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# A Grounded Theory Inquiry Into Parent School Choice Motivation and How Schools Can Better Market Themselves

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A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY INTO PARENT SCHOOL CHOICE  
MOTIVATION AND HOW SCHOOLS CAN BETTER MARKET THEMSELVES

By  
Susan R. Fail

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2021

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Susan R. Fail under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## Acknowledgments

“The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not ‘get over’ the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to.”—Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

The work of this study and this completed dissertation is dedicated to my son, Dillon Fail. Dillon passed away on June 8, 2020. He was 18 years old. I was just beginning this dissertation, and I lost my purpose and my motivation. Dillon was and still is a part of me, and I will forever be thankful that I got to be his Mom.

Mathew, you have never once doubted me, you helped me, and you read my work over and over again. You gave me encouragement and hope. I will always be grateful to you and our partnership. I love you more than I can find adequate enough words to express my love. Jonathan, my quirky and loving son, you are my light and reason for wanting to be better and do better. You helped me to not give up and stay on the course.

My cohort, what an incredible group of educators. The very first day I met you, I knew we had something special; although being the only Bills fan had its challenges. You have a permanent place in my heart. Thank you for supporting me and my family in our darkest hours. I would also like to acknowledge the school district where I work and where I have thrived. I appreciate you supporting my journey and giving me the resources to conduct my study.

My committee members, Dr. Boen Nutting and Dr. Sara Newell. I know I am not an easy task, but you both took me on without hesitation. Your feedback, your encouragement, and your willingness to help me see this through to the end is something

I could never repay. You have set an example for me of leadership, guidance, and work ethic. Thank you is not sufficient enough.

Finally, Dr. Stephen Laws, here we are. I know I have given you more than a run for your money. I know I struggled to finish, and I know how much time you have given me. The day you came to my office when I did not want to continue and you told me to not give up and do this for Dillon, I wish you knew the impact you had on me. I am not the easiest person to work with, and we had our fair share of pointed conversations, but I owe you so much. You picked me up when I was down, and you had the exact words for me to continue on. I knew I would always be connected to you when you came to my son's funeral. You did not need to say anything, but you being there meant more to me than you will ever know. Thank you for taking me on, and thank you for being brave enough to do so.

## Abstract

### A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY INTO PARENT SCHOOL CHOICE MOTIVATION AND HOW SCHOOLS CAN BETTER MARKET THEMSELVES.

Fail, Susan R., 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

It is no longer about neighborhood schools but allowing parents to choose which school is best for their children. In addition, traditional public schools have seen a decline in enrollment, whereas charter, private, and home schools have seen an increase. This study sought to identify what motivates parents to choose a school for their children and how schools can enhance their marketing and branding. To determine the answers to these key questions, a qualitative research design was employed utilizing the Grounded Theory Approach. Data were gathered from a survey and focus groups at five large International Baccalaureate (IB) schools serving over 2,500 students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the Central Piedmont Region of North Carolina. The framework of this study is based on McClelland's Three Needs Theory. The data suggest parents choose their child's school based on the simple fact that it is a choice, it offers an advantage to their child, and the school provides a connection for their child and has strong teachers. It is also important to note most parents, according to the data collected, get their information about a school most often directly from the school. A school's website and social media are two other primary sources where parents learn about a school. Based on the results of this study, public schools should offer parents a choice, be able to clearly communicate the advantage of attending school, and have a high-performing staff.

*Keywords:* school choice, traditional public school, International Baccalaureate, McClelland, Three Needs Theory

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

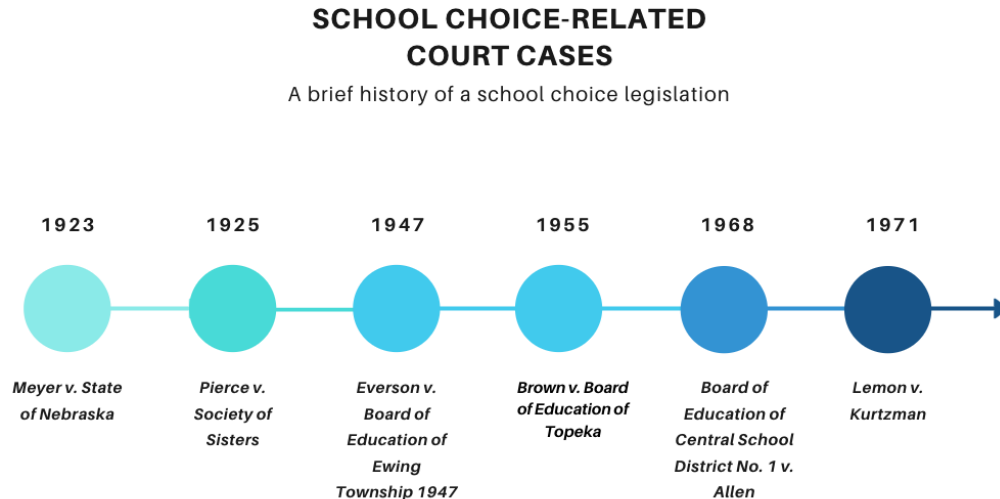
### **Introduction**

Parents have an abundance of schools to choose from; it is no longer about the neighborhood schools. Parents want to find the best school for their children. This study sought to identify what motivates parents to choose a school for their children and how schools can enhance their marketing and branding. As outlined in the literature review, the motivators are grounded in McClelland's Three Needs Theory, also known as Need Theory. Understanding parents and their motivation to choose the right school will benefit schools to maintain and/or increase enrollment and to market themselves.

### **Background of the Problem**

Cunningham (2017) suggested individuals supporting school choice believe it creates competition among all schools to maintain enrollment. Essentially, schools must improve to maintain their school enrollment. Voucher programs can have negative impacts on public schools. Public schools are held to rigorous standards and guidelines; and private schools should be held accountable to the same rigorous standards and guidelines (Cunningham, 2017).

Figure 1 displays a timeline of school choice related court cases. School choice court-related cases began as early 1923.

**Figure 1***School Choice Related Court Cases Timeline*

Early on in education, parents wanted a voice in their child’s schooling. There have been many court cases about school and a parent’s right to choose a school for their child as shown in Figure 1. In 1923, the United States Supreme Court acknowledged that parents have a say in their child’s schooling. In *Meyer v. State of Nebraska* (1923), the Supreme Court did not uphold a Nebraska law that banned the teaching of foreign languages in school since the law did not uphold the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The law originated after World War I. The goal of the law was to ensure that students learned English first and did not want foreign languages due to the war. The Supreme Court decision also asserted the Nebraskan law took away the rights of the teachers and the rights of parents to make decisions about their children’s education. In the court case of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), the Supreme Court did not uphold a law that originated in Oregon that required all children to attend a public school. Again, the court claimed the law interfered with parents’ abilities to make decisions about their child’s education (McCluskey,

2019).

*Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township* (1947) was a court case pertaining to a New Jersey law that allowed school districts to refund bus fare to students using public transportation to attend religious schools. The court ruled in support of the Board of Education affirming the funding was not based on religion, and all students had access to the same funds. Additionally, in the *Board of Education of Central School District No. 1 v. Allen* (1968), the court approved textbooks being loaned to parochial school students.

In the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1955), the Supreme Court put an end to “separate but equal,” ruling it unconstitutional. As a result of this court case, southern states instituted the Freedom of Choice legislation. This legislation was designed to allow a parent to choose the school they felt best for their child. In response, segregated states drafted and sent the Declaration of Constitutional Principles to the United States Senate in 1956. (Robinson & English, 2016). This document was a declaration by previously slave states to fight the “overreach” of the courts in the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Declaration supports states and to whom they allow admission. Southern lawmakers in opposition to the *Brown* court ruling supported a parent’s right to choose a school they feel best meets their children’s needs.

Throughout the last 100 years, many supreme court decisions have supported parent voice. The idea that parents have the right to choose a school they feel best meets their children’s needs became known as the Freedom of Choice Movement. These court decisions brought to light the Freedom of Choice Movement, which championed the idea

that parents have the right to choose a school that best meets their child's needs and provided parents with the option to decide they did not want to participate in school integration. The Declaration of Constitutional Principles, which is also referred to as the Southern Manifesto, was created to assist southern states' actions to not support the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1955). The Declaration of Constitutional Principles provided tuition grants for White students who wanted to attend segregated private schools. The Declaration of Constitutional Principles also gave authority to school boards to assign students to schools based on race and to refuse support to public schools that supported desegregation. Additionally, school choice advocates began to voice their thoughts about schools and the ability for parents to be offered school choice.

### **Milton Friedman—School Choice**

Milton Friedman (1955), an economist, wrote an essay saying schools should be part of a free market:

Given greater freedom about where to send their children, parents of a kind would flock together and so prevent a healthy intermingling of children from decidedly different backgrounds. Again, whether or not this argument is valid in principle, it is not at all clear that the stated results would follow. Under present arrangements, particular schools tend to be peopled by children with similar background, thanks to the stratification of residential areas. In addition, parents are not now prevented from sending their children to private schools. Only a highly limited class can or does do so, parochial schools aside, in the process producing further stratification. The widening of the range of choice under a private system would operate to

reduce both kinds of stratification. (p. 5)

Friedman believed that parents should have the ability to choose a school that best meets the needs of their child, rather than just attending their neighborhood school. Friedman argued that universal vouchers would increase innovation and student success within public schools. He also believed that vouchers would increase choice for parents and create more positive outcomes for students and parents. In the implementation of Friedman's education voucher system, parents would receive a sum of money to spend at a school of their choice if the school met standards set by an appropriate governmental unit. Certain criteria must be met to determine if the school of choice meets the standards for students to receive vouchers; for instance, curriculum, safety policies, and the mission of the school. Eligible schools would include those sponsored by private enterprise, for-profit and nonprofit schools, private schools, religious schools, and government schools. Friedman believed the voucher system would help reduce government spending and would allow low-income families to select quality education over a poorly performing public school. Friedman also contended that school vouchers would also increase the variety of schools and create competition for enrollment. Private school vouchers began to emerge in the 1990s (Cunningham, 2017). Education Savings Accounts are another form of school vouchers. Education Savings Accounts are funded through public tax dollars. Parents can use these funds not only for tuition but also to secure tutoring and other school-related expenses (Cunningham, 2017).

### **Lemon Test**

In *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), the Supreme Court determined it was unconstitutional for states to provide aid to religious institutions. In this case, the court

did not support a Rhode Island law that provided a partial salary to parochial school teachers. This case led to the emergence of the Lemon Test, which is a tool used to determine if a law violates the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment. It was found unconstitutional for two states (Rhode Island and Pennsylvania) to provide financial aid to schools supported by the church. As a result of *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the statutes proposed must have a secular legislative purpose, schools must not advance or inhibit religion, and the statute must not contain excessive religion and government intertwining.

### **Voucher Programs**

The Office of Economic Opportunity founded the federal government's first voucher program for low-income and minority students in Alum Rock, California. School vouchers give parents the freedom to choose a private school for their children; public funds are used to pay for the expenses incurred in the public. Voucher funds come from budgets that are usually spent by a school district which would be allocated to a participating family in the form of a voucher to pay partial or full tuition for their child's private school, including both religious and non-religious options. This program was designed to give low socioeconomic students vouchers so they could attend any public or independent school that best meet their needs. Tuition for the school would be paid for by the voucher, and the school would be required to accept the voucher. The voucher program was strongly opposed by teacher unions and, as a result, was developed on a much smaller scale (Kafer, 2009).

### **School Choice Options**

Magnet schools became choice options in the 1960s and 1970s. Kafer (2009) suggested that magnet schools are designed to attract students of different ethnic

backgrounds. Magnet schools are based on voluntary enrollment. Students are not assigned to these schools, but parents can choose to enroll their students in magnet schools. Magnet schools, according to Kafer (2009), focused on a specific area or a specific theme. McCarver Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington and Trotter Elementary in Boston, Massachusetts were the first magnet choice schools and were formed with the intent of reducing segregation. These magnet programs gave parents in segregated school districts the option to enroll their children in an integrated school.

Homeschooling became legal in three states in 1989, and by the early 1990s, it was legal in all 50 states (Kafer, 2009). In the U.S. Supreme Court case *Mueller v. Allen* (1983), the plaintiffs thought it was unfair that parents of students attending private secular and religious schools would receive a tax exemption for purchasing school supplies that promoted religious instruction. The decision was in favor of the plaintiff and determined the tax exemption was religiously neutral because financial assistance was given to parents and not to the schools (Kafer, 2009).

The first public charter school opened in 1992 in Minnesota. Public charter schools were originally designed to be schools of choice. Students are not assigned to attend a public charter school; instead, parents must select that school for their children. While some states have a variety of public charter schools in most geographic areas, other states have placed caps on the number of charter schools that can operate in the state (Campanella, 2020).

In 2020, Senator Alexander from Tennessee and Senator Scott from South Carolina proposed a new bill, The School Choice Now Act. This bill would give federal funding for state-approved, scholarship-granting organizations that provide educational



assistance. These funds would be allocated for private school tuition and expenses incurred with homeschooling. These funds would use 10% of the Federal Emergency Education budget, and this bill would create permanent tax credits of up to \$5 billion annually for scholarship-granting organizations in states (Ujifusa, 2020). Table 1 displays North Carolina student enrollment in 2018 and 2019 by school type.

**Table 1**

*North Carolina K-13 Student Enrollment*

School type	Student enrollment (2018)	Student enrollment (2019)
Public school	1,469,266	1,458,814
Charter school	114,057	121,260
Private	102,400	103,959
Home school	90,688	94,863

Table 1 shows a decline in North Carolina public school enrollment, but shows increased enrollment in North Carolina charter, private, and home schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

**Statement of the Problem**

Parents have so many choices for their children as far as school options. There is legislation that supports parents' rights to choose. With public school enrollment declining, public schools must now consider methods to attract students and parents in order to reverse that trend. It is essential that public schools understand parents and what they desire in a school and what motivates them to pick a school that best fits their expectations for their children.

**Marketing and Branding**

School choice has taken away the premise that students will come simply because students are assigned to a particular school. To be competitive with the charter,

magnet, and private schools, public schools need to develop a brand or a means to attract key stakeholders. Rubin (2017) suggested public schools must create a message within the community, define the true worth of the school, and communicate why parents should send their students to that school. A clear mission and vision will help attract and retain students and will support the school's message within the community (Rubin, 2017). Parents are offered many choices. If schools do not effectively market and brand their school, enrollment will decline (Rubin, 2017).

Malaure (2017) stated that for schools to stand out, the school brand must be memorable and parents need to have a positive perception of the school. The school must have a brand and reason for someone to connect with the school. It is essential to get your brand right. Branding a school helps to create its culture and identity, which should reflect the school's core values and meet student needs at the school. Without an effective brand, a school may find it difficult to motivate parents to send their children to that school. The school's message needs to be clear as to why the school is a more attractive option than the other schools within the community (Malaure, 2017).

School choice has forced public schools to be innovative to attract and retain students. In the past, public schools received tax revenue regardless of student numbers, so an incentive to be a better school did not exist. Public schools no longer have control over the school market due to an increase in school choice options, which has created an environment for schools to improve and adapt to the needs of parents (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018).

Campanella (2020) suggested, "School choice encourages schools to continue enhancing the services they provide to students and families. Your choice of a school or

learning environment for your child provides important information to school leaders and community leaders” (p. 9). Public charter schools were conceptualized for parents to have a choice. According to Campanella, parents are not assigned to charter schools. Table 1 displays the student enrollment of four different types of schools in North Carolina in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the school year 2018-2019. It is important to understand what parents want in a public school.

Enrollment trends within the traditional public schools of North Carolina demonstrate a decline; however, enrollment trends for charter, private, and home schools are steadily increasing. The purpose of this study was to examine the parental motivation for determining a school for their children. Bielick and Chapman (2003) analyzed data from the National Household Education Survey for the years 1993, 1996, and 1999. Parents took the survey for the schools their children attended. The survey included questions pertaining to the teacher, the school, and discipline. The survey analysis yielded parents whose children attended a school they had chosen were more pleased than those parents whose children attended their assigned school. Likewise, Bielick and Chapman found parents who chose the school for their child versus if their child was just assigned were more satisfied with the school. Bielick and Chapman determined the number of students who attended public schools declined from 80% in 1993 to 76% in 1999; moreover, there was an increase in enrollment in public magnet schools from 11% to 14%. Campanella (2020) concluded that because of school choice, if a school is not a good fit or if the school community does not appeal to a parent, they can choose another school for a better fit.

Over the past 3 decades, the foundation of schools has changed. Public schools

have been forced to market and brand their schools to improve enrollment (Campanella, 2020). Additionally, public schools must maintain student achievement and parental involvement to attract students and keep enrolled students. Public schools need to market their schools like successful businesses market their products (Stack, 2017). It is critical for schools to understand their market and to be able to appeal to those within that market to attract students. Parents are not putting their children in the community school where they live. Parents are searching for information about schools on the internet. In doing so, parents are determining the quality of schools based on the image a school portrays through digital communication (Stack, 2017).

What specifically about a school does a parent want for their child? The specific problem that is addressed is that school choice is not a new concept; however, with more and more options for parents to choosing schools based on marketing, the exclusivity of the school, and word of mouth from other parents. Charter, private, and home schools are creating a new level of competition for public schools.

Schools must learn to thrive in a large competitive market in order to survive by creating a positive, appealing brand or image that will attract parents to your school to increase enrollment. Branding is the creation of a product or service that sets it apart from similar products and services. A brand has a logo or trademark identifying the goods or service, and the brand sets it apart from other competitors. Just as branding helps businesses to increase sales, branding and marketing schools should be done to draw in parents and students (Hidayatun, 2017).

Hidayatun (2017) affirmed parents not only look for standardized testing information, but they also research the school's brand. The school brand could be present

on the internet, website, media information, social media, and the school's perception within the community. Schools should transition their mindset to students and parents being customers, and the service a school provides should focus on the needs of the customer. Schools must be willing to shift to meet the needs of the customer.

One branding strategy is to hold meetings with all stakeholders of the school. During these meetings, stakeholders will be asked to define what makes the school great and what areas of the school can be improved. Another tool is to create the mission and vision of the school; this approach helps to bring the stakeholders together with a clear and defined message. The mission and vision the school creates should communicate the core values of the stakeholders and what direction they would like to see the school go. This approach will help to spread the word of your school (West-Rosenthal, 2017).

Najjar (2018) advised a successful marketing plan should go beyond surface-level items such as a mascot, static websites, and a predictable website; schools need to tell their stories. Schools need to be able to express their success, communicate the culture of the school, and create a place where parents want to enroll their children. Effective storytelling and communication are key to a successful marketing campaign (Najjar, 2018).

Many school districts have turned to magnet schools to attract parents and students. The fundamental purpose of magnet schools has changed over time. In 1985, the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program was implemented to provide choice for parents and ensure diversity was being disseminated across a school district. Magnet schools were intended to increase the quality of instruction. Magnet school goals have changed since their implementation into providing more choice for parents, improving

student learning and achievement, and expanding the use of innovation in education (Paige et al., 2004).

In theory, magnet schools were created as an option so appealing to parents, they would be willing to bus their child across a county to attend an innovative school. The idea being the magnet school's educational program will be innovative and draw on a diverse population of students. Magnet school choice programs include but are not limited to fine and performing arts, dual language immersion, STEM, and International Baccalaureate (IB; Paige et al., 2004).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to understand what motivates parents to choose a school for their children. This study will identify what data parents are interested in and what expectations parents have for schools in which their children are enrolled. Additionally, this study will help school administrators determine how to market their schools and improve student learning to maintain and/or increase enrollment among all the parents' school choice options. This study will assist schools to improve enrollment and perhaps parent involvement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is centered around McClelland's Three Needs Theory. According to McClelland (1961), humans are motivated by three drivers: power, achievement, and affiliation. It is important to understand these drivers and what is the dominant motivator for people. In this study, each driver is examined. This study examined each driver to determine which best motivates parents to choose a school for their children. Furthermore, the study determined how a school can respond to the data on parental

motivation to maintain and/or increase student enrollment in the school setting with an effective marking and branding strategy. According to McClelland (1961), identifying your motivational drivers will provide insight into what drives you and how to respond to those drivers in a positive manner to elicit a desired behavior from the individual.

### **Research Questions**

The study was framed through the following research questions:

1. Which factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
2. How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
3. How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?

### **Significance of the Study**

White (2018) stated that parental involvement is crucial to a child's success in school. White defined parental involvement as being engaged with their child's learning and knowing what is going on inside the classroom and school. When parents are interested in what is going on at school, students will recognize their education is important. When parents are deliberately involved in their child's schooling, it will impact them in a positive way outside of the classroom as well (White, 2018).

Data gathered from this study will aid principals to create marketing to increase school enrollment. By understanding what motivates parents to choose a school for their children, school leaders will be able to target parents based on what parents are seeking in a school. Parents have many schools to choose from; however, knowing what motivates a parent to choose a specific school will be instrumental to increase student enrollment.

## **Overview of Research Design**

Qualitative research is intended to help understand humans and what they attribute to a problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study is a qualitative collection of parental opinions about what motivates them to enroll their child in a particular school and of the parameters parents use to determine if a school is a good fit for their children. Additionally, parental opinions regarding how schools can better market themselves were solicited. Data were gathered through focus groups and survey questions for parents of current elementary school-age children. Qualitative data were used to categorize parent motivators regarding power, achievement, and affiliation and to help understand what parents desire in a school for their children. The data obtained from this study will be used to market and brand schools to attract and retain students. Additional details of the research design are provided in Chapter 3.

## **Setting of Study**

This study was conducted at five large schools serving over 2,500 students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the Central Piedmont Region of North Carolina. The two elementary schools are authorized IB schools offering the Primary Years Program. The Primary Years Program is a transdisciplinary approach based on inquiry emphasizing the whole child. The middle schools used in this study are authorized IB schools offering the Middle Years Program, and the high school is an authorized Career-Related Program and Diploma Program by IB.

## **Definition of Terms**

### ***Charter School***

A charter school is a school of choice. Charter schools operate with specific goals



and are largely exempt from local, state, and federal guidelines and regulations. Charter schools cannot charge tuition or have any affiliation to a specific religion. Charter schools are funded with public funds (Nelson, 2014).

### ***Diploma Program***

IB's Diploma Program is for students between 16 and 19 years old, and it is based on the international-mindedness framework that uses internal and final exams to help students be prepared for a path at a university or college ("IB Diploma Programme," 2021).

### ***Every Student Succeeds Act***

Every Student Succeeds Act replaced No Child Left Behind. The purpose of ESSA is to ensure every child receives a high-quality and rigorous education. This act allows states to implement their own education plans, but these plans must fall within federal guidelines. Parents have an opportunity to provide feedback for plans for each school. State plans must include a state curriculum, standardized testing, and accountability measures for schools. Goals to improve student learning, plans for the improvement of schools that are not meeting growth measures, and state and local report cards must also be part of the state plan (Klein, 2016).

### ***International Baccalaureate***

An IB school is a transdisciplinary and inquiry-based approach to student learning. The foundation of all IB schools is to teach international mindedness. IB promotes socially conscious students with a global perspective to make the world a better place (Accredited Schools Online, 2021).

### ***Magnet School***

A magnet school offers special instruction or programs operating within a public school district and is funded with public taxes. Magnet schools are meant to attract diversity within a school district (Chen, 2019).

### ***Middle Years Program***

IB's Middle Years Program is for students between the ages of 11 to 16. The framework is based on international mindedness with an emphasis on the world around them. It promotes critical thinking and student reflection ("IB Middle Years Programme," 2020).

### ***Mission Statement***

A mission statement is a paragraph or a few sentences of what the school's goal or purpose is. A mission statement should be defined to represent the school, staff, and community values (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

### ***Motivators***

Power, achievement, and affiliation as defined by McClelland (1961).

### ***Parochial School***

A parochial school is a non-public school supported by a church.

### ***Private School***

A school supported by private individuals or private organizations.

### ***Public School***

A public school is maintained and funded by federal, state, and local funds. It is run under guidelines and statutes from federal, state, and local education agencies.

### ***Stakeholders***

A stakeholder is someone with a vested interest in a school or organization.

## ***STEM***

STEM is an integration of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics into a curriculum (Dalton, 2019).

## ***Vision Statement***

A vision statement is a long-term goal for the school. In essence, where you see the school in the future (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

## **Scope**

This dissertation is structured into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a history of school choice and the impact on public schools in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Chapter 1 also provides the problem statement, purpose, and significance of the problem. Research questions and definitions of terms are provided. Chapter 2 begins with the theoretical framework in which the study is anchored. Additionally, Chapter 2 provides a literature review of research concerning human motivation. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to gather information about parental motivation for choosing schools for their children. Chapter 3 also discusses the validity and the reliability of the study. Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the study. Last, Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the data from the research, along with any implications of the findings and recommendations for future research.

## **Summary**

School choice has evolved over time and has catalyzed the need for schools to market and brand their schools to attract parents who have an abundance of choices. Federal policymakers who seek to expand school choice need to focus on policies that impact their region. For example, some states may want to focus on securing additional

funding to improve access to high-quality schools by providing better transportation options for families. Others may want to focus on expanding their charter or private school sectors or on encouraging more choice within the traditional public school sector. This study examines parental opinions about schools, their motivation to select a school for their children, and how schools can respond to parents to increase student enrollment.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

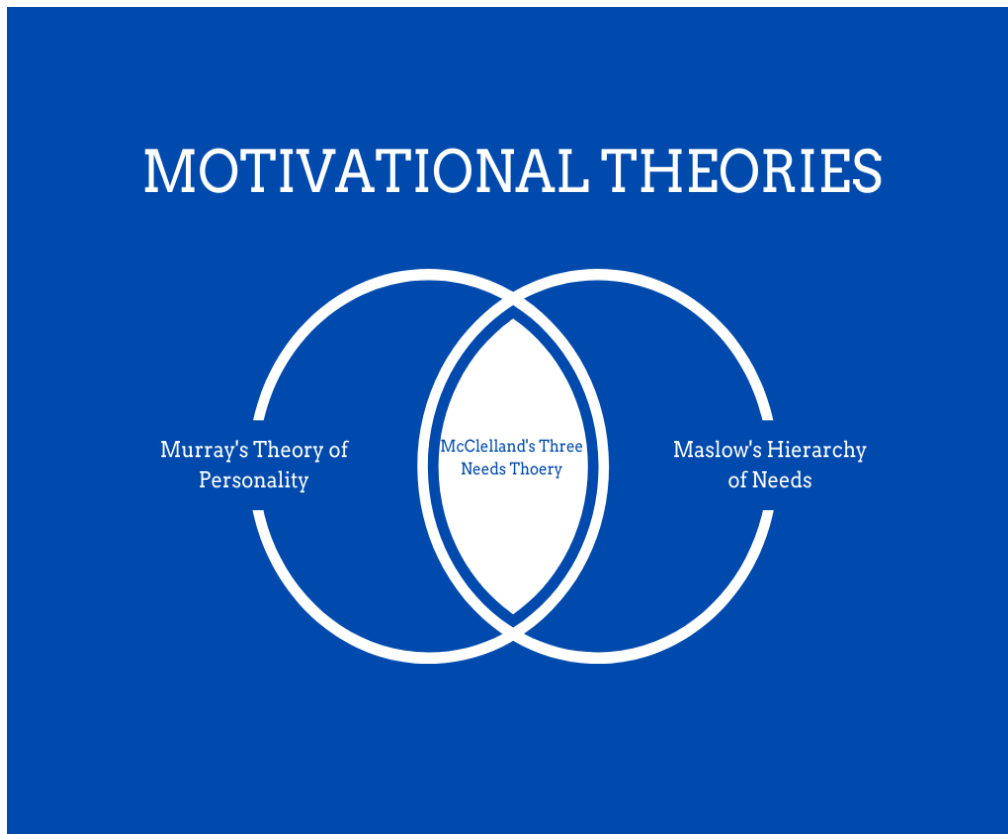
### **Introduction**

This study's purpose was to examine parent motivation for choosing a public school for their children. The study uses the framework of McClelland's Three Needs Theory, which focuses on the needs for power, achievement, and affiliation. This chapter provides a thorough presentation of information related to the three needs as well as studies aligned with the needs in relation to decision-making. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Which factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
2. How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
3. How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?

### **Motivational Theories**

McClelland's Three Needs Theory was developed using the work of Henry Murray (1938) and Abraham Maslow (1943) two leading psychologists. McClelland utilized the Theory of Personality derived from Murray and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to develop his theory based on the need for power, achievement, and affiliation.

**Figure 2***Motivational Theory Framework*

As shown in Figure 2, McClelland's Three Needs Theory was influenced by the work of Murray and Maslow. McClelland created his Three Needs Theory based on concepts derived from Murray and Maslow.

**Murray's Theory of Personality**

Henry Murray was an American psychologist who developed a theory of human personality based on an individual's innate needs and their association with the physical and social environment. Murray's (1938) Theory of Personality described human needs and motives. He believed a person's behavior was controlled by needs. Murray identified 24 needs that could be categorized as either a primary or secondary need. Though the researchers believed these needs operated in the subconscious mind, the needs were a

major part of what creates an individual's personality. Murray's Theory of Personality provided a comprehensive model of human needs and motivational processes. The system organized personality in terms of motives, presses, and needs. Murray defined a need as a readiness to respond in a certain way under certain given conditions and presses as external influences on motivation that may influence an individual's level of a need as well as their consequent behavior.

According to Murray (1938), motivation is defined as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is something that is based internally on one's personal values, and they get the reward of feeling good when they receive a positive reaction. Extrinsic motivation is being motivated by money, rewards, or praise. Murray's concept of needs and his definition of motivation and direction of behavior encompass his Theory of Personality. He explained a need involves a physicochemical force in the brain that organizes and directs intellectual and perceptual abilities. Needs may arise either from internal progressions such as hunger or thirst or from external environmental events. Murray argued needs create an increase of tension within an individual. When an individual experienced this increase in tension, the individual would try to decrease this tension by acting to satisfy the need(s) causing the increase in tension.

Consequently, needs strengthened one's direct behavior. In other words, needs triggered behavior in the appropriate direction to satisfy the need(s). Murray's (1938) research led him to formulate a list of 20 needs. He concluded that not every person has all these needs; although, over the course of a lifetime, one may experience all these needs. On the other hand, there may be some needs an individual never experiences. Some needs supported other needs, and some needs opposed other needs. Murray noted

each need is unique, but the needs have shared attributes, and he identified a list of 20 manifest needs. An individual may have conflicting needs causing tension. For example, if one needed autonomy at the same time as recognition, this could cause conflict within oneself.

### **Types of Needs**

Murray (1938) believed everyone has primary and secondary needs. Primary needs were for survival such as food, water, and air. Secondary needs were identified as psychogenic needs. Secondary needs (psychogenic needs) are subordinate to primary needs. He identified them as secondary because they developed after the primary needs. Secondary needs were connected to emotional satisfaction, not survival. Murray also identified proactive and reactive needs. Reactive needs involved a response to something specific in the environment and were provoked only when that object appeared. For example, the harm avoidance need appeared only when there was a threat. Conversely, proactive needs did not depend on the presence of a particular object. Proactive needs were spontaneous needs eliciting appropriate behavior whenever they were stimulated. For example, 30 people looked for water to satisfy their need; they did not wait for a stimulus, such as a television ad for bottled water, before acting to find water. Reactive needs involve a response to a specific object; proactive needs arise spontaneously (Murray 1938).

### **Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)**

Murray (1938) developed a tool to measure an individual's interpersonal relationships and their attitudes toward themselves. The tool was the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Murray wanted to use a measure that would reveal information



about the whole person but found the contemporary tests of his time lacking in this regard; therefore, he created the TAT. Murray (1938) theorized people would interpret unclear images based on underlying needs and current pressures. Murray (1938) believed people would be less defensive about telling a story based on an image, while at the same time, sharing personal information about the individual. The TAT revealed how an individual sees the world, their unconscious motives, and their concerns. In addition, the results of the TAT would help to identify one's dominant needs (Murray, 1938).

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs was a motivational theory in psychology describing a five-tier model of human needs and was often represented as levels within a pyramid. Needs lower in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to higher-level needs. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs were physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. An insufficiency occurred when one of the needs was deprived. The needs became stronger when there was an insufficiency. When a deficit need has been adequately satisfied, the individual will be able to direct activities towards meeting the next level of needs that have yet to be satisfied. These new needs then became the significant needs. However, growth needs continued to be felt and may become stronger once they were engaged. These significant needs continued to be felt by the individual until they were met and became more significant once they started to be engaged (Maslow, 1943). For example, if an individual was hungry, they continued to get hungrier until the need was met. If an individual experienced the loss of a loved one, they may stay in love and belonging or move down into safety needs (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow (1943) stated people are motivated to get their needs met, and some needs take precedence over others. For example, psychological and safety needs need to be fulfilled to move to the top tier, which is self-actualization. Every person can get to self-actualization (McLeod, 2020). Progress toward self-actualization may be delayed due to an inability to meet the lower level of needs, until the need gets met it continues to get stronger. Life experiences can deter progress such as death, loss of a job, or divorce. Life events like these will cause an individual's needs to go between the various levels but not move up. Maslow's work laid the groundwork for McClelland in his study of needs and human motivation.

### **McClelland Three Needs Theory**

David McClelland, an American psychologist, focused most of his work on human motivation. McClelland (1961) examined what motivates humans in achievement. Early in McClelland's work, he determined individuals construct and control their environment in many ways as they explore behaviors to satisfy their need for achievement. Humans act on and balance their achievement motives based on their psychological influences. Based on this early work of McClelland (1961), the Three Needs Theory was developed.

McClelland's Three Needs Theory was a framework categorizing motivation into three needs: power, achievement, and/or affiliation. These needs drove and motivated individuals to make decisions (McClelland, 1961). McClelland (1961) explained the level at which needs were present was dependent upon the person and what was influencing those needs. He postulated people had instinctive abilities which were shaped and formed by their skills, experiences, resources, and life circumstances. The motivation for power,

achievement, and affiliation was derived from those factors. In McClelland's theory, a person's need for power, achievement, and/or affiliation can predict cycles of behavior and function within a society. These needs can play an important role in society and how society changes over time. McClelland's Needs Theory was also referred to as the Achievement Motivation Theory, Acquired Needs Theory, or the Learned Needs Theory (Achua & Lussier, 2007).

McClelland (1988) rooted his work from that of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Murray's (1938) Types of Needs. After McClelland's initial research, he condensed Murray's list of 20 needs to concentrate on the three needs of power, achievement, and affiliation. Individuals' needs varied in importance and depended on an individual's cultural and societal background. Murray was also known for a scoring system which he co-developed with Christina Morgan for the TAT. The TAT aided McClelland and his team with personality assessments and research on motivation within his three domains (McClelland, 2015).

McClelland (1961) used the TAT and Murray's (1938) procedures and scoring system to assist with his research within his Needs Theory. McClelland (1961) modified Murray's (1938) work and included pictures of their own. These pictures were displayed on a large screen, and subjects would identify with the pictures evoking achievement-, affiliation-, or power-based responses; whether those responses were based on success or failure. In addition, the TAT was modified by McClelland (1961) to have subjects write a story based on their reactions to those pictures.

Motivation was something different for everyone. Motivation was the desire to achieve goals and the processes needed to achieve those goals and to maintain the

motivation (Murray, 1938). Motivation set up the groundwork for intellectual behavior such as decision-making, planning, learning, and performance on assessments (Pintrich, 2004).

McClelland's Three Needs Theory work began in the 1960s, 2 decades after Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was first proposed. McClelland (1988) stated we all have these three types of motivation regardless of age, sex, race, or culture. Motivation varies within people; environmental or current life situations impact which motivational driver has the most significant influence. McClelland's theory was based on the fact people have varied personalities, which means different motivators exist. An individual's will changed according to the place where they were, who was involved, and where they were in their own life (McClelland, 1988).

Boogard (2018) examined the components of McClelland's theory and asserted people will have varied personality characteristics which are dependent on their dominant motivator. Essentially, humans possessed all three drivers or motivators of power, achievement, and affiliation; and one was always dominant. He claimed experimentalists deal with motivation in the short term; personality theorists think in terms of motives impacting lifelong decisions.

To demonstrate this concept, McClelland (1961) set up an experiment where he asked a group of people to throw rings over a peg. He provided no instruction; however, he observed that participants fell into one of the needs. Participants motivated by achievement were changing positions to throw the rings that were neither too close nor too far away. These individuals were interested in winning; in other words, their desire was to achieve. Another group displayed crowd-pleasing techniques such as throwing

from far, far away or just walking up to the peg and dropping the ring. These individuals were interested in being part of the group; in other words, their desire was affiliation. Finally, there was a group that did not throw the rings at all but guided or instructed others on how to throw and celebrated successes. This group was guided by control; in other words, their desire was power (McClelland, 1961).

McClelland (1988) rejected IQ and character assessments to determine a person's ability to be successful in life. McClelland (1961) felt these did not measure motivation, so he developed an innovative way to measure those characteristics. McClelland (1961) acknowledged aptitude and the motivation to achieve as the characteristics that were the most accurate in predicting a person's success, ability to carry out responsibilities, or ability to make decisions in life, and ultimately determined what motivates a person. McClelland's Need Theory was based on human needs and he believed those needs were shaped by a person's life events and their environment. These needs were typically shaped by the events and stages of life. McClelland (1998) believed a general behavioral model of motivation was needed. He felt those who conducted experiments on subjects dealt with motivation using short-term situational influences, whereas people's behaviors were long-term and situational.

McClelland (1988) studied personality theorists and surmised theorists thought within a framework of motives, those that explained what a person says or does. McClelland believed that determining the strength of the power motive would help to identify one's needs and motivation. McClelland (1988) examined how a temperament like power, achievement, and affiliation motive was produced by a situation; and when provoked, how it influenced what the person did and how the person acted. Motives were

based on emotionally arousing incentives. These incentives started out subtle but changed to more intense feelings and emotions, both positive and negative. Incentives can change quickly with experiences and life changes (McClelland, 1988).

McClelland (1961) stated the need for power, achievement, and affiliation is always present in some combination. However, one of the needs is typically dominant within an individual. The dominant need is what molds behaviors and motivation in work and life. The dominant driver affects decision-making, especially parenting and personal decisions within the wider world (McClelland, 1988). The combination of the three needs brought different elements of strengths and weaknesses, various ways of performing tasks, determined a person's job performance and satisfaction, and determined the level of risk-taking an individual would take. An awareness of an individual's needs and motivators individuals possess would increase their ability to make decisions, self-manage, develop close relationships, and be self-aware. This sense of awareness can increase work productivity and relationships, which can help with management and improved family relationships. Most people have a sense of their own needs; however, most do not share them with others in the workplace or home.

McClelland (2015) used an iceberg analogy to explain what people share and what they choose to keep to themselves. Like an iceberg, what was seen at the surface was what was seen by others. Observations included their knowledge of a particular topic, skills, and behaviors. He determined that the factors allowing people to excel were not seen by others and that in some cases not apparent to the individual. Most of the factors that determined motivation was below the surface, things that were not observed. Under the water were the elements of personality not easily observed and were

much more abstract and controlled by thoughts, feelings, and situations. The relationships between people, how they are feeling, how they express their thoughts and feelings, and their sense of being and purpose was what was not easily observed and below the surface (Thompson, n.d.).

McClelland (1988) determined IQ tests, aptitude tests, and personal indications were not effective ways to measure whether a person was motivated by power, achievement, and/or affiliation. Instead of focusing on IQ or aptitude tests, McClelland (1988) focused on abilities. In his theory of the iceberg, the person's own awareness of his role in society was not something you see on the surface but was something below the surface that predicted success or failure in society. Thompson (n.d.) stated people position themselves to what their needs are; therefore, they project their needs in society and onto their families. The things we do not see, what was usually below the iceberg, was their true self. The true motivators of McClelland's (1988) theory existed below the surface, what was not seen by others. This included their motives, personality characteristics, values, beliefs, and self-opinions. Most individuals had a dominant motivational need. The dominant need formed a person's feelings towards themselves and others. It also shaped a person's desires and enhanced their strengths (McClelland, 1988).

McClelland (1988) examined his motivation theory regarding conscious intents and inner thoughts. For example, if someone wanted to play the drums or wanted to be an astronaut, they were thinking about how to learn to play drums or how to become an astronaut. Another aspect of motivation could be seen by looking at external behaviors. Motivation referred to interpretations made consciously while observing specific

behaviors. If a swimmer walked up to a pool, dove in, and swam, one would infer they wanted to swim. If the swimmer hesitated and stopped swimming, we would infer they no longer wanted to swim. McClelland (1988) wrote motivation had to do with why a behavior occurred, not the how or what of the behavior. The swimmer jumped in and swam because he wanted to. It may have been due to a need for affiliation. In this case, the swimmer was motivated to be with his friends. The focus was not on the actual swimming, but on why the swimmer chose to swim.

The results of the Duncan and Peterson (2014) study yielded those who identified themselves as having a high-achievement motivation performed better on projects than those who did not identify as having a high-achievement motivation. The study also demonstrated those with a high-achievement motivation demonstrated effective leadership styles and efficient management techniques, which included communication and relations.

In a study conducted by Moore et al. (2010), using McClelland's Three Needs Theory, student motives for taking on leadership roles were examined. Eighty-nine students were posed a question asking them what their main motive for seeking leadership roles was. Their responses were categorized in the need for achievement, the need for power, the need for affiliation, or any combination of the three. Results of the study indicated all three needs were present, but the need for power was not as important as the need for achievement and affiliation. Forty of the 89 students demonstrated the need for achievement, 39 of the 89 students demonstrated the need for affiliation, and only eight of the 89 students demonstrated the need for power. According to Achua and Lussier (2007), McClelland's research only revealed approximately 10% of the U.S.



population had a high need for achievement; however, in this study, half of the students surveyed referenced the need for achievement (Moore et al., 2010).

Stuart-Kotze (2010) stated most people exhibit all three motivators. Some people display a predisposition toward a particular type of motivational behavior which impacts their behavior at home and work. McClelland's theory explained how the need for power, achievement, and affiliation motivation impacted the actions of people, how they responded to life events, and what career paths they chose. People were impacted by the three needs in a variety of ways. McClelland (1988) believed everyone had all three motives but at varying levels. The level of needs created the unique blend that gives one's personality and the dominating driver. McClelland (1988) attributed affiliation to the need to be accepted and liked by others. This need can impair judgment and impact decision-making because the desire to be liked influenced decisions. Those who were most motivated by power may struggle to compromise and get along with others. Individuals who were most motivated by achievement were likely to be overachievers and may be overbearing. McClelland (1988) believed a model of motivated behavior was needed to explain human behavior.

McClelland (1961) believed that individuals with a high need for affiliation typically have a large circle of friends, are very social, and seek approval from others. People who fall within this category spend a lot of time being social (such as writing letters or talking on the phone) and are more likely to be a part of social groups or clubs. Those with a high need for affiliation tend to get lonelier than those with a low affiliation need, which in turn motivates them to be social. Individuals with a high need for achievement are focused on meeting deadlines and fulfilling obligations. Also,

accomplishing tasks is important. Those falling within this group are more aware of their internal motivation rather than external rewards. Individuals with high-achievement motivation value intelligence and personal achievement over recognition and praise (McClelland, 1988).

Cultural and gender differences also impacted the three needs among people and how they were demonstrated. In the United States, the need for achievement was more prevalent than in other countries. In contrast, the need for affiliation was more prominent outside of the United States. This demonstrated that in other countries, relationships were more valued than personal achievement. Men and women also demonstrated differences within motivation. Men with a high need for power tended to be risk-takers and acted out more, while women with a high need for power tended to be more active in volunteer and social roles. Introverts and extroverts also demonstrated the three needs differently. An introverted person had a high need for affiliation through intimate groups and intellectual endeavors, while an extrovert demonstrated the same high need for affiliation in large groups and parties (McClelland, 1988).

### **Power**

Murray's (1938) psychogenic needs have been the basis of McClelland's Need Theory, as previously mentioned: the need for power, achievement, and affiliation. The need for power refers to someone who wants to exercise control and be influential or impactful to others. Those with a strong need for power often work in fields such as teaching, journalism, psychology, or a supervisory role. Those with a high need for power are not always the most effective in a leadership role, because they often rate those they supervise higher if the employee flatters them. In contrast, those with a low need for

power were more objective in their ratings of employees (Murray, 1938).

McClelland (1961) described the need for power as “concerned with the control of the means of influencing a person” (p. 167). Achua and Lussier (2007) stated the need for power as the “unconscious concern for influencing others and seeking position of authority” (p. 42). Daft (2017) defined the need for power as the desire to control others and the need to be an influencer over others. Daft stated having power equates to being responsible for others and exerting authority over others. Power is the desire to cause others to behave in a certain way or the desire to control and influence others. Individuals with a high need for power are motivated and willing to make high-stakes decisions. Those with a high need for power are willing and motivated to do whatever it takes to attain goals and success. Those motivated by power find it satisfying to work on more difficult tasks, they want their effort to be recognized, and they seek feedback. The high need for power often translates to volunteering for high-stakes responsibilities and being willing to take calculated risks (McClelland, 1988).

Boogard (2018) found people who identify with power as the dominant motivator enjoy work and place value on discipline. The need for power motivates the drive for improved status, influence and control over others, and winning. Those with a high need for power seek authority and respect from others. Power is also demonstrated through input on rules and policies, and those with power as a dominant motivator prefer control. Based on McClelland’s (1988) theory, individuals spend time thinking about how to gain and use power to influence others as well as to inspire people to achieve, attain happiness, and learn (McClelland, 1988).

The high need for power is also prevalent in the enjoyment of status

acknowledgment, winning arguments, rivalry, and influencing others. Dominance is present in the power motivator. Reputation is important, along with the need for seeking improved status. A high power motivated individual exhibits control over others. The need for power is defined into two groups: personal and institutional. Personal power is control of family and friends, while institutional means they want to achieve a much higher work-related goal or seek a significant change in life (Boogard, 2018).

Personal power involves high motivation for family life, personal goals, and the personal need to succeed. Individuals who are motivated by personal power could mean family members are impacted by that need for power, including children. Institutional power includes power within the workplace and the need to dominate and achieve goals within the workplace. Institutional power includes setting and exceeding goals within the workplace and leading and controlling others within the workplace.

Individuals with a high need for power possess the need to manage and direct others. Those with the high need for power want to exude control over others. They thrive on winning competitions, tolerate risk, and are highly competitive. They will go to great lengths to win (Boogard, 2018). People who have a dominant power motivator typically work well on teams and keep the work focused and structured. They ensure the work gets done. On the downside, if the person with the high motivation need has separate goals and different objectives than those on the team, they could focus on their own goals. Those with the motivation of high power need to ensure their goals and objectives are aligned to those of the team or organization (Boogard, 2018). Individuals with a high need for power could bring undue risk in a leadership position. The constant competition and need to excel may bring unneeded stress and competition within a team.

The potential risk includes undermining leaders and making decisions for the benefit of the individual (Boogard, 2018). Parents of school-age children want to see them succeed.

Parents who possess a need for power want to ensure their children are successful. Jeynes (2005) found that a parent's level of involvement is based on their level of knowledge and the ability to help their children succeed in school. Therefore, by providing support and resources, parents would increase their ability to be involved in and exercise power within their child's education. Huang and Mason (2008) asserted parents demonstrate a strong desire to exert power and influence over their children's learning. Parents are motivated to empower themselves with the knowledge to enhance their child's education. Parents also demonstrate the need to control their child's educational environment by choosing which school they attend.

A parent's probability of being involved in their child's education increases when they possess the skills and knowledge to help their children. Parents will become more involved if they believe their actions will improve the learning and academic performance of their child (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Influence and power increase when parents are involved and feel they are equipped to provide support and the necessary input for their child's academic success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Additionally, parents feel empowered when their child's teachers provide opportunities for involvement and an inviting school environment, which will increase parent input and involvement (Comer & Haynes, 1991).

In a study conducted of 770 parents of secondary-age children, 42% reported they have power and feel motivated to be involved in the school setting when the environment is inviting and they feel equipped to help their child (Rollande & Bertrand, 2005). Parents

were given a survey of questions based on a model of parent involvement and what motivates them to be involved. Parents are likely to respond to the power motive in terms of preparing their children to be competitive in today's society in terms of academics. In other words, parents have the fear of appearing weak when they do not express a desire of wanting more for their own children (McClelland, 1988). Parents have the perception of power when they make decisions about their children. According to achievement motivation theory, motives drive, orient, and select behavior. Children learn the definition of power from authoritative figures in their lives; for example, the need for power is a motivating factor for parents when placing influence on their elementary school-age children (McClelland, 1988).

Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) stated,

Parental involvement refers to the collaborative process through which parents and the school work together to improve the child's education experience and academic performance. Studies have found that parental involvement is important to a child's success in school.

Parent involvement can take many forms. It can include discussions after school, helping with homework, engaging in extracurricular activities, keeping abreast of academic progress, imparting parental values, participating in parent-teacher conferences, attending school activities, and volunteering in the classroom. (paras. 1-2)

### **Achievement**

McClelland et al. (1958) defined the need for achievement as,

Success in competition with some standard of excellence. That is, the goal of

some individuals in the story is to be successful in terms of competition with some standard of excellence. The individual may fail to achieve this goal, but the concern over competition with a standard of excellence still enables one to identify the goal sought as an achievement goal. (p. 181)

Spence (1983) described achievement as behavior that is goal-oriented and being driven to achieve goals. The performance of individuals is often compared against standards or others for assessments within the realm of motivation. The definition varies by the different perspectives of those studying it.

Achievement motivation is defined as the need to do well and be successful. This coupled with persistence and effort even when it is difficult is the need for achievement. McClelland (1961) identified a need for achievement and measured it by analyzing respondent narratives in his studies. McClelland (1961) hypothesized that a need for achievement was related to economic growth; as such, it is defined as a need to set and accomplish challenging goals, to take calculated risks to accomplish a goal, to receive regular feedback on progress toward goals, and to work independently. McClelland's work on achievement is what is referred to as achievement motivation, which is a theoretical model intended "to explain how the motive to achieve and the motive to avoid failure influences the behavior in a situation where performance is evaluated against some standard of excellence" (Atkinson, 1957, p. 371). By looking at achievement levels, McClelland (1988) sought to better understand why some people are more energetic or driven to achieve than others. McClelland (1988) stated that people's perceptions around whether or not tasks are easy or not challenging enough greatly impact their achievement levels because individuals with a high need for achievement seek challenge. For example,

there is a propensity for children with high-achievement motivation to set goals for themselves that are somewhat challenging to attain.

Atkinson (1964) stated achievement-based motivation is competition with others on completing tasks with the same set of standards. McClelland (2015) suggested that those who want to be accomplished have a high need for achievement. They perform tasks and set goals for accomplishment, not rewards. Atkinson (1957) proposed that achievement motivation is a combination of a tendency to want to attain success and to avoid failure within a personality. Bigge and Hunt (1980) believed achievement motivation is the drive to compete and compare yourself to others, an internal drive for achievement. Those with the high need for achievement seek work that is challenging, valuable, and will help to attain goals they have set. Sparrow (2000) found that motivation includes the need for meaningful work, job security, and a sense of achievement.

McClelland (1988) further defined the need for achievement as the desire to accomplish something in your life, the drive to excel. A high need for achievement is the desire to obtain a set goal or standard in your life; it is a desire for competition while performing at high levels of excellence. Achua and Lussier (2007) stated, “the need for achievement is the unconscious concern for excellence in accomplishments through individual efforts” (p. 42).

McClelland (2015) distinguished achievement motives (i.e., positive emotions and the belief that one can succeed) and fear of failure (i.e., negative emotions and the fear that the achievement situation is out of one’s depth). According to McClelland’s definition, the need for achievement is measured by describing affective experiences or



associations such as fear or joy in achievement situations. Through his research, McClelland identified the following six characteristics of high-need achievers.

- High-need achievers take personal responsibility in finding solutions to problems and performing tasks
  - High-need achievers set challenging goals.
  - High-need achievers take calculated risks.
  - High-need achievers seek performance feedback.
  - High-need achievers seek to attain personal accomplishments.
  - High-need achievers tend to project the motivation of achievement onto their families.
  - High-need achievers constantly seek improvements and ways of getting better
- McClelland et al. (1958).

Boogard (2018) claimed if you are a writer with a strong need for achievement, an appropriate goal may be writing a book. If you are a doctor with a high need for achievement, an appropriate goal may be making a medical breakthrough. Those with a high need for achievement in the workplace are motivated by promotion and moving up in the field. Achievement is defined as the desire to accomplish something in your field.

The need for achievement is the drive to move at a fast pace toward success: achieve goals, set difficult tasks, and perform at high levels of functioning and job performance (McClelland, 1988). Individuals with achievement motivators thrive on performing multiple tasks and enjoy the reward of task completion in a successful manner. There is a risk that if the tasks are too difficult, they may not be successful. If the task is too easy, they may not feel accomplished (McClelland et al., 1958). Unfortunately,

this drive can also be a weakness. If those with a high level of achievement work at a fast pace for an extended period of time, they may face burnout and become overworked (Boogard, 2018). McClelland (2015) explained achievement motivation as, “affect in connection with evaluated performance in which competition with a standard of excellence was paramount” (pp. 76-77). Achievement motivation is the need that drives human outcomes to higher levels (McClelland et al., 1958).

Achievement motivation is whether or not people can achieve excellence in their lives, either personally or professionally. People who demonstrate poor performance are unmotivated or are lacking self-determination (McClelland et al., 1958). Winterbottom’s (1969) study discussed the need for achievement is defined as reaching a certain standard. This level of performance is rewarding and creates intrinsic motivation for achievement (McClelland, 2015). Hart and Albarracin (2009) examined different aspects of the influence of chronic achievement motivation and achievement reminders on achievement and fun goals, with 226 psychology students participating in the study. The findings of this study indicated those with low-achievement motivation identified better with a fun goal and were not interested in challenging tasks. Individuals who demonstrated low-achievement motivation wanted a fun-themed goal. Those with high-achievement motivation performed better with a goal based on achievement and worse with a fun-themed goal. This means high-achievement motivation individuals were focused on achieving the goal itself and did not require any external fun-based goals, and those who had low-achievement motivation where the tasks were perceived to be fun performed better. Individuals with high-achievement motivation might perform best when characteristics of the settings focus on the aptitude-based characteristics of tasks. In

conclusion, for success to be obtained in the classroom or life, it is best to know what motivates a person and what needs are dominant in that motivation: power, achievement, or affiliation (Hart & Albarracin, 2009).

Conditions that encourage achievement-oriented resourcefulness can result in higher scores on the need for achievement. McClelland (1988) found that individuals who possess high levels of achievement motivation performed better on tests that were timed, improved on difficult tasks, and focused on tasks they failed. Also, individuals who have a high level of achievement focused more on tasks that were based on achievement (McClelland, 2015). McClelland found a strong correlation between the need for achievement in cultures with families where there was an emphasis on the social and emotional development of children with an emphasis on early childhood learning. Achievement in some cultures was more important than material things or financial rewards. Achieving the task gives greater personal satisfaction than gaining commendation or recognition. Financial reward is regarded as a measurement of success, and financial security is not a major motivator, nor is status. Feedback is essential for those with a high need of achievement, as it is a measure of accomplishment. Additionally, those with high motivation seek ways to improve, set challenging goals, and achieve them (Boogard, 2018).

Winterbottom (1969) conducted a study on children between the age of 8 and 10 years old about their affiliation to their parents and whether their parents had certain demands or restrictions on them. Many of the items in the study dealt with the children's attitudes and whether they did well in school on their own and were self-reliant; the study was exclusively focused on middle class American families. The results showed that the

children who had demands placed on them by their parents were assumed to have greater stress on achievement from their parents (McClelland, 1988). In summary, the family structure was viewed as a likely factor in promoting the development of achievement. Another experiment by Winterbottom (1969) studied the influences of a mother on her son. Winterbottom found that when a mother with high achievement reported her son succeeded at something, she increased affection towards him (McClelland, 1998), thereby showing her more emotional connection in his success. The need for achievement explains how people have the motivation to achieve and avoid failure depending on their own behaviors, understanding why some people are more energetic in meeting needs for achieving (McClelland, 1988).

### **Student Achievement**

Achievement can be defined in relation to student achievement. The key characteristics of achievement also fall within student achievement. Student achievement is most often equated to scores obtained from standardized tests in the areas of reading, math, science, and history. Standardized tests include statewide exams, SAT/ACT scores, National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, or other assessments students participate in at the end of a school year. Student achievement measures could also include student growth in tested subjects, closing achievement gaps, graduation and dropout rates, and student success after high school. All these factors are indicators of effective schools and teachers (Cunningham, 2017).

According to the United States Department of Education, student growth is also considered part of student achievement. Student growth is defined as comparing an exam or assessment taken by a student between two or more points in time for each student.

Student achievement is a combination of student performance on exams and growth between two assessments over time.

Student achievement improves when parents are involved in their children's academic lives (Brown & Iyengar, 2008). A child's academic motivation to do well in school is directly connected to their parent's attitude toward school and the level of their involvement. For example, when parents are involved and make homework a positive experience, the child will perform better and motivation to do the homework will increase. If a parent has negative thoughts toward school and perceives school and homework in a negative light, the motivation for the child will be low and their outlook on school will be negative (Brown & Iyengar, 2008).

Parents are motivated by their child's academic achievement, and a child's academic achievement is influenced by their parents (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007). Parenting styles and attitudes toward school are influenced by their belief structures and attitudes (Brown & Iyengar, 2008). Bandura (1997) found that children with strict parents perceive themselves as less successful for self-directed learning and motivation.

Assessment data are important for educators to be able to understand children's learning outcomes; conversely, it should not be the only indicator of student achievement. Other factors should be included such as social and emotional health, and being well-adjusted in school indicated that overemphasizing standardized testing has nothing to do with student achievement. Teaching to the test and focusing on just the final test created a culture of students not wanting to learn and showing little to no enthusiasm for learning (Sindelar, 2003). Huang and Mason (2008) studied parental involvement and motivation in their child's education, stating involvement was not an option but a necessity. Parents

feel it is their duty to ensure their children have many educational opportunities. Some parents are motivated, no matter the challenges, to increase their children's chances for high student achievement.

Billman et al. (2005) reported there is a direct connection between parent attitudes toward school and parental involvement with their child's education and their child being successful in school. Essentially, the more a parent is involved and demonstrates a positive attitude toward school, the more successful their child will be. Jeynes (2005) identified the positive correlation between parent involvement and student success was evident in various racial backgrounds and gender groups. Parental involvement at the preschool level set the foundation for the benefits of parental involvement and student achievement. These children were retained less frequently and reading data were stronger.

Parents who exhibit a high need for achievement extend this need to their children. McClelland (1988) stated that individuals with a high need for achievement like situations in which they take personal responsibility for finding solutions to problems. For example, by attending school-sponsored events, parents believe their child's educational achievement can be increased. Huang and Mason (2008) indicated that parents seek educational opportunities to help their children succeed and be successful. Opportunities for parents to help their children succeed include providing supplemental educational services, evaluating school curriculum, and searching for the schools with the highest quality of education. Huang and Mason stated that parents have communicated concern over the quality of public school. Parents indicated that their children's educational opportunities and achievements were indicative of the public school their

children attended. According to Huang and Mason (2008), parents believed that the public schools have failed. They failed to keep quality teachers, their children were not proficient on state exams, schools failed to set high academic expectations for students, and public schools failed to gain funding for their children's education.

Huang and Mason (2008) concluded that parents believe the quality of their children's education will shape their future and success. Parents are driven to find ways to provide their children with ways to achieve in academics. McClelland's Need Theory indicates that a parent's need for their children to be successful in school is their need for achievement by ensuring their children are successful in school (Huang & Mason, 2008).

Huang and Mason (2008) reported that parents indicated their motivation was to ensure their children were successful in school and to increase opportunities for them to be successful. Parents set academic goals for their children, took chances, and tried to improve school and ensure academic achievement. Parents felt motivated to take personal responsibility for their children's success. Parents took risks in finding the right school for their children and supplementing their education.

### **Affiliation**

McClelland (1961) defined affiliation as, "establishing, maintaining, or restoring a positive affective relationship with another person. This relationship is most adequately described by the word friendship" (p. 160). Therefore, "the need for affiliation is the unconscious concern for developing, maintaining or restoring close personal relationships" (Achua & Lussier, 2007, p. 43). Those with a high need for affiliation seek to establish close friendships, avoid any potential conflict, and increase social interactions. Individuals who demonstrate the need for affiliation want to interact with

people. People with a high need for affiliation work well in groups and have a desire to be liked by others. High-affiliation need individuals like to work in areas where there is a lot of social interaction, and they are driven to maintain positive relationships. High need for affiliation individuals want to ensure those they work with like them and are satisfied. They are concerned with whether or not people like them more than whether or not they are doing a good job. McClelland (1988) regarded a strong need for affiliation can create poor decision-making and possess a lack of objectivity.

People who have a need for affiliation prefer to spend time creating and maintaining social relationships, enjoy being a part of groups, and have a desire to feel loved and accepted. People in this group tend to adhere to the norms of the culture in their communities and typically do not change the norms of the community for fear of rejection. This person favors collaboration over competition and does not like situations with high risk or high uncertainty (Stuart-Kotze, 2010). The people with a high need for affiliation possess characteristics of conforming to the wishes of those people whose friendships and companionships they value, and they have a strong desire for acceptance and approval from others and value the feelings of others (Boogard, 2018).

People who have a need for affiliation work well in areas based on social interactions like customer service or client interaction positions. Those with a need for affiliation value building strong relationships, admire belonging to groups or organizations, and are sensitive to the needs of others (Boogard, 2018). The need for affiliation presents itself as an emotional drive towards being liked and accepted. Individuals with a high need for affiliation desire to have agreeable and collaborative working relationships with others and a harmonious social environment (Boogard, 2018).



Individuals with a high level of emotional need for affiliation want to constantly work in an environment where people feel welcomed, included, harmonious, and collaborative. They are often socially perceptive and work towards maintaining effective social relationships and creating positive environments. These individuals typically end up with fairly low levels of risk tolerance. Their desire for social harmony means they do not want to “rock the boat” or take on activities that may upset people or lead to conflict (McClelland, 1988).

Individuals with a high need for affiliation can work well on a team. During teamwork, these individuals work on keeping the team unified and focused on the task. These individuals can motivate the team and create enthusiasm among the team. Those with a high need for affiliation work best in a setting where there is a clear common goal. A downfall to possessing a high need for affiliation is lessening the quality of work to maintain everyone’s happiness on the team (McClelland, 1988).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) stated that one of the primary motivators of parental involvement is an invitation from teachers and schools to have an important role in helping ensure their children are successful. Affiliation with the school helps the parent to be involved and monitor their child’s academic progress. Huang and Mason (2008) reported building rapport with other parents enhances the whole school experience. Parents working together with common goals and through affiliation provide parents the opportunity to monitor progress within the school setting. McClelland (1988) stated that individuals with a need for affiliation want the companionship of others and take steps to be liked by them as well as share positive experiences. Huang and Mason concluded it is essential to design a system for families to interact, connect, and support each other and

to support parents' needs for affiliation with others and create opportunities for interaction.

Affiliation with other parents provides an avenue for parents to develop relationships with other parents. In many ways, parents are motivated to establish close relations with other parents who share similar backgrounds and experiences. Affiliating with other parents helps to enhance their children's learning at school. Also, working with others helps parents to be active participants within the school setting (Huang & Mason, 2008).

### **Human Motivation**

In the United States, research shows that firstborn children tend to have higher achievement, most likely because their parents are motivated by achievement and can give more attention and affection to one child, instead of multiple children (McClelland, 1988). Parents with a high need for affiliation desire pleasant relationships with other people and need to feel accepted by others. Parents tend to conform to the norms of their group, whether it is family or work. Parents have a need for affiliation when they are expecting their child to have interactions with other peers, adults, or friends.

Motivation is a significant component in this study because parents are driven to parent their children, whether it is motivation towards power, achievement, and/or affiliation to relationships for their children. Motivation is the desire to do well relative to some standard of excellence, as parents may have a desire for their children's physical activity to involve a social form of motivation and a competitive desire to meet the standards of excellence (Singh, 2011).

Motivation for a child within a relationship with their parents will produce a

personal encounter as an effect of happiness, love, peace, and tender behavior (McClelland, 1988). Research shows that parents are the first motivators to school-age children, where parent expectations, behavior, and support are a motivational foundation for children in regards to schoolwork, behavior, and achievement. The parents are the most important indicator of motivation from which to understand a child's behavior and attitude (Singh, 2011).

### **Summary**

This chapter examined various theories of motivation and what drives humans to make decisions in their lives and the lives of their loved ones. McClelland (1988) studied workplace motivation and theorized workers as well as their superiors have needs that influence their performances, but the context of motivation goes beyond the workplace. McClelland narrowed the needs to power, achievement, and affiliation.

Schools need to assess and understand parent motivation for making school choices. This study uses McClelland's Three Needs Theory as the framework for parent motivation in choosing their child's school.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

School choice is not a new concept; however, the increasing number of options for parents to choose from prompts the question, “Do parents choose the best school for their child based on the marketing and branding of a school?” Charter schools, private schools, religious-based schools, and home schools are creating a new level of competition for public schools. Enrollment in North Carolina’s public schools is declining, while private, charter, and home schools are experiencing an increase in student enrollment. This grounded theory study generated valuable insight into the parental motivation for choosing a school. The research plan, participants, and analysis procedure are the primary elements of this chapter.

### **Review of Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
2. How do these factors relate to McClelland’s Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
3. How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?

### **Selection of Research Approach**

This study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is a means to measure individuals or groups that relate to a humanistic issue. This type of research involves creating questions and procedures to elicit information and opinions from a selected group of people as it relates to a specific problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research methods were designed to understand motivation and patterns of human

behavior. This type of study also enables a productive response to respond to the data in a manner to improve practices. In this case, the data will help to improve public school marketing efforts. This study extracted firsthand knowledge of stakeholders who directly impact a school (Lincoln & Guba, 1995, as cited in Foley & Timonen, 2014).

Corbin and Strauss (2015) explained,

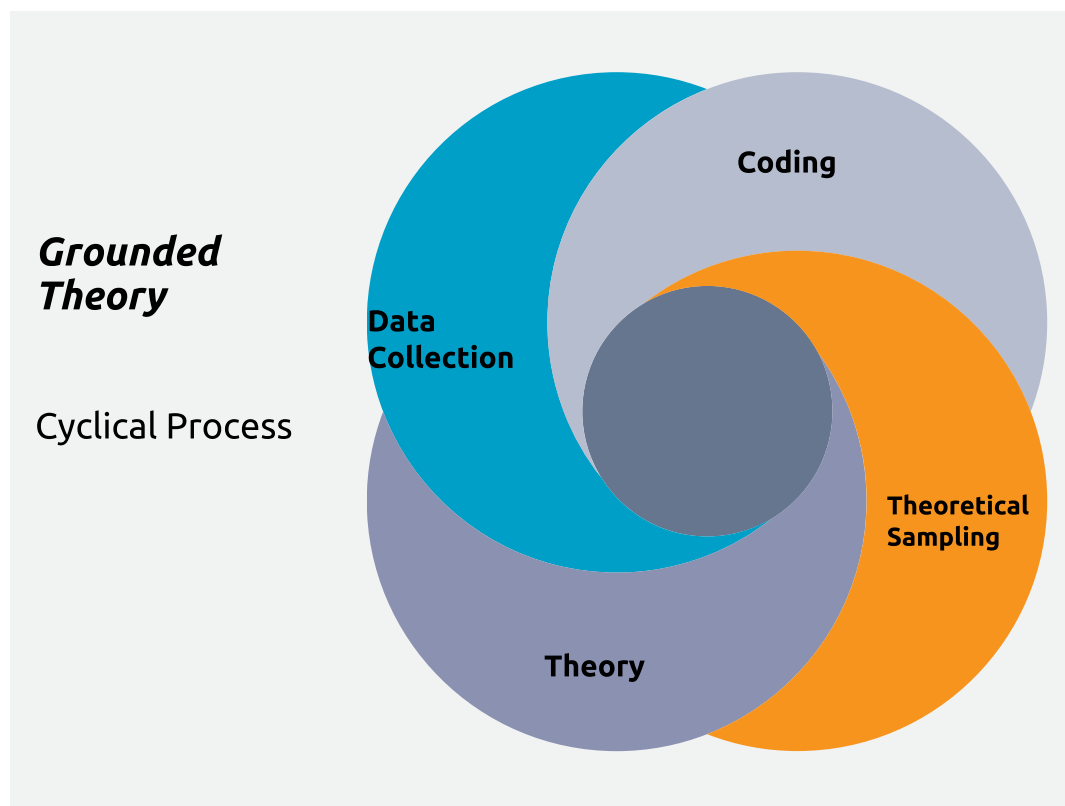
We think there are additional reasons why some persons choose to do qualitative research. Committed qualitative researchers tend to frame their research questions in such a way that the only manner in which they can be answered is by doing qualitative research. In addition, qualitative researchers are drawn to the fluid, evolving, and dynamic nature of this approach as opposed to the more structured designs of quantitative methods. In addition, they enjoy serendipity and making discoveries. Statistics might be interesting, but it is the endless possibilities to learn more about the human response that attract them. Qualitative researchers want the opportunity. (p. 5)

A quantitative method of data collection was considered; however, for this specific study, qualitative data collected were utilized to provide information on how to help schools attract parents. Nevertheless, some statistical data that were used in this study included the student enrollment numbers for public, private, charter, and home schools in North Carolina. Additionally, North Carolina school report card data and North Carolina teacher effectiveness growth data were reviewed. According to Hoerr (2005), perceptual data are key to understanding what motivates stakeholders, what is working within a school, and which areas can be improved. Perceptual data were used in this study to identify key parent motivators, and data collected will aid schools to better

reach their target audience to increase student enrollment.

This research study followed the grounded theory framework in an inquiry-based approach to research based on the selected participants' understandings. Grounded theory utilizes the connection between many platforms of data collection (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2007, 2015, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the late 1960s, Corbin and Strauss (2015) studied how terminally ill patients responded to the knowledge they were dying and how healthcare workers treated dying patients. Corbin and Strauss did not accept the scientific methodology used in their study and determined a comparison method was more effective. The process of comparing, organizing, gathering, and analyzing data was the most effective, which is grounded theory. "Grounded theory is a design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13).

Figure 3 is a graphic representation of the grounded theory process, which shows the cyclical relationship between data collection and analysis in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

**Figure 3***Grounded Theory Model*

In this grounded theory study, data gathered from this research will be utilized by school officials to increase student enrollment in public schools amidst many school choice options. The grounded theory approach based on the nature of the research questions is the most appropriate. This type of study was distinctive from other forms of research in that the conceptual elements were created from the data collected during the research procedure. The conceptual elements were not chosen before conducting research. Also, within the grounded theory framework, the gathered data and the data analysis were connected in a continuous process.

School districts across the country are reporting decreasing student enrollment. Families are opting for homeschooling options or other school choice options. The

decline in enrollment is concerning due to the potential negative impact on school funding. The goal of this study was to gain insight into parental motivation to enroll their children in a particular school and to aid schools with marketing and branding that appeals to parents. Through continuous data collection and analysis, parental motivation in choosing a school for their children may be better understood.

### **Research Design**

Permission was obtained through the Gardner-Webb University's Institutional Review Board. Permission was requested from the Central Office Executive Cabinet within the school district from which participants were selected. Participants were provided an informed consent form (Appendix A). Informed consent allowed the participants to understand their rights and involvement in the study. This form also provided them protection of their rights should they have chosen not to participate in the study. This form was required to be completed for participants to partake in the focus group portions of the study. A consent section was included in the survey sent to participants. Only those who selected the consent box were able to continue with the survey.

### **COVID-19 Protocol**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interactions with participants were not permitted. To ensure the safety of all participants, interactions were virtual. The five schools listed in this study did not permit any non-staff members in the building. Also, due to the preferred size of the focus groups, focus groups were held online via Zoom following COVID-19 protocol.



## **Participants**

Five schools within the Central Piedmont Region of North Carolina were chosen to participate in this study. The survey was sent to parents via Google Forms using a Mass Notification System. Focus group participants were selected from those who indicated they were interested in participating from their survey response. Consenting participants took part in the focus groups via ZOOM, due to current COVID-19 protocols within the schools. Measures were taken for consent, to ensure confidentiality, and to develop mutual trust for all participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Consideration was given to the participants and their views and opinions during the data gathering process. If their opinions differed from the researcher's opinions, care was given not to make any judgment (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

## **Rationale for Target Population**

The study's target population was parents of school-age children. Participants were parents who were responsible for enrolling their children in school and maintaining their children's attendance in a school recognized by the state. This study sought parent opinions of the school they selected and why. In addition, parent responses offered insight into a school's reputation, what improvements could be made to a school's branding, and information identifying what was working.

## **Purposeful Sampling**

Qualitative research should include purposefully selected participants to better understand the problem and answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sampling for the survey included parents of students in the five choice schools selected in this study from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The focus group participant

sample consisted of those who completed the survey and indicated at the end of the survey they would be interested in participating in a focus group. Participants who indicated they were interested in participating were chosen to take part in the focus group.

Focus groups were conducted via Zoom due to COVID protocols within the school setting. Questions were constructed in a way that does not inhibit the participants' views and/or opinions. Information gathered from each instrument was organized and categorized into themes. Responses from the participants were organized based on the category and relevance to the research questions. These procedures were utilized with the full use of ethical guidelines (Creswell, 2012).

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Research questions were answered and aligned within each of the data collection instruments used in this study. Two different types of instruments were used and both were grounded in McClelland's Three Needs Theory. Creswell and Miller (2007) reported,

As a validity procedure, triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. A popular practice is for qualitative inquirers to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes. The narrative account is valid because researchers go through this process and rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study. (p. 127)

This study required data collection and interpretation which are key elements in qualitative research. The survey (Appendix B) and focus group questions (Appendix C) were designed based on the study's problem and research questions. "In the entire qualitative search process, the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researcher brings to the research or writes from the literature" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44).

### **Survey**

A qualitative survey was designed to collect data on frequencies, means, or other quantitative data. The survey included questions constructed for participants aligned to the research questions. Questions were postured using a Likert scale, with the exception of an open-ended question at the end of the survey. This question was designed for participants to further explain, in detail, their response to the final research question, which pertained to schools and marketing.

Data were analyzed and categorized. Questions were generated within the framework of McClelland's Three Needs Theory: power, achievement, and affiliation, and marketing and branding. A pilot test survey was conducted with a small sampling of parents within one elementary school. Bell and Waters (2014) discussed surveys sent online. The survey in this study was sent to all parents of all five schools via the Mass Notification System. The survey was a Google Form. All responses were gathered on a Google Sheet that was created via the Google Form survey. Surveys had a return date, and a plan was made for surveys returned because of an inaccurate email. Although it was preferable to conduct the survey in person to discuss the purpose of the study, answer questions, and ensure the survey was completed, due to COVID-19 protocols, an online

survey was used in this research.

### **Focus Groups**

The analysis of the survey data and focus group questions generated further insight from participants pertaining to the study's research questions. Open-ended responses allowed the researcher to understand possible reasons for close-ended responses and explore further (Creswell, 2011).

“A focus group is not just getting a bunch of people together to talk” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 2). The purpose of this focus group was to acquire deeper opinions and feedback from the initial survey given. Each focus group consisted of four to six participants. Focus group participants were determined by their interest expressed in the survey. Participants were selected randomly. Four to six participants were selected for each focus group. Each focus group participant had a school-age child enrolled in one of the five schools used in this study. Data were gathered using open-ended questions and questions derived from survey responses (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather data significant to this study. Data were compared from each of the focus groups. Questions created for the focus group were predetermined and given in sequential order. The questions were general in nature. The goal of the focus groups was to gain an understanding of the participants' thoughts and opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Focus groups were conducted in all five schools used in this study.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot test was necessary to ensure the questions were clear. Participants answered research questions, which provided the necessary data to complete the study.

The survey was validated using the Lawshe Method for Validation. Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index were used to quantify the validity of the survey used in this study. The survey contained items grounded in McClelland's Three Needs Theory. The survey items were composed and given to a content evaluation panel to review. The content panel consisted of a minimum of five parental experts as outlined by Lynn (1986). Each member of the panel was given the survey questions and asked to rate each item on the survey. The members of the panel had the purpose and process carefully explained before taking the survey. In this study, the experts were members of a Parent Teacher Organization. Ratings of the survey included essential, useful, or not necessary. Lawshe's CVR was applied to each survey item tabulated from the panel of experts. The Likert responses were entered into a spreadsheet using the Lawshe CVR method. Items with a CVR of 0.78 or higher from three or more experts were accepted as confirmation of high validity. If an item did not reach this level, the item was adjusted or deleted from the survey (Appendix D).

Survey questions were analyzed to determine validity using the CVR developed by Lawshe (1975). The CVR is determined based on a panel of experts. In this study, seven parents were used as the experts and agreed to serve on a panel to measure the validity of the survey being used in this study. Panelists were asked to rate the survey items as not essential, useful but not essential, and essential. A CVR score was given to each item on the survey. Based on the panel's responses, 60% of the questions were determined valid. The CVR for each item was calculated using the formula  $CVR = (n_e - N/2) / N/2$ . Items on the survey should receive a minimum CVR score of .62 or above in order to be considered for use in the survey. For example, a CVR score of .62 is the

recommended cut score based on 10 raters. For six raters, the recommended CVR is .99. Lawshe's guidelines were followed, and items were retained if the minimum CVR values fell within a range of validity.

Focus group questions were analyzed to determine validity using the CVR developed by Lawshe (1975). Panelists were asked to rate the focus group questions as not essential, useful but not essential, and essential. A CVR score was given to each focus group question. Based on the panel's responses, 100% of the questions were determined valid. Focus group questions should receive a minimum CVR score of .62 or above in order to be considered for use. Lawshe's guidelines were followed, and items were retained if the minimum CVR values fell within a range of validity.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The framework of this study was grounded. Grounded theory is the methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data. The data are continuously gathered and analyzed. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015),

An important part of doing analysis is reflecting back on who we are and how we are shaped and changed by the research. It is important that a researcher take the time to practice these strategies and make them part of his or her way of thinking. Without practice, the use of the strategies becomes forced rather than skillful. The ethics of doing qualitative research demand that a researcher not jump to conclusions about meaning and that every attempt is made to explore all possibilities and then to check these out against data or with participants. (p. 102).

Bell and Waters (2014) suggested reviewing data in a timely manner, ensuring all data have been collected, but not too long of a time has elapsed between collection and

analysis. The themes of this research are already in place based on McClellan's Three Needs Theory and the marketing and branding of schools. The next phase of the data collection was organizing the data, coding, and transcribing the data (Creswell, 2012). Upon completion of the focus groups, the data were transcribed and coded. Data gathering is complete when the study reaches a saturation point, or no new information has been gathered (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

This grounded theory report was coded in three sections: open, axial, and selective coding. "In open coding, the researcher forms categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting information" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 87). Axial coding is making connections of the themes, creating a central theme from the data, and exploring concepts and the categories recorded during the open-coding process. During this process, the data were condensed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The final step in coding was selective coding within the grounded theory of this study to create a singular theme connecting all of the subthemes. A grounded theory report was created based on data collected, themes identified, and research questions posed. Surveys were completed via Google Forms. Entries from the parents were collected on a Google Sheet and further analyzed and coded into themes.

Table 2 illustrates how each analysis tool aligns with the data collection instruments and research questions used in this study.

**Table 2***Data Analysis*

Research question	Instrument	Methodology	Data collected	Method of analysis
What factors influence a parent when choosing a school?	Parent survey	Qualitative	Parent responses about what factors influence them when choosing a school	Analyze positive and negative comments
	Parent focus group			Descriptive statistics Thematic coding
How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?	Parent survey	Qualitative	Parent perspectives within the themes of power, achievement, and affiliation of the survey	Descriptive statistics
How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?	Open-ended question on the parent survey	Qualitative	Parent perspectives about schools within the framework of marketing and branding	Thematic coding
	Focus group			Descriptive statistics

Table 2 demonstrates a qualitative approach to this study. Creswell (2011) stated the use of multiple tools to gather data about a specific subject will help the reader better understand the problem of the study. This study was conducted to produce insight from parents for schools to increase enrollment and to better market themselves based on the data gathered.

### **Reporting the Data**

A narrative form of the qualitative data was categorized and written in reference to each research question in this grounded theory study. Data were organized and displayed based on the themes of McClelland's Three Needs Theory: power, achievement, and affiliation. Data collection instruments were constructed using the headings of the three themes of McClelland. Key themes from the survey and focus groups were included in the narrative report. Data were displayed in a table format, along



with the narrative, with the research questions being the headings. Quotes from the data were used to support each theme of this study. Descriptive data were organized by theme, from highest to lowest in response frequency, both from the survey and the alignment of the focus groups.

Chapter 5 of this study further explores the data analysis that came from this study in connection with the research questions posed. Chapter 5 connects McClelland's Three Needs Theory and research presented in Chapter 2 of this study with the data collected by the researcher to answer the three research questions.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Overview of the Chapter

This study sought to identify parental motivation when choosing a school for their children using McClelland's Three Needs Theory as the study's foundation. The methodology applied in this study was a qualitative approach using grounded theory methodology. This chapter provides the study's findings in relation to the following research questions:

1. What factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
2. How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
3. How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?

Chapter 4 begins with an overview of the research design, specifically outlining the participants of the study, the results of the survey, a review of the focus group interview questions, and the focus group results.

As previously stated, parents have a plethora of choices when it comes to selecting a school for their child. School choice offers many options beyond the neighborhood school where you live. The current trends in public school enrollment were decreasing, as discussed in Chapter 1, whereas charter, public, and home school options were seeing an increase in student enrollment. School administrators need to know and understand what parents deem as important or inconsequential when choosing a school. Possessing this knowledge will help school administrators maintain and increase public school enrollment.

### **Participants of the Study**

The survey participants were parents of school-age students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade who were enrolled at an authorized IB school within the same school district of the Central Piedmont Region of North Carolina. A survey was sent to all parents at the five schools participating in this study. Three hundred ten responses were received. Twenty-six participants who took the survey participated in one of four focus groups conducted in this study. In this grounded theory study, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were applied to complete the data analysis.

### **Sources of Data**

Survey questions and the focus group questions were created to align with the three research questions posed in this study. Elements within the survey as well as focus group questions were aligned to the research question they best answer as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

### **Survey**

The survey consisted of one primary question with 10 factors ranked against a Likert scale rated 1-5. A rating of 1 on the Likert scale meant the participant rated an item as unimportant, a rating of 2 meant the item was less important, a 3 rating meant neither important nor unimportant, a 4 rating meant somewhat important, and a rating of 5 meant the respondent felt the item was very important. The survey also contained two multiple-choice items and an open-ended question. Survey questions were aligned with the research question they best answer as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3***Survey Question Alignment With Research Questions*

Survey questions		Research questions
What factors did you use when choosing a school? (multiple choice)	=	What factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
What do you find effective with your school's marketing and branding? What can be improved? (open-ended)	=	How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?
Where do you find information about schools? (multiple choice)	=	How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?
What do you think makes a good school? (multiple choice)	=	How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?

Survey questions were designed to answer the research questions in this study.

Data were analyzed based on participant responses. Open-ended responses were analyzed, and themes were generated from the responses received.

**Focus Group**

Twenty-six participants who took the survey participated in one of four focus groups conducted in this study. In this grounded theory study, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were applied to complete the data analysis. Table 4 displays each of the focus group questions and the alignment to the research question in this study.

**Table 4***Focus Group Question Alignment With Research Questions*

Focus group questions	Research questions
Why did you decide to enroll your child in this school?	= What factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
In what ways are you actively involved in this school?	= What factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
How would you define student achievement for your child?	= What factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
In what ways do you and/or your child have a voice in this school?	= How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
How would you define student achievement for your child?	= How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
How would you define rigor for your child?	= How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
Please describe how you are connected in this school?	= How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
What activities or programs are you involved with at your school?	= How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
Please describe ways in which this school has an effective marketing plan. What works and what could be improved?	= How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?

Table 4 displays each of the three research questions in this study and how they are aligned to the focus group questions. The focus group questions in this study were created to ensure they would provide data to answer the research questions posed in this

study.

### ***Focus Group Data***

Upon IRB approval, all focus group participants were provided consent forms and asked to submit the consent forms via Google Forms. Each focus group consisted of at least six participants, with no more than eight participants. Six to eight participants is preferable to facilitate the focus group well and allow participants appropriate time to share insights and experiences. (Krueger & Casey 2015). Participants of the focus group were connected to the study, as parents are the ones who make decisions about their child and where their child attends school (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The focus group helped to answer the research questions. The focus group participants were informed they were being recorded at the start of each focus group. Focus groups were read the same script at the beginning of the session.

### ***Open Coding***

Focus group recordings were transcribed and read several times during the study. After careful review of the responses, the responses were coded. The coding of these responses permitted the researcher to define key emerging themes from the focus group responses. Each section of the transcripts was then broken down into smaller segments and numbered and memos were created. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015),

When doing analysis, researchers are interacting with data. They are examining it, making comparisons, asking questions, coming up with concepts to stand for meaning, and suggesting possible relationships between concepts. In other words, a dialogue is occurring in the mind of the researcher. Writing a concept in the margin does not preserve that dialogue or indicate how concepts might relate to

each other. Memos and diagrams fill this role. (p. 107)

Applying the open-coding process, 64 codes (Appendix E) were created based on the responses from the focus groups under the six themes during the coding process.

The four focus groups and the use of surveys provided adequate data to ensure saturation was reached in this study. Theoretical saturation occurs when the researcher is satisfied that they have attained sufficient data and no new terms or theories are being derived from the data gathered (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). With saturation complete, data were aligned with the three research questions in order to provide answers.

### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1, “What factors influence a parent when choosing a school,” was developed to address the declining public school enrollment and for schools to be more efficient with their marketing plans that appeal to a parent’s desire to find the right school for their child. This research question provided insight into what parents truly feel is important in a school.

### ***Survey Data***

As shown in Table 5, the rigor of the curriculum is the leading factor in parent decision-making when choosing a school.

**Table 5***Factors That Influence a Parent When Choosing a School*

Factors	Important/Somewhat Important	McClelland's Three Needs
School's website	70.2%	Affiliation/achievement
Tour of the school	75.4%	Affiliation
Choice Program	88%	Achievement
Rigor of curriculum	90.5%	Achievement
Application process	54.9%	Affiliation/power
Open enrollment	85.4%	Power
Parental feedback for school policies	79.7%	Power
Active parent teacher organization	73.9%	Affiliation
Opportunities for parents to volunteer	67.2%	Affiliation/power
Offers clubs	80.1%	Affiliation

Table 5 illustrates the parent responses to the factors they felt were influential when choosing a school. As shown in Table 5, the rigor of the curriculum was the leading factor in parent decision-making when choosing a school, with 90.5% selecting this as important or somewhat important. Eighty-eight percent of parents responded to offering a choice within a school as important or somewhat important, making this factor the second most influential in a parent's decision when choosing a school. The third most influential factor for parents when deciding on a school for their child was open enrollment, with 85.4% of respondents marking it as important or somewhat important. Open enrollment



on the survey was defined as being able to choose the most preferred school despite the parent's home address. Schools that have an application process for student entry seem to have little influence on parent decision-making, with only 54.9% of parents marking it as important or somewhat important.

Table 6 covers the responses to the first multiple-choice question on the survey. The factors included in the survey that was used in this study varied from high-test scores to discipline.

**Table 6***What Parents Believe Makes a Great School*

Factors	% of Respondents
Quality of teachers	56.8%
Leadership of school	18.6%
School choice options (IB, dual immersion, STEM)	11.5%
High test scores	2.7%
High test scores, size of school, after-school activities	>1%
Discipline	>1%
Combination of leadership and teachers	>1%
Combination of leadership, teachers, and curriculum choice	>1%
A good balance of student learning, enrichment, parental involvement, and school leadership	>1%
Quality of teachers and leadership combined with choice options, extracurricular activities, and communication	>1%
Safety, quality educators, and educational resources	>1%
Leadership and quality of teachers	>1%
The school as a whole having a unified goal of family and higher learning	>1%

Multiple choice survey Item 1 asked parents what they think makes a good school, and it was designed to determine the qualities of a good school from a parent's perspective. Additionally, these data provided marketing information. Table 6 illustrates the parent responses with 56.8% of parents perceiving the quality of teachers as what makes a good school. The leadership of the school is the second-highest indicator at

18.6% of what parents believe makes a good school. Offering a choice program was the third-highest factor at 11.5%, and then high test scores at 2.7%. The other 10.4% of responses included diversity, a combination of leadership and teachers, sports programs, safety, and parental involvement.

### ***Focus Group Responses***

Focus group questions were categorized based on the research questions of this study. The first focus group question based on Research Question 1, “What factors influence a parent when choosing a school,” responses are found in Table 7. Table 7 demonstrates the emerging themes that pertain to enrolling their child in a specific school, based on the first focus group question. The analysis of the four focus groups’ responses produced 64 codes (Appendix E). Of those, 28% were associated with advantage and opportunity.

**Table 7**

#### *Focus Group Responses—Enrolling*

Supporting quote	School level
“I enrolled my child here because I knew there were kids getting acceptance letters into better colleges.”	High school
“This school offered more and my kid would be challenged.”	High school
“My child wanted to graduate and finish the IB program.”	High school
“I researched all of the area schools, and once I toured the school I knew this is the school my child would attend.”	Elementary school
“This school offered more of a rigorous curriculum.”	Middle school
“I feel this school gives my child an advantage.”	Middle school

Table 7 displays why parents chose the school their child attends. This question

was used in all focus groups. Participant responses were solicited from all levels of school in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Focus Group Question 2, “In what ways are you actively involved in this school,” yielded almost the same response at all three school levels, as shown in Table 8. Three out of the seven codes emerged from the focus group question pertaining to parent involvement related to either the parent teacher organization or being a member of the School Improvement Team.

**Table 8**

*Focus Group Responses—Parental School Involvement*

Supporting quote	School level
“If asked, I will help any way I can.”	High school
I am on the school improvement team, so I stay involved that way.”	Elementary school
“I’m very active with the parent teacher organization and the school improvement team.”	Elementary school
“I’m a member of the school improvement team and the parent teacher organization. I feel that gives me a connection.”	Middle school
“I’ve been involved with IB boosters and athletic boosters.”	High school

The majority of participant focus group responses noted parents were primarily involved in the parent teacher organizations, were members of a booster club, were school improvement team members, or attended school-sponsored events or sporting events, as outlined in Table 8. This aligned to the survey results where 79.7% of respondents felt parent feedback on school policies was an important or somewhat important factor when choosing a school, 73.9% felt an active parent teacher organization was another important or somewhat important factor when choosing a school, and

opportunities for parents to volunteer yielded 67.2% of respondents stating volunteering was either important or somewhat important when choosing a school.

The responses in Table 9 are focus group participant's views on student achievement in relation to their child. Within the theme of Student Achievement, 57% of the focus group response codes related to teachers being open and responsive.

**Table 9***Focus Group Responses—Student Achievement*

Supporting quote	School level
“Student achievement is mental health, a voice in the community and above average grades.”	Middle school
“Student achievement to me is getting involved in what you are learning and taking what you’ve learned and being inspired.”	Middle school
“Depends on the child. I have two very different children, so what’s achievement for one may not be achievement for the other.”	High school
“It is more about effort and good grades, not necessarily the top grades.”	High school
“Achievement is whatever they choose to do that they will be prepared for it.”	High school
“Learn through the process on how to take care of home and school business without being chased down.”	High school
“Our child evolving from elementary through middle school. He’s more autonomous and stays on top of his own learning. It is academic and maturity.”	Middle school
“It comes from within, it is more about responsibility and motivation. It is not about perfect grades.”	Middle school
“If my child is motivated and interested in learning and can tell me what he’s learned, that’s student achievement. I do not care about the grades or standardized tests. Those do not matter in life.”	Elementary school
“It is about being competitive and having options.”	Elementary school
“My child should be ready for the next grade. They should be able to retain what was taught.”	Elementary school

Table 9 yielded a wide range of responses in relation to student achievement.

Participants in the four focus groups did not mention students needing to have the top grades or being the top of the class as defining student achievement.

Question 5 of the focus group was designed to gain an understanding of what parents define as rigor. Participants who took the survey responded with a 90.5% agreement that the rigor of the curriculum was either very important or somewhat important, which was the highest reported factor that influenced a parent when choosing a school for their child. A parent responded to what they believe rigor is:

Kids connecting to what they are learning. Kids engaging in productive struggle.

If it is too easy or too hard, they disengage. So, we have to find the sweet spot between struggle and success. Students should be pushed beyond what they could achieve normally. Rigor is letting kids fail and learning what to do when they fail.

It is about creating a structure that works for the child, not just the entire class.

Another parent stated they felt rigor was, “managing the daily multi-disciplinary things within the day. My child is learning to study and retain information.” A high-school parent identified rigor as being, “not just the final score, but the improvement and the process of learning.”

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2, “How do these factors relate to McClelland’s Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation,” was created to provide an understanding of McClelland’s Three Needs Theory and its relationship to parent motivation in choosing a school for their child. In Chapter 2, based on McClelland’s theoretical framework, it was discussed that all humans possess needs for power, achievement, and affiliation. Research Question 2 was designed to provide a connection between the factors parents consider when choosing a school and their need for power, achievement, and affiliation. The questions for the focus group were organized into McClelland’s Three Needs Theory of

power, affiliation, and/or achievement. The factors presented in the survey were correlated to the Three Needs Theory, based on McClelland's definition of each of the factors of power, affiliation, and achievement, as outlined in Chapter 2. Table 10 illustrates the connection between the factors parents consider when choosing a school and McClelland's three needs: power, affiliation, and achievement.

**Table 10**

*Factors That Relate to McClelland's Three Needs Theory*

Factors	McClelland's three needs
School's website	Affiliation/achievement
Tour of the school	Affiliation
Choice program	Achievement
Rigor of curriculum	Achievement
Application process	Affiliation/power
Open enrollment	Power
Parental feedback for school policies	Power
Active parent teacher organization	Affiliation
Opportunities for parents to volunteer	Affiliation/power
Clubs	Affiliation

**McClelland's Three Needs Theory and Its Relationship to Survey Results**

Based on the survey results, the rigor of curriculum and offering a choice program were the most important factors when deciding on a school. The need that corresponds most with these factors of choosing a school is achievement. As previously discussed, the leading indicators of personal achievement based on McClelland's Three Needs Theory are as follows.

- High-need achievers take personal responsibility in finding solutions to problems and performing tasks.
- High-need achievers set challenging goals.



- High-need achievers take calculated risks.
- High-need achievers seek performance feedback.
- High-need achievers seek to attain personal accomplishments.
- High-need achievers tend to project the motivation of achievement onto their families.

High-need achievers constantly seek improvements and ways of getting better

McClelland et al. (1958).

Table 11 shows the connection between the survey responses with the factors that influence a parent when choosing a school and McClelland's Three Needs Theory for power, affiliation, and achievement.

**Table 11**

*Factors That Influence a Parent When Choosing a School and McClelland's Three Needs*

Factors	McClelland's three needs	Survey response
School's website	Affiliation/achievement	70.2%
Tour of the school	Affiliation	75.4%
Choice program	Achievement	88.0%
Rigor of curriculum	Achievement	90.5%
Application process	Affiliation	54.9%
Open enrollment	Power	85.4%
Parental feedback for school policies	Power	79.7%
Active parent teacher organization	Affiliation	73.9%
Opportunities for parents to volunteer	Affiliation/power	67.2%
Clubs	Affiliation	80.1%

Achievement and power are the dominant needs based on the factors presented in the survey and as outlined in Table 11. However, affiliation still presents as a strong factor that influences a parent when choosing a school.

### *Focus Group Responses*

Question 3 for the focus groups, “In what ways do you have a voice in this school? How about your child,” was formed to understand if having a voice creates a sense of power, as defined by McClelland in Chapter 2. Table 12 displays responses from the focus groups when posed the question about having a voice in the school.

**Table 12**

#### *Focus Group Responses—Having a Voice in the School*

Supporting quote	School level
“I was invited to be on a parent advisory group. We talk about key issues and work together.”	Elementary school
“I reach out if I need something or vocalize something. I feel I have always been heard. I’m not sure about my child. I would assume she is being listened to.”	Middle school
“As my child has gotten older, I feel as though my voice is getting quieter. I do not feel I have a voice with class selection and understanding scholarship opportunities.”	High school
“Climate surveys are good. Those give me a chance to have a voice.”	High school
“I’m not sure about my child.”	High school
“Yes, the principal pays attention and listens, she is always available and takes a collaborative approach with the students.”	Middle school
“I feel my voice comes from being on the school improvement team and the parent teacher organization. I have a direct connection.”	Middle school
“I think my kid has a voice, because she is allowed to be her own person.”	Elementary school
“I feel as though the more my kid is connected and has his own voice, the less I need one.”	High school

Table 12 illustrates parent responses to having a voice in the school. Responses at all three levels were similar with having some kind of voice in the school.

### **Research Question 3**

As previously stated, public schools are facing a plethora of competition from charter schools, home schools, and private schools. Research Question 3, “How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment,” was developed to gain an understanding of how marketing can be improved within public schools to broaden their appeal to a larger audience to increase enrollment and remain competitive among the competition.

### ***Survey Data***

The results from the second multiple choice question are in Table 13. Table 13 illustrates where parents find information about schools. Direct communication was the leading indicator of sources of information for parents, with 44.7% of parents selecting this mode of communication. Almost half of the parents selected direct communication. A school’s website was the second-largest source of information for parents, with 25.4% of parents reporting it as the primary means of learning about the school. No parents, however, selected using the local newspaper or TV and news as a source for school information.

**Table 13***Survey Results: Where Do Parents Find Information About Schools*

Information Sources	Survey response
Direct communication from the school	44.7%
School website	25.4%
Social media	16.6%
Informal discussions within the community	13.2%
Local newspaper	0%
TV & News	0%

Two other choices on the survey for the open-ended question was local newspaper and TV and news. As shown in Table 13, no respondents chose either of these options.

### **Open-Ended Survey Results**

Open-Ended Survey Item 1 focused on the marketing of a school: “What is effective with the current marketing plan and what could be improved?” This item was developed to gain a better understanding of public school marketing and how schools can market more effectively to attract and retain students. One respondent noted, “their enthusiasm for and pride in their school. Improvements could be made to give a better idea of the limited variety of opportunities available to students since I thought there were far more languages available than there actually are.” Another participant noted,

I think schools could do better with marketing itself by using more signs. They could do flyers, magnetic car door pieces, etc. Since the school is a choice program, they need to get it out more since the school is at a dead-end road.

People do not have to actually pass the school to know that it is a choice school and that they offer elementary sport. A lot of parents look for schools that offer sports and after school care and the IB program is a bonus to them.

The open-ended responses contained many suggestions for better curb appeal and updating of signage around the school. One theme that was common throughout the open-ended responses was to advertise what the school has to offer. One parent responded, “if I were new to the area I would not have any idea what the school has to offer or even know where to go to find the information about the school.”

Social media was another theme that was present in over 75% of the participant’s open-ended responses. “Our school’s use of social media and weekly emails are very effective at keeping parents informed and engaged. I see nothing that needs to be improved.” Participants stated that keeping it current with high-interest posts was important to them. It was stated that “social media keeps me connected to the school, especially during the pandemic when schools aren’t allowed to have visitors.” Another participant responded, “social media presence has increased over the last few years, and I feel it has been beneficial in communication for existing students and increased engagement among parents.” Additionally, a participant stated, “our schools’ social media and weekly emails are very effective at keeping parents informed and engaged. I see nothing that needs to be improved.” Although most survey respondents stated social media was an effective marketing tool, some survey respondents stated they do not use social media. For example, one participant stated, “So at times it can be difficult to locate information or stay connected to the school.”

### ***Focus Group Responses***

“Please describe how you are connected in this school,” was created to gain a better understanding of marketing and what, if any, strategies help parents feel connected within a school. Table 14 displays the responses of the focus group participants.

**Table 14***Focus Group Responses—Connected to the School*

Supporting quote	School level
“I am connected to this school through weekly phone calls, social media, parent teacher organization activities, and chaperoning.”	High school
“I do not get involved unless I have to.”	High school
“I connect through my children. They come home almost every day and tell me what they learned, they tell me all about what is going in their classroom and they even talk about ways in which students are taking action.”	Elementary school
“I am connected through athletics. I am around kids when I get to practice, being in the building and coaching.”	Middle school
“This is year I am not connected due to the pandemic.” It has isolated us and I fear when we return to normal that it will be the same. I hope the school will do something to encourage connectedness and understanding we have been isolated for a long time.”	Middle school
“Even though I am disconnected, I feel like my kids are connected and that is what keeps me connected to this school.”	High school
“I feel connection, because I seek connections.”	Elementary school
“Connection from us comes from your child and the community.”	Middle school
“I mostly feel connected to our school through the social media channels and the website.”	Elementary school
“I believe, we as parents, can get as connected as we want to be. Some are working parents and cannot volunteer or be in the building, so they donate and help the classroom teacher whenever they can. Others like to be involved with certain activities. It really becomes a choice for that parent.”	High school

Table 14 included focus group responses pertaining to a connection to the school.

Parents in the focus group were connected to the school if they were part of the school

through coaching, Parent Teacher Organizations, a School Improvement Team, or being a volunteer.

### **Summary of Findings**

Chapter 4 was composed of survey data and focus group data. Several quotes from participants in focus groups were included throughout the chapter for the authenticity of the research and to gain an understanding of the purpose of the research.

At the conclusion of the study, five memos emerged from coding the focus group responses. These memos were determined by coding the data in a cyclical process.

1. Provided a connection for their child (knowing someone already in the school)
2. Offered an advantage for their child
3. Delivered increased rigor with a transdisciplinary curriculum
4. Provided a set criterion to be accepted in the school (choice school framework for authorization)
5. Better prepared their child for college

Chapter 5 provides further analysis of the data in relation to studies discussed in Chapter 2 along with implications for practice and recommendations for further study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Study Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory inquiry was to examine what factors parents use to choose a school, and how public schools can be more effective with their marketing strategies to increase student enrollment. As discussed in Chapter 1, public school enrollment is declining, while private, charter, and home school enrollment is increasing. Tippet (2021) reported that in North Carolina, there were 63,000 fewer students enrolled in public schools in the fall of 2020 compared to the 2019 school year. Charter school student enrollment increased by 8,088 students in the same time period.

The 50,000 students who did not enter charter schools likely entered home schools or private schools. Across the state of North Carolina, only two public school systems reported an increase in student enrollment of the 115 public school districts in the 2020-2021 school year. Some districts reported a decrease of close to 18%. Public school enrollments have been in a negative trend since the 2015-2016 school year. The factors that have contributed to this decline in student enrollment are increasing student enrollment in charter schools, home schools, and private schools and smaller kindergarten classes due to the low birth rates during the recent recession (Tippet, 2021). The question therefore is, are charter schools and private schools attracting more parents by meeting the needs of what parents want when choosing a school?

Participants in this study took a survey that consisted of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Participants of this study were also provided the option to take part in a focus group. The survey and the focus groups conducted were designed to answer the following research questions:



1. Which factors influence a parent when choosing a school?
2. How do these factors relate to McClelland's Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?
3. How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?

McClelland's Three Needs Theory was the foundational framework utilized for this study. McClelland believed people are motivated by the need for power, affiliation, and/or achievement, and the actions and beliefs of people are motivated by one or more of those needs. This chapter covers an analysis of each research question, implications, recommendations, limitations, and a conclusion of this study.

Along with the data collected through a survey, focus groups were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 protocols. The focus group recordings were transcribed and coded, resulting in the following memos:

1. Provided a connection for their child (knowing someone already in the school)
2. Offered an advantage for their child
3. Delivered increased rigor with a transdisciplinary curriculum
4. Provided a set criterion to be accepted in the school
5. Better prepared their child for college

Figure 4 illustrates the grounded theory cyclical process used in this study and the specific data and theory are displayed. The grounded theory process was repetitive and grounded in school choice.

**Figure 4**

*Grounded Theory Model for this Study*

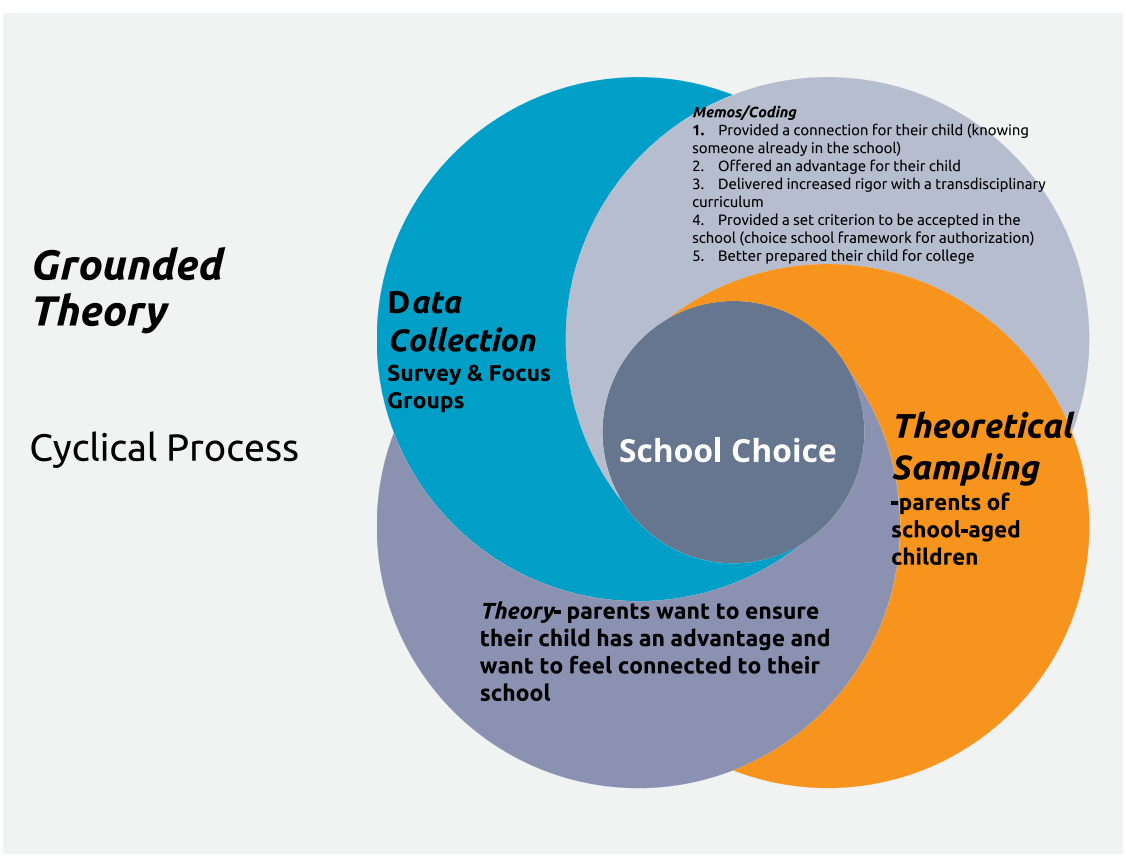


Table 15 illustrates a more in-depth review and examples of the memos created from coding the focus group responses. Each code created provided the framework for the memos.

**Table 15***Memos Created From Codes and Support Quotes From Focus Groups*

Memo	Supporting quote(s)
Provided a connection for their child (knowing someone already in the school)	“My neighbor is a teacher at this school. I knew based on what she told me about the principal and the school that my kids would go here.”
	“When I toured the school and met some of the staff, I knew this was the school for us.”
Offered an advantage for their child	“The IB curriculum is much more rigorous and gives my child an advantage.”
	“The criteria to get into this school is rigorous, whereas the traditional schools anyone can get in.”
Delivered increased rigor with a transdisciplinary curriculum	“All of the subjects are taught together and the kids begin making connections to what they are learning in all classes.”
	“This school has to follow the IB standards and practices, so the curriculum is advanced.”
Provided a set criterion to be accepted in the school	“You know the school is good when there is a waitlist.”
	“To get into this school you have to apply, and the other schools you do not have to apply. They take everyone.”
	“There is a level of excellence to get into this school. You have to have good grades and excel in all areas to even be considered.”
Better prepared their child for college	“By having my kid at this school and having such a hard schedule it is only going to help when they go to college.”
	“The school advertises how many IB students get into good schools.”

Table 15 illustrates the memos created from the data received from the focus group participants. Participants at all three levels of school (elementary, middle, and high

school) felt their child had an academic advantage by attending a choice school over the children who attend traditional K-12 public schools.

### **Analysis of Research Question 1**

“Which factors influence a parent when choosing a school?” There were many choice factors parents were presented with when taking the survey; however, the perceived rigor of curriculum was the dominant factor at 90.5%. Additionally, focus group data supported rigor as an important factor in a parent’s choice of school. For example, one parent stated, “When there are criteria to get into a school, it is going to be high performing.” Another parent stated, “It is important for me to know my child is being challenged and learning at high levels.” The use of this question in this study helped to identify what factors parents truly use to decide on the best school for their child. McClelland (1961) defined power as the need to be in control. A parent’s ability to exercise control over their child’s school is directly associated with McClelland’s need for power.

Choice program was another dominant factor for parents when choosing a school. Eighty-eight percent of parents felt this was important when choosing a school. A choice program in this study was the IB program at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. One focus group participant mentioned, “This program has its own set of standards on top of the state standards, which holds teachers to a higher level of accountability.” Another focus group participant stated, “Having a choice option like IB or dual immersion creates a better and more challenging atmosphere for kids.” McClelland defined achievement as one’s desire to accomplish goals and the willingness to take risks to meet those goals. A parent’s appeal to a rigorous curriculum is directly

associated with McClelland's need for achievement. In other words, a parent's motivation to achieve is a driver in choosing their child's school.

Open enrollment was another factor that was ranked high on the survey, with 85.4% of parents feeling their ability to choose their child's school was another key element. Parents want to have the power of choosing the school and not letting where they live determine the school. Parents want to feel empowered to choose their child's school, which is one of McClelland's three needs. A parent from a focus group stated, "It is important for me to find a school that I feel is best for my child." Parent responses from the focus groups and survey were very clear that they want the power to choose their child's school.

It is clear from the results of this study that parents want the ability to choose their school and want their children to be successful as defined by a rigorous curriculum. For example, from the focus group question, "Why did you decide to enroll your child in this school," it was apparent that parents want school choice (power), open enrollment (power), and rigor (achievement): the factors that are most prevalent to them. One focus group respondent stated, when being asked about why they chose their particular school,

This school is very hard to get into. Many students that apply do not get in and it sets the standard very high. I know that the best kids get in this school because of their grades and their academic merit. This gives my child an advantage. Since it takes such good grades to get into this school I know that my child is getting the very best education and he will be more prepared for a good college.

Another parent stated, "It is the choice of the school and me being able to decide is why we stayed in this school district. People do not understand and know there are many

options for parents.”

According to McClelland (1961), the need for power is the desire a person has to control and have authority over another person and influence and change their decision in accordance with their own needs or desires. School choice is the power a parent has to decide where their child attends. “How would you define student achievement” is a focus group question that was also used to help determine the factors parents consider when choosing a school. One focus group respondent stated, “Achievement looks different for every child, I just want to make sure my child is challenged and learning. I want my child to be prepared for the next level of learning.” Another parent stated, “Student achievement for us is connecting to the content and wanting to explore more on their own. It is not about the highest grades or being number one.” Achievement is one of the three needs in McClelland’s Three Needs Theory. Achievement is something that is an inner desire to achieve one’s goals and make decisions that best help one to achieve those goals.

“In what ways are you actively involved in this school” was another question posed in the focus groups that helped to determine the factors parents use when choosing a school. The majority of the parents shared they were a volunteer or a member of a Parent Teacher Organization or the School Improvement Team. All but one of the focus group participants stated they are active in the school. Affiliation is another of McClelland’s three needs.

Affiliation is a social need. Parents feel affiliated with a school. Parents seek affiliation through various avenues. Some examples include being a member of the School Improvement Team or Parent Teacher Organization or volunteering within the

school. A focus group respondent reported that she likes being a part of the school; it helps her to understand what is going on, and it develops positive relationships with the teachers.

The multiple-choice question on the survey asked parents what they believe makes a great school. The top three responses were the quality of teachers, the leadership of the school, and the school choice options being offered. Again, the data revealed that school choice is an important factor for parents to designate a school as being great. Additionally, I strongly believe the data indicate that since parents surveyed were allowed to choose the school their child attends, it created a greater sense of affiliation and power.

Likewise, parents want to ensure their child is learning at high levels, and they want to know and see evidence of the rigor of the curriculum. Parents also want the ability to be able to choose the best fitting school for their child. They want the schools with the best quality teachers and an effective leadership team, and they want to be involved.

### **Analysis of Research Question 2**

“How do these factors relate to McClelland’s Need Theory of power, achievement, and affiliation?” McClelland’s Three Needs is based on a person’s need for power, achievement, and/or affiliation. These needs occur all at once or one at a time. According to McClelland (1961), environmental factors can play a role in which need presents as the dominant one. Another key factor is what is going on in a person’s life can influence which need is dominant. Essentially, at any given time, a person can have all or one of the three needs present, and that is what drives them in decision-making and their

behaviors. The motivation for this question within this study was to gain a deeper understanding of what underlying needs parents have and how public schools can best meet those needs as they pertain to choosing a school.

Upon review of the focus group question, “Please describe how you are connected to this school,” parents stated the school is responsive to specific questions they may have. One parent stated, “If I feel I need to be connected to the school, I will find and make connections.” Another parent stated, “My kid is connected, because she has the drive to want to go to school, she talks about her school and that makes me feel connected.” Many focus group respondents stated they stay connected through the use of social media and receiving the weekly update phone calls. However, one parent stated, “Since we do not live in this community we have made a point to do things around the community and attend school-sponsored activities to get to know more people.” Affiliation, one of McClelland’s three needs, is the need to connect to others and create relationships. These responses directly relate to the need for affiliation.

“How would you define student achievement for your child” is a focus group question posed to further provide data for this study. Some of the responses included, “It varies by student, but it should be that student’s very best work.” Another parent stated, “Student achievement is a combination of good grades and excelling in anything a child does.” Achievement based on McClelland (1961) is the need to achieve at high levels and possesses the desire to excel. In this study, a parent’s need for achievement may be transferred to their children and connected to academic achievement.

The next focus group question explored a parent’s definition of rigor, which is correlated to the aforementioned question about student achievement. This question is



connected to the need for achievement based on McClelland's Three Needs Theory. A focus participant stated, "Rigor is being challenged at a high level." Additionally, another participant stated rigor is "the point in learning where a student no longer thinks it is easy, they are being stretched out of their comfort zone." Rigor and student achievement-related questions both indicate parents have a desire for their kids to achieve at high levels and they want their children to succeed with the use of rigor within a curriculum.

The factors used in the survey were correlated to the needs in McClelland's Three Needs Theory. Each factor was assigned to one or more of the needs for power, affiliation, and achievement. Based on the survey results, achievement, as it relates to the rigor of the curriculum, was rated at 90%, which corresponds to the achievement need. The school offering a choice program was rated at 88%, and it correlates to the power need; offering open enrollment (out of district) was rated at 85.4%, which also corresponds to the power need. The affiliation need, which parallels offering a variety of clubs for students, was rated at 80.1%.

Throughout this study, parents expressed their desire to be involved and connected in the school their child attends. They seek opportunities to be present within the school. I assumed this would be more of a dominant factor at the elementary level from my own experience; however, the desire to be involved and connected was also present at the middle and high school levels.

### **Analysis of Research Question 3**

"How can schools better market themselves to parents to increase enrollment?" The data for this question primarily came from an open-ended question on the survey, the multiple-choice question that was on the survey, and the focus group question about

marketing for this study. The goal of this question was to provide deeper insight into marketing and provide information to school districts and schools to create an effective marketing strategy. Parents who took the survey reported they get information from direct communication from the school, the school website, social media, and informal discussions within the community. No respondents stated they get information from local newspapers or the news on television. Schools need to understand these data and apply appropriate marketing strategies to the source for information.

The survey contained an open-ended question about marketing that permitted participants to record their free responses. Parents answered a question about what works in terms of marketing in their current school and what could be improved. The themes that emerged from the data analysis are in Table 16.

**Table 16**

*Themes From the Open-Ended Question on the Survey*

Themes from open-ended survey question
Marketing should be current and look professional
International Baccalaureate should be present in all logos
Schools should understand what parents what to see
Schools should market themselves based on their academic performance

Table 16 provides themes from the responses to the open-ended question within the survey. Each response was read and then categorized into the four themes within Table 16. Fifty percent of the survey respondents did not answer this question.

Focus group participants were posed this question, “Please describe ways in which this school has an effective marketing plan. What works and what could be improved?” One participant asserted,

If I were new to this area I would not have any idea where to begin looking for

information about the schools in my county. I did not know that the schools were even organized by county, because where I am from it is by zip code. It would be nice that information was placed in a central location on a website or available at realty companies.

Another participant stated, “It would be nice to know all that the district has to offer, why should I choose this school over the other.” Throughout the conduction of the focus group, it was evident that parents were unclear where to solicit information about specific schools and how to compare them. Parents stated social media is helpful for current events; however, one parent asserted, “I do not use social media so I rely on my child for information. If she doesn’t keep me informed then I probably miss out on information.” One focus group participant felt the marketing of the school where her child attends is “static.” When I probed further, she stated that there was nothing that made that school stand apart from the others. She reported when she talks to her neighbors within her community, she really does not know what to say about the school that is specific or what makes the school so great. Another parent stated it would be great for schools to communicate more information about scholarships and colleges to make them more competitive. One parent shared that IB schools need to design their marketing plans around that. The participant also stated that she would struggle to share what IB truly was to those who asked her. One parent shared the idea of using social media in a nonconventional way. This participant talked about all school’s social media sites are nearly the same; that it would be effective for a school to use social media tools to stand out of the crowd and draw attention to it.

A participant in a focus group shared an experience she had with marketing and

seeking information from the school:

I have asked several times for information about scholarships, deadlines of when to apply to college and what I need to be doing as the parent. I have to go and look at other schools to see what they have posted so that I can be in the know. In terms of marketing, high schools need to have a place where parents can access that type of information. We should not have to ask for it, nor should we have to spend so much time looking for it. This is such crucial information, so I do not understand why that information is not available.

Research Question 3 was interesting in terms of the varied responses in the survey and from the focus groups. The bottom line is that parents want communication in a streamlined manner. They want to be able to rely on the website and social media for their information. Additionally, direct communication from the school is something many respondents stated was helpful and effective. The feedback from parents was very specific and not difficult to implement.

The three research questions that were investigated in this study provided data that public schools can review and determine how to apply the recommendations to increase student enrollment and be competitive with the charter, private, and home school sectors.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

### ***Assumptions***

The criteria set for the sample were appropriate and taken from those with similar backgrounds. This study assumes the survey respondents and interviewees provided honest answers. Survey participation was not required. Participants in the survey

remained anonymous to solicit authentic answers. Participation in focus groups was not required, and the results from the focus group were confidential. No names were identified on the computer screen.

Participants in this study were not coerced to participate. Participants had to agree to participate. It is assumed the participants were interested in this study. At no time were participants offered any reward. In addition, it was communicated with participants that they could withdraw from the study at any given time with no consequence. Participants who chose not to continue would not experience any negative recourse.

### ***Limitations***

One of the most prominent limitations in this study was the response rate to the survey. The survey was sent to 4,190 parents, and only 310 responses were received or 13.5%. Of those who chose to take the survey, only 27 chose to continue with the study and participate in one of four focus groups. The first focus group only had four participants, as two of the survey respondents stated they would participate but they did not join the focus group. Perhaps with an increase of survey respondents, this study would have had the ability to gain a deeper insight into the parental motivation for choosing a school and school marketing.

The timing of the survey was a limitation in this study. Prior to the study's survey being sent, a different survey was sent out by the school district. The time-lapse between both surveys being sent out was approximately 1 month. There may have been an increase in survey respondents if the survey for this study was sent out at a more optimal time; in other words, not within close proximity of the district survey.

Another limitation of this study was the sampling of a specific population of

parents. The survey in this study was sent only to parents of students who were enrolled in an IB school.

Survey questions were another limitation within this study. The first question in the survey probed into the factors parents use when choosing a school. The list of factors was provided, and survey respondents could choose using a Likert scale to rate from very important to unimportant. The factors were based on literature but may not have been all-inclusive.

The final limitation of this study, and perhaps had the largest impact on the focus groups, was the COVID-19 protocols put in place during the time of this study. Survey respondents had the opportunity to indicate if they would like to participate in a focus group after the survey. Due to COVID-19 protocols, parents were not permitted to enter a school building, so those interested in participating in a focus group had to do so via Zoom. This meant that no focus group could meet in person, so focus groups were conducted virtually.

This limitation also created technological issues, as one focus group participant was not able to log on using the Zoom link provided; and once she logged on, this participant was 20 minutes late to the Zoom session. Another technology-based issue that arose was the mute button. Some participants were responding to questions but were muted, and others had a large amount of background noise which created distractions for the rest of the members of the focus group.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

To broaden the scope of the survey, perhaps the survey should have been sent out to traditional elementary, middle, and high public schools as well as other choice schools.

This would aid in the research to gain further insight into parental motivation and marketing. Since parents had the opportunity of school choice and the ability to enroll their children in their preferred school, it may have created bias within the survey or focus groups. One focus group participant stated, "I chose to enroll my child at this school. We are here by choice, so that makes us satisfied as parents." The sampling of non-school choice parents would have provided this study a different perspective. In addition, surveying other choice school parents would have provided a larger scope of results from which to draw conclusions. Upon analysis of the data yielded from the survey, an open-ended question could have been provided to determine if other factors were present that were not included in the survey.

Identifying what makes a quality teacher would be another area to consider for further study. Based on the survey data, 56.8% of parents believe the quality of the teachers makes a good school. A study that examines what parents perceive as a quality teacher would aid schools in creating a specific marketing plan focused on the elements parents believe embody a quality teacher.

Isolating the study to focus on one age group is another recommendation for further study. This study included parents from elementary, middle, and high school-age students. Isolating a study to just one age group would allow for specific data based on age. Throughout this study, parents of elementary students had different feedback from parents of middle and high school-age students. Limiting the study to just one age group would allow for specific data concerning marketing, factors that parents use to determine a good school, and what factors are important to parents when choosing a school.

The final recommendation for further study would be to include data from parents

who have left a school and chose to enroll their child in a charter, private, or home school. Soliciting data from parents who made this decision would be helpful to know why they made this choice. These data would allow for schools to ascertain if there is something the school could have done differently and if there are practices that have room for improvement and would allow for fine-tuning a marketing plan.

### **Implications for Practice**

School enrollment data indicate that students are leaving public schools and enrolling in charter, private, and home schools. Traditional public school enrollment has been declining over the past 5 years. The data from this study were used to determine several implications for public schools and public school districts.

### ***Offer Choice***

Parents are motivated by the ability to choose their child's school. School choice is a catalyst for school satisfaction and being connected in the school community. Parents have indicated through this and other studies that offering various forms of school choice such as IB, Dual Immersion, or STEM schools provides them with more appealing options. The key when offering choice programs is to ensure the choice option is the right fit for the community and then to market it. The idea of choice increases parent satisfaction with school. Moreover, even though the family might not live in the area surrounding the school, parents feel a sense of connection to the school community. With this in mind, finding the fit between needs for parents/students and choice offerings from schools is vital. Public schools and public school districts should provide parents with school choice options that require an application process that helps address the fit component.



### ***Collect Exiting Data***

Public schools currently do not track the reason students choose to leave their schools. The lack of such data is a gaping hole in the knowledge needed to retain students. This is true for both traditional and choice schools. Tracking these data will assist schools and districts in creating and implementing specific steps to retain students. Public schools and public school districts should implement processes to gather data on withdrawn students such as an exit survey or an exit conference with students leaving the school. In addition, schools should conduct follow-up phone calls with those families to discover if and why they are satisfied with their new school choice.

### ***Create a Marketing Plan***

Parents believe good teachers coupled with good leadership is what constitutes a good school. It is clear then that public schools and public school districts should create and implement a marketing plan that capitalizes on sharing information about the quality of teachers in their building. This can be done in a general sense, but it is also an opportunity for schools to highlight specific teachers and share their stories. This must also be done with leadership. Leadership must be open and communicative as part of the overall marketing strategy. In this way, the leader's actions will serve as notification to parents of the leader's strength in guiding the school community.

Direct communication from the school is one of the ways parents reported they received information from the school. Therefore, within the marketing strategy, schools must market their school directly to parents. As one parent stated,

We were lucky enough to find this school by chance, but I think about what would have happened if we were new to this area. How would we have known

about this school and the fact that it is an IB school? Schools need to do a better job of letting us know about the school and why we should bring our kids there. Why should we tell our neighbors about this school? Create a way to let those know about how wonderful this school is and be specific about why we should enroll our kids here.

School choice may then be compared to choosing in which supermarket you prefer to shop. Parents may visit many stores before selecting the supermarket of their choice. In the same way, public schools and public school districts need to be prepared to market their school the moment someone calls, visits on-site, or hits a social media page. The message should be consistent and positive. In addition, marketing continues even after the family joins the school community. This is especially important for schools and school systems to realize because every communication sent to parents, whether it be a phone call from a parent, a school-wide phone call, a teacher newsletter, a school newsletter, or a social media post, is a vital part of sending that consistent positive message. School leaders need to communicate the importance of the school message to all employees and that each employee is part of the marketing strategy. This study's data suggest every interaction a parent has with the school impacts that parent's satisfaction with the school.

Social media is another tool most of the survey respondents indicated as a mode where they receive information about the school. Schools would benefit by using social media as a major component of their marketing strategy. Schools should use platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Schools should work to increase the number of followers, likes, and visits as well as other key data from the different social networking

platforms. These data provide an insight as to how many social media visits a school has received, how many people have mentioned the school in their own posts, and suggestions for page engagements. Schools should analyze these data regularly; and if numbers are down or have plateaued, a school should think of high-interest stories to engage and attract new followers.

### ***Parent Involvement***

This study indicated that parents want to have school choice (power), they want the opportunity to be involved and connected to their child's school (affiliation), and they want to know their child is achieving at high levels (achievement). The best way to ensure parent expectations are being met is to regularly communicate with them. Focus group participants shared they want to be connected to their school, they want a voice in their school, and they want their child's needs to be met. School leaders should engage in two-way communication such as sharing and gathering information through parent groups such as the Parent Teacher Organization, the School Improvement Team, and/or a parent advisory team. In addition, teachers and other staff should regularly engage parents in two-way communication such as handwritten or electronic notes and phone calls. This practice will provide schools and districts with the opportunity to engage with families and make data-driven decisions to increase enrollment.

### **Summary**

Public school student enrollment numbers have been declining in recent years. Students are leaving public schools to attend charter, private, or home schools. Parents are seeking alternatives to the traditional school pathways. School choice is not a new concept; it has been around since as early as 1923 in the court case of *Meyer v. State of*

*Nebraska* (1923), where it was ruled that parents have a say in their child's schooling. This study sought to provide a connection to parental motivators such as the need for power, affiliation, and achievement based on McClelland's Three Needs Theory in choosing a school and how schools can better market themselves to increase student enrollment. The study followed the grounded theory framework in an inquiry-based approach to research based on the selected participants' understandings. With this framework, we acknowledge that grounded theories can, and should be revised with continuous data collection.

A focus group participant stated, "I as a parent have so many choices, so I want to know why I would send my child to your school. What would make me leave my school to come to yours?" This sentiment has come through in all aspects of this study. Parents no longer must send their children to their neighborhood school; they have been afforded choice. Choice is something parents want in terms of schooling. Parents are also seeking nontraditional schools; schools that offer more than the traditional schools, such as IB, Dual Immersion, or STEM schools. In addition, participants in this study seek an advantage for their children and want to ensure their children are learning the curriculum with rigor. A focus group participant stated, "I want to make sure my child has an advantage, it is my job as their parent to give them that advantage. I will find the right school to make sure that happens."

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Appendix A  
Participant Informed Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB  
Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant-

You are invited to participate in an online focus group studying parent's motivation for school choice and how schools can better market themselves. Susan Fail will be the researcher conducting this study.

The purpose of the research is to understand what motivates parents to choose a school for their children. This study will also identify what data parents are interested in and what expectations parents have for schools in which their children are enrolled. Additionally, this study will help school administrators determine how to market their schools and improve student-learning to maintain and/or increase enrollment amongst all the parents' school choice options. Data from this study will potentially be used in Iredell-Statesville Schools to enhance choice options.

Your participation in the focus group is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the group at any time. This process should take approximately 60 minutes to complete via Zoom. The focus group will be recorded. Each focus group will consist of six to eight participants. Due to the sensitive nature of the confidential material discussed, you will be asked to leave out any student identifiable information when responding to oral questions. You may choose to decline to answer any posed questions. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data or responses you've provided be destroyed. All responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Your personal information will not be collected to report and your responses will not be identifiable in the research.

Participants will not receive any payment for participation in the study or compensation for their time. However, your valuable feedback and participation may benefit special education programs across the nation. There are no risks involved with participating in the focus group activities.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the transcribed section containing your information will be destroyed. If you want to withdraw from the study, please tell the researcher during the on-line focus group and you will be released from the meeting electronically. If you would like your materials withdrawn after submitted, please contact Susan Fail at [susanfail@iss.k12.nc.us](mailto:susanfail@iss.k12.nc.us).

**If you have questions about the study, contact:**

Researcher: Susan Fail

Researcher telephone number: 704-929-8180

Researcher email address

Faculty Advisor name: Stephen Laws

Faculty Advisor telephone number: 704-691-4477

Faculty Advisor email address: [slaws@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:slaws@gardner-webb.edu)

**If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.**

Dr. Sydney K. Brown  
IRB Institutional Administrator  
Gardner-Webb University  
Telephone: 704-406-3019  
Email: [skbrown@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:skbrown@gardner-webb.edu)

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant Printed Name

—

Date

Participant Signature

—



Appendix B  
Parent Survey

2/15/2021

Introduction

## Introduction

My name is Susan Fail, I am currently the principal at Coddle Creek Elementary in Iredell County. I am conducting research through Gardner-Webb University, I am a doctoral candidate. Thank you for your willingness to take part in my research. The data from this survey will help us to better understand how to market our schools and meet the expectations parents have for a school. This survey will not take more than 10 minutes for you to complete. Thank you very much for your time. Susan Fail

For the following indicators use the Likert Scale to select whether the indicator is unimportant (1) to very important (5) or somewhere in between.

1. School's Website

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

2. Tour of the school

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

3. Choice program (I.B., Dual Immersion, STEM)

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

2/15/2021

Introduction

## 4. Perceived Rigor of Curriculum

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

## 5. Application process to enroll

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

## 6. Ability to choose the school (open enrollment)

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

## 7. Parental feedback for school policies

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

2/15/2021

Introduction

## 8. Active and influential Parent Teacher Organization

*Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5		
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

## 9. Opportunities for parents to volunteer

*Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5		
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

## 10. Clubs: (e.g. chess, robotics)

*Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5		
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Important

## Marketing &amp; Branding

## 11. What do you find effective with your school's marketing and branding? What can be improved?

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2/15/2021

Introduction

14. I would like to be considered for participation in a focus group. If yes is checked, please click on the link to provide your contact information.

*Mark only one oval.*

No

Yes-If you chose yes, please click on this link to provide contact information:

<https://forms.gle/krL6GpVFgJD1ivXXA>

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Google Forms

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

1. Why did you decide to enroll your child in this school?
2. In what ways are you actively involved in this school?
3. In what ways do you have a voice in this school? How about your child?
4. How would you define student achievement for your student?
5. How would you define rigor for your student?
6. Please describe how you are connected in this school?
7. What activities or programs are you involved with at this school?
8. Please describe ways in which this school has an effective marketing plan? What works and what can be improved?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

## Appendix D

## Lawshe's Content Validity Results

<b>SURVEY</b>	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5	Expert 6	Expert 7	Expert 8	Expert 9	Expert 10	CVR
<b>SRC</b>		X	x			x				x	0
School's Website	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
<b>Referral Friend</b>	X	X			X					x	0
Tour of School	X	X	X	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
Choice Program	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	0.667
<b>Standardized Test Score</b>	x	x	x			x				x	0.333
<b>AIG Program</b>	x		x							x	-0.333
Rigor	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
Close Friends	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
<b>Child has Friends</b>		x								x	-0.667
Application Process	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
<b>advertising</b>		x								x	-0.667
<b>Waiting List</b>		x									-0.667
<b>Plenty of Spots</b>											-1
Ability to Choose	x	X		X	X	X	x	x	x	x	0.667
Parental Feedback	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	0.667
Active PTO	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	0.667
Volunteer	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
Clubs	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
Market	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0.667
CVR(Critical) for a panel size (N) of 6 is 1.										CVI	0.367



Appendix E

Codes Created During Analysis

<b>ENROLLMENT</b>	
better school	I
additional opportunities	III
better prepared	III
program within the school	I
accepted based on academic merit	I
rigorous curriculum	III
advantage	IIII
not traditional	II
<b>INVOLVEMENT</b>	
PTO	II
advocacy	I
School Improvement Team	III
athletics	I
<b>STUDENT ACHIVEMENT</b>	
parent advisory	I
monthly principal survey	I
teachers always open	IIII
principal pays attention	I
<b>VOICE IN SCHOOL</b>	
reach out when needed	II
surveys	III
teachers are always open to listen	I
<b>RIGOR</b>	
engagement	III
autonomy	I
organization	II
connections to learning	III
responsibility	I
motivation	I
varies by child	IIII
stretching out of comfort zone	II
<b>CONNECTED TO SCHOOL</b>	

parent advisory	I
social media	III
athletics	I
School Improvement Team	II
Parent Teacher Organization	II