deferred? The continuing quest for equal educational opportunity. In *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- D'Souza, D. (1996). *The end of racism: Principles for a multicultural society* (2nd ed.). New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Edwards, T., & Whitty, G. (1992). Parental choice and educational reform in Britain and the United States. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 40(2), 101–117.

- Ely, M., Anzul, M., Friedman, T., & Garner, D. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles*. Bristol, PA: Falmer.
- Ferraiolo, K., Hess, F., Maranto, R., & Milliman, S. (2004). Teachers' attitudes and the success of school choice. *The Policy Studies Journal*, 32(2), 209–224.
- Friedman, Milton. (1955). "The Role of Government in Education," in Robert A. Solo, ed., *Economics and the Public Interest*, New York: Rutgers University Press.
- Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fuller, B., & Elmore, R. (1996). *Who chooses? Who loses? Culture, institutions, and the unequal effects of school choice*. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Fusarelli, L. D. (2007). Restricted choices, limited options: Implementing choice and supplemental educational services in No Child Left Behind. *Educational Policy*, 21, 132–154.
- Fusarelli, L. (2003). *The political dynamics of school choice*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Giorgi, A. (2008). Concerning a serious misunderstanding of the essence of the phenomenological method in psychology. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 39, 33–58.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers* (3rd ed., Rev.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Goldring, E. B., & Hausman, C. S. (1999). Reasons for parental choice of urban schools. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 14(5), 469–490.
- Goodman, K., Shannon, P., Goodman, Y., & Rapoport, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Saving our schools: The case for public education*. Berkeley, CA: RDR Books.
- Hausman, C., & Goldring, E. (2000). Parent involvement, influence, and satisfaction in magnet schools: Do reasons for choice matter? *The Urban Review*, 32(2), 105–121.
- Heidegger, M. (1993). *Varat och tiden [Being and Time] (Part 1)* (Rev. ed.). Goteborg, Sweden: Daidalos.
- Henig, J. (1994). *Rethinking school choice: Limits of the market metaphor*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Hickok, E. (2010). *Schoolhouse of cards: An inside story of No Child Left Behind and why America needs a real education revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hess, F., & Finn, C. (2004). *Leaving no child behind? Options for kids in failing schools*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hickok, E. (2010). *Schoolhouse of Cards: An Insdie Story of No Child Left Behind and Why America Needs a Real Education Revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Howe, K., Eisenhart, M., & Betebenner, D. (2001). School choice crucible: A case study of Boulder Valley. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(2), 137–146.
- Howell, W. (2006). Switching Schools? A closer look at parents' initial interest in and knowledge about the choice provisions of No Child Left Behind. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 8, 140–179.
- Hsieh, C., & Shen, J. (2001). Is school choice a mechanism for sustaining change? *The Clearing House*, 75(2), 88–91.
- Hunter, R., & Bartee, R. (2003). The achievement gap issues of competition, class, and race. *Education and Urban Society*, 35, 151–160.
- King, K. (2005). The impact of school choice on regional growth. *The Review of Regional Studies*, 35(3), 356–368.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lewis, M. (2000). *Focus group interviews in qualitative research: A review of the literature*. Retrieved June 15, 2008, from Action Research E-Reports website: <http://www.fhs.usyd.edu.au/arow/arer/002.htm>
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Maddaus, J. (1990). Parental choice of school: What parents think and do. *Review of Research in Education*, 16, 267–295.
- Maranto, A., & Maranto, R. (2004). Options for low-income students: Evidence from the states. In F. M. Hess & C. Finn (Eds.), *Leaving no child behind: Options for kids in failing schools* (pp. 64–88). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Martinez, V., & Thomas, K. (1994). Who chooses and why: A look at five school choice plans. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(9), 678–681.
- Meier, D. (2002). *In schools we trust: Creating communities of learning in an era of testing and standardization*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press
- Meier, D., & Wood, G. (2004). *Many children left behind*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Merrifield, J. D. (2000). The school choice choices. *Independent Review*, 5(2), 189–198.
- Merton, R., & Kendall, P. (1990). *The focused interview: A manual of problems and procedures* (2nd ed., Rev.). London, England: Collier Macmillan.
- Moe, T. (2001). *Schools, vouchers, and the American public*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Murnane, R. (1986). *Private education: Studies in choice and public policy—Comparisons of private and public schools: The critical role of regulations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2006). Trends in the use of school choice: 1993-2003. *NCES World Wide Web Electronic Catalog*, NCES 2007-045, 1–48. Retrieved March 21, 2008, from U.S. Department of Education Web Site: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>
- Patterson, J. (2001). The truth about school choice. *Curriculum Administrator*, 37(1), 38–49.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed., Rev.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—One's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17, 17–21.
- Peterson, P., & West, M. (Eds.). (2003). *No Child Left Behind? The politics and practices of school accountability*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

- Phenomenology. (2008). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Online]. Retrieved October 12, 2008, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology> database
- Pipho, C. (1998). Stateline: The evolution of school choice. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(4), 261–262.
- Popham, W. (2009). Transform Toxic AYP Into a Beneficial Tool. *Phi Delta Kappa*, 32, 577–581.
- Riley, D. (1990). Should market forces control educational decision making? *American Political Science Review*, 84(2), 554–558.
- Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (2007). The 39th annual PDK/Gallup Poll. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(1), 33–48.
- Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (2006). The 38th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(1), 41–56.
- Rudestam, K., & Newton, R. (2007). *Surviving your dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sandlowski, M. (1995). Sample size in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 18, 179–183.
- Schneider, M., Teske, P., & Marschall, M. (2000). *Choosing schools: Consumer choice and the quality of American schools*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schneider, M., Teske, P., & Marschall, M. (2002). *Choosing schools: Consumer choice and the quality of American schools* (2nd ed.). United Kingdom: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, A. (1776). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Chicago, IL, c1952: Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Smrekar, C., & Goldring, E. (1999). *School choice in urban America: Magnet schools and the pursuit of equity*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Stengel, R. (2009, April 27). The apostle of reform. *Time, Inc.* Retrieved October 17, 2009 from <http://libproxy.uncg.edu>
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientist*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

- Streubert, H. J., & Carpenter, D. R. (1999). *Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative* (2nd ed.). New York: Lippincott.
- Stulberg, L. (2006). School choice discourse and the legacy of Brown. *Journal of School Choice, 1*, 23–43.
- Stullich, S., Eisner, E., & McCrary, J. (2007). *National Assessment of Title I. Final Report. Volume I: Implementation*. Jessup, MD: National Center for Education, Evaluation, and Regional Assistance. Available: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20084012_rev.pdf
- Sunderman, G., Kim, J., & Orfield, G. (2005). *NCLB meets school realities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *No Child Left Behind: A desktop reference*. Washington, DC: Author, Office of the Undersecretary, Elementary and Secondary Education.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Public Law 107-110*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2008). NCLB update. *U.S. Department of Education's April 25, 2008 edition of ED REVIEW*. Retrieved April 30, 2008, from U.S. Department of Education Web Site: <http://www.d.gov/legislation/FedRegister/other/2008-2/042308a.html>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *A blueprint for reform: The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved December 9, 2010 from <http://www2ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf>
- Wilson, D. W. & Washington, G. (2007). Retooling Phenomenology: Relevant Methods for Conducting Research with African American Women, *The Journal of Theory Construction and Testing, 11*(2), 63-66.
- Wong, K. K. (1992). Choice in public schools: Their institutional functions and distributive consequences. In *Handbook of research on urban politics and policy in the United States*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Wong, K. K., & Nicotera, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Money, politics, and law: Intersections and conflicts in the provision of educational opportunity*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

- Wong, K. K., & Walberg, H. J. (2006). Introduction to the special issue on contemporary school choice research. *Peabody of Journal Education*, 81(1), 1–6.
- Woodward, R. (2009). *More power to you: Parental experiences with the public school choice option provided by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of San Diego.
- Yell, M. L., & Drasgow, E. (2005). *No Child Left Behind: A guide for professionals*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTION AND DATA SOURCE TRIANGULATION

Parent/School	Choice Option	Documentation	Response to Research Question 1 Interview Questions 1,2,3,4,8,10	Response to Research Question 2 Interview Questions 5,6,7,14	Response to Research Question 3 Interview Questions 9,11,12,13,15	Topics in Parent Responses
Precious/ School A to School B	Transfer	School A did not make AYP 2008 & 2009 School B made AYP 2008 & 2009	X X	X	X	Topic 1 Topic 2
Mario/ School A to School B	Transfer	School A did not make AYP 2008 & 2009 School B made AYP 2008 & 2009	X	X X	X X	Topic 1 Topic 3
Tina/ School C to School D	Transfer	School C did not make AYP in 2008 but made it in 2009. School D did not make AYP 2008 & 2009, not a Title I School	X X	X	X X	Topic 3 Topic 4 Topic 5
Tracy / School A	Remain	School A did not make AYP 2008 & 2009	X	X	X	Topic 2 Topic 6

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
2718 Beverly Cooper Moore and Irene Mitchell Moore
Humanities and Research Administration Bldg.
PO Box 26170
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336.256.1482
Web site: www.uncg.edu/orc
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

To: Carl Lashley
Ed Ldrship and Cultural Found
245 Curry Building

From: UNCG IRB

Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

Approval Date: 11/25/2009

Expiration Date of Approval: 11/24/2010

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

Submission Type: Initial

Expedited Category: 7. Surveys/interviews/focus groups

Study #: 09-0349

Study Title: An Exploration of the Exercise of Parental Choice and Decision Making Under the Provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act

This submission has been approved by the IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:

This study involves research focused on the perceptions and attitudes of parents who made decisions about school placement for their children as part of the public school choice provisions under NCLB Act.

Investigator's Responsibilities

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

When applicable, enclosed are stamped copies of approved consent documents and other recruitment materials. You must copy the stamped consent forms for use with subjects unless you have approval to do otherwise.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented (use the modification application available at <http://www.uncg.edu/orc/irb.htm>). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the "Unanticipated Problem/Event" form at the same website.

CC: Sandra Culmer, Dr. Cathryne Schmitz, (UNCG IRB Chair), Non-IRB Review Contact

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: An Exploration of the Exercise of Parental Choice and Decision Making Under the Provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act

Project Director: Sandra Culmer

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

This is a research project. The purpose of this study is to try to find out about information and experiences that parents have in placing their children in one school over another as part of the public school choice program under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal law. As part of NCLB, schools have to make progress toward the goal of all students performing at an expected level in reading, math, and science by the year 2014. This progress is defined as "adequate yearly progress", (AYP). Title I elementary schools that have not met AYP for two or more years in a row must provide parents the opportunity to move their children into a school that has made AYP. This study will research how parents who qualify for NCLB's school choice work through the school choice process and decide to change schools or remain in the school that the children have been attending.

Why are you asking me?

You have been picked for this study because of your experience in choosing the school that your child(ren) attend(s). You may have information that you can offer through an interview that will be helpful in gaining new knowledge about parents' experiences in making public school choices. This study will include parents who either transferred their children from a Title I School Improvement school to another school; or parents who did not want to transfer their children from the Title I School Improvement school and kept their children at that school.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

You will be asked to participate in a forty-five minute to one hour interview about school choices that were offered to you, the decisions you made, and actions you took as a parent. You will also be asked complete a short questionnaire that asks about your background (including race/ethnicity, your child's school and eligibility for free/reduced lunch). The time required to complete the questionnaire is not more than ten minutes. All individual data, including the identity of participants will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. I will transcribe interviews that are completed in English and Guilford County Schools translation services will transcribe any interviews in other languages. Pseudonyms will be used for participant and school names for all transcriptions to ensure that confidentiality and privacy are protected. You will be offered the opportunity to review the transcript and a draft of the final research findings for the purpose of accurately representing their thoughts and ideas. The review of the transcript by participants will take approximately thirty to forty five minutes. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses a minimal risk to participants. Some parents may be sensitive about not

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid 11/25/09 to 11/2/10

being knowledgeable or informed about the NCLB law and school choice options. They may have feelings of inadequacy in their personal decision-making situation. Your answers to the interview questions will not reflect unfavorably on you. If you have any concerns about your rights or how you are being treated please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research and Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions about this project or your benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Carl Lashley who may be contacted at (333) 334-3745 or by Sandra Culmer at culmers@gcsnc.com.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

This research will promote recognition of your roles as a parent, school partner, decision-maker and advocate for your child(ren)'s education. It will provide you the opportunity to share your experiences and advice regarding NCLB school choice policies and practices. You may gain information through the study to help you become better informed as a parent and advocate for your children and their schools.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

Promoting increased understanding and greater awareness of parental experiences and ideas may be helpful in directing changes in the policies and practices of NCLB at the national level as this legislation is reviewed and/or changed under President Obama's administration. This study may be instructive to public school-choice legislation reform, both in practice and ideally.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to participants or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

I will use measures to protect the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of data. I will use fictitious names and pseudonyms for the participants and their school locations. All identifiable and private information will be secured in a locked file cabinet at my work office located at 900 English Street, High Point, NC. All information obtained in this study will remain strictly confidential and not be made public unless disclosure is required by law. I only will have access to the data. I will destroy the data at the conclusion of my research study. A numbering or coding system will be used as needed to de-identify individual respondents.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are willing to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by Sandra Culmer.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form

Valid 11/25/09 to 11/24/10

APPENDIX D**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS WHO CHOSE TO KEEP
CHILD(REN) IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL**

1. I would like to talk with you about how you made your decision to keep your child(ren) in this school and I would also like to know about your child's educational experiences. Where would you like to begin our discussion?
2. If there was one reason why you choose not to transfer your child(ren) to another school, what would that reason be? Talk to me about that reason.
3. What do you like or find useful about the right to transfer your child(ren) to another school under the provisions of No Child Left Behind?
4. What do you not like or would like to change in the No Child Left Behind provisions for transferring students to another school?
5. What considerations were important to you when determining which school your child(ren) would attend for this school year?
6. What attributes of your child's school do you value most or what is most important to you about the school?

7. Are there certain aspects of your child's school that you do not like?
8. What sources of information did you use or continue to use, if any, to find out about your child's school?
9. How would you describe the match between what you want for your child's education and what your child's school delivers?
10. Please tell me about any other schooling options that you may have considered for your child.
11. Talk to me about your involvement in the school this year.
12. Overall how satisfied are you with your child(ren)'s school?
13. How does that compare to your satisfaction with your school last year?
14. In your opinion, how well does the school that your child(ren) attends this year meet his/her academic needs?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

APPENDIX E**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS WHO TRANSFERRED THEIR
CHILD(REN) TO THE OPT-OUT CHOICE SCHOOL**

1. I would like to talk with you about how you made your decision to keep your child(ren) in this school and I would also like to know about your child's educational experiences. Where would you like to begin our discussion?
2. If there was one reason why you choose to transfer your child(ren) to another school, what would that reason be? Talk to me about that reason.
3. What do you like or find useful about the right to transfer your child(ren) to another school under the provisions of No Child Left Behind?
4. What do you not like or would like to change in the No Child Left Behind provisions for transferring students to another school?
5. What considerations were important to you when determining which school your child(ren) would attend for this school year?
6. What attributes of your child's school do you value most or what is most important to you about the school?

7. Are there certain aspects of your child's school that you do not like?
8. What sources of information did you use or continue to use, if any, to find out about your child's school?
9. How would you describe the match between what you want for your child's education and what your child's school delivers?
10. Please tell me about any other schooling options that you may have considered for your child.
11. Talk to me about your involvement in the school this year.
12. Overall how satisfied are you with your child(ren)'s school?
13. How does that compare to your satisfaction with your school last year?
14. In your opinion, how well does the school that your child(ren) attends this year meet his/her academic needs?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

APPENDIX F
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

First, I would like to ask you a few questions about your background. Thank you for completing the survey questions.

1. What is your name?_____
2. What is the name of your child(ren)'s elementary school?_____
3. Does your child attend the school assigned to your attendance zone?
Yes____ No____
4. Did your child transfer to another school out of your attendance zone?
Yes____ No____
5. Please check your race/ethnicity as indicated below:
White_____ American Indian_____
Black_____ Hawaiian/Pacific Islander_____
Hispanic_____ Other _____
Asian_____
6. Is your child eligible for free or reduced lunch at school?
Yes____ No_____

APPENDIX G

MATRIX OF FINDINGS AND SOURCES OF DATA TRIANGULATION

	Data Sources	
Major Findings	Interviews	Documentation
Topic 1: Emergent Theme Emergent Theme	X X	X
Topic 2: Emergent Theme Emergent Theme	X	X X
Topic 3: Emergent Theme Emergent Theme	X X	X X
Topic 4: Emergent Theme Emergent Theme	X	X X