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PUSH AND PULL: FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENT MOTIVATION AND  
SCHOOL CHOICE IN A SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DISTRICT

By  
Kelli N. Passmore

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 Kelli N. Passmore 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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## **Abstract**

PUSH AND PULL: FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENT MOTIVATION AND SCHOOL CHOICE IN A SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DISTRICT. Passmore, Kelli N., 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The demand for school choice options is increasing, as is the number of families selecting to educate their children through alternative means, including homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling. As both the number of school choice options and the number of families choosing such options increase, the relationship between the two is worth examining. The purpose of this explanatory sequential study was to determine the factors motivating parents to select alternatives to traditional public schools and to find those similarities and differences existing across the three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling). The phenomenon was examined through the lenses of Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration and Rational Choice Theory and built on the Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice. This study addressed two research questions: "Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?" and "What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, charter schooling?" Descriptive statistics were employed during data analysis to assist in reporting the results and to form conclusions. The Likert scale data contradicted the open-response data. Ultimately, the findings showed that parents in all three subgroups were motivated by an equal push and pull.

*Keywords:* education reform, school choice, education marketplace, traditional public schools, homeschooling, faith-based schooling, charter schooling

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

A dichotomy exists in American education—one that has sparked an ongoing debate brewing between advocates and opponents. Both parties pose the same question: Is school choice the great equalizer, or is it the great divide? To understand this bisection, one must know a bit of history. The United States was arguably the dominating force in the education arena for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). However, by the 1970s, it was evident that American students had fallen far behind those in virtually every other industrialized country, leading to a growing sense of crisis and push for educational reform (Chubb & Moe, 1990). As a result, the bureaucratic infrastructure of education that defined our success as a global leader became subject to close scrutiny (Fife, 2016).

A 1983 report made a very strong claim to the nation, the Secretary of Education, and the United States Department of Education (USDE) about the public education system that echoes the sentiment of many still today: “Our Nation is at risk” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). This imperative for educational reform was written to argue that in a democratic society such as the United States of America,

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (National

Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 2)

Almost 40 years later, the debate over educational reform continues through the school choice movement. President Donald Trump asserted that “education is the civil rights issue of our time...families should be free to choose the public, private, charter, magnet, religious, or homeschool that is right for them” (NBC News, 2017, 0:06 ). School choice is the freedom for parents to choose the best education for their child and to encourage healthy competition to increase the quality of all schools (Fife, 2016). While the movement is arguably rooted in good intentions, its effects and consumers’ methods of decision-making are increasingly debated among advocates and proponents.

Milton Friedman, notable economist and the Father of School Choice, spent his life touting the virtues of applying market principles to education for the betterment of the system as a whole (Fife, 2016). Friedman, who opposed government regulation, championed the private marketplace (Ravitch, 2010). He maintained throughout his career that “the ultimate objective of society should be to maximize the freedom” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 119) of families and predicted in the 1970s that schools would rise to the demands of parent discontent with traditional public schools (TPSs). Still recognizing a need for change in 1990, scholars and school choice advocates claimed the only way to bring about the fundamental change needed to improve schools in the United States was through promoting a system of choice that was no longer subject to democratic control and empowered all parents, including low-income and underrepresented populations (Ravitch, 2010). They believed schools that are free from external control are more likely to be effective (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Ironically, while advocates across the nation on either side of politics rally behind

the perceived benefits of a private marketplace in education, a seemingly equal number of opponents, including educational policy analyst and historian of education, Diane Ravitch (2010), described school choice as a powerful, well-funded, and well-organized movement that is “stealthily advancing an undemocratic agenda, cloaked in deceptive rhetoric” (p. xviii) that seeks to privatize public schools and destroy the teaching profession. Ravitch aggressively claimed that “turning public education into a free-market system of choice is a terrible idea” (p. xix). She elaborated that “those who demand ‘school choice’ give little thought to these consequences of their advocacy; they do not fret about their role in the likely destruction of a democratic institution” (Ravitch, 2010, p. xx). Ravitch contended that the inequities resulting from school choice parallel those found in a 1950s segregated America.

Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education and 19<sup>th</sup> century American reformer of education Horace Mann, used his position to promote what he believed to be an equitable, public education for all. Often called the Father of the Common School, he believed that public schools were a critical tool for building civic equality and productive citizens, the very ethos of the philosophy reflected inequity and unification through a common opportunity for all children (Fife, 2016; Taylor, 2010). School choice opponents Bartholet (2019), Fife (2016), Krull (2016), and Frankenburg et al. (2011) found the movement and the very methods by which its consumers choose to be a threat to the ideals of Horace Mann’s common school movement.

Researchers have since cited a slew of problems for TPSs created by school choice. They argue that school choice increases segregation, stratification, and inequalities among students and schools (Frankenburg et al., 2011; Krull, 2016, Lindle,

2014). These critics claim that school choice policy isolates the most disadvantaged students in the worst schools because their parents lack the resources to make the best decision for their child. With only a select few able to choose, de facto segregation is inevitable (Lindle, 2014). Further, they argue, those choice schools intended to offer American families quality educational options are often the most segregated (Frankenburg et al., 2011). Meanwhile, as school choice draws a seemingly equal amount of advocacy and opposition, the movement continues to proliferate as the public's trust in the K-12 education system continues to erode (Lindle, 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Mirroring trends across the United States, school choice options have increased and expanded in the proposed district of study. Whereas advocates believe that such market-based competition will increase academic achievement and the overall performance of all schools (Lindle, 2014), opponents protest there is little evidence even after years of experience that competition sparks improvement (Ravitch, 2010). Further, while advocates oftentimes market schools of choice as the superior option by pointing to the shortcomings of TPSs (i.e., low test scores, low graduation rates, and a widening achievement gap), researchers warn of a lack of evidence supporting those allegations (Ravitch, 2010).

Aggressive claims have been made regarding the effects school choice may have on TPSs. Researchers have found that increased competition negatively impacts enrollment at TPSs, thereby negatively impacting the funding those schools receive (Krull, 2016; Lindle, 2014). They also claim that school choice increases segregation “because parents generally select schools that enroll students similar to the race, ethnic,

and economic status of their own children” (Krull, 2016, p. 5). District ABC has expressed similar concerns regarding the immediate impacts that the growing demand for school choice may have on its schools. These concerns include increased competition, a challenge to the current diversity found in its schools, and a threat to the “place identity” its neighborhood schools provide. The district has also predicted long-term effects, including imbalanced ethnic subgroups and free and reduced lunch populations; significant increases to the transportation costs associated with bussing to combat enrollment imbalances; and/or suppressed enrollment due to competition from the available choice options.

Despite the ongoing debate, the movement is undeniably growing in the United States and District ABC (Reynolds, 2016). As policy continues to shift power away from bureaucratic control and toward choice and market principles (Chubb & Moe, 1990), the parents are the ones who continue to shape the terrain by the very choices they make. However, researchers continue to question parent abilities to truly be savvy consumers of the available educational options (Lindle, 2014).

Also, at the center of the debate are those competing for student enrollment and who ultimately benefit from consumer choices—the schools of choice themselves. Each alternative to public schooling involved in this study, including homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling, were at unique points in history. They continued to find their niche in the market and distinguish themselves from TPSs in order to attract support (Wilson, 2016). However, the growth of the three forms of school choice involved in this study (homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling) has not been equally linear.

With legislation authorizing homeschooling in all 50 states, increasing numbers of parents across the nation are choosing to educate their children at home (Wagner, 2008). As described by Dwyer and Peters (2019), “pervasive in colonial times, an anomaly a half century ago, today a national movement” (p. 1), the homeschooling movement has only gained momentum (Ray, 2020b). Homeschooling and virtual education are distinguishable in that homeschooling is private and parent-directed, rather than overseen and funded by the state. As of 2020, an estimated two to three million children were homeschooled in the United States, or roughly 3-4% of school-age children, and climbing (Dwyer & Peters, 2019; O’Donnell, 2020).

In South Carolina, roughly 2%, or 16,815 students, were defined as homeschoolers, as opposed to the 750,000 TPS students during the 2015-2016 school year (Andrysczyk, 2020). With an estimated 2% to 8% growth each year from 2015 to 2020, growth in the homeschooling movement was exponential in South Carolina (Neaves, 2020). According to the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools (SCAIHS), the last reported numbers were expected to drastically increase in 2020 (Neaves, 2020). In 2020, given the effects of COVID-19, parents who had never considered homeschooling became part of the movement (Neaves, 2020). The National Home Education Research Institute claimed that homeschooling may have been the fastest-growing form of education in the United States in 2020 (Neaves, 2020).

The charter movement, according to Murphy and Shiffman (2002), has consistently been characterized by expansion. Since Budde’s (1988) initial proposal for Education by Charter in the 1980s and the first charter legislation in Minnesota in 1991, much has changed. There were no charter schools in the United States in 1990. By 2000,

there were over 1,700 (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). In 2020, President Donald Trump boasted that charter legislation spanned 44 states as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam, with 7,400 schools serving over three million students. Additionally, virtual charter schools delivered instruction in online and/or blended format in 21 states at the time of this study (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). As the effects of COVID-19 on education continued to unfold, thousands of parents selected virtual charter as the best educational option for their child for the first time, causing exponential growth in the span of 1 school year (Powell, 2020). Given an established infrastructure to deliver online learning during a global crisis, virtual charter schools outgrew their demand (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020).

The same trend has been found in South Carolina since it joined the movement in 1996 with the enactment of the South Carolina Public Charter School Law of 1996. By 2001, the state contained eight operational charter schools (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Since then, 100 public charter schools have been established in South Carolina (Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2019, p. 1), including three virtual charter schools. The two largest virtual charter schools in South Carolina each saw over a 30% increase in student enrollment between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, resulting in an enrollment cap and increased staffing to accommodate the growth resulting immediately after COVID-19 (Powell, 2020).

As evidenced by research, both homeschooling and virtual charter schooling were trending upward in the United States at the time of this study (Mason, 2020; Murphy & Shiffman, 2002; O'Donnell, 2020). However, despite being the nation's earliest form of school choice (Schultz, 2009), faith-based schooling was seemingly trending downward

and was not experiencing the same exponential growth according to some researchers (Hollenbeck, 2008; Lockwood, 2014; Schultz, 2009). While the exact causes are up for debate, Schultz (2009) found that factors beyond matters of faith seemingly take precedence for this phenomenon today. Perhaps the most obvious factor is that whereas parochial grade school was once the only alternative to TPSs, abundant and tuition-free options now exist (Schultz, 2009). In fact, one study uncovered that 55% of parents of TPS students would choose faith-based or private education if tuition were no concern (Hollenbeck, 2008).

One can argue that faith-based education has perhaps seen its peak. By 1880 in the United States, over 2,000 faith-based schools served over 400,000 students (Lockwood, 2014). That number steadily increased until the 1960s when faith-based schools saw their highest enrollment (Schultz, 2009). Catholic schools, the nation's oldest form of faith-based education, lost over half of their enrollment between 1965 and 1990, from 5.5 million to 2.5 million enrolled students (Ravitch, 2010; Schultz, 2009). That number decreased further to 1.9 million by 2015 (Ravitch, 2010). Since 1965, in total, 6,906 Catholic schools have closed, and enrollment has dropped by nearly 3.6 million students (Lockwood, 2014).

Despite trending downward nationwide, in 2020, all South Carolina private schools, including faith-based schools, reported increased interest from parents (Adcox, 2020). After seeing a reduction in student enrollment in 2019, South Carolina's Catholic schools stabilized in 2020, while other faith-based schools reported increased enrollment (Adcox, 2020). As of 2019, roughly 70,000 students attended faith-based schools in South Carolina (Adcox, 2020). Therefore, given the complexity of the problem and its



potential place among other studies of school choice, this study sought to understand a timely phenomenon as it pertained to parent motivation in District ABC where choice was abundant and arguably increasing in popularity.

### **Purpose of the Study**

School choice comes in many forms. As more and more families explore options beyond TPSs in order to make the best choice for their child's education, researchers seek to understand this modern paradigm. The purpose of this empirical study was to compare and contrast parent motivation(s) across three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling families) by (a) providing insight into the rapidly growing school choice movement in the area and (b) identifying similarities and differences in motivators across the subgroups.

### **Significance of the Study**

Expanding school choice was perhaps the most salient theme of modern education reform initiatives at the time of this study (Reynolds, 2016). With the available education options varying by location, and as schools increasingly competed for support, it was beneficial to understand the consumer decision-making. Researchers and school choice advocates Chubb and Moe (1990) were among the first to propose a revolutionary education system that minimizes political and bureaucratic control and instead relies on markets and parental choice. They believed that those most immediately affected by schools (students and parents) should have the authority to choose what they see to be the best option for their child (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Wilson (2016) claimed that parents have ordered preferences about the schools their child should attend; therefore, schools must find their niche in the market to attract

consumers. Schultz (2009) stated,

In a society in which consumers have a lot of choice in nearly everything, the decision for a school for their children is approached in the same way as many other decisions that are made when choosing one product over another. (p. 7)

Schultz added that parents, as consumers, go to considerable lengths to maximize market information, noting that dissatisfaction with a TPS often motivates them to desire an alternative. With the education system's survival depending on parental satisfaction (Valentine, 2016) and with the understanding that parents report a significantly higher level of satisfaction when they engage in the school choice process (Hall, 2009), gaining insight into this symbiotic relationship between parents and schools of choice is significant.

The specific aforementioned concerns of the district of study, District ABC, coupled with a rapid increase in school choice participants in the area, warranted the examination of this phenomenon. The results of this study will inform various parties on either side of the school choice debate who have an equally vested interest in student enrollment. Valentine (2016) found that the vast amount of school choice research has left the parent voice unheard with regard to why and how they engage in the education marketplace. Since choice policies were intended to provide options to parents looking for the best education for their children, it is critical that their voices be heard and understood. This study addressed a gap in the literature identified by Valentine (2016).

This study also occurred at a critical juncture in our nation's history of education—a time when the education marketplace was perhaps the most responsive to its consumers. The COVID-19 pandemic created a mass disruption of schooling in the United States,

forcing a near-total shutdown of school buildings, including 124,000 public and private schools serving roughly 55.1 million students in 48 states (Education Week, 2020). The unprecedented event brought our nation, including District ABC, to what could have been the pinnacle of the school choice debate by forcing parents to seek alternatives to TPSs when they would unlikely have done so otherwise. According to a 2020 Gallup poll, given the threat of COVID-19, opinions among parents of school-age children in America were split into equal thirds with regard to the best format for reopening schools for the 2020-2021 school year (McCluskey, 2020). The poll captured what Gallup named an “undeniable reality” in that families needed school choice (McCluskey, 2020). In response to COVID-19, many TPSs, including District ABC, took the extreme side of caution (McCluskey, 2020), meaning roughly one third of parents were likely left dissatisfied with the decision.

While the literature includes numerous studies explaining parental motivation for choosing alternatives to TPSs, a notable gap exists in explaining how these motivations can be compared and contrasted across subgroups (i.e., homeschooling families, charter schooling families, and faith-based schooling families). Just as the pioneers of the choice movement, including the “grandfather of homeschooling” Dr. Raymond Moore, faith-based organizations across the nation, and charter trailblazer Ray Budde, each championed their unique causes separately with the same overarching goal, those researchers most influential to this study explored parental motivation within a singular subgroup. Mason (2020), Ray (2020a, 2020b, 2017), O’Donnell (2020), Bartholet (2019), and Wagner (2008) studied the homeschooling movement. CREDO (2019), Chandler (2015), Frankenburg et al. (2011), and Murphy and Shiffman (2002) studied the charter

school movement. Lockwood (2014), Hall (2009), Schultz (2009), Hollenbeck (2008), and Valentine (2016) studied the faith-based schooling movement. None drew comparisons to other groups. For these reasons, this study was timely and relevant to an issue that impacted districts, schools, and families across the United States in very similar ways.

### **Research Questions**

This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of parental motivation for enrolling in three specific school choice options in a district in South Carolina. Two research questions were developed to guide data collection and analysis and to contribute to the body of research regarding the stated problem:

1. Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling?

### **Overview of the Methodology**

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was employed to best answer the research questions of the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described the mixed methods approach as follows:

The researcher bases the inquiry on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative data alone. The study begins with a broad survey in order to generalize results to a population. (p. 17)

Data collection occurred in a 2-phase QUAN>qual approach. During the initial quantitative phase, an electronic survey was distributed to participants within each of the three subgroups (homeschoolers, charter schoolers, and faith-based schoolers). Butin (2010) described quantitative research methods, such as Phase 1 of this study, as able to examine the opinion and perspectives of thousands of people, yet quantitative data lack attention to the detail and obscurities to be found through qualitative methods. Therefore, the quantitative data collected from the survey informed the subsequent qualitative phase involving focus groups composed of willing participants from each of the three subgroups. The intent of this QUAN>qual design was “to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 222), thus the two data sets were merged during analysis to increase the validity of the resulting conclusions.

### ***Instruments***

In a 2-phase mixed methods study such as this, the researcher first collects quantitative data, analyzes the results, and uses the results to inform the subsequent qualitative phase. I determined that an online questionnaire containing both forced-choice and open-ended response items was most appropriate during the first phase of research. Guidelines for survey construction were obtained from the works of Butin (2010) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), who each stressed the importance of a valid and reliable instrument.

While performing an extensive literature review on parental motivation for selecting alternatives to TPSs, I discovered the work of Dr. John Chandler (2015), who conducted a similar study in Michigan. His instrument, titled Survey of Choice Factors

Influencing Parents' Decisions to Enroll Their Child in an Online Program, was designed to measure similar constructs in a study built on a similar conceptual framework.

Therefore, I requested permission from Dr. Chandler to modify his instrument for the purposes of my study, to which he agreed. His instrument was then modified to measure the appropriate constructs of this study. The modified survey, titled Survey of Factors Influencing Parental Motivation to Enroll in Homeschooling, Charter Schooling, or Faith-Based Schooling (Appendix A), was distributed to all parties in the form of a hyperlink.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The study was built upon two complementary frameworks. The first, Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration, provided a framework for determining why parents choose. The second, Rational Choice Theory (RCT), a deductive theory, provided a framework for understanding how parents choose.

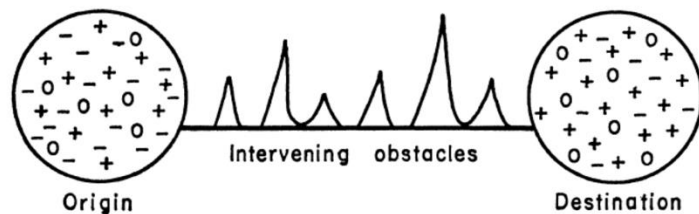
#### ***Lee's Model of Migration***

According to Lee (1966), migration is defined as "a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence" (p. 49). For the purposes of this study, migration was defined as a permanent or semi-permanent change in schools and/or forms of schooling. Lee explained that every act of migration involves an origin (the original school and/or form of schooling), a destination (the new school and/or form of schooling), and an intervening set of obstacles. Lee argued the factors leading to an actor's decision to migrate (a parent's decision to migrate in the case of this study) are summarized under four headings: "(1) Factors associated with the area of origin; (2) Factors associated with the area of destination; (3) Intervening obstacles; (4) Personal factors" (p. 50). Further, Lee claimed that while some factors repel actors away from an area (or school and/or form of

schooling), some tend to hold and/or attract them. Even still, there are other factors to which people are indifferent. For some actors, the set of intervening obstacles may be consequently minimal; however, for other actors, the set of intervening obstacles may delay or inhibit migration altogether. Figure 1 illustrates his original model for explaining this phenomenon.

**Figure 1**

*Lee's Model of Migration*



*Note.* From “A Theory of Migration,” by Everett S. Lee, 1966, *Demography*, 3(1), p. 50 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2060063>)

As explained in Lee’s (1966) Model for Migration (Figure 1), both origin and destination possess factors that repel actors (indicated by -s), hold and/or attract actors (indicated by +s), as well as those factors to which actors are indifferent (indicated by 0s). For the purposes of this study, those factors that repel actors are referred to as “push” factors, and those that hold and/or attract actors are referred to as “pull” factors. Again, the intervening obstacles vary by actor and may be trivial or profound, depending on individual circumstances. Either way, intervening obstacles play a role in an actor’s decision to migrate.

Lee (1966) believed that while factors that hold or repel are defined differently for every actor, some groups react in a similar fashion to a given set of factors at origin and

destination. Lee stated,

Indeed, since we can never specify the exact set of factors which impels or prohibits migration for a given person, we can, in general, only set forth a few which seem of special importance and note the general or average reaction of a considerable group. (p. 50)

Lee added that for some, there are compelling reasons for migration, while others need little provocation. Therefore, Lee's Theory of Migration provided a suitable lens for examining and determining the push and pull factors involved in parent decisions to choose an alternative to TPS across three subgroups—homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling.

### ***RCT***

Lee (1966) explained that migration tends to fluctuate with the economy. During periods of economic growth and expansion, migration increases. At the time of this study, parallels were drawn between Lee's explanation for increased migration and an explanation for increased parental choice. School choice options were rapidly expanding around the nation and in the area of study. RCT provided a framework for understanding parental choice in terms of economics (Walberg, 2000).

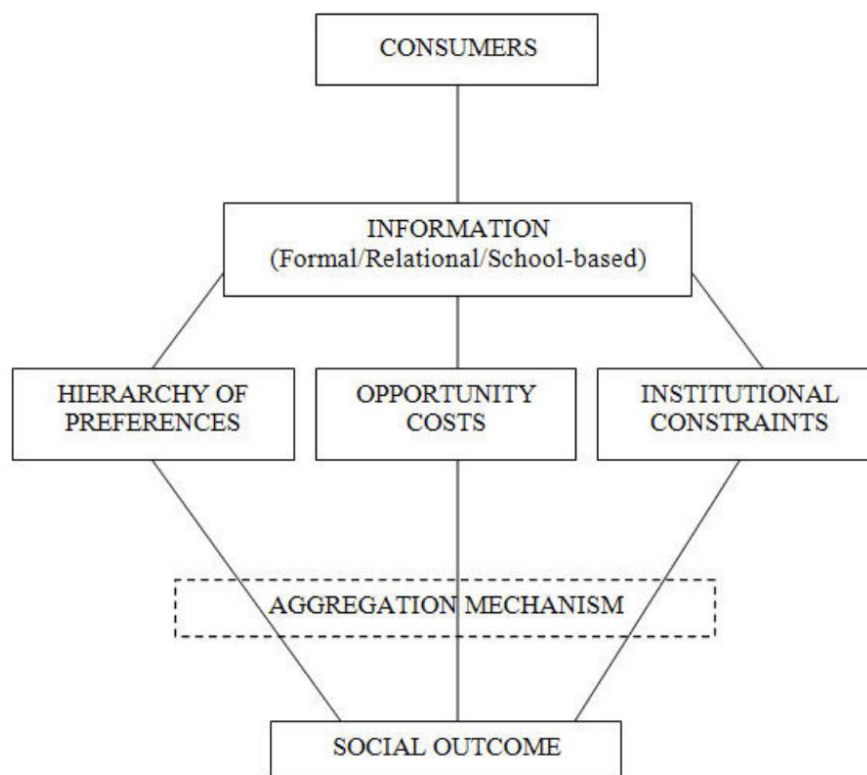
RCT, according to Walberg (2000), "is a fundamental assumption of market theory" (para. 3). Sociologists Friedman and Hechter (1988) explained that rational choice models assume that consumers (or parents as is the case of this study) have given preferences and act with the explicit goal of attaining specified ends consistent with a predetermined hierarchy of preferences. However, their intentions are often complicated by constraints, including available resources and opportunity costs, each of which varies



by consumer. Social institutions, or those constraints imposed by society, may also provide either positive or negative sanctions for a course of action (Friedman & Hechter, 1988). Figure 2 illustrates the framework and explains the process with which consumers engage to achieve a desired social outcome.

**Figure 2**

*The Various Paths to Social Outcomes in Rational Choice Explanations*



*Note.* From “The Contribution of Rational Choice Theory to Macrosociological Research,” by Debra Friedman and Michael Hechter, 1988, *Sociological Theory*, 6(2), p. 202 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/202116>).

Friedman and Hechter’s (1988) model (Figure 2) provides a heuristic device for exploring consumer choice that was applied to this study as well. Market theorists

emphasize individual choice over centralized decision-making and argue that consumers are better off having the greatest possible say in how they should allocate their personal resources (Walberg, 2000). The application of such market principles has had profound implications on education policy and reform, ultimately leading to the education marketplace commonly known as school choice.

School choice, as argued by many, including Peterson (2006), models education after American business and industry in order to promote healthy competition to better attend to families' unique needs and to increase the quality of schools. Since RCT, according to Zey (2001), is based on the premise that individuals act and choose in the interest of self in order to maximize their available resources, it can be used to examine parental motivation (Sato, 2013). When applied to the school choice phenomenon, RCT assumes that a consumer, or parent, selects the alternative (i.e., homeschooling, charter schooling, or faith-based schooling) that they believe will best optimize their circumstances. Constraints, such as their tastes, existing resources, and the market characteristics of the products (i.e., the type of education) impact available choices by either making some alternatives impossible and/or changing the costs and benefits of the alternatives (Sato, 2013). In addition, interactions with other consumers impact the list of alternatives, as the subjective constraints caused by learning about each party's choices are reciprocated (Sato, 2013).

Hamilton and Guin (2005) outlined three necessary tenets for a parent's choice to work as planned. First, parents should have preferences and information to build their understanding of the available choices. According to Friedman and Hechter (1988), the quantity and quality of information should be taken as a significant variable in the

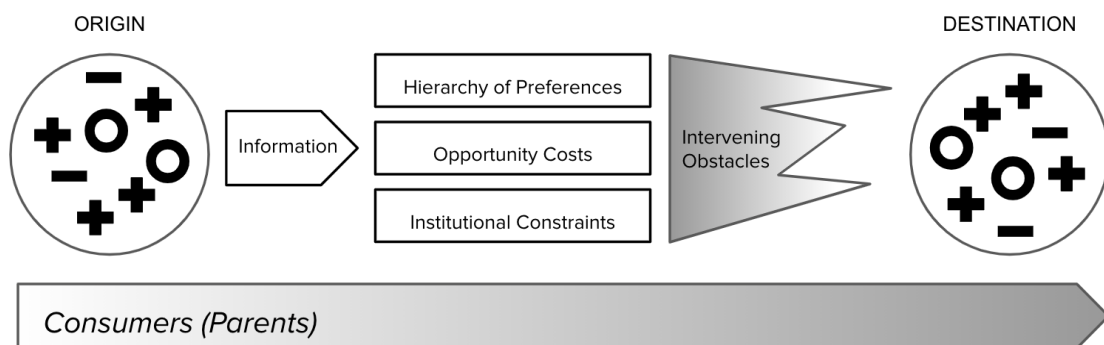
process. Simply put, “meaningful information is essential in order to make rational choices” (Hall, 2009, p. 35). Second, parents should work to compare and contrast the schools’ attributes. Third, parents make the choice that best fits their preferences. With so much to take into account, actors calculate and recalculate possible choices according to changing conditions, yet they continue to act rationally and select the best alternative based on the expected value of their choice (Zey, 2001).

### ***The Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice***

Both Lee (1966) and Friedman and Hechter (1988) acknowledged the complexities of their theories. Further, each acknowledged the personal nature of choice. Again, while the Theory of Migration can be used as the lens for understanding why parents choose to leave a TPS, RCT can be used as the lens for understanding how parents engage in the choice process. Figure 3 illustrates the combined Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice.

**Figure 3**

### ***Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice***



*Note.* The model was adapted from elements of Everett Lee’s (1966) “Theory of Migration” and “The Various Paths to Social Outcomes,” as cited in the work of

Friedman and Hechter (1988).

The Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice was created to intertwine the essential tenets of both theories—Lee’s (1966) Theory of Migration and The Various Paths to Social Outcomes. Like Lee’s Theory of Migration, it is represented as a left-to-right linear process, beginning with a place of origin. In the case of this study, the origin is a TPS. Again, much like Lee’s model, each school (origin and destination) possesses what the consumer (parent) perceives to be either positive or negative factors (Lee, 1966). Those factors that are positive (+) attract or pull consumers to come or to stay, whereas those factors that are negative (-) repel or push consumers to leave (Faridi, 2018). In addition, each school possesses factors to which some people are indifferent (o) (Faridi, 2018).

Lee (1966) suggested that while consumers have a near-perfect assessment of the push and pull factors associated with the origin due to the length of association, the same is not necessarily true for the destination (Faridi, 2018)—hence the need to merge the two theories. First, upon expressing interest in migrating, consumers need and work to retain information about a destination (a school of choice). Friedman and Hechter (1988) shared that initial rational choice models assumed that consumers had sufficient and accurate information for considering their choices; however, recent works indicate that information should be considered to be a highly significant variable (Friedman & Hechter, 1988). Lee (1966) himself said that the urge to migrate is often rooted in perceptions.

Next, according to the combined model, parents filter their intentions to migrate through a predetermined hierarchy of preferences, associated opportunity costs, and an

imposed set of institutional constraints. Each of these factors serves to either positively or negatively impact a parent's decision to choose an alternative to public schools.

Therefore, they are represented as equally weighted steps in the process.

Finally, Lee (1966) stated that “between every two points there stands a set of intervening obstacles” (p. 51). Whereas these obstacles are trivial to some, they may be prohibitive to others (Lee, 1966). At this advanced stage of the choice process, “the balance in favor of the move must be enough to overcome the natural inertia and intervening obstacles” (Faridi, 2018, para. 5). Since it is my perception that a parent's decision to choose is the net result of the interplay among all of the factors represented in the Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice, the inclusion of a distinct aggregation mechanism, as found in Friedman and Hechter (1988), would be redundant.

Push and pull factors associated with both origin and destination bookend the framework and initiate parental engagement in the choice process. Therefore, they are worth examining through data collection and analysis for the purpose of answering the two research questions of this study:

1. Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, charter schooling?

Also, given its place in the history of American education and the undeniable expansion of the school choice movement, the framework provided a lens for understanding school choice on a local level where, as found in Lee's (1966) research, movements in the form of specific streams (i.e., homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling)

have taken form.

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

There are specific key terms used throughout this study. A brief description of each term provides clearer understanding of the research.

#### ***Education Reform***

The term reform, in and of itself, according to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), is to change in order to improve and/or remove faults or abuses. School reform, although interpreted differently among different groups, for this study, is the term that describes any efforts to change public education for the better by applying market principles (Wikipedia, 2020).

#### ***School Choice***

School choice is an educational reform effort that empowers parents with the freedom to choose the form of education that best suits their child's individual needs (Fife, 2016). The movement advocates for individual freedom with options including TPSs, private schools, public magnet schools, public charter schools, public virtual charter schools, homeschooling, and faith-based schools (MySCEducation, 2020).

#### ***Education Marketplace***

Education marketplace is a figurative term describing where parents gather resources when determining the best educational options for their children (Valentine, 2016).

#### ***TPSs***

TPSs are free, tax-supported neighborhood schools controlled and established by local school districts and boards of education (MySCEducation, 2020). While

historically, students attended a public school according to geographic zoning, open enrollment policies have made it possible for students to attend public schools outside of their designated zone.

### ***Homeschooling***

Homeschooling is an educational alternative to TPSs in which parents or guardians accept sole responsibility for their child/children's education (Wagner, 2008).

### ***Charter School***

Public charter schools are a popular alternative to TPSs because they are allowed more freedom to innovate in exchange for strict accountability to student achievement (MySCEducation, 2020). Charter schools, according to South Carolina legislature, may be defined as a tuition-free, "public, nonreligious, non-home-based, and nonprofit...school that operates by sponsorship of a public school district, the South Carolina Public Charter School District, or a public or independent institution of higher learning" (Charter Schools, 1996, para. 4). Virtual charter schools are free, online programs that operate under the same legislation as brick-and-mortar charter schools. The South Carolina Public Charter School District has authorized five virtual charter schools, including Cyber Academy of South Carolina, South Carolina Connections Academy, South Carolina Virtual Charter School, Odyssey Online Learning, and SC Whitmore (MySCEducation, 2020).

### ***Faith-Based School***

Faith-based schools are private organizations that do not receive state or local funding, but rather charge tuition and have a religious mission (MySCEducation, 2020).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are required to frame a study. They are necessary beliefs that prompt research but cannot be proven (Simon & Goes, 2011). This study was designed around three driving assumptions. First, I assumed that the study participants, as consumers of school choice, selected the alternative to TPSs that they believed best optimized their circumstances. This choice, I assumed, was made after engaging in the choice process as outlined in the Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice (Figure 3). Second, provided that their identities remained fully protected and kept anonymous, I assumed the participants would answer survey and focus group questions about their engagement in the school choice process honestly and factually. Finally, I assumed that differences in parental motivators existed across the three subgroups (or “streams,” as coined by Lee, 1966), homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling families. Each of the three assumptions was addressed or proven through careful data collection and analysis and by answering the study’s research questions.

### **Limitations**

Both Ray (2020a) and Butin (2010) shared that educational researchers rarely see a perfect study and must work within their given constraints to design and execute it to the best of their ability. Limitations are beyond the researcher’s control and may affect the end results and conclusions that can be drawn (Simon & Goes, 2011). They relate to a study’s methodology and design and therefore should be acknowledged by the researcher.

This study was subject to the following limitations identified before research: (a) I previously engaged in school-choice decisions for my own children; (b) as a former employee and resident, I was familiar with District ABC and the community in which the study occurred; (c) participation in the study was voluntary; (d) with COVID-19 and



other current societal issues in national news, it was understood that the results of this study were potentially impacted in a way that they would not have been before these unprecedented events; and (e) social media would be used as a supplemental recruitment measure.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) shared that researchers need to openly convey the steps they will take to address study limitations. First, as a past participant in the choice process and as a former employee of District ABC, I brought a degree of bias to the study. My personal bias was clarified and controlled by first acknowledging its existence openly and honestly throughout the course of this study, as advised by Creswell and Creswell. As a result, I served only as researcher and facilitator, rather than study participant.

Second, given that study participation is voluntary, I acknowledge that those participant samples drawn from each of the three subgroups may or may not have been truly representative of the larger population (Urdan, 2017), especially provided social media served as a supplemental platform for recruitment. Consequently, it was understood that the results of this study may or may not be generalizable to other settings, people, or samples (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, to increase the validity of the results and conclusions, I employed multiple validity procedures, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

First, mixed methods research designs assist in overcoming the limitations that one may encounter by utilizing either qualitative or quantitative methods alone, thereby building a stronger understanding of the research problem and questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I triangulated different data sources by converging survey and focus

group data, again, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Also, to add to the validity of the findings and to further address my personal bias and the potential limitations discussed, I provided rich and detailed descriptions of the setting and offered multiple perspectives about the evident themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, to enhance the accuracy of the account, I involved peer debriefers to review my findings and again increase the validity of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In addition to the five limitations identified before conducting research, six additional limitations were identified during the execution of the study: (a) social media (Facebook) was used as a supplemental recruitment measure at only two of seven participating organizations (one brick-and-mortar charter school and one virtual charter school); (b) the faith-based subgroup had a disproportionately higher representation in Phase 1 of the study (68.27%); (c) only the faith-based subgroup had representation during Phase 2 of the study; (d) a disproportionate number of participants identified as being White (74 of 83 total participants, or 89.16%); (e) substandard response rates from the homeschooling (11.54%) and charter schooling (7.26%) populations; and (f) mean and standard deviation (SD) were used to analyze and report the quantitative results.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the parameters or defining boundaries of a study consciously set by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2011). I selected the following delimitations for this study in order to properly address the determined research questions: (a) the study was set in one suburban South Carolina school district, District ABC; (b) the study included participants living only within District ABC; (c) all participants were parents or primary caregivers of only first- through fifth-grade children who had the responsibility of making

decisions regarding their child's education; (d) study participants had experience with making choices in the education marketplace; and (e) the study explored parental motivations of the three school choice options available in District ABC (homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling).

While this study was potentially applicable across the United States, I selected to focus on District ABC in particular, because the education marketplace is very rich and continually growing. Again, while this study applies to all grade levels, I selected to engage parents of first- through fifth-grade children, because they were likely to have the most recent experience of engaging in the education marketplace and with push and pull factors of both origin and destination. I selected to limit the study to include homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling because they were the available alternatives in the area.

### **Scope**

The scope of a study specifies the study's parameters (Simon & Goes, 2011). The study's purpose was to address two research questions to contribute to the literature and understanding of school choice. While the exact population size was contingent upon voluntary participation, three subgroups were formed, including homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling families. While the school choice phenomenon was worth examining in any setting across the United States, this study was set in one suburban South Carolina school district, where numerous alternatives to TPSs were available to families. This study, built on elements of both RCT and Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration, was conducted from winter to spring of 2021.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I established a detailed and relevant problem, identified the purpose and significance of the study, and outlined two research questions that were addressed through mixed methods. The conceptual framework of the study undergirding the process was justified by research. The definitions of key terms used throughout this study were explained. Finally, the study's assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and scope were detailed, providing a thorough introduction to the study and its intent.

Chapter 2 examines the existing literature to further build on the relevance and importance of this study. The literature review mirrors the study's participants in that it is organized into three sections: homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling. Each section outlines the history of each movement, the modern era of each movement, its place in South Carolina education, and the ongoing debate.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

School choice is perhaps the predominant and most polarizing topic surrounding American education today. Pointing to the shortcomings of TPSs (Ravitch, 2010), advocates of school choice tout its ability to improve education through market-based competition (Lindle, 2014). However, opponents have cited concerns about the negative impacts choice may have on TPSs. They have countered that evidence supporting predicted improvements in education is lacking (Lindle, 2014).

In 2016, District ABC, the location of this study, expressed specific concerns regarding the impact a growing demand for school choice in the area may have on its schools. Among these concerns were increased competition, suppressed enrollment, imbalanced student diversity, a threat to the place identity of its neighborhood schools, and increased costs of bussing to combat enrollment imbalances. Despite these concerns, in the years 2020 and 2021, the time of this study, school choice options continued to expand across the nation and particularly in District ABC (Reynolds, 2016). Support for three forms of school choice was particularly abundant. Homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling each had notable representation in the area.

To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, two research questions were addressed. First, I determined why parents selected homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling. Second, I identified the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling.

To build a rationale, this chapter presents an analytical review of research and

literature relevant to this study of school choice and parental motivation with a focus on homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling. It begins by introducing the broad history of school choice in the United States. Next, it presents pertinent literature and research concerning each of the three school choice movements explored in this study: homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling. A history of each movement is outlined, current trends are explained, their impact on education in South Carolina is reviewed, and the debate surrounding each movement is detailed. Then, potential themes and perceptions found in the literature review are presented, followed by a thorough explanation of the conceptual framework undergirding this study of parental motivation and school choice.

### **School Choice**

The topic of school choice is not new. First arising as a political strategy for limiting the racial desegregation of TPSs after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision declaring separate schools for Blacks and Whites to be illegal, the term “school choice” was stigmatized as a conscious strategy to maintain a separation of the races (Ravitch, 2010; Reynolds, 2016). Southern segregationists, namely White families, interpreted the decision as merely an opportunity to exercise their “freedom” by moving or enrolling in a private school of their choice to avoid mixing with Black citizens (Ravitch, 2010). This so-called “freedom of choice” policy dominated schools in the South, with few Whites choosing to attend Black schools and few Blacks choosing to attend White schools (Reynolds, 2016). In summary, freedom of choice preserved segregation (Ravitch, 2010; Reynolds, 2016).

Economist and Nobel Prize recipient Milton Friedman opposed government

regulation and championed the private marketplace. He maintained that “the ultimate objective of society should be to maximize the freedom” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 119) of families. He predicted in the 1950s that schools would rise to the demands of those parents expressing discontent with TPSs (Ravitch, 2010). He proposed that introducing competition in education would stimulate underperforming schools and promote a variety of programming from which families could choose. Friedman recognized later that southern states had adopted his proposal to evade desegregation. Even still, while he detested racial prejudice, he continued his pursuit of maximizing individual freedom through school choice (Ravitch, 2010).

The modern school choice movement gained momentum once again in the 1980s when American students reportedly fell far behind those in virtually every other industrialized country (Knaak & Knaak, 2013). This growing sense of crisis sparked an urgent push for reform. Republican President Ronald Reagan, directly influenced by Friedman’s ideas, advocated for deregulation and market-based solutions, eventually naming Friedman as one of his own advisers. Reagan specifically advocated for vouchers that would allow parents to use all or part of the public funding set aside for their children’s education toward tuition at a private school of their choosing (EdChoice, 2020; Ravitch, 2010). To make the concept more palatable to the public at the time, however, vouchers were only available for use by low-performing students. By Reagan’s second term, he backed away from vouchers and instead promoted school choice for all. This decision prompted the resignation of U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell, who emphatically opposed school choice. Bell’s successor, however, William J. Bennett, enthusiastically embraced the movement (Ravitch, 2010). Despite the controversy

surrounding school choice, given Reagan's support, the movement found its way into state and local think tanks devoted to free-market principles and armed with a will to battle for Friedman's ideals (Ravitch, 2010).

By 1990, the bipartisan belief was that government-run schools were ineffective. As a monopoly, they had no incentive to improve (Ravitch, 2010). Early advocates theorized that an education market undergirded by free-market values and built on decentralization, competition, and choice would provide incentives for all schools to become more effective (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Lindle, 2014). Chubb and Moe (1990) claimed that "choice has the capacity to address the basic institutional problem plaguing America's schools" (p. 8), referring to it as a panacea. The two proposed that the elimination of political and bureaucratic control and a shifted reliance on market principles and parent choice would unleash the productive potential already present in schools and their personnel (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Clearly, school choice has been on the nation's agenda for decades. It has garnered bipartisan support and endorsement by every United States President from Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s to George H. W. Bush in the late 1980s, from Bill Clinton in the 1990s to George W. Bush in the 2000s, and from Barack Obama to Donald J. Trump in the 2010s (Knaak & Knaak, 2013; Ravitch, 2010). However, despite having an extensive list of supporters, school choice has faced harsh criticism as well.

Fife (2016) spoke of the threat school choice poses to a long-standing American institution—common schools for all as proposed by 19<sup>th</sup> century education reformer Horace Mann. Mann and his colleagues touted nonsectarian common schools (known as TPSs today) as the single most critical tool for building equality and for producing



responsible, productive citizens (Fife, 2016). The notion of school choice, however, according to Fife, runs counter to Mann's ideals and is based on dubious perceptions of market principles as they pertain to the public good of K-12 education. Ever since the 1983 A Nation at Risk report was made public, he claimed, negative commentary about public education has been consistent (Fife, 2016). Nevertheless, while choice advocates boast the benefits of applying free-market principles to public education as a remedy for the shortcomings of our nation's schools, he argued that choice emphasizes inequalities and benefits the private sector above all (Fife, 2016).

Historian of education Diane Ravitch (2010) is also an outspoken opponent of school choice. In her book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*, Ravitch made very pressing accusations that school choice seeks to destroy public education on unfounded claims that TPSs are inferior to choice schools. She believed that the aims of privatizers are misguided. According to Ravitch, parent obligation should be to ensure that all children within their communities are educated, rather than consider themselves individual consumers. Further, she boldly labeled the school choice movement as a stealthily advanced "undemocratic agenda, cloaked in deceptive rhetoric, that the public is not aware of and does not understand" (Ravitch, 2010, p. xviii).

Undoubtedly, America's relationship with school choice is dichotomous, with each side building a valid argument for or against it. In keeping with the economic foundation of school choice, in his book *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, economist Albert O. Hirschman (1970) hypothesized that while loyalty to an organization can delay a consumer's exit, it will not do so indefinitely in the absence of improvements.

Eventually, a loyalist exits when they feel the organization's decline is irreversible (Reynolds, 2016). Clearly, the public trust in public education continues to erode (Lindle, 2014). Research suggests that customers exit an organization, such as a TPS, when they are no longer satisfied with the services offered. As a result, they seek alternatives (Reynolds, 2016)—hence the demand for alternatives. Given the undeniable exodus of students from TPSs and the growing enrollments found at schools of choice around the nation and within District ABC in particular, the phenomenon is worthy of examination.

I merged two conceptual frameworks to guide the study and the review of literature in particular. Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration served as the lens for understanding why parents choose to leave a TPS, whereas RCT served as the lens for understanding how parents engage in the choice process. Lee theorized that migration includes an origin and destination (the TPS and the school of choice), each of which possesses characteristics that are either negative (push) or positive (pull) factors that contribute to the consumers' (parents') decision-making process (Faridi, 2018). Rational Choice theorists Friedman and Hechter (1988) believed that consumers (the parents) rationalize their choices based on a predetermined hierarchy of preferences (the best schools of choice).

The Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice (Figure 3) was created to merge the essential tenets of each theory and served as the framework for guiding and understanding this review of literature. The literature included in this chapter was carefully selected for its relevancy pertaining to the three forms of school choice involved in this study (homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling). I specifically selected to review those studies built on similar frameworks, specifically those grounded

in market theories. The selected literature includes both historic, landmark research, as well as present-day studies.

## **Homeschooling**

Ubiquitous in colonial times, an anomaly a few years ago, and today a nationwide movement (Dwyer & Peters, 2019), homeschooling exists nowhere else in the world on the scale that it does in the United States (Bartholet, 2019). While several definitions exist in the literature, for the purposes of this study, homeschooling was defined as an educational alternative to TPSs in which parents or guardians accept sole responsibility for their child's/children's education (Kortner, 1994, as cited in Wagner, 2008).

Arguably, no other form of school choice is as polemic as homeschooling. To understand the controversy, one must know its history and evolution in America.

### ***The History of Homeschooling in America***

Historically in America, homeschooling was a necessity. From the moment European settlers arrived, homeschooling served to educate children on the fundamentals of reading and writing while also providing religious training (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). As very few public schools were available, even as early as the American Frontier, many of America's Founding Fathers were home educated. Home education continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although the movement at the time was not equated to repudiating the state's authority and expertise in education (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Instead, the state was indifferent in regulating schooling, given that children in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were expected to contribute to their families' economic well-being by working in the fields (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

However, over time, laws mandating the construction and staffing of schools were

enacted; New Haven, Connecticut being among the first in 1642 (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). In 1647, the Old Deluder Satan Act was written to require towns of 50 or more to provide a school, with the objective being to increase the children's Biblical knowledge (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Although unrecognized as such at the time, these two moves represented small steps toward compulsory education in America (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

The state's interest in gaining control over education in America grew in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as immigration and industrialization were perceived as threats to American ideals (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Public education became viewed as a convenient means of assimilating immigrant children into American society (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Nineteenth century education reformer Horace Mann thought schools could serve as fortification against those perceived threats; therefore, he pushed for the establishment of common schools for all, insisting that everyone had a right to an equal education. His efforts, however, stressed the rights of children, not the rights of parents (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). It is the rights of parents that continue to fuel the debate.

In the decades following the Civil War, Mann's common school was widely advocated and expanded (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). The state of Massachusetts became the first in the nation to establish compulsory education laws in 1837. Those laws promoted education and reduced child labor. Within the next 40 years, 12 other states followed suit (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Although widely accepted, compulsory attendance did not go unchallenged. After centuries of home education, parents believed their rights within their own homes were being revoked. Therefore, some parents defied authority and continued to educate their children in the home and at church schools (Wagner, 2008). The notion of resisting state authority was born by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Dwyer &

Peters, 2019).

According to Dwyer and Peters (2019), early opponent of common schools and compulsory attendance lawyer and publisher Zachariah Montgomery claimed in 1886 that the common school system had negated parental authority, severed family ties, and nearly obliterated the human conscience. This claim, for many homeschooling advocates of today, served as the touchstone for the movement (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

Nevertheless, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as legislation in favor of common schools and compulsory attendance advanced, parental authority over their children's education diminished. Dwyer and Peters (2019) summarized the shift in power and stated, "Home and school, once indistinguishable, became separated" (p. 22).

### ***The Modern Era of Homeschooling in America***

While homeschooling as a necessity can be traced back to European settlement, many claim the modern era of homeschooling as we know it, like most forms of school choice, has been growing and evolving in America for only the past 40 years (Bartholet, 2019; Mason, 2020; Ray, 2020b). Harvard Law professor and homeschooling opponent Bartholet (2019) called it "a relatively recent phenomenon" (p. 8).

Former public school teacher, principal, superintendent, and university president Dr. Raymond Moore is credited by many families as the "grandfather of homeschooling" (Mason, 2020). He found in his 1960s study of early childhood education that subjecting young children to institutionalized learning, meaning what occurs in TPSs, hindered intellectual development. The study attracted widespread notice and seemingly sparked the homeschooling movement that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, albeit still viewed as subversive at the time (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Dr. Moore's fight against compulsory

education in California in 1972, followed by his continued research and expert witness for families in South Africa, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, set the legal precedent for those wanting the same freedom today (SDA Homeschool Families, n.d.).

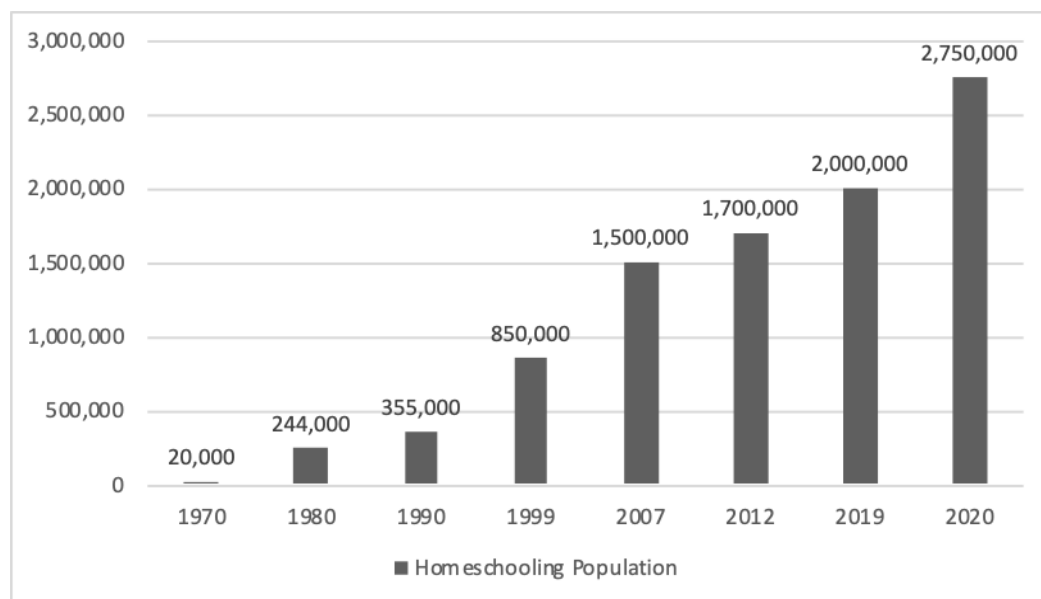
Dr. Moore aggressively claimed in a 1980 interview that “if you will look at the statistics today of learning and failure and delinquency, you can’t possibly say that our [American] schools are doing a great job” (Kan, 2015, 10:40). He came to believe through careful research that the highest type of learning was by parental example (Bartholet, 2019; Kan, 2015). Following that notable 1980 interview, Dr. Moore gained countless followers, including lawyers and homeschooling parents Mike Smith and Mike Farri. The two founded the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) in 1983, the same year *A Nation at Risk* was published.

Although the 1983 report was meant to be a clarion call rather than a justification for the abandonment of public schools, *A Nation at Risk* was catalytic for homeschoolers arguing that their children could learn better at home (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). As a result, in 1985, seven states enacted measures to facilitate homeschooling. In 1988, five other states followed (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). With such a congenial environment, homeschooling boomed in the 1980s and 1990s. An estimated 20,000 students were homeschooled in the 1970s; however, the USDE estimated that number grew to 244,000 in the 1980s and to 355,000 by 1990 (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

The homeschooling movement once again gained momentum in the 2000s. Dwyer and Peters (2019) claimed that no alternative to TPSs has grown at a greater rate in recent times. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimated that

roughly 850,000 students were homeschooled in the United States in 1999. In 2007, they reported a 74% increase, with a total 1.5 million students. Five years later, in 2012, they estimated that number grew another 20% to 1.7 million, which was comparable to the number of students found in both charter and Catholic schools at the time (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). In 2019, the number rose again to an estimated two million, totaling 4% of all school-age children in the United States (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

Recent evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 sparked unprecedented growth in the movement across the nation between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years (Ray, 2020c). Brian D. Ray, Ph.D. of the National Home Education Research Institute announced that given the state governors' restrictive responses to the crisis, the TPSs' responses, and families' experiences with crisis institutional schooling, experts predicted a conservative estimated 10% growth, or roughly 2.75 million total homeschooled students in the United States during the 2020-2021 school year (Ray, 2020c). That estimate was yet to be confirmed at the time of this study. Figure 4 illustrates the substantial 50-year growth in homeschooling in the United States.

**Figure 4***A 50-Year Growth in Homeschooling in the United States*

*Note.* Based on data presented in Ray (2020c) and Dwyer and Peters (2019).

Arguably, in part, the growth of the movement could be attributed to the continued success homeschooling advocates have had in securing advantageous judicial decisions (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). The HSLDA, which has received the utmost praise and equal opposition for its leadership in the modern homeschooling movement, is a Christian nonprofit organization that grew at the same phenomenal pace as the homeschooling movement itself. Its mission is to preserve and advance the constitutional rights and religious freedoms of parents through advocating in courtrooms, before government officials, and in the public arena by any means necessary (Bartholet, 2019).

The organization was instrumental in growing the movement through numerous acts of advocacy. They succeeded in having the No Child Left Behind Act amended to omit homeschooling children from testing requirements in the early 2000s at the national level and stifled a 2013 bill requiring mandatory testing and recordkeeping for



homeschoolers in South Carolina at the state level (Bartholet, 2019). The organization also pressed for change to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, obligating homeschooling parents to become certified as teachers. Victorious, they convinced lawmakers to change the language and thereby disavow federal control (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

After years of countless crusaders' efforts, in most states at the time of this study, there were few legal obstacles preventing parents from homeschooling in whatever terms they like (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). As of 2021, every state permitted homeschooling (Bartholet, 2019). While regulations varied, accountability measures in most states were arguably modest, leaving children to their parents' devices (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Some states required parents to submit a plan for instruction. Others required preapproval of a homeschooling curriculum. A few states required parents to maintain records of progress, and even fewer required parents to submit a portfolio as evidence of learning. Only 10 states required parents to have any education themselves, that requirement being just a high school diploma or the equivalent (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

In 2021, homeschooling appealed to diverse supporters, including virtually all races, religions, socioeconomic groups, and political viewpoints (Wagner, 2008). Within the bunch were conservatives who argued TPSs were too liberal, liberals who found TPSs too conservative, and others who were motivated by religious convictions (Wagner, 2008). A new generation of tech-savvy parents were also choosing to homeschool because they found traditional, less tech-dependent models of education to be outdated and ineffective in the modern world. This accessibility to educational technology facilitated the growth of the movement and has improved the connectivity and

networking of homeschooling families in recent years (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

### ***The Homeschooling Debate***

For the past century, an overwhelming majority of students in America were educated by public or private schools outside of the home by professionally trained educators (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Much like the debate the phenomenon has sparked, the number of parents who selected to homeschool rapidly expanded at the time of this study (O'Donnell, 2020). During the 2019-2020 school year, homeschooling students accounted for roughly 3-4% of all school-age children in the United States (Bartholet, 2019; O'Donnell, 2020). However, conservative estimates predicted that number grew by 10% during the 2020-2021 school year (Ray, 2020c). While parents and researchers across the country have cited a slew of reasons for their choices, opponents continue to protest their validity and even their morality.

Dr. Raymond Moore, a figure who was instrumental in launching the modern homeschooling movement, was among the first expert witnesses to argue its benefits as an alternative to TPSs. In a 1980 interview with evangelical Christian author, psychologist, and founder of the *Focus on the Family* radio broadcast Dr. James Dobson (Focus on the Family, 2020), Moore asserted that children are denied the chance to be independent thinkers in TPSs (Kan, 2015). He said that if parents “want thoughtful learning that is based upon some experience, a depth of experience and thoughtfulness, a child that can answer why and how” (Kan, 2015, 9:11), they should consider educating at home. The argument was based on findings that the level of peer dependency children develop from attending public school is cancerous to their ability to reason for themselves (Kan, 2015). He also claimed that children are subject to all kinds of negative

influences in TPSs (Kan, 2015). The spark of the homeschooling movement was further ignited following this monumental interview (Mason, 2020).

The interview also led to the founding of the HSLDA, a Christian nonprofit organization, in 1983 (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). The organization grew at a phenomenal pace during the 1980s and established leadership in the homeschooling advocacy world (Bartholet, 2019). The HSLDA's stated mission is to

preserve and advance the fundamental, God-given, constitutional right of parents and others legally responsible for their children to direct their education. In so doing, we rely on two fundamental freedoms—parental rights and religious freedom. We advocate for these freedoms in the courtrooms, before government officials, and in the public arena. Additionally, we assist other educational organizations in similar activities. (Bartholet, 2019, p. 44)

The HSLDA is composed of many attorneys working so parents may continue providing what they believe to be the best education for their children (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

They have been an instrumental legal asset over the past few decades.

Harvard Law professor Bartholet (2019) has remained an outspoken opponent of the work of the HSLDA and the homeschooling movement in general. She described homeschooling as a “threat” to children and society, claiming the movement denies children the right to a meaningful education. Concerned that homeschooling exists in what she called a “legal void,” Bartholet said that existing research pertaining to the positive or negative causal impacts of homeschooling is inconclusive, provided the inconsistent accountability measures across states. Bartholet said,

Homeschooling proponents make two primary arguments in defense of the current

regime, one factual and one legal. The factual claim is that homeschooled children do as well as or better than public school children, including on standard educational measures like college admission tests. (p. 5)

She went on to say that the absence of significant regulation, the inability of parents to teach content appropriately, the extreme ideological views many parents hold, the limited socialization provided, and the risks of abuse and neglect in homes provide a rational argument against homeschooling.

A 1997 survey of public school superintendents found that nearly 75% of them believed homeschooling was insufficiently regulated, and 90% believed homeschooling to be the worst form of education for students (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Despite clear opposition, the general public perception has turned in favor of homeschooling recently. In 1985, one survey showed that only 16% of respondents felt that homeschooling was good for the nation. By 2001, that number rose to 41%. Given the exponential growth in the total number of homeschooling families at the time of this study, one can conclude that the percentage would be higher still today (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

Just as the families who practice it, research has shown very diverse reasons for homeschooling (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Homeschooling historians Dwyer and Peters (2019) sorted families into two basic and unique groups: “pedagogues” and “ideologues.” Whereas pedagogues seek alternatives to TPSs due to their perceived shortcomings, ideologues’ predominant worry is that TPSs pose a threat to their faith and parental authority. Pedagogues, according to Wright (2014), believe they can instruct children better than TPSs, while ideologues rebel against what they perceive to be increasing secularism.

Dwyer and Peters (2019) found that an estimated 90% of homeschoolers in 1990 were believed to be conservative Christians driven more by *what* was taught in public schools than by *how*. Thirty years later, Bartholet (2019) made similar findings and claimed that conservative Christians composed the clear majority of homeschoolers in 2019. In her extensive research conducted with the purpose of building a case against the movement, Bartholet cited a list of parental reasons for homeschooling. The list included the child's fear of discrimination and bullying, the TPSs' inability to meet special needs, flaws in the traditional system, access to online learning, the opportunity to cooperate with other homeschooling families, TPSs' overemphasis on rote learning and testing, a rejection of mainstream culture, to avoid vaccinations, and families' wishes to promote racist ideologies (Bartholet, 2019).

Dwyer and Peters (2019) summarized the most common reasons for homeschooling as cited in their research also. They found after extensive research on the topic of parental choice and homeschooling that 80% of studies cited concerns about the TPS environment, 67% of studies cited a desire to provide moral instruction, 61% of studies showed an overall dissatisfaction with the academic instruction found in TPSs, and 51% of studies cited a desire to provide religious instruction. They also found that African Americans are turning to homeschooling in increasing numbers as of late for their own unique set of reasons. Those reasons include concerns regarding the Eurocentric curriculum of TPSs, racial bullying, and a culture of low expectations (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Other common reasons noted in their research were an ability to individualize curriculum, an opportunity to provide a real-world context for learning, flexibility in scheduling, and reduced time for transportation (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

Brian Ray, PhD of the HSLDA (2017) is credited with over 35 years of research pertaining to homeschooling. He systematically reviewed 45 homeschool studies on the appeal of homeschooling as school choice. Studies spanning 30 years revealed the following: (a) 11 of 14 studies showed homeschooled students performed significantly higher than their TPS peers; (b) 13 of 15 studies showed clear positive social and emotional outcomes compared to TPSs; (c) 11 of 16 studies showed success in adulthood and college after homeschooling, and (d) 35 of 45 revealed significantly positive findings related to homeschooling in general (Ray, 2017).

Wagner (2008) conducted a qualitative analysis of parenting attitudes regarding homeschooling versus traditional public schooling. The study included 28 parents who selected to homeschool their first- through fifth-grade children in rural Wisconsin. Through qualitative means, including questionnaires and interviews, she discovered two emerging themes. First, Wagner found that the decision to homeschool was based on personal familial values and morals and the ability to provide positive influences on their children. Second, Wagner found that parents were concerned about their children's exposure to the negative influences found in TPSs. Overall, her study revealed that parents wanted their children to experience their own positive morals rather than the negative influences of society, as society, in general, is on a decline in their eyes (Wagner, 2008).

Walters (2015) also examined parental motivation for selecting homeschooling. A total of 228 parents with at least 1 year or more of homeschooling experience participated, most of whom resided in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Kentucky. Walters found through qualitative means in the form of a questionnaire that the parents'

top-ranking reasons for homeschooling were (a) to provide religious and moral instruction, (b) to instill similar values in their children, (c) due to concerns with the environment of TPSs, and (d) due to overall dissatisfaction with TPS instruction (Walters, 2015).

Wright (2014) took an alternate approach to homeschooling research and selected to investigate why parents who previously chose homeschooling later decided to enroll their children in TPSs. Wright found that this population is often underrepresented in the literature. Wright's basic qualitative study included five parents and five administrators living in the Intermountain West United States. The study was designed to identify how homeschooling failed to meet the needs of families. Willing parents and administrators participated in a brief survey followed by interviews. The study cited common advantages found in her review of the homeschooling literature, including flexible scheduling, personalized instruction, an alignment to familial values and religious beliefs, and strengthened family bonds (Wright, 2014). Participants shared that they initially began homeschooling for varied reasons, including low-quality neighborhood schools, an objection to TPS curriculum, and the TPS's inability to meet special needs.

Wright (2014) discovered that only one of the five families expressed dissatisfaction with homeschooling and that dissatisfaction was due to personal financial concerns. However, others returned to TPSs after moving to what they considered to be better school districts. "Better" schools and special programming opportunities unafforded through homeschooling drew these families to default to TPSs (i.e., Advanced Placement courses, athletic programs, and arts programs). Interestingly, Wright also found that all five administrators who selected to participate in the study felt that

homeschooling is generally a failure. They claimed that in their experiences, homeschooling students returning to their TPSs lacked social skills, had obvious gaps in their learning, and were not accustomed to the diversity of their peers (Wright, 2014).

Despite the clear reasoning families have, as identified in the literature, opponents continue to argue that homeschooling is a threat to both the children involved and society in general (Bartholet, 2019). Opponents often cite the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and invoke the Civil Rights Act in their arguments against it (Ray, 2020b), claiming that homeschooling parents wish to isolate their children from the ideas and values central to American democracy while denying them the right to a meaningful education (Bartholet, 2019). Bartholet (2019) provided what she considered to be scholarly opposition in stating that “the absence of any significant regulation, the inability of most homeschooling parents to teach the variety of courses appropriately, the extreme ideological views many hold, the limited socialization most provide, and the risks of abuse and neglect” (p. 46) are sound reasons for arguing against homeschooling as an alternative to TPSs.

Specific themes emerged from this review of literature—one rooted in history and the other two most associated with the modern debate. First, I concluded, based on previous research, that parental motivation for homeschooling is likely connected to religion. Even in colonial times, when homeschooling was a necessity, it served dual purposes: (a) to educate children on the fundamentals of reading and writing and (b) to provide religious training (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Still, at the time of this study, conservative Christians composed the clear majority of homeschoolers and indicated that a desire to provide religious training at home was a top motivator for their choice (Bartholet, 2019; Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Wagner, 2008; Walters, 2015). This study



investigated a potential correlation between a desire to provide religious training and parental motivation for homeschooling in a specific district in South Carolina.

Second, as part of the modern debate, I concluded, based on previous research, that parental motivation for homeschooling was likely connected to dissatisfaction with or fear of the perceived negative influences of TPSs that ran counter to specific familial morals and values. With the early works of Dr. Raymond Moore warning of the negative impacts of institutionalized learning in the 1960s, *A Nation at Risk* issuing a clarion call for change in 1983, and modern legislation clearly paving the way for choice (Bartholet, 2019; Dwyer & Peters, 2019), homeschooling provides an alternative for those families wishing to dodge any number of perceived threats to specific familial morals and values (i.e., an overall decline in mainstream culture; Bartholet, 2019; Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Wagner, 2008). Therefore, this study examined the relationship between the push and pull factors of TPSs and homeschooling identified by parents in District ABC.

Third, although not prevalent in the literature prior to March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented another notable motivation for parental choice to homeschool as indicated in other sources. Dwyer and Peters (2019), prior to the pandemic, found that a small percentage of parents found homeschooling appealing because it granted them the ability to protect their children from the sicknesses and diseases that tend to spread in schools. Ray (2020c) shared that while homeschooling has been growing for decades, evidence suggests that perhaps the biggest growth occurred during the 2020-2021 school year. For many students, parents, and teachers, government officials' responses to COVID-19, including restrictive lockdowns to schools, were stressful and unhappy, perhaps causing millions to realize they no longer needed TPSs, according to Ray

(2020c).

In mid-May 2020, a nationwide poll found that 41% of American families were more likely to consider homeschooling or virtual schooling as education alternatives when lockdowns ended (Ray, 2020c). Another national survey released by EdChoice (2020) revealed new insights regarding the effects of COVID-19 in relation to homeschooling. For one, 43% of parents not homeschooling prior to the pandemic were more in favor than before. Also, 53% of Black parents had a more favorable opinion of homeschooling as a result of the pandemic. Further, minorities, specifically Black and Hispanic parents, were more likely than White parents to consider homeschooling during the 2020-2021 school year. Finally, 23% of those parents not homeschooling before indicated that they were “very likely” to do so, and another 35% were “somewhat likely” to do so following the pandemic (Ray, 2020c).

Ray’s (2020c) educated estimate indicated a 10% increase in homeschooling in America between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, or a total of 2.75 million students, as a direct effect of COVID-19. I felt that while this estimate was yet to be confirmed as fact, given Dwyer and Peters’s (2019) previous findings, the historic and continual upward trend in homeschooling, and the apparent connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and seemingly instantaneous appeal of the movement, the potential correlation was worth examining in District ABC.

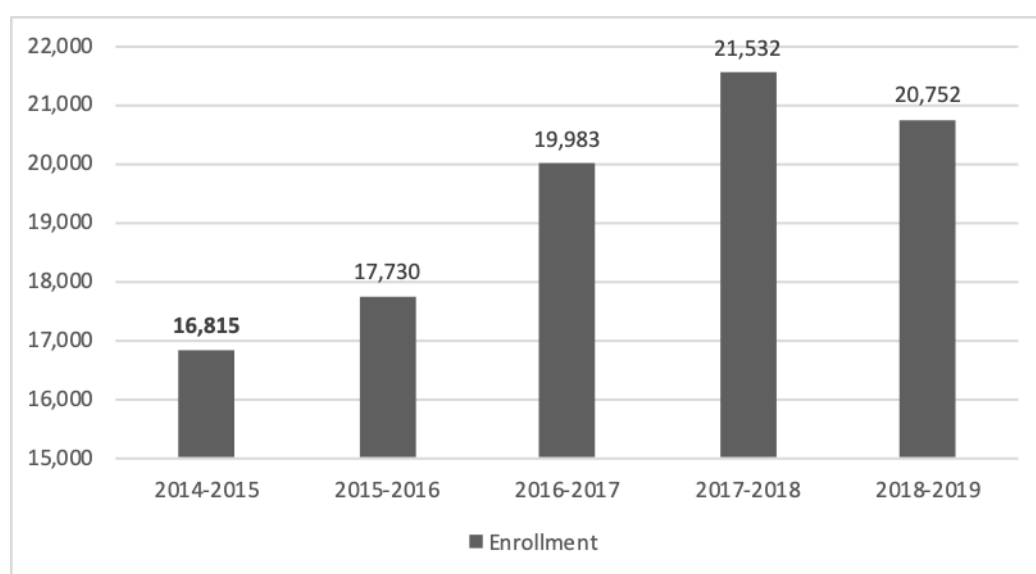
### ***Homeschooling in South Carolina***

Homeschooling in South Carolina has flourished much like it has across the United States. By 1988, South Carolina, along with 11 other states, had enacted measures to facilitate homeschooling (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). In 2017, South Carolina Governor

Henry McMaster joined 28 other governors and more than 700 city and county leaders across the nation to proclaim January 22-28 as School Choice Week (Business Wire, 2017). With a governor clearly in favor of school choice, homeschooling being one of those promoted choices, the movement saw steady growth between the 2014-2015 and 2018-2019 school years. Figure 5 illustrates this steady growth.

**Figure 5**

*The Growth of Homeschooling in South Carolina: 2014-2019*



*Note.* Based on data presented in Andrysczyk (2020), director of the SC TOP Homeschool Association.

From the 2014-2015 school year to the 2018-2019 school year, homeschooling enrollment in South Carolina increased by roughly 4,000 students, or approximately 8%. Total enrollment slightly declined between the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years; however, like elsewhere around the nation, while numbers were yet to be confirmed, evidence suggested that homeschooling enrollment in South Carolina grew exponentially following the effects of COVID-19 (Neaves, 2020). The pandemic caused an abrupt and

near-total shutdown of South Carolina schools in March 2020 through the end of the 2019-2020 school year, forcing an upheaval of all face-to-face schooling and affecting nearly 800,000 students across the state (Education Week, 2020).

According to parent interviews, South Carolina families realized they had to approach the 2020-2021 school year differently. Parents who never considered the option reportedly joined the homeschooling community thanks to COVID-19, according to Neaves (2020). South Carolina homeschool associations, such as SCAIHS, SC TOP Homeschool Association, and The South Carolina Homeschool Accountability Association each experienced an undeniable uptick in membership and hoped the 2020-2021 school marked a turning point for the movement (Neaves, 2020).

While most families choose TPSs, under South Carolina law, parents may select for their own children to learn at home through home-based instruction, online classes, and various other settings, as long as those choices are approved by a district board of trustees in accordance with those standards for homeschooling outlined in South Carolina law (Attendance of Pupils, 1962; MySCEducation, 2020). As of 2020, there were three legal options for homeschooling enrollment in South Carolina, as outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1***Homeschooling Options in South Carolina*

	Option 1: Home schooling programs	Option 2: Alternative home schooling	Option 3: Associations for home schools
Parent qualifications	High school diploma/ equivalent or has earned a baccalaureate degree	High school diploma/ equivalent	High school diploma/ equivalent
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 4.5 hours daily</li> <li>• At least 180 days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 180 days</li> <li>• Conducted under the auspices of the SCAIHS</li> <li>• Must comply with the SCAIHS</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	180 days
Curriculum requirements	Includes reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, composition, and literature in Grades 7-12	Includes reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, composition, and literature in Grades 7-12	Includes reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, composition, and literature in Grades 7-12
Evidence/ accountability	Parent must present: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written records of subjects taught</li> <li>• A portfolio of student's academic work</li> <li>• A record of evaluations of student progress</li> <li>• Standardized testing</li> <li>• Parent must agree in writing to hold district harmless for educational deficiencies should they exist following home instruction</li> </ul>	In order to become exempt from further requirements, parents must present bona fide membership to the SCAIHS	Parents must present: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Records indicating subjects taught and activities in which parent/student engage</li> <li>• Portfolio showing student work samples</li> <li>• Semiannual progress report including attendance and academic progress in the required subjects</li> </ul>

*Note.* As cited in South Carolina Department of Education (2020), Chapter 65:

Attendance of Pupils (1962), Article 1, Compulsory Attendance.

In compliance with South Carolina law at the time of this study, families had three options. Option 1, which was arguably the most stringent, required district approval

of the curriculum, required students to participate in standardized testing, and required parents to present a portfolio of student work. Option 2, which involved the SCAIHS, required a great deal of accountability to the organization; however, in return, they provided a great deal of support. In Option 3, parents were held accountable to the requirements of their selected association for home schools. However, each complied with South Carolina law (South Carolina Home Educators Association, n.d.). In all three options, the parent or legal guardian must have been the primary instructor and must have had a minimum of a General Education Diploma. Also, all three options required 180 days of instruction per school year as well as core content instruction (South Carolina Home Educators Association, n.d.). Clearly, given the steady increase in homeschooling enrollment, the anticipated enrollment spike due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the governor's advocacy for the movement and school choice in general, parental motivation for selecting homeschooling as an alternative to TPSs was worth examining in South Carolina and in District ABC in particular.

### **Faith-Based Schooling**

Religious, faith-based schools and TPSs have coexisted in the United States for hundreds of years (Hall, 2009). As one of the fastest-growing segments in American education at the time of this study, they offered families a departure from TPSs (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). While several definitions exist in the literature, for the purposes of this study, faith-based schooling is an alternative to TPSs in which students are educated at a private organization that does not receive state or local funding but rather charges tuition and has a religious mission statement (MySCEducation, 2020). It is worth noting that while faith-based schools are considered to be private, as explained by Hall (2009), a

private school,

by its very nature...is directly involved in the “business”—and that is the most accurate term—of attracting potential “customers” while, as a Christian (faith-based) school, the institution seeks to attract ‘believers’ who are particularly interested in a school built around common religious values. (p. 8)

This study included private, faith-based schools as one of three foci. Hall said,

Two movements can be linked together when seeking to understand the current intersection between school choice and private, religious education – the movement toward preserving communal values as a means to maintain and protect specific ideology and the movement toward privatization as a means for social reform. (p. 5)

Like all forms of school choice, faith-based schools have drawn and continue to draw staunch advocacy and opposition, with opposition often tied to the First Amendment.

### ***The History of Faith-Based Schooling in America***

Private and faith-based schools have existed in the United States from the earliest of times (Schultz, 2009). It is believed that the first faith-based schools can be traced back to the Catholic missionaries of Florida and Louisiana in the 1600s and predate compulsory education in Massachusetts (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). During the colonial and Revolutionary years, churches—be they Lutheran, Jewish, Puritan, or Quaker—served as the administrative centers for educational undertakings during the colonial era in America. They operated the schools and were financed through either charity or tuition. Such funding made it possible for all children to attend, no matter their socioeconomic status.

During the same period, missionaries set up schools on the east coast and volunteered to teach the less fortunate for a small fee. The curriculum at these “church schools” was a mixture of academic and religious teachings (i.e., prayers, Bible reading, and moral instruction; Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). The church schools expanded even more quickly during the Revolutionary War than during the colonial period, as states began to use church schools as a means of fulfilling new compulsory attendance laws (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Families at this time chose from a variety of autonomous schools. While schooling was widely available, the line between public and private remained blurred (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). The array of choices began to disappear, however, following the introduction of Horace Mann’s common schools, otherwise known as TPSs (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012).

Immigration and industrialization compelled 19<sup>th</sup> century education reformer Horace Mann to push for common schools for all in an effort to preserve an American identity (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Therefore, private schools, especially those that were faith-based, were considered divisive and un-American. Horace Mann’s common schools, although touted as nonsectarian, remained Protestant in nature (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Ironically, Horace Mann, who championed a common school system for all, did not send his own children to the schools he fought to establish (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

Following the Civil War, faith-based schools continued to be viewed as un-American (Education Encyclopedia, 2020), and the concept of common schools gained popularity and dominated education by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These common schools were Protestant in nature, requiring readings of the King James Bible



and the recitation of hymns in class (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). While most Americans were content with this practice, Catholics were not. With tensions between Protestants and Catholics predating colonial times and ultimately leading, at least in part, to the foundation of American colonies, anti-Catholic sentiment and harsh allegations were prevalent for quite some time (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). In response, Catholics concluded it would be best to create their own schools, ideally through public funding (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012).

Anti-Catholic sentiment found its way into politics in 1875 through U.S. Representative James Blaine of Maine. Blaine proposed an amendment that would prevent the public funding of sectarian (namely Catholic) institutions. While he failed at the federal level, his name has since been applied to state constitutional provisions. His efforts were also manifested in provisions mandating that territories seeking to become new states include plans for establishing nonsectarian public schools and for reserving federal funds to support them (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). While these laws were written to promote nonsectarianism, it was understood that TPSs could continue to be Protestant in nature, and Catholic schools could not be supported by public resources. Even still today, 37 states contain “Blaine Amendments” prohibiting the funding of religious schools.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Catholics dispatched their children to schools where their beliefs would be supported, rather than undermined (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Therefore, despite the resistance, whereas before the Civil War, there were an estimated 200 operational Catholic schools in the United States. That number increased to more than 1,300 within a decade and to 5,000 by the turn of the century (Schultz, 2009). However,

government interest in education increased in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, casting doubt on the ability of private schools to properly foster citizenship. Laws were passed and later repealed in Wisconsin and Illinois in attempts to control and/or eliminate private schools in those states. (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). As a result of negative perceptions and government support of TPSs, the nation saw a decline in faith-based school enrollment.

In 1879, 73% of school-age children were enrolled in private secondary schools. In 1889, just 10 years later, that percentage dropped to 31%. Another 10 years later, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only 7% of secondary students were enrolled in private, faith-based schools in the United States (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

Faith-based education has a 400-year history in the United States. Until much later in our nation's history, these schools represented the only alternative to TPSs available to families (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). However, the historic tension between the U.S. government and faith-based schooling advocates has reaped contemporary consequences for private school choice programs, as anti-Catholic sentiment has now evolved into arguably antireligious undertones (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012).

### ***The Modern Era of Faith-Based Schooling in America***

Faith-based schools continued to face challenges into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather than adhering to a nonsectarian purpose, as intended, TPSs at the turn of the century continued to reflect the public's favor of Protestant ideals. Opponents of faith-based education continued to protest their growth as an alternative to TPSs (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). An anti-Catholic sentiment continued to endure, the effects of which are still evident in choice policies today. World War I (1914-1918) further fueled all things "American" and caused the nation to look toward its schools as a means of instilling patriotism in its

youth. Those schools connected to anything foreign, including Catholic schools, were viewed as suspicious to the general public and became subject to increased government regulation (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

Multiple Supreme Court decisions challenged parents' rights in choosing faith-based education for their children. The first case of this nature, *Meyer v. Nebraska* in 1923, involved a statute forbidding public and private school teachers from instructing students in foreign languages prior to ninth grade (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Robert Meyer, a faith-based teacher, disregarded this law and continued teaching German to his students. The court ruled in favor of Meyer, citing conflict with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and infringements on the rights of parents to control the education of their own children (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012).

The second case, perhaps even more crucial to faith-based choice, occurred in Oregon in 1925. *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* occurred in response to a statute requiring 8- to 16-year-olds to attend TPSs in order to produce strong citizens. Private, faith-based schools were still viewed as divisive in nature at the time, and the statute was arguably designed to eliminate them (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). However, the court declared that parents had the right to send their children to whichever school they deemed best (Education Encyclopedia, 2020; Lockwood, 2014). The court stated of the statute,

We (the Court) think it entirely plain that the Act of 1922 unreasonably interferes with the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control...The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations. (Carpenter & Kafer,

2012, p. 339)

Faith-based schools experienced substantial growth once again in the mid-1900s during and following WWII. Whereas these schools enrolled roughly 9% of all school-age children in America in 1940, that number increased to 12% in 1950 and to almost 14% by 1960 (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). The number of Catholic schools alone had grown to 11,000 schools and 3.1 million students in 1950 (Lockwood, 2014). During that time period, private schools experienced an onslaught of legal struggles, mainly focused on those schools with religious, faith-based missions. The Supreme Court determined that government aid, minus the provisions of student transportation and textbooks, violated the separation of church and state as outlined in the First Amendment. The court based its decisions on three principles: (a) the legislation must have a secular purpose, (b) the effect of the legislation must maintain religious neutrality, and (c) the legislation could not foster “excessive entanglement” (Education Encyclopedia, 2020, para. 15) between church and state.

During this debate regarding government aid, Catholic schools experienced an all-time enrollment high, with 5.6 million students in 1965 and an 87% claim on the private school sector (Education Encyclopedia, 2020; Lockwood, 2014). However, Catholic enrollment would plummet in the years to come. From enrolling 12% of the school-age population in 1965, Catholic schools enrolled only 5.4% in 1990. The total number of Catholic schools also declined from an estimated 13,000 in 1965 to approximately 9,000 in 1990 (Schultz, 2009).

In the early 1960s, landmark court rulings held that Christian-oriented activities sponsored by schools violated the First Amendment’s establishment clause. This sparked

outrage among conservative Protestant parents, many of whom had historically been supportive of TPSs. Their anger was fueled by the perception that evolutionary teachings and sex education supplanted these moral and religious activities deemed unconstitutional (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). In summary, these parents believed that TPSs were becoming, if not already, anti-Christian rather than just anti-Catholic.

American theologian Reverend Rousas J. Rushdooney proposed an alternative: a Christian curriculum grounded in biblical fundamentals. His principles sparked the growth of nonsecular schools for parents who were appalled by the perceived moral decline of public education (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Therefore, whereas the Roman Catholics had a long-established system of schools already, conservative Christians got a much later start. Often coined as “day schools,” the number of non-Catholic, faith-based schools grew exponentially between 1965 and 1975, with an estimated 200% enrollment increase and nearly a half million students. As these Christian day schools continued to flourish, enrollment numbers essentially doubled by the turn of the century (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

A pivotal time for the nation’s TPSs, Christian day schools became known as the fastest-growing segment in American education (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). With other religions now part of the faith-based education market in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the segment continued to grow. It is estimated that 9,000 to 11,000 private schools educated roughly one million students between 1965 and 1980 (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

Minorities also began seeking private, faith-based educations for their children in increasing numbers. Between 1970 and 1987, the overall minority enrollment grew from

just 4% of the total private school population to 11.2%. One report estimated that nearly 25% of Catholic school students were minorities during the 1999-2000 school year (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Urban faith-based schools also saw rapidly increasing enrollment in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to one account, this significant departure of families represented the first widespread secession from TPSs since the establishment of Catholic schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, proving that government-funded education could be challenged (Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

NCES reported that between 1999 and 2017, the percentage of students enrolled in private schools fluctuated between 9.7% and 11.7% (NCES, 2016, 2019). Table 2 shows that fluctuation.

**Table 2**

*Total Private Enrollment as a Percentage of Total Enrollment in Public and Private Schools*

Year	Percent of total enrollment
1995	11.7
1997	11.4
1999	11.4
2001	11.7
2003	11.2
2005	11.0
2007	10.8
2009	10.1
2011	9.7
2013	9.8
2015	10.3
2017	10.2

*Note.* Adapted from Table 205.10 in NCES (2016).

NCES also reported that between 1999 and 2001, the number of private schools in the United States grew from an estimated 27,000 to more than 29,000, or an increase of

more than 2,000 schools in just 2 years (Hollenbeck, 2008). Interestingly, although the number of private schools increased, the popularity of Catholic schools has steadily declined since the 1970s. In 1990, Catholic schools accounted for 33.9% of all private schools in the United States. In 1999, non-Catholic schools accounted for 49% of all private schools, followed by 30% Catholic and 22% nonsectarian.

As a whole, private school students accounted for roughly 10% of all school-age students in the United States in 1999, totaling over five million in enrollment (NCES, 2016). Of the five million, 49% attended Catholic schools, 36% attended non-Catholic faith-based schools, and 16% attended nonsectarian private schools (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Approximately 77% of private school students were White, followed by 9% Black, and 8% Hispanic. Roughly half of all private schools in the United States in the year 1999 were in urban areas, 40% were in suburban areas, and 11% were in rural areas (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

By 2001, the number of Catholic schools decreased from 33.9% in 1990 to 28% of all private schools (Hollenbeck, 2008). In 1990, it is estimated that nearly 2.5 million students were enrolled in 8,700 Catholic schools. By 2015, that number decreased to 1.9 million students enrolled in 6,570 Catholic schools (Ravitch, 2010). NCES (2019) reported that although Catholic school enrollment has seen a declining trend, non-Catholic, faith-based school enrollment remained stable between 1999 and 2015, at roughly 2.3 million students.

Clearly, over the last 100 years, despite ongoing challenges and the popularity of TPSs in America, a healthy, private school market developed side by side with public education (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). The market includes Catholic, non-Catholic, and

nonsectarian schools. However, the focus of this study remained with those options available in District ABC, which were faith-based in nature and included both Catholic and non-Catholic, faith-based schools.

### ***The Faith-Based Schooling Debate***

By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, private schools were engulfed with controversies, including those related to vouchers, elitism, and privatization, among other topics (Education Encyclopedia, 2020); however, vouchers are arguably the most controversial issue in American education to date. A voucher is a government-issued credit for education with which parents may select any school of their choosing, including those faith-based schools that charge tuition. Although controversial, vouchers are not a new concept. Catholic leaders argued in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that parents were owed their fair share of taxes in support of choosing the best schools for their children (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

Economist Milton Friedman examined the voucher debate in the 1950s. He firmly believed that the government should be responsible for funding schooling but not for running the schools (Ravitch, 2010). Further, he believed that in order to maximize the freedom of families, the government should provide vouchers to subsidize the costs of attending the school of their choice—whether faith-based or for-profit—as long as the school met predetermined standards. According to Ravitch (2010), Friedman expected vouchers would stimulate competition among schools and thereby bring about improvement.

Also brewing was the debate as to whether or not Catholic schools should be eligible to receive federal aid. Whereas Catholic allies in Congress said “yes,” public



school organizations, such as the National Education Association replied with a resounding “no.” Whereas the National Education Association advocated for a separation of church and state, Catholics argued that denying benefits for which they were already taxed was religious discrimination (Ravitch, 2010). Republican President Ronald Reagan, directly influenced by Friedman, advocated for vouchers for low-income students in the 1980s (Ravitch, 2010).

Chubb and Moe (1990) stirred the debate once again in support of vouchers in the 1990s, asserting that the only way to improve TPSs was through a system of parent choice based on market principles (Education Encyclopedia, 2020; Ravitch, 2010). Voucher advocates, like Chubb and Moe, touted the benefits of competition between schools. Some predicted they could lead to the empowerment of low-income families and expand opportunities for minorities (Ravitch, 2010). Others maintained that vouchers were owed by distributive justice, and others argued that the de facto monopoly of schooling held by the U.S. government was harmful.

Vouchers were soundly rejected among the states for decades; however, the school choice movement was gaining ground. The first voucher programs were adopted in Wisconsin, followed by Ohio. The first voucher program in Wisconsin in 1990 was designed to permit low-income students to attend only non-religious schools. As limited as they were, they still drew notable opposition, including the state superintendent of education, teachers unions, and the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons.

Despite the efforts of these anti-voucher forces, pro-voucher efforts prevailed in the end (Ravitch, 2010). In 1998, the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld their legality and

began to allow faith-based schools to accept students by voucher. Following this monumental decision, the program allowing voucher students to attend faith-based schools rapidly expanded. In the years between 1998 and 2010, the program grew from 2,000 students to 20,000 students attending non-public schools, 80% of whom attended faith-based schools (Ravitch, 2010). Vouchers are especially appealing to those living in areas of poverty and where perhaps schools are considered to be failing (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Director of public policy and educational research at the National Catholic Educational Association Sister Dale McDonald noted in 2001 that the United States is among the few democracies that do not provide parents with their fair share of tax dollars to enable school choice (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

The voucher debate is ongoing, with critics finding insignificant or no gains in student achievement as promised, while supporters report significant gains. Each side criticizes the others' findings and methodologies, saying the results are biased and cannot be trusted (Ravitch, 2010). Opponents claim that vouchers have the power to destroy the public school system and violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Others argue that because vouchers do not cover the entire cost of tuition, the extremely poor are still excluded (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

It is worth noting that not all advocates of faith-based school choice are in support of vouchers. Some have expressed concern that vouchers make schools subject to government control, negating efforts to remain separate from imposed regulations (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Nevertheless, vouchers were a reality across the United States in 2020, with 29 voucher programs in 18 states, including Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North

Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico also maintain voucher programs (EdChoice, 2020). It is also worth noting that South Carolina, the state in which this study occurred, did not support school voucher programs; therefore, the impacts of vouchers were not explored as part of this study on school choice and parental motivation.

Faith-based schools are often accused of elitism as a result of those market effects associated with privatization. To some extent, these schools may be characterized by a double selection process in which the schools select their teachers, and the parents select the school (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Also, these schools operate on private funds acquired through tuition, donations, and other private financial support. In an education market, such as private school choice, parents are the consumers and are vested with power (Hollenbeck, 2008). Thus, arguably, this branch of the school choice market serves those few who can either already afford it or are fortunate enough to secure a voucher or sponsor (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012).

Some believe that the potential demise of Catholic schools in America has exacerbated a system where private education is reserved mainly for the wealthy (Wong, 2018). Wong (2018) reported that after dominating private education for decades, the National Catholic Educational Association claimed that more than 100 Catholic schools were consolidated or closed during the 2017-2018 school year. This truth is a source of concern not just for the Catholic community but also for those worried about the growing inequalities of the education system as a whole.

While the percentage of school-age children attending private schools in the United States has largely remained the same for many years, the demographic makeup

has not. Many believe that the loss of Catholic schools—that have historically sought low-income and minority enrollment—has resulted in a “creaming” effect. In other words, whereas Catholic schools once served a heterogeneous mixture of cultures, races, and income levels, most recently, although arguably unintentionally, Catholic schools serve mainly a select client base. As the number of Catholic schools declined, the proportion of middle class students enrolled also reportedly declined, leaving a disproportionate number of White and affluent students enrolled in this sector (Wong, 2018). Wong (2018) reported four potential reasons for the decline in the total number of Catholic schools in America, including (a) a drop in the number of clergy members willing to teach for low wages, (b) the church’s sex-abuse scandals, (c) an apparent decline in religiosity among Americans, and (d) a rise in the number of charter schools.

Another source of concern is the growing cost of tuition. During the 2010-2011 school year, private schools in the United States charged an average of \$11,000 in tuition (Wong, 2018). Tuition for those remaining Catholic schools also soared. In 1970, the average Catholic school tuition was \$873 per year. In 2010, the cost was \$6,000 on average. Wong (2018) stated, “As affluent families gravitate toward expensive private schools that are becoming less and less accessible to students in other income brackets, they could take with them political and social capital that public schools need” (p. 4). A study by James Mulligan, published in 1999, showed that the gap between rich and poor continued to grow at an alarming rate, putting faith-based education out of reach for those families with lower income or larger numbers of children (Schultz, 2009). The Public Agenda Survey of 1999 found that 55% of parents of children in TPSs would send their children to private schools if tuition were no concern (Hollenbeck, 2008).

Research has suggested that private school parents are more involved than TPS parents (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Hall (2009) found that when parents participate in the school choice market, whether it be for public or any other form of schools, they report significantly higher levels of satisfaction than they do for neighborhood TPSs in general. Lockwood (2014) found that as the decision makers, parents are the most influential actors within the educational system. Lockwood believed that the recognition of parental attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and the influences they wield are increasingly important in a growing education marketplace. Ultimately, parents are free to take their children where they see fit based on their personal values and ideologies (Lockwood, 2014). Therefore, it is no wonder that parent choice within the education market has remained a focus of academic research for several decades.

Hall (2009) said, “The marketplace of school choice is expanding, and educational researchers must increase their knowledge of the pressure points and choice behaviors of families if American education is to remain competitive in the global arena” (p. 125). Hall believed that discovering families’ reasons for exiting the public education system could benefit an understanding of how school choice leads to improvements. If parents are choosing for academic reasons, then choice could stimulate positive change. However, if parents are choosing for nonacademic reasons, it is unlikely to be a driving force toward positive change.

Hall (2009) examined parent choice of nondenominational Christian education. In a study built on RCT, much like this one, he assumed that “actors” (parents) filter through a hierarchy of predetermined preferences, calculate the potential costs and benefits, and weigh the associated constraints of that choice (Hall, 2009; Krull, 2016).

Wilson (2016) also believed that parents have stable, ordered preferences about the schools their children should attend.

Hall (2009) asserted that adequate information is an inherently critical variable in making even a minimally effective choice. Using survey data collected from parents, Hall found the top two reasons parents selected nondenominational Christian education were (a) a Christ-centered environment and (b) a strong academic reputation. Other reasons included a small average class size, a good teacher-to-student ratio, and a faculty who model the Christian faith. While Hall's findings support the conclusion that families choose faith-based education because they are drawn by a familiar set of values and beliefs, opponents argue that this form of privatization undermines democracy.

Opponents also argue that this type of parent choice is cleverly disguised as discrimination and persistent inequity (Hollenbeck, 2008). According to Lindle (2014), White families choose Whiter schools, and non-White families choose schools where they are more represented. Krull (2016) also found that school choice increases segregation because parents generally select those schools enrolling students similar in race, ethnicity, and economic status.

Lockwood (2014) studied factors influencing parental choice for enrollment in Catholic schools. Using data collected from electronic surveys distributed to four Catholic schools, he found the top identified reasons to be (a) academic quality, (b) a safe environment, and (c) a quality religious education. Other notable reasons included a disciplined and orderly learning environment and a strong sense of community. Over 88% of parents indicated that quality academic instruction was the most important factor, which interestingly is not necessarily associated with the faith (Lockwood, 2014). By

contrast, one of the first studies on parent choice of private education was conducted through a 1969 Gallup Poll asking 2,000 Catholic and Protestant parents why they chose a faith-based education over public education. Overall, 73% of Catholic parents and 93% of Protestant parents listed religious influence as the most important factor for their choice. At the time, academic influence was listed second, and strong discipline was listed third (Lockwood, 2014).

Data, such as that produced by Lockwood's (2014) study, lead some to believe that non-Catholic students are not attending Catholic schools because of the religious component but rather because they are fleeing TPSs. Hollenbeck (2008) researched factors affecting nonpublic choices identified by parents in Arkansas. The study employed a descriptive survey research design built on market and decision theories, each of which named the parents as consumers in the process. Participants were asked to rank eight possible reasons for choosing nonpublic schools from "unimportant" to "very important." The findings were similar to Lockwood's in that academics were listed as the most important factor. Other reasons cited by the participants included religious training, discipline, and safety. In summary, Hollenbeck's study showed that parents who place great value on high academic standards are not simply looking for an atmosphere that promotes religion but rather one that offers the "package deal"—quality academics in an atmosphere of faith.

Various studies contradict the claim of private school elitism, including *Inner-City Private Elementary Schools* conducted in 1982 and sponsored by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights (Cibulka et al., 1982). The study, which included a random sample of 64 schools in eight cities, showed strong support for these schools by

their patrons, despite residing in rundown facilities, being plagued with financial problems, and operating under Catholic auspices. The study also showed that the schools' minority students' achievement surpassed that of their TPS peers (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

Finally, while no systematic data are available yet, it seems that more American families are turning to private education following the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, reports across the nation showed increased interest among families and definite enrollment boosts. Again, this private, faith-based alternative is often difficult for lower-income families, causing many to worry that the increased interest and enrollment may fuel greater inequality (McCluskey, 2020). Time will tell, as those claims were yet to be determined at the time of this study.

There is no doubt that faith-based education in America has been and continues to be undergirded by parental choice. Although well-established since colonial times, that choice has not always been respected. Opponents have cited various concerns, despite strong advocacy. The recent increased interest in and expansion of the school choice marketplace, particularly faith-based education, has blurred the line between private and public education, much like it was during the colonial period when the mentality was *education of the public* rather than *public education* (Education Encyclopedia, 2020).

### ***Faith-Based Schooling in South Carolina***

One could argue that the early growth of private schools in South Carolina was attributed to the White segregationists of the 1950s and 1960s. Several White families chose private schools to evade desegregation, understanding that the private schools at the time could discriminate during the application process (Dobrasko, 2020). Only 16



private schools existed in South Carolina prior to 1956. Between 1963 and 1975, 200 more were created, many of which enrolled over 90% of the White children living in the area. Therefore, for some time, private schools in South Carolina, as well as in other areas of the South, were often referred to as “segregation academies” (Dobrasko, 2020, para. 3).

As of 2020, 439 private schools served almost 70,000 students in South Carolina (Benson, 2020; Private School Review, 2020). Roughly 76% of those 439 schools were religiously affiliated, most of which were associated with the Christian faith (Private School Review, 2020). Although reported tuitions in the state sometimes reached \$20,000 annually (Benson, 2020), the average private school tuition in South Carolina in 2020 was approximately \$6,000 for elementary schools, or \$5,000 less than the national average (Private School Review, 2020).

Private schools in South Carolina operate separately from the South Carolina Department of Education. However, according to South Carolina law, attendance at a private school satisfies compulsory attendance statutes, as long as that school is approved by the state board of education (USDE, 2016). However, with regard to private schools in South Carolina, no state policy exists pertaining to teacher certification, the length of the school year/day, or a required curriculum (USDE, 2016). The South Carolina Constitution also prohibits public funding for the benefit of any religious and/or private school (USDE, 2016). In July 2020, however, South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster designated \$32 million from the state’s federal COVID-19 relief funds for one-time vouchers to private schools. In October 2020, that motion was blocked by a lawsuit, sparking controversy on either side of the debate across the state (Benson, 2020).

Nevertheless, just as they did around the nation, in the fall of 2020, South Carolina parents turned to private schools in record numbers, conceivably in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Private school administrators from around the state claimed that parents were lured by the full-time in-person learning and the perceived stability of a traditional academic calendar (Benson, 2020). Both the South Carolina Independent School Association and the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools reported nearly 2% enrollment increases in the fall of 2020, a dramatic turnaround from predictions made the previous spring (Benson, 2020). Prior to COVID-19, private schools in South Carolina projected a \$34 million loss in tuition across the state (Benson, 2020).

After many public South Carolina school districts elected to continue operation either 100% virtually or through hybrid scheduling during the 2020-2021 school year, Brian Symmes, spokesman for Governor McMaster, said in October of 2020, “We expected (parents) to be frustrated with the lack of a choice, which is why the governor pushed for a full, five-days-a-week option in each district. It naturally follows that they’d look for alternative” (Benson, 2020, para. 19). Further, despite traditional marketing methods (i.e., radio stations, newspapers, etc.), private schools claimed that word of mouth was their best form of marketing. Simply put, as parents experienced positive change, they told their friends (Benson, 2020). While the growth of faith-based schools in South Carolina has not been as steady as other forms of school choice, given the recent effects of COVID-19 and the current 9% enrollment of school-age children in South Carolina (Benson, 2020), parent choice of faith-based schooling over traditional public schooling continues to be a phenomenon worth investigation.

## **Charter Schooling**

Charter schools are known to many as the “jewels of the school choice movement” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 138). They have risen to what is perhaps the apex of the modern school reform agenda (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Murphy and Shiffman (2002) believed that charter schools have awakened those who have historically remained neutral in the education reform debate. While a wealth of advocates confidently tout their promise as a “middle-of-the-road” policy, these schools are not immune to harsh opposition.

First emerging in the 1990s, charter schools, for the purposes of this study, are public and tuition-free, operating independently from local school districts. These schools are granted freedom from many state laws and district policies, but in return, they are strictly accountable for results outlined in a predetermined agreement called a charter (Knaak & Knaak, 2013; USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004). The charter schools of today adopt one of two formats—brick-and-mortar or virtual. Students enrolled at brick-and-mortar charter schools attend classes in face-to-face physical facilities. Students enrolled in virtual charter schools, however, attend classes online through electronic means (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006).

Virtual charter schools were the newest addition to the school choice marketplace at the time of this study. They are an alternative to TPSs in which students are educated through a curriculum offered through a virtual charter school program. These virtual schools, according to South Carolina Legislature, are tuition-free, public, nonreligious, and nonprofit schools operating under the same legislation as brick-and-mortar charter schools and by sponsorship of a public school district, the South Carolina Public Charter

School District, or a public or independent institution of higher learning (Charter Schools, 1996). Given their online format, these schools can enroll and instruct hundreds or thousands of students virtually with a relatively small number of teachers, thereby generating huge profits for charter companies—hence the debate (Ravitch, 2010).

### ***The History of Charter Schooling in America***

Americans in the 1980s agreed that educational reform was long overdue (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). As efforts to improve public education intensified early in the decade, the widespread feeling among reformers was that while seriously impaired, the nation's educational system could be restored through highly mechanistic and centralized means (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). By the late 1980s, however, reformers argued that continued repairs of a dated system would be counterproductive. Real change, they insisted, depended on decentralized power, most specifically through the empowerment of parents. Therefore, market influences found their way into reform designs, oftentimes jarring TPSs from complacency and providing alternatives to interested parties (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002).

While the magnet schools of the 1970s were arguably the first modern schools of choice, they were crafted with very little input from stakeholders, including parents (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Budde (1988), one of the first to propose education by charter, was among those who suggested that the answer to the problem lay in parent choice (if it became widespread). He first coined the term, “education by charter,” in a 1974 presentation calling for the restructuring of districts as a means of school improvement (Budde, 1988).

The idea of charter as a written agreement implies the notions of both franchise

and competition. According to Budde (1988), it can be inspired by a number of factors, including dissatisfaction with the current curriculum or teaching situation, excitement to try a new approach, and/or pressures to respond to the criticism of TPSs. Budde believed that when families actively choose an education program, they are more committed to it.

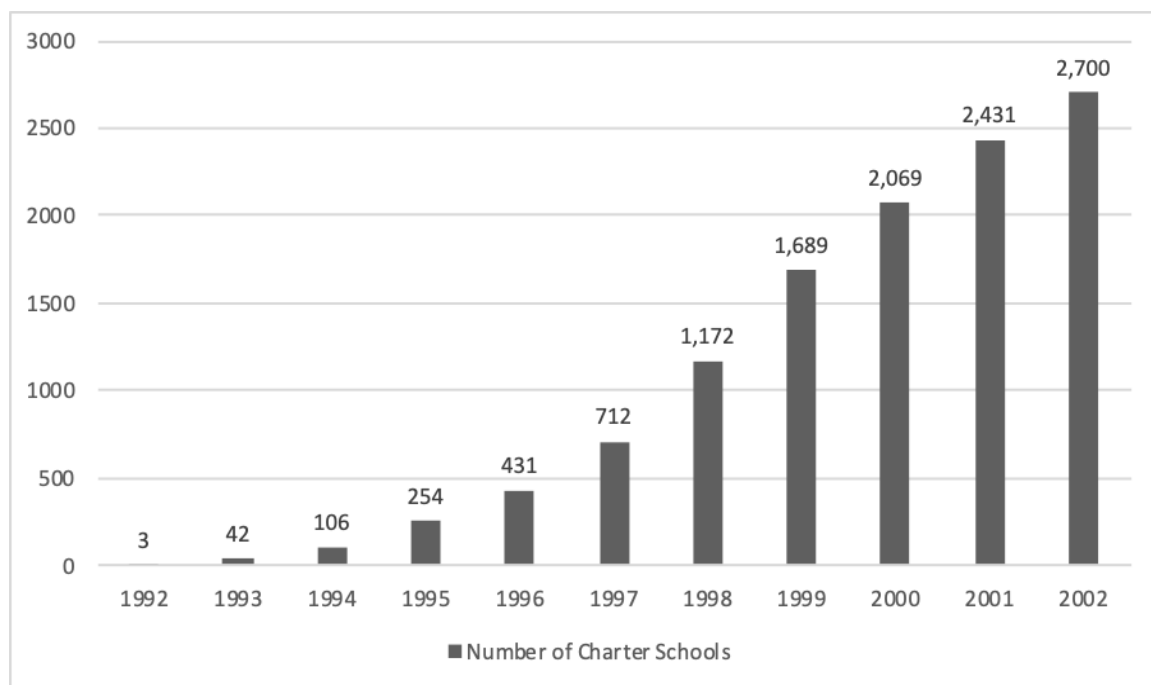
School choice advocates Chubb and Moe (1990) predicted the rise of the charter movement in their 1990 publication *Politics, Markets, & America's Schools* (Ravitch, 2010). They proposed a new system of public education that eliminated most political and bureaucratic control and instead relied on market principles and parental choice (Chubb & Moe, 1990). They believed that schools that are free from external control are more likely to be effective, and the competition encouraged by school choice provides an incentive for all schools to improve. Therefore, being among the first to promote the organization of charter schools, Chubb and Moe suggested that any group or organization that applied and met specific criteria set by each state would be chartered as a public school, granted the right to accept students, and eligible to receive public funding. Those specific criteria pertaining to accountability, for-profit management, and exemption from state law, as determined by each state, are not uniform across the nation. In fact, the term “charter school” holds different meanings across each state and oftentimes multiple meanings within a single state (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002).

In the United States in 1990, there were no charter schools (Peterson, 2006). However, Minnesota passed the first charter school law in the United States in 1991, and similar legislation had proliferated two thirds of the nation by the turn of the century (Knaak & Knaak, 2013; Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). The growth of charter schools in America was most dramatic following the initial passage of charter laws (Peterson,

2006). Figure 6 illustrates this exponential growth.

**Figure 6**

*The Growth of Charter Schools, 1992 to 2002*



*Note.* This chart was adapted from data presented in Peterson (2006).

From 1992 to 2002, the number of charter schools grew 900%. It is estimated that those 2,700 charter schools operating in 2002 served some 700,000 students (Peterson, 2006). Fifteen years after Budde's (1988) initial proposal, the USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement (2004) stated, "the promise charter schools hold for public school innovation and reform lies in an unprecedented combination of freedom and accountability" (p. 17). That same year, in 2004, nearly 3,000 operational charter schools were serving 750,000 students in the United States (USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004). By 2005, 3,000 charter schools served over one million students (Peterson, 2006).

California was the second state to pass a charter school law in 1992 (Peterson,

2006). In response, however, in 2002, California state legislation passed five anti-charter school bills. The most controversial of the five bills granted the state board of education the power to regulate “non-classroom,” or computer-based instruction. The bill was intended to force these “virtual” charter schools to fund staffing over technology. As a result, virtual charters are now required to document instructional minutes as a means of regulating the per-pupil funding they receive (Peterson, 2006).

Clearly, the charter school movement has been consistently characterized by expansion since its conception (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Peterson (2006) said,

The charter movement is now reaching a critical stage. Either it has reached a plateau that leaves it as a curiosity on the fringes of American public education, or it will continue to grow steadily, thereby decisively changing the shape of American education. (p. 9)

Charter schools are undoubtedly one of the most significant organizational changes in education over the past 30 years. As it gained traction in the 2000s, the charter school movement continued to draw strong resistance (Peterson, 2006).

### ***The Modern Era of Charter Schooling in America***

The idea of a charter as a “written agreement” dates back over 1,000 years and implied the notions of both franchise and competition even then. It provided a means for accountability to the grantor for a very specific set of results (Budde, 1988). The charter schools of today are born of a unique need or opportunity identified by community members, concerned parents, committed educators, and/or political and businesspeople (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002).

Echoing the ideology of 1980s reformers, charter schools are schools of choice

created to fit the needs of individual families—not bureaucrats. They mirror the trends evident in our nation’s larger political landscape, including a push for decentralization and local control, market-, rather than government-based solutions, and a collective longing for large-scale change. They represent a maturing of market forces into public education over the last 30 years (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Although underwritten with public funds, charter schools are run independently and are free from many state laws and district policies. In return, they are strictly accountable for results outlined in a predetermined agreement called a charter (USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004).

Charter schools have garnered bipartisan support, beginning with Democratic President Bill Clinton who authorized the first \$15 million in support of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1994. In 1998, Congress increased financial support to \$100 million for the expansion of charter schools in the United States (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Under the leadership of Democratic President Barack Obama, proposed funding increased to \$350 million and reached \$440 million by 2018 under the Republican administration of President Donald Trump (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2018). Each of the last four former presidents of the United States of America viewed charter schools as a concerted effort to deregulate public education with limited restrictions on admissions, curriculum, class size, and other details of operation (Ravitch, 2010).

According to Manno (2019), charter school enrollment continued to steadily increase in the 10 years between 2007 and 2017. At that time, enrollment more than doubled from 1.3 million to 3.2 million students. In 2017, 21 districts across the United



States enrolled at least 30% of students—up from just 1% in 2006. Another 214 districts across the nation enrolled at least 10% of the school-age population in 2017—up from just 20 districts in 2006 (Manno, 2019). By 2016, charter school legislation had been passed in 43 states and the District of Columbia. Just 2 years later, in 2018, 44 states had adopted charter legislation, and 7,500 schools were in operation in the United States (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2018). By 2020, charter legislation spanned 44 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam (Trump, 2020). According to President Donald Trump (2020), in 2020, 7,400 charter schools, including both brick-and-mortar and virtual options, provided learning opportunities for more than three million students, an eightfold increase over 18 years. In May 2020, Trump proclaimed to the nation,

For decades the idea that children can thrive under a one-size-fits-all approach to learning has defined American education. This antiquated and monolithic model leaves far too many of our Nation’s young people trapped in a learning environment that does not meet their individual needs. (para. 3)

The application of technology in education has changed the way we as a nation view the potential of schools (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). Virtual charter schools are the newest addition to the education marketplace and were arguably the fastest-growing segment of the public education sector at the time of this study (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). Though crude by comparison, scholars draw comparisons between modern, online learning and the mail-based “correspondence schools” invented at the University of Chicago in 1891 (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006). Subsequently, instructional delivery evolved from mail-based correspondence to radio, from radio to

television, from television to satellite, and from satellite to internet-based virtual schools over the course of a century.

Evergreen Education Group (2011) defined “virtual school” as an educational organization that offers courses online, with time and distance separating teacher and student. Several terms are used interchangeably to describe virtual schools in the United States. For example, Alaska and Pennsylvania use the term “cyber schools,” Minnesota and Colorado use the term “online schools,” Ohio uses the term “e-schools,” and Arizona uses the term virtual schools (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). While each of these terms is essentially synonymous when used to modify the word school, this study will use the term virtual when referring to internet-based charter schools.

In August 1993, Horizon Instructional Systems established a charter school in Lincoln, California that offered various programming to students, including one that blended at-home, computer-based instruction with distance learning (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006). However, the first K-12 virtual school is thought to have launched in 1995 in Eugene, Oregon. The school, created by nine TPS teachers, offered supplemental, fully virtual high school courses for students.

By 1996, interest in virtual schooling began to spread very quickly (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006). The first virtual charter school, The Cyber Village Academy, was founded in 1998 in Minnesota. Its original model was created to serve seriously ill children, such as those who were home- or hospital-bound. To achieve its mission, students attended a blend of face-to-face classes twice weekly and participated in home-based, online learning three times weekly using virtual learning platforms (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006).

Charter schools lead the pack in terms of providing full-time, virtual education in the United States. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2018), there were a total of 147 virtual charter schools in 2006. In 2011, there were a reported 219 virtual charter schools, while another 142 identified as blended or hybrid (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). The number of states allowing virtual charter schools also increased from just 18 in 2006 to 38 in 2011 (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). Again, this study of parental motivation for enrolling their child in homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling included the brick-and-mortar and virtual charter schools serving students in District ABC.

Clearly, charter schools have been early advocates of virtual schooling in America. As of 2010, Ohio had 27 virtual charter schools serving 31,852 students, an increase of roughly 15,000 in total enrollment since 2006. Pennsylvania had 12 virtual charter schools serving almost 25,000 students, and Wisconsin had 14 virtual charter schools serving 4,000 students in 2010. Minnesota had a reported 24 virtual charter schools serving 8,000 students in 2010, representing a 43% increase in just 1 school year. Nevada virtual charter schools reported 6,000 in enrollment in 2010, representing a 76% increase in just 1 school year (Evergreen Education Group, 2011).

Though clear research and data were not yet established at the time of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 arguably catapulted virtual learning to the top of the list as one of the most popular school choice options. Several virtual charter programs, including Florida Virtual School, K12, Inc, and Pearson's Connections Academy each saw striking enrollment numbers in the fall of 2020. According to Education Week (2020), Florida Virtual School enrollment increased 64%, K12 Inc. increased 72%, and

Connections Academy increased 61% (Lieberman, 2020). According to Koeske (2020), “The pandemic-fueled exodus of TPS students has created an unprecedented explosion in charter school enrollment, especially at virtual charters, which account for nearly two-thirds of this year’s growth” (para. 5). However, whether the increased enrollment remains after the pandemic is yet to be determined (Koeske, 2020). Either way, virtual charter school enrollment has trended upward since its inception.

For obvious reasons, the operation of virtual charter schools is very different than brick-and-mortar education options. Student-teacher interaction occurs through a variety of methods, both synchronous and asynchronous. However, all communication is internet-based. Asynchronous tools, such as email, discussion groups, chat rooms, phone calls, text messaging, and video calls support student learning (Evergreen Education Group, 2011).

Like most forms of school choice, despite its seeming popularity, increasing enrollment, and favorable legislation, virtual charter schools are subject to the same scrutiny as brick-and-mortar charter schools (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). Manno (2019) claimed that the assault on charter schools, in general, is fierce. Perhaps the dispute is because charter schools have challenged some of the most enduring and basic assumptions regarding schooling in America.

### ***The Charter Schooling Debate***

Of all three forms of school choice examined in this study, many argue that charter schools are the most controversial (Ravitch, 2010). At the forefront of the school choice movement, charter schools often emerge at the most opportune moments, creating what Murphy and Shiffman (2002) believed to be opportunity for bundling ideas tailored

to a specific environment. They described five identified needs that merged to form the concept of charter schools: (a) increased parent and student choice, (b) increased competition for TPSs, (c) school, rather than centralized, management, (d) deregulation and freedom of educators, and (e) accountability for results (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002).

Peterson (2006) said, “For public schools, there is no such thing as profits” (p. 7), implying that TPSs have little incentive to improve. However, charter schools are held accountable for results in ways TPSs are not (Peterson, 2006). Based on this review of literature, charter school critics identify three main concerns. First, they believe charter schools are harmful to the TPSs. Second, they believe there is little evidence of effectiveness. Third, they fear the effects of applying market principles to education, namely partnerships with for-profit businesses.

America’s TPSs have historically fought against the movement, which shifts power to consumers (the parents) and moves control from centralized bureaucracies to autonomous schools, implying to many that public education practices can be challenged (Peterson, 2006). Opponents Murphy and Shiffman (2002) viewed charter schools as a vehicle for dismantling TPSs and a pathway to education privatization. Charter schools directly impact the local school districts in which they choose to locate, as per-pupil funding travels with those who withdraw from the TPSs.

The most scathing critique of critics of charter schools is that they drain TPSs of their best students and most involved parents. Charter school opponents Frankenburg et al. (2011) made strong accusations against charter schools. They claimed that while charter schools had the potential to become even more integrated than TPSs, given the lack of isolating school boundary lines, the sector is even more segregated. “Skimming,”

as this phenomenon is often referred to, leaves public schools stripped of the resources they need to respond to the call of competition adequately, often leaving those students left behind even worse off (Peterson, 2006).

Knaak and Knaak (2013) claimed that while the promoters of charter schools intend to enhance the learning of lower-achieving students, it is often the parents of the upper academic elite who seize the opportunity. Researchers have found in following up with Minnesota, the birthplace of charter schools, that the learning gap between White and other poor, underrepresented populations is among the worst in the nation, meaning charter had little to no positive effect (Knaak & Knaak, 2013). However, Washington, D.C. provides an example of harmonious coexistence of public and charter schools, with 53% of school-age children enrolled in public and the other 47% enrolled in charter. Since that arrangement came to be, both sectors have seen increased student achievement (Manno, 2019). With an eightfold enrollment increase over the past 18 years and more than one million students on waitlists to attend charter schools in America, President Donald Trump (2020) boasted of the charter movement's ability to better serve underrepresented populations.

With student enrollment, parent support, and per-pupil funding on the line, researchers continue to find parental motivation for enrolling in charter schools a subject worthy of examination. Murphy and Shiffman (2002) claimed that findings across the literature categorize conditions that prompt parents to explore charter schools as either push or pull factors. They claimed that those schools that fail to address customer demand lose students and ultimately fail—whether they are public, private, or charter (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Connell (2016) supported this claim and said, “People tend

to change course only when there is dissatisfaction with the current course” (p. 9).

However, school choice researchers continue to question the ability of parents to be savvy consumers of education options (Lindle, 2014). Given one of three foci of this study is parental motivation for enrolling in charter schools, similar studies were examined to build this review of literature and to further my understanding of this phenomenon.

Chandler (2015) examined those factors influencing Michigan parents to select virtual charter schools for their kindergarten through sixth-grade children in a descriptive exploratory study guided by market theory. To determine which push or pull factors led to enrollment, Chandler distributed an online questionnaire containing both forced-choice and open-ended items to parents of students enrolled in both K12 and Pearson’s Connections Academy through email. Each of those schools is a publicly funded virtual charter program (Chandler, 2015). The survey elicited a 17% response rate from 144 participants. Results identified the highest-ranking push factor, or the TPS characteristic that compelled parents to choose virtual schooling, as the TPSs’ inability to meet the students’ individual needs. The second-highest-ranking push factor was dissatisfaction with the discipline, safety, and/or bullying at the TPSs. The top-ranking pull factor, or the characteristic that drew parents to virtual learning, was the ability to individualize learning for their children (Chandler, 2015). As for virtual charter enrollment in general, Chandler concluded that these schools provide a choice option to literally everyone, regardless of where they live.

Connell (2016) examined why parents in Pennsylvania chose virtual charter or brick-and-mortar charter schools over TPSs in the area. This inductive case study was

built on Weiss's (1995) Decision Making Framework and involved a theoretically motivated sample of 25 parents. Connell collected quantitative data in the form of focus groups and individual interviews to determine those push characteristics of TPSs that repelled parents, as well as those pull factors that drew parents to consider virtual and brick-and-mortar charters as worthy alternatives. Connell found that the phenomenon was rooted in dissatisfaction with the TPSs, which in turn led parents to gather more information regarding alternatives by word of mouth. Furthermore, the positive perception of this new information led parents to choose charter and/or virtual charter programs. She determined that the most common push factor among those parents surveyed was the perception that TPSs in the area were a one-size-fits-all system lacking in parent communication and higher order thinking experiences. Parents also believed the TPSs placed inappropriate emphasis on high stakes testing. She concluded that all 25 parents left the TPSs as a result of dissatisfaction (Connell, 2016).

Greenway and Vanourek (2006) claimed that the research on virtual schooling is newer and slimmer, with the least research available on K-8 virtual schools. Greenway and Vanourek concluded that parents select virtual charter schools for a variety of reasons, including their curricular focus, individualized instruction, flexibility, and technology integration, among other things. They also determined that most virtual charter students transferred from TPSs or homeschooling environments (Evergreen Education Group, 2011; Greenway & Vanourek, 2006). Virtual charter schools are appealing to certain groups who are well-served by their flexibility in scheduling, to urban parents who are concerned with safety and/or overcrowding, and to rural parents who seek specialized offerings unafforded in their local schools (Greenway & Vanourek,



2006).

Despite the debate, there is no doubt, given previous findings, that certain factors push parents away from TPSs and pull parents toward charter schools in growing numbers. However, America's TPSs are not the only ones feeling threatened. Ravitch (2010) said that as the pendulum swung in favor of charter schools in the 1990s, more and more Catholic schools closed their doors. Suddenly, not only did charter schools offer a new alternative to TPSs, but they also offered a tuition-free alternative to Catholic schools (Peterson, 2006; Ravitch, 2010).

One of the charter movement's biggest foes, Ravitch (2010), claimed that while marketed as superior to TPSs, charter schools are typically not so. Knaak and Knaak (2013) maintained that research does not substantiate claims that the charter school movement has resulted in education reform; therefore, they asserted that it is indeed a failed initiative. The USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement (2004) outlined the five elements of effective charter schools: (a) a well-conceived and powerful mission, (b) creative scheduling, curriculum, and instruction, (c) flexible structure and operations, (d) a responsive and specialized staff, and (e) a supportive school environment.

Manno (2019), the former secretary for policy and planning at the USDE and charter school ally, believed that as of 2019, charter schools were living up to the promises they made. However, critics argue that most effective charter schools are merely single-site success stories (Peterson, 2006). Murphy and Shiffman (2002) also contended that after decades in existence, there is insufficient evidence linking charter schools to increased student achievement. Murphy and Shiffman also claimed that charter school students are not equitably enrolled, state accountability measures are not

uniformly effective, and charter school teachers are less experienced than TPS teachers as a whole (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Lagging test scores among charter schools across the nation have also added to the debate over charter school effectiveness and their ability to deliver on promises of student achievement (Koeske, 2020).

In 2004, just as the charter school movement was gaining significant ground, the USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement (2004) stated, “Proponents hope that this new mix of choice and accountability will not only provide students stronger learning programs than local alternatives but will also stimulate improvement of the existing public education system” (p. 1). Advocates also claim that the autonomy given to charter schools increases their flexibility to allocate budgets, hire staff, experiment with curriculum, and involve the community in ways that are unafforded to TPSs. Further, early advocates theorized that freedom from regulation would stimulate innovation and experimentation (USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004).

Murphy and Shiffman (2002) believed that charter schools have been historically difficult to study, given their complexity. They maintained that the existing research base leaves something to be desired. Ackerman and Egalite (2016) believed that “there is no consensus among researchers on charter school effectiveness in the USA” (p. 1). In their within-study analysis, Ackerman and Egalite examined numerous studies to determine the strengths and limitations of the various methodologies used to evaluate charter school effectiveness. Ackerman and Egalite believed that despite having a wealth of available studies, findings vary a great deal depending on the study’s design. In summary, Ackerman and Egalite found that whereas experimental studies have found large, positive impacts on student achievement among charter schools, nonexperimental studies tend to

indicate the opposite. Many nonexperimental studies have found very small or even negative impacts on student achievement in charter schools in a substantial number of states. Therefore, one can conclude there is no perfect way to measure charter school effectiveness (Ackerman & Egalite, 2016).

Research into virtual education is also mixed (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). The USDE evaluated online learning through a meta-analysis and review of online learning studies. They found that online learning can be effective if done well; however, it can also be ineffective. They reported no significant differences between these new technologies and traditional face-to-face classes (Evergreen Education Group, 2011).

Greenway and Vanourek (2006) discussed the hardships specific to virtual charter schools. Many have found that virtual charter schools face difficulties in serving those students with limited English proficiency, visual impairments, severe disabilities, or motivation problems (Evergreen Education Group, 2011; Greenway & Vanourek, 2006). It is also believed that teachers are often insufficiently trained to instruct online (Evergreen Education Group, 2011). In 2006, according to Education Week (2020), only 11 states at the time required virtual teachers to have regular training in online instruction, meaning teachers needed training in software applications, hardware maintenance, online communication, information management, and instructional intervention to truly be effective in a virtual learning environment. According to the two, while the use of technology in education will continue to expand and evolve, there is clearly work to be done (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006). Evergreen Education Group (2011) stated,

Just putting the word “virtual” in front of the word “school” doesn’t make it good

(or bad, or even innovative). What matters is the school's ability to educate children as shown in successful student outcomes...Virtual programs are showing that interaction is not lost in an online environment. By expanding the set of communication tools available to students, teachers, parents, and administrators, these groups are communicating more than ever before...We don't know what's next, but we can predict with confidence that the educational benefits (improved student performance as well as increased graduation rates) will increase over time as the technology advances—along with our understanding of how to best use it.

(p. 13)

The transition of what some termed to be “remote education” was ushered in by the COVID-19 global pandemic in the spring of 2020. For the first time in the history of our nation, America's public school students were unable to attend face-to-face classes for an extended period of time. As a result, a reported 85% of public school districts offered some form of online learning, and another 82% provided devices to students to access virtual instruction (Tienken, 2020). NCES reported that whereas 94% of school-age students in America did have internet access in 2020, another 6%, or almost 3.4 million students, did not (Tienken, 2020). Even still, of the 94% with internet access, not everyone had sufficient access to the Internet for schooling purposes. According to NCES, the majority of those students with sufficient internet access for schooling purposes are often White and living in households with incomes of \$75,000 or more. Nearly 35% of those students without internet access reported that it is too expensive. Whereas only 25% of White families cited cost as a reason for not having access to the internet, 39% of Black families and 45% of Hispanic families cited cost as a deterrent.

Therefore, one can conclude that poverty impedes internet access and thereby also limits those families' abilities to choose virtual charter schools as alternatives to TPSs (Tienken, 2020).

Advocates of charter schools are said to include a diverse mix of right-wing conservatives, progressive educators, Christian fundamentalists, civil rights groups, business groups and entrepreneurs, and reformers, among others. These schools have been lauded by multiple U.S. presidents, from Bill Clinton to Donald Trump (Ravitch, 2010). Therefore, researchers have sought to gain a better understanding of charter's most influential consumers, the parents (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Chandler (2015) examined the push and pull factors influencing parents to engage in the education marketplace and choose virtual charter. Connell (2016) examined how parents engage in the decision-making process and gather information in the education market to choose charter. Murphy and Shiffman (2002) determined that freedom to choose is a proven motivator in favor of charter schooling.

According to Peterson (2006), opponents of school choice shrink at the notion of applying market principles to the education arena, because TPSs have long been institutions that symbolize equality of opportunity. Their initial efforts to stop the spread of the charter school movement took three forms: (a) hindering the enactment of charter laws, (b) limiting the formation of new charters, and (c) ensuring meager funding for those existing schools. These attacks typically come from policymakers, public school systems, and/or public education interest groups (Peterson, 2006). However, with charter legislation spanning 44 states and 7,400 charter schools serving more than three million students in the United States at the time of this study (Trump, 2020), they very quickly

grew to represent a significant portion of the education market.

Vouchers introduced intense competition and choice into American education (Peterson, 2006). Choice proponents of the early 2000s latched onto charter schools because, unlike voucher programs that can involve faith-based schools, charters seemingly raise no immediate concerns among the general public (Peterson, 2006; Ravitch, 2010). Any group or organization can apply for a charter for 3-5 years. Most charter schools receive federal start-up grants of anywhere from \$10,000 to \$150,000 for 1-3 years (Peterson, 2006). In return for public funding, they must agree to meet minimum requirements and academic targets, or the schools risk closing (Ravitch, 2010).

Although virtual charter schools often receive less funding than conventional schools (often 20-30% less), they offer online instruction to students at home while still receiving the per-pupil payment. These schools can enroll and instruct hundreds or even thousands of students online with a relatively small number of teachers. Thereby, they generate huge profits for supporting charter companies, causing many to fear the privatization of education (Ravitch, 2010).

Much has been accomplished since Budde's (1988) initial proposal of "education by charter" (p. 21); however, after 30 years of charter school operation within a growing education marketplace, the debate over whether they have delivered on promises of increased student achievement and choice for all continues. Clearly, the addition of virtual charter programs has provided researchers with new veins to explore within this phenomenon of parental motivation, as much still remains to be understood. Again, this study attempted to contribute to the research available with regard to parental motivation for selecting a variety of alternatives to TPSs. However, as this review of literature

indicates, the research specifically pertaining to virtual charter schools is thin (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006); therefore, this study serves to fill that particular void.

### ***Charter Schools in South Carolina***

South Carolina officially joined the charter school movement in 1996 (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Much like they have across the nation, charter schools in South Carolina thrived following the enactment of the South Carolina Charter Schools Act of 1996. According to South Carolina law, the purpose of charter schools is to create new, innovative, and flexible ways to promote educational improvement for all students and to close achievement gaps between low- and high-performing groups (CREDO, 2019). The law was written based on the South Carolina General Assembly's desire to "provide an opportunity for the organization and operation of flexible, innovative, and substantially deregulated public schools" (South Carolina Charter Schools Act, 1996, para. 1) in an effort to reform the state education system. The assembly believed that charter schools could become a flexible, innovative, and deregulated means for improving education through full accountability for student achievement (South Carolina Charter Schools Act, 1996, para. 2).

New charter schools can be authorized in South Carolina by a public school district, the South Carolina Public Charter School District, or an institution of higher education. Within the application, the charter school must include the proposed mission statement, specific pupil achievement standards, a description of the educational program, evaluation procedures, a proposed budget, and a description of its governance and operation, among other items (South Carolina Charter Schools Act, 1996). Those schools that neglect to meet predetermined performance criteria are at risk of closure

(CREDO, 2019). While specific charter laws vary state by state, charter schools in South Carolina must adhere to the same health, safety, and civil rights requirements applied to TPSs. During the 2013-2014 school year, there were approximately 60 operational charter schools in South Carolina. By the 2017-2018 school year, that number rose to 77. By 2019, 100 charter schools were established in South Carolina (CREDO, 2019).

Consequently, as the number of charter schools increased, the number of students enrolled in charter schools also increased. During the 2016-2017 school year, roughly 33,000 students were enrolled in South Carolina charter schools (CREDO, 2019). By 2020, that number increased by 18% to roughly 40,000 students (Koeske, 2020). Koeske (2020) found that 14,000 of those 40,000 enrolled in South Carolina charter schools in September 2020 did so following the 2019-2020 school year, arguably in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Another 40,000 were reportedly on waitlists during the 2019-2020 school year. Statewide charter school leaders projected another 40% increase between September 2020 and January 2021; however, that figure was yet to be verified at the time of this study (Koeske, 2020).

Virtual charter schools accounted for the majority of new charter school students in the state of South Carolina in 2020 (Koeske, 2020). At that time, there were five virtual charter schools in the state, including Cyber Academy of South Carolina, Odyssey Online Learning, SC Connections Academy, SC Virtual Charter School, and SC Whitmore School (Koeske, 2020; Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina, n.d.). CREDO (2019) found that roughly 30% of charter school enrollment during the 2016-2017 school year were those students enrolled in virtual charter programs in South Carolina.



Despite their increasing popularity, virtual charter schools in South Carolina are not immune to the ongoing nationwide debate experienced by brick-and-mortar charter schools. Whereas lagging test scores cause opponents to question their effectiveness and ability to deliver on promises of student achievement, advocates argue that virtual charter programs offer an alternative for those students who do not perform well in traditional public classrooms (Koeske, 2020). CREDO (2019) was established to improve the empirical evidence regarding education reform and student performance. CREDO claimed that while the charter school debate is ongoing, only a fraction is grounded in research. Therefore, to strengthen the validity of the research base, CREDO completed a program evaluation of charter school performance in South Carolina in 2019. Using data ranging from 2013 to 2018, the results showed that the typical charter school student in South Carolina made relative progress in reading but showed less growth in math compared to their TPS peers. Those charter school students living in poverty, as well as those students in special education programs, showed fewer academic gains than TPS students in general. CREDO also discovered that South Carolina charter schools enroll more White students and fewer students in poverty than TPSs. As for the virtual charter, the study showed that those schools had weaker growth in reading and math when compared to both TPSs and brick-and-mortar charter schools.

Regardless of CREDO's (2019) findings, seemingly in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, South Carolina families considered virtual charter schools in numbers like never before in 2020. According to Koeske (2020), Dave Wilson, Spokesman for the Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina, believed that parent willingness to explore school choice options may be the pandemic's most lasting impact

on education in America. Wilson said, “this is the place where the individualization of education is going to really begin to take root in South Carolina” (Koeske, 2020, para. 46). In the fall of 2020, parents cited several reasons for abandoning their zoned neighborhood schools during COVID-19, including the difficult transition TPSs experienced when moving to all virtual learning and the uncertainty about how their zone neighborhood schools would reopen (Koeske, 2020).

Just as with all forms of school choice, market forces influence parents to select charter over TPSs in increasing numbers (Koeske, 2020). Those push and pull factors involved in parent school choice decisions have been in play for decades, far before the COVID-19 pandemic (Chandler, 2015; Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). According to Murphy and Shiffman (2002), the charter school movement of today, which represents a maturing of the infusion of market forces into public education, echoes the sentiment of the education reform efforts of the 1980s. With increasing support from the federal level (Trump, 2020) and increasing enrollment numbers, particularly following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Koeske, 2020), charter schools represent a credible alternative to a centuries-old institution—America’s TPSs.

Given that virtual charter schools offer online instruction to thousands of students at home while still receiving the valuable per-pupil funding that would otherwise be slated for the TPSs, it is no wonder they are also widely debated (Ravitch, 2010). Provided the newness of virtual charter schools, the gap in the existing literature, the prominent position of all charter schools in the education marketplace, and the trends in parental choice following the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, this study sought to increase understanding of the phenomenon, particularly in District ABC where the movement

appeared to mirror happenings across the nation.

### **Potential Themes and Perceptions**

This review of literature produced four prominent themes, some of which translated across multiple forms of schooling (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and/or charter schooling), whereas others were specific to only one form of schooling. Those four themes are (a) dissatisfaction with TPSs, (b) religious and/or moral instruction, (c) convenience, and (d) elitism and/or skimming. Table 3 outlines those identified themes according to correlating studies and the form of schooling with which they are associated.

**Table 3***Themes Presented Within the Review of Literature*

	Homeschooling	Faith-Based schooling	Charter schooling
Dissatisfaction with TPSs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wagner (2008)</li> <li>• O'Donnell (2020)</li> <li>• Bartholet (2019)</li> <li>• Dwyer and Peters (2019)</li> <li>• Kan (2015)</li> <li>• Wright (2014)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hollenbeck (2008)</li> <li>• Lockwood (2014)</li> <li>• Schultz (2009)</li> <li>• Hall (2009)</li> <li>• Dwyer and Peters (2019)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chandler (2015)</li> <li>• Connell (2016)</li> <li>• Budde (1988)</li> <li>• USDE (2004)</li> <li>• Murphy and Shiffman (2002)</li> <li>• Koeske (2020)</li> <li>• Peterson (2006)</li> <li>• Greenway and Vanourek (2006)</li> <li>• Evergreen Education Group (2011)</li> </ul>
Religious and/or moral instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wagner (2008)</li> <li>• Bartholet (2019)</li> <li>• Dwyer and Peters (2019)</li> <li>• Kan (2015)</li> <li>• Walters (2015)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hollenbeck (2008)</li> <li>• Lockwood (2014)</li> <li>• Schultz (2009)</li> <li>• Hall (2009)</li> <li>• Dwyer and Peters (2019)</li> </ul>	
Convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wagner (2008)</li> <li>• Bartholet (2019)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chandler (2015)</li> <li>• Ravitch (2010)</li> <li>• Greenway and Vanourek (2006)</li> <li>• Evergreen Education Group (2011)</li> </ul>
Elitism and/or Skimming		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hollenbeck (2008)</li> <li>• Schultz (2009)</li> <li>• Carpenter &amp; Kafer (2012)</li> <li>• Education Encyclopedia (2020)</li> <li>• Wong (2018)</li> <li>• McCluskey (2020)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CREDO (2019)</li> <li>• Murphy and Shiffman (2002)</li> <li>• Peterson (2006)</li> <li>• Tienken (2020)</li> </ul>

Clearly, a dissatisfaction with TPSs is perhaps the most salient of the four themes,

given that it was apparent in all three categories. However, I noted specific causes for dissatisfaction unique to each category. For example, multiple research cited parent belief in their ability to provide a superior education at home as a prominent pull factor for homeschooling (Bartholet, 2019; Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Wagner, 2008; Wright, 2014). That particular motivator was unique to homeschooling alone. Stronger academics than TPSs was cited as a pull factor for parents in multiple studies pertaining to faith-based schooling (Hall, 2009; Hollenbeck, 2008; Lockwood, 2014; Schultz, 2009;). Multiple research pertaining to charter schooling referenced parent safety concerns (i.e., bullying and COVID-19; Chandler, 2015; Greenway & Vanourek, 2006; Koeske, 2020).

The desire to provide religious and moral instruction was unique to homeschooling and faith-based schooling. The theme did not appear as a pull factor for charter schooling. In several research studies, religious and moral instruction was the top factor in determining parental choice of homeschooling or faith-based schooling (Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Hall, 2009; Hollenbeck, 2008; Schultz, 2009; Wagner, 2008; Walters, 2015).

The theme of convenience was only apparent in research pertaining to homeschooling and charter schooling, arguably because both homeschooling and virtual charter schooling occur in the home. Convenience was not cited in research pertaining to faith-based schooling. Both homeschooling and charter schooling research, specifically that pertaining to virtual charter schooling, cited flexibility as a pull factor for parents (Bartholet, 2019; Chandler, 2015; Evergreen Education Group, 2011; Greenway & Vanourek, 2006; Ravitch, 2010; Wagner, 2008).

Finally, although not directly cited as a push or pull factor by parent participants,

the theme of elitism/skimming was apparent in the research pertaining to faith-based schooling and charter schooling. It was not apparent in homeschooling research. Multiple research studies discussed the concern that due to the cost of tuition, faith-based schooling is only a reasonable choice for a select few (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012; Education Encyclopedia, 2020; Hollenbeck, 2008; McCluskey, 2020; Schultz, 2009; Wong, 2018). As a result, faith-based schools are continually engulfed in controversies regarding elitism, minority enrollment, and vouchers (Education Encyclopedia, 2020). Although charter schools do not charge tuition, they too were accused of being elitist in multiple research studies (CREDO, 2019; Frankenburg et al., 2011; Murphy & Shiffman, 2002; Peterson, 2006). An added complexity is that virtual charter schools require student access to sufficient technology and the Internet, which limits the ability of some to choose these schools (Tienken, 2020).

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was built on two complementary frameworks. First, Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration provided a framework for determining why parents choose. Second, RCT, a deductive theory, provided a framework for understanding how parents choose. Each framework was integral in building the review of literature.

Lee (1966) explained that all acts of migration involve an origin (the zoned TPS), a destination (the new school and/or form of schooling), and an intervening set of obstacles. Further, he explained that while some factors repel actors away (push) from an area (the zoned TPS), others tend to hold and/or attract them (pull). Both origin and destination possess factors that repel, hold, and/or attract actors (or parents, as in the case of this study). Lee added that while some may cite compelling reasons for migration,

others need little provocation. Therefore, Lee's Theory of Migration provided a suitable lens for examining those push and pull factors involved in parent decisions to choose alternatives to TPS across three subgroups as identified in the selected literature pertaining to homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling.

Given that school choice options were rapidly expanding across the nation and in District ABC at the time of the study, RCT provided the framework for this review of literature to increase the understanding of parent choice in terms of economics (Walberg, 2000). Rational choice models assume that consumers (or parents as is the case of this study) have given preferences and act to attain specified ends consistent with a predetermined hierarchy of preferences (Friedman & Hechter, 1988). However, intentions can be complicated by constraints, such as available resources and opportunity costs, varying by consumer. Social institutions, or those constraints imposed by society, may also provide either positive or negative sanctions for a course of action (Friedman & Hechter, 1988). Market theorists argue that consumers should have the most say in how they choose to allocate their given resources. This sentiment echoes that of the school choice advocates, who prefer the elimination of the bureaucratic control of schools and favor the indirect control of market forces and parental choice (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Given the value of public favor in economic terms, Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration and RCT alike explain why educational entities such as TPSs, homeschooling associations, faith-based schools, and charter schools compete for support.

### **Summary**

This review of literature provided a general overview of the school choice movement in America. Next, it introduced each individual branch of the larger school

choice movement involved in this study—homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling. The chapter explained each of the three branches in terms of their definitions, their histories in America, their places in modern education, the ongoing debates, and their place in South Carolina education. Finally, Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration and RCT is summarized and provided the framework for the selected literature.

Whereas the literature review provided the focus of the study, the subsequent chapter explains how it was executed (Butin, 2010). Chapter 3 explains how the research questions were answered according to the determined methods. First, the study's explanatory sequential mixed methods research design is introduced. Next, the study's setting, population, and sampling procedures are explained. Then, those measurers and instruments used to collect data are outlined, and data analysis procedures are discussed. Finally, the chapter delineates those limitations and delimitations that impacted results.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

School choice in America has created a dichotomy between those who advocate for parental rights to choose their child's education (Fife, 2016) and those who deem choice to be destructive to the centuries-old democratic institution of public schools (Ravitch, 2010). As school choice options continue to expand across the United States, advocates tout the education marketplace as a means of promoting competition and thereby improving all schools (Lindle, 2014). However, opponents protest a lack of evidence supporting this theory after decades of competition among schools (Ravitch, 2010).

While aggressive claims have been made on both sides of the debate, data show that all three forms of school choice involved in this study—homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling—continue to gain favor in terms of legislation, increasing enrollment, and parent support (Reynolds, 2016). Echoing the positive trends in school choice identified across the nation, District ABC also expressed concerns, as alternatives to its TPSs expanded there as well. Therefore, provided what is potentially at stake for both the public schools and the schools of choice, it is beneficial to better understand consumer, in this case parent, decision-making to help explain the phenomenon.

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to determine why parents selected homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling; and (b) to compare and contrast parent motivation(s) across three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling families). The ultimate goal was to provide insight and reason for an ever-growing school choice

movement in America.

While an abundance of research is available to explain parent motivations for choosing alternatives to TPSs, there is a lack of research comparing and contrasting parent motivation across subgroups. Also, this study occurred during a critical juncture in the history of education. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 disrupted schooling nationwide, forcing all states to reconsider daily operations and causing parents to research alternative education options in record-breaking numbers (McCluskey, 2020). Therefore, due to both the nationwide and local impacts of COVID-19 on the public education system, it was logical to reassess the phenomenon of increasing parental choice.

The review of literature examined the school choice movement. In particular, the research pertaining to homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling was investigated in terms of each submovement's history, modern era, place within the larger debate, and impact on education in the state of South Carolina. Four themes were identified within the literature, one of which translates across all three forms of schooling, (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling), whereas others are specific to only one or two forms of schooling. Those four themes are (a) dissatisfaction with TPSs, (b) religious and/or moral instruction, (c) convenience, and (d) elitism and/or skimming. Of the four themes, dissatisfaction with TPSs was the most prominent and the only one to appear as a parent motivator in all three forms of schooling.

This chapter details the study's explanatory sequential mixed methods design and provides information pertaining to the population and sampling procedures. Next, the

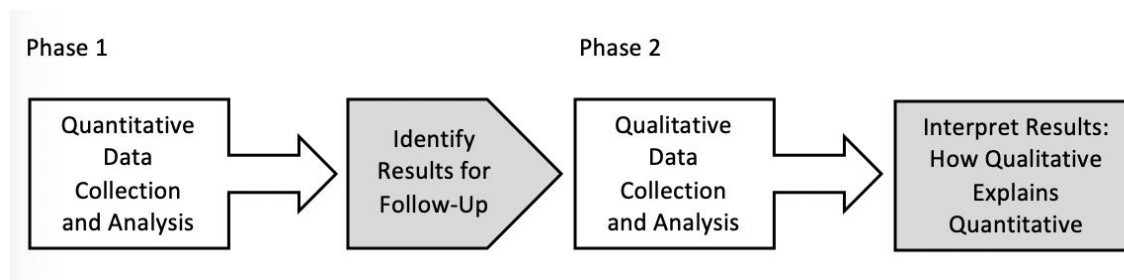
location of the study is explained. Then, the measures and instruments used for data collection are presented and explained, followed by a review of the planned data analysis procedures. Finally, those limitations and delimitations potentially impacting the study's results are delineated.

## Research Design

A study's research design represents the procedures for inquiry that span all steps within the process and provide direction for the researcher when conducting a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this design, the researcher first conducts the quantitative research, then builds on the results of initial data analysis to further explain the findings through qualitative research. The term explanatory is used because the first phase of quantitative research is further explained by a second phase of qualitative research. The term sequential is used because one phase is always followed by the other (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The explanatory mixed methods design is visually detailed in Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

### *Explanatory Sequential Design*



*Note.* This figure was adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018), Figure 10.1 (p. 218).

I selected to employ a mixed methods design because it incorporates both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Integrating the two forms of data yielded insight

beyond that provided by quantitative or qualitative data alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given that a researcher collects more varied data by using mixed methods, the validity of the final conclusions is strengthened (Butin, 2010).

In order to gain a better understanding of parental motivation for enrolling in three specific school choice options in a district in South Carolina, two research questions were developed. The two questions guided data collection and analysis and contributed to the body of research regarding the stated problem. The two research questions guiding this study were

1. Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, charter schooling?

Explanatory research such as this is designed to explain a phenomenon or to explain how specific variables relate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research questions attempted to explain the phenomenon of parent choice of alternatives to TPSs in terms of motivating factors. Further, the research questions attempted to explain how these motivators related across three subgroups through comparing and contrasting the results. To answer the questions, data collection was planned to occur in a 2-phase QUAN>qual approach. During this 2-phase approach, the quantitative phase occurs first and has primary emphasis. The subsequent qualitative phase occurs second and receives less emphasis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

During the initial quantitative phase of this study, an electronic survey was distributed to participants within each of the three subgroups (homeschool parents, faith-

based parents, and charter school parents). Butin (2010) described quantitative research methods to be, by their nature of quantification, able to examine the opinions and perspectives of thousands of people, yet quantitative data lack attention to the detail and obscurities to be found through qualitative methods. Therefore, the quantitative data collected from the survey informed the subsequent qualitative phase involving four planned focus groups composed of willing participants. The intent of this QUAN>qual design was “to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 222). Merging the two data sets during final analysis increased the validity of resulting conclusions.

### **Setting**

This study of parental motivation for enrolling in various school choice alternatives occurred in a public school district, District ABC, serving one particular suburban city in the state of South Carolina. The city in which District ABC is located was home to approximately 75,000 people and experienced a 12% population growth over the decade in which the study occurred. Although the city was very diverse in terms of race, White (54.5%), Black (39.1%), and Hispanic or Latino (6.8%) had predominant representation in the area. Table 4 explains other characteristics of the location in terms of the general demographics most relevant to this study.

**Table 4***Population Demographics of the Setting*

Characteristic	Total
Population estimate (July 2019)	75,048
School-age persons, age 5-18 years	17,035 (22.7%)
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2015-2019, in dollars	\$155,800
Median gross rent, 2015-2019, in dollars	\$967
Households, 2015-2019	29,251
Households with a computer, percent, 2015-2019	92.3%
Households with broadband internet, percent, 2015-2019	86.0%
High school graduate, percent age 25+ years, 2015-2019	89.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent age 25+ years, 2015-2019	30.3%
Median household income (2019), in dollars	\$50,444
Per capita income in past 12 months (2019), in dollars	\$27,959
Persons in poverty, percent	15.6%

It is worth noting that the location of the study was home to over 17,000 school-age children (ages 5-18) in 2020. Also worth noting was the significant number of households with a computer. All students attending TPSs within District ABC received a Windows device for instructional purposes. Also, for instructional purposes, the district formed a partnership with the local internet service provider to accommodate students in need. Therefore, while the clear majority of households in the location of the study had both a computer and internet access, all students attending public schools in District ABC had both due to the district's provided accommodations.

District ABC contained 27 schools, including 17 elementary schools at the time of the study. The study participants were parents of children in first through fifth grades zoned for TPSs within the boundaries of District ABC yet enrolled in either homeschooling, faith-based schooling, or charter schooling. I sought to include representation from all three alternative options available to families living within the area. Table 5 explains the participating schools of choice in terms of the most relevant

characteristics pertaining to the study.

**Table 5**

*Schools of Choice Within District ABC*

Subgroup	Organization (Pseudonym)	Grades served	Total enrollment	1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> grade enrollment	Socioeconomic characteristics
Homeschooling	Homeschool Association A	K-12	Undetermined	130	Undetermined
Faith-Based schooling	Faith-Based School A	K3-12	500	153	Tuition for Grades 1-5: \$4825-\$9650
	Faith-Based School B	K-12	180	75	Tuition for Grades 1-5: \$5675
	Faith-Based School C	K3-12	290	140	Tuition for Grades 1-5 (practicing Catholics): \$5999-6120 (non-Catholics): \$8120-8280
Charter schooling	Brick and Mortar Charter School A	K-12	493	288	50.9% poverty, 6% free lunch
	Virtual Charter School A	K-12	6250 (statewide)	36 (in District ABC)	49.5% poverty (statewide)
	Virtual Charter School B	K-12	1727 (statewide)	34 (in District ABC)	58% poverty

Clearly, choice was abundant within District ABC. The study garnered the participation of the only homeschooling association located in the area, three faith-based schools, one brick-and-mortar charter school, and two statewide virtual charter schools serving the area. While all these schools of choice were invited to participate, seven of the nine organizations operating within the boundaries of District ABC participated in this study. Also, although magnet schools and private non-religious schools are viable choice options, there were none in the area serving students in first through fifth grades at the time. Therefore, they were not represented in this study.

## **Population and Sampling**

The study was designed to include parents of elementary-age homeschoolers, faith-based schoolers, and charter schoolers residing in District ABC. Once the committee approved the research study, formal participation requests were sent to the administrators of all schools of choice operating within the area. However, seven of nine total organizations expressed interest, including the homeschooling organization, all three faith-based schools, the one brick-and-mortar charter school, and two statewide virtual charter schools.

Once the interested schools expressed formal intent to participate, information describing the electronic survey to be used during Phase 1 was distributed to the appropriate personnel for distribution. The administrators at the homeschooling association, the faith-based schools, and the brick-and-mortar charter school distributed the survey to all first- through fifth-grade families. However, given their statewide operation and knowing the study's parameters in advance, the administrators of the virtual charter schools distributed the survey to only first- through fifth-grade families residing within the boundaries of District ABC.

Table 6 reflects the study's target population sizes, the estimated sample sizes, and the survey's response rate (Phase 1). The estimated sample sizes reflect the study's intended sample size calculated before the study's execution and based on a 95% confidence level and 10% margin of error, as recommended and calculated by SurveyMonkey (2020).



**Table 6***Population, Sample Sizes, and Response Rate*

Subgroup	Population size (students, Grades 1-5)	Estimated sample size (students, Grades 1-5)	Actual sample size (students represented, Grades 1-5)	Response rate (percent)
Homeschooling	130	56	15	11.54%
Faith-based schooling	368	77	89	24.18%
Charter schools	358	76	26	7.26%

*Note.* The calculations included in this table were made using SurveyMonkey's Sample Size Calculator.

Research indicates that while several factors affect survey response rates, they are highly influenced by participant interest and the perceived relevance. Further, the response rate for online surveys is typically lower than other formats (Saleh & Bista, 2017). Munoz-Leiva et al. (2010, as reported in Saleh & Bista, 2017) reported that the response rate for email surveys was above 50% in the 1990s due to the novelty of email; however, it is not uncommon for web-based surveys to achieve a response rate below 10%. One could argue that people today are bombarded by email, and the use of filters and survey fatigue have had a negative impact on email survey response rates (Saleh & Bista, 2017).

The response rate was aggregated by subgroup. Much like the results of the survey, aggregating the response rate by subgroup allowed me to better understand who responded. Nearly one quarter (24.18%) of the faith-based population responded to the parent survey. A much lower percentage of the homeschooling (11.54%) and charter schooling (7.26%) population responded. The low response rates of the homeschooling

and charter schooling populations were added to the list of study limitations. Despite the low response rates, the survey results were thoroughly analyzed, and the gaps resulting from a low response rate are provided in the research.

It is worth noting that the virtual charter schooling administrators had the ability to send the email containing the parent survey link to only the parents qualified to participate in the study. However, the other subgroups' organizations (homeschooling and faith-based) did not have this capability. Therefore, many homeschooling and faith-based schooling parents received the email and were disqualified by Survey Item 2 because they did not reside within the boundaries of District ABC. Further, given this understanding, one can conclude that the response rate of the charter schooling population would have been even lower if emailing measures were consistent with the homeschooling and faith-based organizations.

Given the disproportionate number of participants across each subgroup, the homeschooling subgroup in particular, supplemental recruitment measures were requested to ensure fair representation in the study. In an attempt to increase participation where and as needed, I requested that the organizations use social media (Facebook) as an additional platform for recruitment. Facebook was selected as the social media platform of choice because each organization participating in this study maintained a current Facebook page. The same could not be said of other social media platforms, including Instagram and Twitter. Further, according to Omnicore (2020), the statistics related to active users as well as the demographics of Facebook users across the United States justify its use as a platform for recruiting participants in this study. Table 7 outlines this information most relevant to the audience targeted in this study.

**Table 7***The Statistics and Demographics of Facebook Users*

Descriptor	Total
Total number of daily active users	1.79 billion
Number of U.S. adults using Facebook, percent	69%
College graduates on Facebook, percent	82%
Marketers using Facebook in 2020	6.1 million
Percent of monthly social media visits	45%
Customer responses within the first 60 minutes	42%
Number of people using Facebook groups	1.4 billion
Minutes per day users spend on the platform	38

*Note.* The information within the table was adapted from Omnicore's (2020) *Facebook by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics, & Fun Facts*.

Again, Facebook was selected as the most logical social media platform for recruitment in order to maintain consistency across the three subgroups. Each of the participants maintained a presence on the platform. Also, as presented in Table 7, seven of 10 U.S. adults use Facebook. Therefore, I assumed that most school choice parents follow suit. Further, provided Facebook users spend 38 minutes per day on the site, and customers typically respond within 60 minutes of an initial posting, I assumed that posting the parent survey hyperlink on the organizations' Facebook pages elicited additional participation where and as needed.

To utilize Facebook as a supplemental means of recruiting, I first sought permission from the appropriate personnel at each organization to contact the page administrators with whom I would share the details of the study. Only two of seven organizations provided consent to use Facebook as a recruitment platform, including the brick-and-mortar charter school and one virtual charter school. The other participating organizations did not provide consent to recruit in this manner.

After consent was provided by the two schools agreeing to recruit via Facebook, the study's details, as well as the survey hyperlink, were posted to further increase participation. While social media was intended to serve as a supplemental means of recruitment to ensure fair representation across subgroups, its use was not uniform across the seven participating organizations. Only two of seven organizations shared the parent survey on Facebook. Given the voluntary nature of the study, all participants were selected through convenience sampling, or based on convenience and availability, during Phase 1 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Urdan, 2017).

Recruitment for Phase 2, the focus group interviews, occurred differently. In order to garner participation, a description of Phase 2, including an opportunity to express consent to participate, was included at the end of the parent survey used in Phase 1. Four focus groups, including one for homeschooling, one for brick-and-mortar charter schooling, one for virtual charter schooling, and one for faith-based schooling were scheduled. Only the interested parents participated in Phase 2.

Initial sampling measures for Phase 2 were based on convenience. However, very detailed goals were set to guide Phase 2 recruitment. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended including six to eight interviewees; however, I understood that either more or fewer parents could express interest. If more than six to eight parents had expressed interest in participating in any subgroup's focus group interview, random sampling would have been employed to determine the final six to eight participants. Random sampling, according to Creswell and Creswell is ideal, because each willing participant has an equal probability of selection. In order to randomly select the participants, I would have selected every "X" numbered person on the list of willing participants, "X" to have been

determined based on the number of volunteers.

Given the limited interest in Phase 2, none of these measures was necessary. A total of 12 parents provided consent to participate in the focus groups, including one homeschooling, two brick-and-mortar charter, three virtual charter, and six faith-based schooling parents. Although participation across the subgroups was lower than desired, all willing parents were invited to attend one of four scheduled focus group meetings that occurred via Zoom. Meeting invitations were shared with all parents 2 weeks before the event, along with a review of the study's title and intent. A meeting reminder was sent 1 week before the event.

In all, only three of 12 parents confirmed intentions to attend, each of whom had children enrolled at a faith-based organization. The three faith-based parents attended the focus group meeting as scheduled; however, there were no representatives from the homeschooling or either charter schooling subgroup in Phase 2 of the study. Therefore, limited participation in the focus group is listed as a limitation to the study.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

After reviewing research designs, I determined that mixed methods would yield the most dependable results for this study of the factors influencing parental choice of homeschooling, faith-based schooling, or charter schooling in first through fifth grades. By triangulating data sources (quantitative and qualitative), the potential biases and weaknesses residing in the use of a singular form of data collection were reduced (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, I determined that an explanatory sequential design utilizing an online survey during Phase 1, followed by focus groups from each subgroup, was best for answering the study's two research questions:

1. Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, charter schooling?

I initially planned to create an original electronic survey to suit the unique purposes of this study. However, the review of literature led me to a study very similar by design to this one. Chandler (2015) researched parent factors for enrolling children in virtual charter programs in Michigan. Based on research, he created the Survey of Choice Factors Influencing Parents' Decisions to Enroll Their Child in an Online Program containing both forced-choice and open-ended response items. The survey items helped Chandler determine the push and pull factors parents in Michigan used in their decision-making. Fortunately, because his study and instrument were built on similar frameworks emphasizing market theory, I recognized that his work could be modified to answer my research questions. Therefore, I emailed Dr. Chandler to request permission to use and modify his survey to further contribute to the literature regarding parent choice and to answer recommendations for future research he proposed in his 2015 dissertation. Dr. Chandler generously agreed to my request.

After modifying Chandler's (2015) instrument to address the specifics of my study, I worked to establish validity. First, a preliminary version was shared with Dr. Morgan Blanton, Clinical Assistant Professor at Appalachian State University and Adjunct Professor at Gardner-Webb University, who provided feedback to address the instrument's content and construct validity. Content validity ensures the items measure what the researcher intends them to measure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), whereas

construct validity refers to how well the instrument represents the intended theoretical constructs (Taherdoost, 2016). Creswell and Creswell (2018) claimed that construct validity is the overriding objective in validity in more recent studies.

Dr. Blanton and I determined that the majority of survey items should be worded either positively or negatively to align with the study's push-pull framework and measured on continuous scales (extremely important to not important), as advised by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice (Figure 3), which served as the framework for this study, represents the merging of Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration and Friedman and Hechter's (1988) Paths to Social Outcomes in Rational Choice Explanations. The central tenets of Lee's Theory of Migration were used to design the survey items that determined why parents engage in the choice process, whereas the central tenets of RCT were used to design the survey items that were used to determine how parents engage in the choice process. Demographic variables were added to allow for further disaggregation of data than allowed in the first version of the survey (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After addressing the initial feedback from Dr. Blanton, I sought additional counsel from Dr. Sydney Brown, Dean of School of Graduate Studies and dissertation committee member. Dr. Brown provided thorough feedback on the instrument's online formatting and assisted in the creation of a pilot version. The Survey of Factors Influencing Parental Motivation & School Choice (Appendix A) was published in Qualtrics, an online survey design program offered through Gardner-Webb University. It was field-tested with four school choice parents who were not involved in the study, Dr. Brown being one of those parents.

Each of the parents selected for the pilot test had experience with the education marketplace. However, none was eligible to participate in the actual study, because they did not reside in District ABC. The survey was shared electronically, and participants were asked to provide feedback regarding the required time for completion, grammar/readability, and potential bias (Butin, 2010). Creswell and Creswell (2018) said that such testing is important to establish the instrument's validity; to improve the questions, the format, and the instructions; and to receive recommendations for other improvements.

Comments provided by pilot test participants were incorporated into the final revisions of the instrument. Two of four pilot test participants were satisfied with the survey as it was. One pilot test participant complimented the overall positive versus negative structure (push and pull framework) of the questions; however, she suggested that participants be given the opportunity to list those personal reasons for choosing an education alternative beyond those provided on the survey. Additionally, Dr. Brown suggested that the wording used in the continuous scales be changed from "Levels of Importance" to "Levels of Relevance," should someone find the provided options irrelevant to their unique circumstances.

To address each of these suggestions, I first changed the wording according to Dr. Brown's advice. I also made sure future survey participants had an opportunity to contribute additional thoughts with regard to the positive and negative factors they found most relevant in their decision by providing two open-ended survey items that allowed text entry. Before publishing any of these changes, I emailed Dr. Chandler once again to request permission to modify his original survey. He consented to the changes, and the final survey was published in Qualtrics.



Butin (2010) named two key principles for survey design: (a) “carefully align your research questions, research literature, and survey questions,” and (b) “be sure to disaggregate your data based on key demographic variables” (p. 92). Further, participant answers to survey questions contributed to answering the study’s research questions (Butin, 2010). It was through a series of edits and revisions that I arrived at the final version of the parent survey used in this study.

The survey itself began with three items pertaining to consent and study qualification. Those questions were conditioned to automatically end the survey for disqualified participants. For example, parents not residing in District ABC could not participate and exited the survey prematurely. Items 4 and 5 served to divide participants into the study’s three main subgroups: homeschoolers, charter schoolers, and faith-based schoolers. These items were especially important because they allowed me to disaggregate the data to identify similarities and differences in motivators across subgroups.

Items 6, 7, and 8 gauged parent demographics in terms of participant characteristics pertaining to their choice but not automatically associated with the push or pull factors identified in the latter survey items. Butin (2010) shared that seemingly innocuous questions are oftentimes the most important. Those demographics identified in Items 6, 7, and 8 pertained to previous schooling experience, the choice in relation to the timing of COVID-19, and the predicted duration of the choice. I included survey items related to COVID-19 and the predicted duration of the choice because I wanted to know if perhaps the participants’ increased interest in school choice was temporary and may decline after the effects of the pandemic subside. I assumed that these data would differ

across subgroups, contribute to my conclusions, and assist me in writing focus group questions for Phase 2. Also, I assumed these data would provide direction for future research pertaining to school choice.

Item 9 determined the levels of relevance of the push factors associated with their child's zoned school (their child's zoned TPS in District ABC) that influenced the decision to choose education alternatives. Parents were asked to select the level of relevancy of 12 descriptors. Sample descriptors from the survey include *personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's ZONED school* and *concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's ZONED school*.

Similarly, Item 10 determined the level of relevance of the pull factors associated with their child's current education arrangement (i.e., homeschooling, charter schooling, or faith-based schooling). Parents were asked to select the level of relevancy of eight descriptors leading to their decision to choose an education alternative. Sample descriptors from the survey include *high academic expectations/rigor of the CURRENT program* and *the CURRENT program individualizes learning for my child*.

Subsequently, Items 11, 12, and 13 provided an opportunity for parents to elaborate on their responses to Items 9 and 10. Items 11 and 12 were open-ended and asked that parents indicate other positive (pull) or negative (push) factors that were extremely or very relevant in their decision. Item 13 asked parents to summarize their decision and determine whether it was made based on mostly positive (pull) factors or negative (push) factors. Items 9-13 were designed in direct alignment with the study's blended theoretical frameworks—Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration and RCT. While the Theory of Migration was used as the lens for understanding parent choice in terms of

push and pull factors, RCT was used as the lens for understanding how parents engaged in the choice process (see Figure 3).

Survey Items 14, 15, and 16 asked parents to indicate specific demographics, including their race, age, and education level. Butin (2010) claimed that demographic variables such as these three are critical in a study. These concrete characteristics allowed me to further disaggregate the data during analysis and when summarizing findings. While other demographics are often asked in surveys, these three seemed most relevant and contributed the most to the collective understanding of the phenomenon of parent choice. Each demographic (race, age, and education) told me more about who was engaging in the education marketplace in District ABC. Were some races more likely to consider certain education alternatives? Was a particular age group more likely to engage in school choice than others? Was there a correlation between the parent's education level and school choice? Were there trends in terms of demographics across subgroups? Again, these survey items allowed me to answer the study's two research questions and identify similarities and differences in parent motivation across the three subgroups.

Finally, Item 17 explained the focus group interviews, which served as the second, qualitative phase of research. Parents indicated whether or not they agreed to participate in Phase 2 by selecting one of two options—one indicating that they were not interested and another indicating interest. Interested participants were directed to a separate Google Form where they left their email addresses as a contact for Phase 2. Uninterested participants exited the survey.

The electronic survey for this study was distributed in the form of a hyperlink with directions and informed consent information. A period of 2 weeks was allowed for

participation before the survey was closed. As a courtesy, reminder emails were sent when 1 week remained for survey participation. The statistical procedures used to analyze this quantitative data set were descriptive in nature, given the data provided information about specific groups (homeschoolers, faith-based schoolers, and charter schoolers; Urdan, 2017). Findings were summarized in tables and graphs according to demographic variables and by subgroup. Other important findings were emphasized where appropriate.

Phase 2 of this study, the qualitative phase, occurred after the quantitative data analysis concluded. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated of mixed methods such as those employed during this study: “This ‘mixing’ or integrating of data, it can be argued, provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than by itself” (p. 213). The quantitative data collected from the initial survey informed the subsequent qualitative phase.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that in an explanatory sequential study such as this one, typical procedures involve the collection of survey data and initial data analysis, followed by qualitative interviews or focus groups to further explain confusing, contradictory, or unusual survey responses. Therefore, qualitative data collection in the form of four focus groups (i.e., homeschooling, brick-and-mortar charter schooling, virtual charter schooling, and faith-based schooling) was scheduled to occur on Zoom with the intent to further explain the quantitative findings. The focus groups were planned to include six to eight participants, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell, selected based on expressed interest as indicated at the end of the initial survey. However, as previously discussed, due to the lack of participation, only one of four scheduled focus

group interviews occurred.

Table 8 summarizes the study's procedures for data collection and analysis in alignment with the two research questions.

**Table 8**

*Research Questions, Instruments, and Analysis Alignment*

Research questions	Data collection instruments	Analysis
1. Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?	Online survey & focus group (faith-based only)	QUANTITATIVE—descriptive statistics (mean + SD, percentages). Qualitative—a priori themes (push/pull) + inductive coding
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling?	Online survey & focus group (faith-based only)	QUANTITATIVE—descriptive statistics (mean + SD, percentages). Qualitative—a priori themes (push/pull) + inductive coding

*Note.* The primary method for analysis is capitalized.

While I planned to use two data collection tools to answer the research questions, focus group data were limited to the perspectives of the faith-based population.

Descriptive statistics guided analysis of the quantitative parent survey data. I found the mean of the push and pull factors reported by participants, taking into account all responses (Urdan, 2017) to answer both Research Questions 1 and 2. I decided to calculate and report the mean values rather than other measures of central tendency, because it included every response as part of the calculation. However, understanding that the effects of outliers on the mean are oftentimes dramatic, I also calculated and reported the SD. Urdan (2017) said, “when combined, the mean and standard deviation

provide a pretty good picture of what the distribution of scores is like” (p. 22).

Some open-ended response items included within the survey required qualitative analysis to answer Research Question 1 as well. Those data were primarily analyzed according to a priori themes, including push and pull factors uncovered during the review of literature that were used to design the parent survey; however, unexpected subthemes also emerged from examining the initial themes inductively.

The second phase of research was expected to provide qualitative data collected through focus group interviews. The qualitative data acquired from the focus groups would have been used to further explain the initial quantitative phase, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), and would have assisted me in answering Research Question 2. Again, however, due to the lack of participation from the other subgroups, only the faith-based population participated in a sole focus group interview. I analyzed those data primarily according to a priori themes identified in existing literature (Table 3) and according to prominent push and pull factors.

Despite collecting data in two distinct phases, both data sets were merged to form conclusions and to answer each of the research questions. Therefore, both the survey and the focus group served as data collection instruments for each research question. Quantitative data analysis received emphasis in this mixed methods explanatory sequential study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Protecting Participants**

Ethical issues associated with research today command attention. Therefore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) asserted that researchers must make adequate plans to protect study participants. Multiple measures were taken to ensure best practice. During

the pilot test of the parent survey, a suggestion was made to secure participant identities. The initial version asked those interested in focus group participation to share their email addresses within Qualtrics; however, realizing that practice would compromise anonymity, the suggestion was made to divert interested participants to a Google Form separate from Qualtrics. That correction was made and further tested by Dr. Blanton, the study's committee chair.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) provided a list of ethical issues to anticipate during the course of a study as well as proposed measures for addressing them. Their recommendations guided me in protecting my study's participants. Table 9 lists the anticipated ethical issues and methods for addressing those issues.

**Table 9***Anticipated Ethical Issues and Methods for Addressing the Issues*

When the ethical issue may occur	Ethical issues	Methods for addressing the issues
Beginning the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share the research problem with participants</li> <li>• Disclose the study's purpose</li> <li>• Do not pressure participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform participants of the general purpose of the study</li> <li>• Tell participants that involvement is not mandatory</li> <li>• Obtain consent where appropriate</li> </ul>
Collecting data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the site</li> <li>• Treat all participants as equals</li> <li>• Avoid deceiving participants</li> <li>• Avoid collecting harmful information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build trust</li> <li>• Discuss the study's purpose and how the data will be used</li> <li>• Avoid leading questions</li> <li>• Do not share personal opinions</li> <li>• Involve participants as collaborators</li> <li>• Adhere to those questions within protocol</li> </ul>
Data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid siding with participants</li> <li>• Avoid disclosing only one side of the results</li> <li>• Respect the privacy of participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report all perspectives, including contradictions</li> <li>• Assign fictitious names for participants when necessary</li> </ul>
Reporting, sharing, and storing data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid falsities</li> <li>• Do not plagiarize</li> <li>• Avoid disclosing harmful information</li> <li>• Communicate clearly</li> <li>• Share with appropriate parties</li> <li>• Keep raw data</li> <li>• Provide proof of compliance with ethical issues if necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be honest</li> <li>• Use unbiased language</li> <li>• Provide copies of the report to participating institutions</li> <li>• Share the results with other researchers</li> <li>• Store the data and recordings for 5 years on a password-protected device</li> <li>• Do not use the data for multiple publications</li> <li>• Documented informed consent</li> </ul>

*Note.* This information was adapted from Creswell and Creswell, Table 4.1 (p. 90).



Clearly, much was to be anticipated during this study; however, ethical issues that threaten a study's integrity can be addressed through proper planning. Again, the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018) ensured this study stayed on course.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis occurred in two phases in accordance with the explanatory sequential mixed methods design.

#### ***Quantitative Data Analysis***

The statistical procedures for the initial quantitative phase (the survey) were descriptive in nature. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the characteristics of the sample from whom data were drawn—the parents in this study (Urdan, 2017). Quantitative data analysis occurred in both written narrative and visual formats, including tables and graphs showing characteristics of the initial survey sample according to demographics collected during Phase 1 and factors that influenced participating parents to enroll their children in Grades 1-5 in homeschooling, charter schooling, or faith-based schooling. These factors were analyzed as either push or pull collectively first, then separately for comparison.

This study's methodology was designed to mirror that of Chandler (2015), who also studied school choice and parent motivation by way of an electronic survey. To determine the push and pull factors that motivated each subgroup (Research Question 2), I assigned values to the items within the survey that utilized a Likert scale. During survey data analysis, like Chandler (2015), I sorted the selected factors from most to least influential within each subgroup by calculating the mean. The mean, according to Urdan (2017), is simply the average score. Because the effects of outliers on the mean can be

dramatic, I also calculated and reported the SD of the scores. Urdan described the SD as the average “deviation between individual scores in a distribution and the mean for the distribution” (p. 22). I created tables to summarize key findings pertaining to parent motivators by showing the mean and SD.

The mean and SD combined provide a fairly accurate account of the distribution of scores (Urdan, 2017); however, following the study’s execution, I understood that employing another statistical analysis could have produced different results. Therefore, mean and SD were added to the list of limitations, which will be discussed at a different point in the study.

Since the survey also included open-ended response items, those data were primarily analyzed according to the push and pull a priori themes identified in the review of literature; however, unexpected subthemes also emerged from examining the initial themes inductively. These qualitative findings helped shape my analysis of the other quantitative data collected during Phase 1 and were reported in the summary of findings.

Quirkos (2020), an online data analysis software, aided in the analysis and representation of the qualitative survey data. Quirkos is useful in the social sciences as a tool for color coding data according to themes and sorting it into graphic displays. Because the intent of mixed methods is to build understanding from one database to another (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the quantitative results indicated how the qualitative phase should be used for follow-up (see Figure 3).

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis***

The key rationale behind an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design is that the qualitative data builds on the quantitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018);

therefore, focus groups composed of willing participants were planned. In order to increase participation and address the health and safety concerns brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus groups were scheduled to occur via four separate Zoom meetings—one for faith-based, one for homeschooling, and two for the two distinct forms of charter schooling included in this study.

The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately, and the quantitative results assisted me in planning the subsequent qualitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), focus group interviews typically involve open-ended questions used to elicit the views and opinions of participants, and they are generally unstructured; however, as researcher and facilitator, I made initial plans to rephrase questions from the Phase 1 parent survey as more open-ended in order to build my understanding of the initial responses as needed. The following questions guided my initial planning of the focus group interviews:

- Tell me about what type of school your child attended before enrolling in the current program.
- When did you make the decision regarding your child's current education arrangement? What prompted this decision?
- How long do you predict your child will be enrolled in the current program of choice? Please explain your thinking.
- Describe the positive factors (those factors that drew you toward the school of choice) of the current education program.
- Describe the negative factors you associate with the zoned public school.
- Would you say your decision to enroll in the school of choice was based more

on the positive factors associated with the choice school or negative factors associated with the zoned school? Please explain.

In addition to the list of focus group questions I planned to ask each subgroup uniformly, in accordance with the explanatory sequential nature of the research design, I recognized that Phase 1 data analysis may reveal confusing, contradictory, or unusual responses specific to each subgroup (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); therefore, I understood that other questions would emerge from quantitative data analysis that could not be determined beforehand. Those questions were typed into a Google Doc before the scheduled Zoom meetings to help guide the interview (Appendix B).

The focus group meetings were scheduled to be recorded on Zoom to support transcription and assist in analysis. These data were first analyzed as a distinct data set to inductively identify emerging themes related to the research questions. Butin (2010) agreed that data triangulation enables a more valid analysis and provides more thorough conclusions; however, data triangulation does not mean that the data will agree. Butin asserted that some of the most helpful findings occur when the data conflict, because different research tools may reveal differing perspectives. Quirkos (2020) aided this stage of analysis as well; however, most importantly, the qualitative data were integrated with the quantitative to provide more insight into the initial quantitative results, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Both Ray (2020a) and Butin (2010) recognized that researchers must work within their given constraints to design and execute a study to the best of their ability. While limitations are beyond the researcher's control, they can affect the end results if not

controlled properly; therefore, they should be acknowledged (Simon & Goes, 2011).

Five limitations were identified before executing the study. First, I had previously engaged in school choice decision-making for my own children in District ABC. My choice involved bringing my children to the TPS within District ABC where I worked, rather than to the one where they were zoned to attend. They did not attend one of the three types of schooling involved in this study. The decision was solely made based on convenience and nothing more.

Second, as a former employee and current resident of the area, I was familiar with District ABC and the community in which the study occurred. Third, participation in the study was voluntary. Fourth, with COVID-19 and other current societal issues facing the nation at the time, it was understood that the results of this study were most likely impacted in a way they would not have been prior to the unprecedented events. Finally, social media was used as a supplemental recruitment measure. I recognized the platform as a limitation because a large number of users does not necessarily equate to a large number of participants (Marketing Interactive, 2014).

Simon and Goes (2011) suggested that researchers explain how they intend to deal with limitations so they do not affect the outcome of the study. First, I recognized that I brought a degree of personal bias to the study as a former employee of District ABC and a past participant in the school choice process. As a mother of three children, I selected prekindergarten and elementary school programs in District ABC for each. District ABC touts its unique public choice program, which included seven elementary schools and two middle schools at the time of the study. It also offered various prekindergarten options, including one tuition-free half-day program, two tuition-based

full-day programs, and six tuition-free programs for students living within Title I attendance zones.

After careful consideration, my family chose to send all three children to the tuition-free prekindergarten program as well as the elementary school of choice where I was employed at the time. The decision was made based on convenience, as each school was in close proximity to the other, the children attended my school, and transportation arrangements were simplified. For these reasons, I categorized my family's decision as mostly influenced by those pull factors associated with the two schools of choice. My bias was clarified and controlled by acknowledging its existence throughout the course of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, I did not participate in the study, serving only as researcher and facilitator.

Second, because participation was voluntary, I acknowledged that the samples drawn from each of the three subgroups may or may not have been truly representative of the larger population (Urdan, 2017). Consequently, I understood that the study results may or may not have been generalizable to other settings, people, or samples (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, to increase the validity of the results and conclusions, I employed multiple validity procedures, including the use of a mixed methods design. Mixing research methods provided a stronger understanding than employing quantitative or qualitative methods alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I triangulated quantitative and qualitative data sources and thereby added to the validity of the findings.

Third, to enhance the accuracy of the account, I involved two peer debriefers, including two colleagues, to review my findings and again increase the validity of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, to address the issue of social media as a

limitation, I planned to use it consistently across subgroups as a supplemental platform for recruitment. Doing so would decrease bias in my sampling methods (Butin, 2010).

In addition to the five limitations identified beforehand, this study was subject to six additional limitations identified during execution. First, while I requested that each of the seven participating organizations post the study's information on their social media pages (Facebook), only two of seven administrators agreed to do so. One brick-and-mortar charter school administrator and one virtual charter school administrator allowed it, meaning social media was used inconsistently and only at the charter schools.

Second, the number of faith-based schooling participants was disproportionately higher during the parent survey than the other two subgroups, with 68.27% faith-based representation, 20.19% charter school representation, and 11.54% homeschooling representation in the study. Third, in addition to having majority representation during the parent survey, the faith-based subgroup was the only one to participate in the Phase 2 focus group interviews. Whereas 12 parents provided consent to participate in the focus groups, including one homeschooling, two brick-and-mortar charter, three virtual charter, and six faith-based schooling parents, only three confirmed intentions to attend, each of whom had children enrolled at a faith-based organization. Therefore, the three faith-based parents attended the focus group meeting as scheduled, and neither homeschooling nor charter schooling had representation in Phase 2 of the study.

Fourth, in addition to having a disproportionate faith-based representation, a disproportionate number of the participants identified as being White (74 of 83, or 89.16%). The remaining participants identified with other underrepresented races, including four (4.82%) from multiple races, two (2.41%) Black or African American, one

(1.20%) Asian, one (1.20%) Hispanic or Latino, and one (1.20%) identifying as “other.” Given the disproportionate representation in terms of both form of schooling and race, one can conclude that the results of the study may or may not be generalizable to other settings.

Fifth, the response rates of the parent survey were disproportionate across the subgroups. The response rates were aggregated by subgroup and were reported as follows: faith-based (24.18%), homeschooling (11.54%), and charter schooling (7.26%). Again, the faith-based schooling parents’ representation in the study was much higher than the other two subgroups. It is worth noting that the response rate of the charter schooling subgroup would have been much smaller if recruitment measures were consistent with the other two subgroups. The virtual charter school administrators were able to aggregate the parent email list to include only the parents qualified to participate in the study; therefore, more homeschooling and faith-based schooling parents received the emailed survey link. However, only the qualified virtual charter schooling parents received the emailed survey link. To address this limitation, the responses that were received were very thoroughly analyzed, and gaps in the data are detailed in the results.

Finally, mean and SD were used to analyze and report the study’s quantitative survey results. The results of Phase 1 data analysis, which were based on mean and SD, were used to inform the planning of Phase 2, the focus group interview. Therefore, because analyzing and reporting through other measures (mode, for example) could have produced different results, this was included in the list of limitations.

Delimitations are the parameters or defining boundaries of a study consciously set within the researcher’s control (Simon & Goes, 2011). The following five delimitations



were set before the study's execution to address the two research questions:

1. The study was set in one suburban South Carolina school district—District ABC.
2. The study included participants living only within District ABC.
3. All participants were parents or primary caregivers of only first- through fifth-grade children who had the responsibility of making decisions regarding their child's education.
4. Study participants had experience with making choices in the education marketplace.
5. The study explored parental motivations of only three school choice options available in District ABC (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling).

While this study is potentially applicable across the United States, it occurred exclusively in District ABC. Additionally, while this study is potentially applicable to all grade levels, I chose to engage only those parents of first- through fifth-grade children because they were likely to have the most recent experience engaging in the education marketplace and with push and pull factors of both origin and destination in particular. While other forms of school choice are available across the nation, I limited the study to include homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling because they are the only options available in District ABC.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the planned methods for answering the study's two research questions. The study's mixed methods explanatory sequential design was

explained, and the population and sampling procedures were detailed. The Phase 1 data collection instrument, an electronic Qualtrics survey, was presented; and the measures used to establish validity were shared. The study's 2-phase data analysis procedures were summarized. Finally, the limitations beyond the researcher's control and the delimitations set by the researcher were provided.

This summary of the study's methodology lays the foundation for a study that occurred at what was perhaps a crossroads in education. The undeniable growth of the school choice movement coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportune time to conduct this research. Chapter 1 explained why this study is necessary. Chapter 2 provided present-day, historical, and debatable descriptions of the three types of schooling included in this study. Chapter 3 explained how this study was possible. Chapter 4 explains the study's results.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Overview**

School choice options have increased and expanded across the nation and specifically within District ABC. Whereas advocates believe that the market-based competition brought about by the movement will increase the overall academic achievement and performance of all schools (Lindle, 2014), opponents protest there is little evidence after years of experience that competition sparks such improvement (Ravitch, 2010). Given the clear dichotomy and the understanding that the parents are the ones who shape the terrain by the very choices they make, this study sought to understand a relevant phenomenon as it pertained to parent motivation in District ABC where choice is abundant and arguably increasing in popularity.

While an abundance of research is available to explain parent motivations for choosing alternatives to TPSs, there is a lack of research comparing and contrasting parent motivation across subgroups. Therefore, the purpose of this empirical study was to compare and contrast parent motivation(s) across three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling families) through (a) providing insight into the rapidly growing school choice movement in the area and (b) identifying similarities and differences in motivators across the subgroups. The study was completed in the spring of 2021 with seven of eight choice organizations located within District ABC.

This study intended to employ an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, including both quantitative and qualitative methods in a 2-phase QUAN>qual approach. Both parent survey and focus group data were used to answer the research questions. This chapter outlines the study's two research questions, the data collection processes, the

profile of the participants, and the findings.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions guided data collection and analysis and contributed to the body of research regarding the stated problem. The research questions guiding this study were

1. Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, charter schooling?

### **Data Collection Processes**

Data collection was planned to occur in two phases, including an initial survey designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, followed by qualitative parent focus group interviews. Phase 1 of data collection began in February 2021 and ended in March 2021. Phase 2 of data collection began and ended in April 2021.

#### ***Research Question 1***

Research Question 1 asked, “Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?” To answer this question, in keeping with the study’s mixed methods design, both quantitative and qualitative measures were employed in two phases. Phase 1 consisted of an electronic parent survey, and Phase 2 consisted of the parent focus group.

I adapted Chandler’s (2015) Survey of Choice Factors Influencing Parents’ Decisions to Enroll Their Child in an Online Program to answer this study’s two research questions. The adapted version, Survey of Factors Influencing Parental Motivation &

School Choice, contained 34 items, including 12 multiple choice items, 20 Likert scale items, and two multiple choice items with opportunities for open response. Of the 34 survey items, two assessed participant eligibility to take part in the study, and six items classified the participants by demographics specific to the study's purpose. Twenty Likert scale items, two open-response items, and one multiple choice item assessed participant decision-making processes according to the push and pull factors associated with the TPS and choice alternative. Finally, three survey items were used to collect the standard demographics of the population, including race/ethnicity, age, and education level.

While a total of eight choice organizations operated within the boundaries of District ABC at the time of this study, the survey was shared with the seven choice organizations that agreed to participate. The seven organizations included one homeschooling association, three faith-based schools, one brick-and-mortar charter school, and two virtual charter schools. In February 2021, the participating organizations' administrators distributed the survey link to all first- through fifth-grade parents through their email listservs. The survey link remained active for 2 weeks, after which it was disabled. The data were then downloaded for analysis.

Gaps and contradictions were identified during analysis of the survey data. Therefore, Phase 2, the parent focus groups, was designed to help clarify remaining questions. Parents who were interested in participating in Phase 2, the focus group interviews, provided consent upon completion of the Phase 1 survey. A total of 12 parents across the four subgroups volunteered for this phase of research; however, only one of four focus group interviews occurred due to the lack of participation at the time Phase 2 was conducted. Therefore, only the faith-based focus group interview data were

available to follow through with the explanatory sequential design and to fully answer Research Question 1 as planned.

The faith-based focus group interview occurred in April 2021. Three parents were in attendance. I recorded the meeting on Zoom, after which I transcribed and analyzed the data according to the gaps and contradictions in the Phase 1 data identified previously in the process. The findings from Research Question 1 will be discussed in conjunction with Research Question 2 after the participants for Research Question 2 have been described.

### ***Research Question 2***

Research Question 2 asked, “What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling?” Again, to answer this question, mixed methods were employed in two phases of data collection. Phase 1 consisted of an electronic parent survey that produced mostly quantitative data; however, two open-response items included in the survey’s design produced some qualitative data about the perceived push and pull factors associated with the zoned TPS and choice alternative. Phase 2 was designed to include parent focus group interviews; however, as previously stated, only one of four planned interviews occurred—that one interview being with the faith-based focus group. The qualitative focus group data helped to further explain Phase 1 findings in keeping with the study’s explanatory sequential design.

### **Participant Profile**

A total of 223 parents engaged with the Phase 1 electronic survey, with 221 providing consent to participate in the study. The first two survey items assessed participant eligibility according to the criteria set by the researcher, which were (a)

parents must reside within the boundaries of District ABC yet selected an alternative to TPS for their child/children, and (b) parents must have at least one child in Grades 1-5. Of the initial 221 participants providing consent to participate, 137 (63.13%) lived within the boundaries of District ABC, with another 80 (36.87%) disqualified by the first criterion. Of the remaining 137 parents, 100 parents claimed to have at least one child in Grades 1-5; therefore, of the initial 223 total parents who engaged with the survey, 123 (55.16%) were disqualified by the two criteria set by the researcher, and 100 parents moved forward with the study. Table 10 provides a profile of the 100 participants who responded to Item 1 according to the grade level of their youngest child.

**Table 10**

*Profile of the Participants According to Grade Level*

Grade level	Total number	Total percentage
1	28	21.37%
2	26	19.85%
3	15	11.45%
4	12	9.16%
5	19	14.50%

*Note.* The data represent the parents' youngest child in Grades 1-5, should they have more than one child enrolled in the choice alternative.

Item 3 of the survey aggregated the participants into subgroups according to the research questions—homeschooling, faith-based schooling, or charter schooling. A total of 104 parents responded to Survey Item 3. Table 11 accounts for the three subgroups by number of participants per subgroup and percentage representation in the study.

**Table 11***Profile of the Participants According to Subgroup*

Subgroup	Total number	Total percentage
Faith-based schooling	71	68.27%
Charter schooling	21	20.19%
Homeschooling	12	11.54%

Clearly, of the 104 total participants, the faith-based population had predominant representation in the study (68.27%).

Item 4 asked parents how many of their children are currently enrolled in Grades 1-5 in the choice alternative reported in Item 2. A total of 102 parents responded to Item 4. Of the 102 total parents, 78 (76.47%) claimed to have one child enrolled in the reported alternative, 20 (19.61%) claimed to have two children enrolled in the reported alternative, four (3.92%) claimed to have three children enrolled in the reported alternative, and no parents claimed to have more than three children enrolled in the reported alternative.

Item 5 of the survey focused specifically on the charter schooling population and sought to aggregate the group into two smaller subgroups—brick-and-mortar charter schooling and virtual charter schooling. A total of 47 parents responded to Item 5. Given the discrepancy between the total number of parents identifying with charter schools in Item 2 (21 total) and the more than double number of responses here, one can conclude that this data point is inaccurate and unreliable. Nevertheless, of the 47 total respondents, 36 parents identified with brick-and-mortar charter schooling, and 11 parents identified with virtual charter schooling.

Item 6 of the survey asked parents to identify which type of school their child



attended before enrollment in the current program. Table 12 provides a profile of the 100 respondents according to the type of school their child attended before enrollment in the choice alternative.

**Table 12**

*Profile of the Participants According to Previous Form of Schooling*

Previous type of school	Total number	Total percentage
Always attended the current program	34	34%
Traditional public school	28	28%
Private, faith-based school	19	19%
Brick-and-mortar charter school	8	8%
Homeschool	6	6%
Private, non-religious school	2	2%
Other	2	2%
Virtual charter school	1	1%

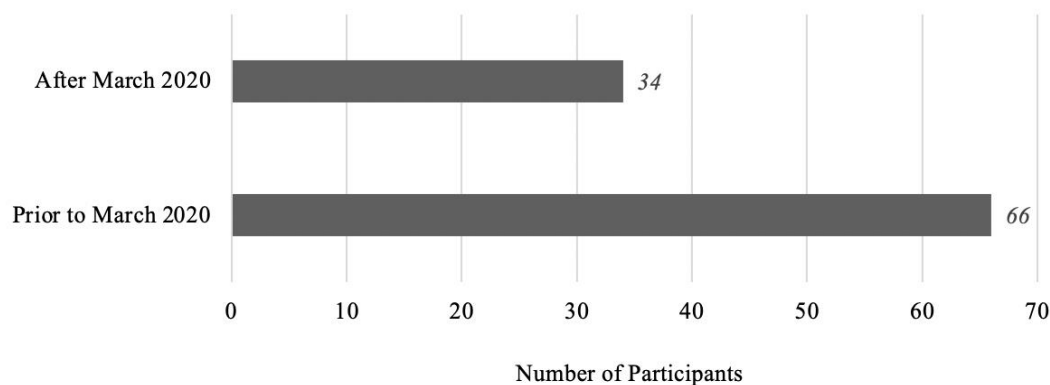
*Note.* The schools referred to as “other” as reported by parents included preschool and childcare centers.

As shown, the majority of parents responding to the survey (34%) claimed their child has always attended the choice alternative. However, 28% of parents claimed their child was previously enrolled in a TPS. A combined 38% of the remaining parents had experience with other choice alternatives.

Item 7 of the survey asked parents to share when they made their decision regarding their child’s current choice education program in terms of either (a) prior to March 2020 (before the local impacts of COVID-19) or (b) after March 2020 (following the local impacts of COVID-19). Figure 8 explains when the 100 participants who responded to this item reportedly made their decision to select an alternative to TPS in relation to the impacts of COVID-19.

**Figure 8**

*Profile of the Participants According to the Time of Decision*

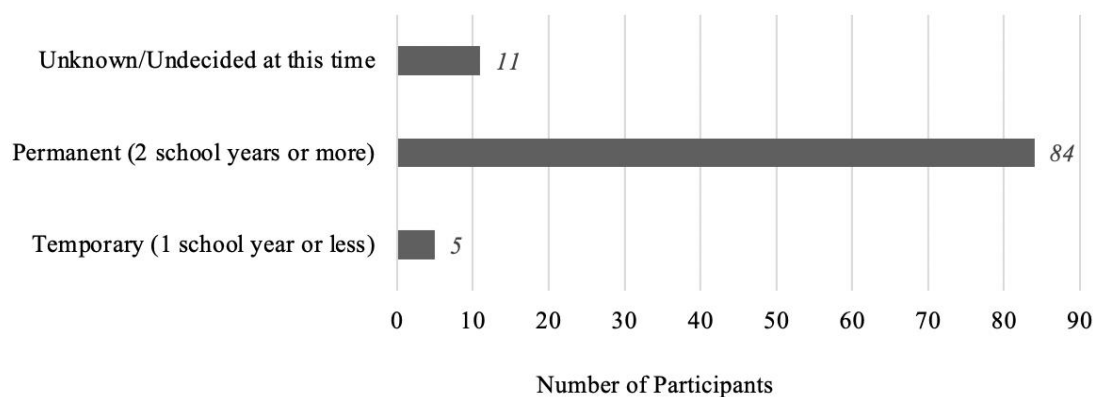


Based on the responses of 100 parents, roughly two-thirds decided to enroll their child in an alternative to TPSs before COVID-19; however, roughly one-third made their decision following the local effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the significant number of participants who seemingly considered school choice following the effects of COVID-19, I determined that the phenomenon warranted further examination during the focus group interviews; however, as discussed, focus group data were only collected from the faith-based population. Therefore, given the limited data and the inability to generalize findings across the subgroups, this phenomenon could only be further examined specific to the faith-based data.

Item 8 of the survey assessed the permanence of the decision discussed in Item 7 by asking participants to report the predicted duration of their child's current enrollment in the choice alternative. Figure 9 explains how long the 100 participants who answered this item anticipate their child's enrollment in the current choice program of choice to last.

**Figure 9**

*Profile of the Participants According to the Predicted Duration of the Choice*



Based on the responses of 100 parents, the clear majority (84%) anticipate continued enrollment in the choice alternative beyond the 2020-2021 school year. Just 5% of the participants reported that their decision would last only 1 year; however, another 11% were undecided about how they would move forward with enrollment in the future.

When the data produced from Items 7 and 8 were merged, I concluded that the 5% reporting temporary enrollment following the effects of COVID-19 may perhaps return to their previous education program. However, I also concluded, given the discrepancy between the reported 34% of participants who made their decision following the effects of COVID-19 and the overwhelming majority of participants who predict their decision will become permanent, that the pandemic perhaps served as a catalyst for a certain percentage who may otherwise have maintained enrollment with the previous education program.

Survey Items 32-34 served to understand the basic demographics of the population, including race/ethnicity, age, and level of education completed. A total of 83

parents reported their race for Survey Item 32. Table 13 provides a profile of the participants according to race/ethnicity.

**Table 13**

*Profile of the Participants According to Race/Ethnicity*

Race/Ethnicity	Total number	Total percentage
White	74	89.16%
From Multiple Races	4	4.82%
Black or African American	2	2.41%
Asian	1	1.20%
Hispanic or Latino	1	1.20%
Other	1	1.20%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0.00%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0.00%

The clear majority of study participants were White (89.16%), according to the data, with eight participants from other underrepresented races (9.63% combined representation). The category of “other,” as reported by one participant, was selected because “race is not relevant to this decision.” The disproportionate representation of race/ethnicity was added to the study’s limitations.

A total of 83 parents reported their age for Survey Item 33. Table 14 provides a profile of the participants according to age.

**Table 14**

*Profile of the Participants According to Age*

Age	Total number	Total percentage
24 Years or younger	0	0.00%
25 to 29 Years	1	1.20%
30 to 34 Years	9	10.84%
35 to 39 Years	25	30.12%
40 to 44 Years	26	31.33%
45 to 49 Years	17	20.48%
50 to 54 Years	3	3.61%
55 Years or better	2	2.41%

According to the data, most participants were between 35 and 44 years old, with 25 (30.12%) between 35 and 39 years old and 26 (31.33%) between 40 and 44 years old. These two groups represented roughly two thirds of the participants.

Last, a total of 83 parents reported their education level for Survey Item 34. Table 15 provides a profile of the participants according to their level of education.

**Table 15**

*Profile of the Participants According to Level of Education*

Level of education	Total number	Total percentage
Less than a high school diploma	0	0.00%
High school diploma or equivalent	2	2.41%
Some college but no degree	6	7.23%
Associate degree	8	9.64%
Bachelor degree	44	53.01%
Graduate degree	23	27.71%

The data showed that the majority of parents participating in this study possessed a bachelor's degree or higher (67 total, 80.72%), while two (2.41%) possessed the equivalent of a high school diploma or less. In summary, based on the data compiled from Survey Items 32-34, the majority of study participants as a whole were college-educated White parents in their late 30s to early 40s.

### **Research Findings**

Data collected for Research Questions 1 and 2 consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data collected in two phases: the initial parent survey, followed by parent focus group interviews. The data collected during Phase 2 were used to further explain Phase 1 findings. The two data sets were first analyzed separately but were eventually merged to draw overall conclusions pertaining to both research questions. Research Question 1 findings are based on aggregated data from all participants; however,

Research Question 2 findings are disaggregated into the three subgroups.

### ***Research Question 1***

Research Question 1 asked, “Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?” Survey Items 9-20 and 21-28 served to assess the levels of relevance of a provided list of push and pull factors in parent decision-making. Survey Items 9-20 pertained to the child’s zoned TPS, while Items 21-28 pertained to the child’s current education arrangement (the choice program). Survey Items 29 and 30 provided an opportunity for open response in terms of push and pull factors involved in the decision, and Item 31 asked participants to summarize their motivation for choosing the alternative as mostly push or mostly pull.

Parents were asked to rate each factor according to its level of relevance on a Likert scale (5=extremely relevant, 4=very relevant, 3=relevant, 2=slightly relevant, or 1=not at all relevant). I assigned numerical values to the Likert scale to calculate the means and SDs of the responses. Therefore, the responses scoring means closer to 5 represent extremely relevant factors, whereas those responses scoring closer to 1 represent irrelevant factors.

A total of 83 participants responded to Survey Items 9-28, the Likert scale items. Table 16 shows the results of Survey Items 9-20 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means. The factors with means closest to 5 are considered extremely relevant to the participants.

**Table 16***The Zoned School Means and SDs*

Push factor	Mean	SD
The zoned school was inconveniently located	4.72	0.84
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with the students at the zoned school	4.36	1.21
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with staff at the zoned school	4.19	1.39
The zoned school utilized outdated teaching methods	4.06	1.26
Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's zoned school	3.87	1.60
The student body makeup at the zoned school was not what my child nor I wanted	3.76	1.57
Personal dissatisfaction with teacher quality at my child's zoned school	3.72	1.38
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual learning needs	3.37	1.56
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual social/emotional needs	3.28	1.57
Personal dissatisfaction with discipline, safety, and/or bullying at my child's zoned school	3.12	1.56
The class size was too large at the zoned school	2.99	1.51
Personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's zoned school	2.81	1.33

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of all three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling).

The results indicate that an inconvenient location, unpleasant experiences with students at the zoned TPS, unpleasant experiences with the staff at the zoned TPS, and outdated teaching methods were among the top-ranking push factors reported by parents.

Each had means above 4. All factors had SDs between 0.84 and 1.60. It is worth noting that an inconvenient location had both the highest mean and the lowest SD, indicating parent responses were fairly consistent. Provided that each of these four factors had such high means, I decided that further explanation and clarity were needed to better understand parent perspectives with regard to these factors.

I planned to investigate this finding further during the focus group interviews; however, focus group data were only collected from the faith-based population, given the lack of participation from the other subgroups. The limited data resulted in an inability to generalize findings across the subgroups, meaning this phenomenon could only be further examined specific to the faith-based data.

Table 17 shows the results of Survey Items 21-28 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.



**Table 17***The Choice School Means and SDs*

Pull factor	Mean	SD
The current program utilizes modern teaching methods through technology integration	3.10	1.51
The current program allows my family more flexibility in scheduling	2.78	1.61
The current program individualizes learning for my child	2.64	1.53
The current school will do a better job of teaching basic reading, writing, and math	2.20	1.28
Good teacher quality of the current program	1.99	1.08
High academic expectations/rigor of the current program	1.95	1.07
The current school supports our family's religious beliefs	1.88	1.35
The current school supports our family values	1.57	0.93

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of all three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling).

The data for Items 21-28 had lower means overall, indicating that perhaps the pull factors of the choice alternatives were less relevant than the push factors of the TPS in the decision-making process.

The highest-ranking pull factor reported by parents was the choice alternative's use of modern teaching methods through technology integration (3.10 mean, 1.51 SD). The two lowest-ranking pull factors were the school's support of family religious beliefs (1.88 mean, 1.35 SD) and the school's support of family values (1.57 mean, 0.93 SD). It is worth noting that the very lowest-ranking factor, which pertained to the school's support of family values, also had the lowest SD of all, meaning parent responses were

fairly consistent. The SDs between all factors ranged from 0.93 to 1.61.

Because 68.27% of participants were faith-based schooling parents, I decided that this data point was worth further exploration, particularly with the faith-based focus group. Therefore, I planned to explore this contradiction further while conducting the focus group interviews. Since only the faith-based focus group interview occurred, this phenomenon was further examined through that lens alone. The results of this analysis are reported later in the study's findings.

Survey Items 29 and 30 were formatted as opportunities for open response. Item 29 asked parents to indicate other positive (pull) factors they considered extremely relevant or very relevant in their decision to enroll their child in the choice alternative, and Item 30 asked them to indicate other negative (push) factors they considered to be extremely relevant or very relevant. Item 29 elicited 67 total responses, and Item 30 elicited 47 total responses. Provided this portion of the survey produced qualitative data, these responses were coded separately (push and pull) to identify themes. Quirkos, an online data analysis program, assisted in this process.

Survey Item 29 asked parents to indicate the positive factors associated with the choice program in which their child was enrolled at the time of the study. During analysis of the 67 total responses, seven themes emerged. Table 18 outlines the seven themes and total codes (mentions) within each theme.

**Table 18***Positive Factors of the Choice Program*

Theme	Total codes
Academics/curriculum/methods	35
Positive relationships	23
Religious beliefs	17
Class size	15
Pandemic response	9
Safety/discipline	8
Convenience	7

A total of 114 codes were drawn from the 67 responses, provided some responses crossed multiple themes and were therefore counted twice. Other responses contained multiple statements that were coded separately. Responses pertaining to the choice program's academics, curriculum, and teaching methods appeared most frequently during analysis, followed by positive relationships.

The positive factors of the choice program pertaining to academics, curriculum, and teaching methods named by the parents varied a great deal; therefore, that theme was divided into four subthemes for a more detailed analysis. The four subthemes included (in order of the greatest to least number of codes) were high standards/rigor (11 codes), traditional teaching methods (10 codes), flexible curriculum/teaching methods (nine codes), and project-based learning (three codes). Based on these data, the top motivator for selecting an alternative to TPSs was the choice program's high academic standards and rigor. Interestingly, these data directly contradicted the findings associated with Survey Items 9-20, in which it was determined that personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor of the zoned TPS was the lowest-ranking push factor (Table 16). Therefore, I decided that this contradiction should be explored during the focus

group interviews. However, since only the faith-based focus group interview occurred, this contradiction was further examined through that lens alone. The results are reported in the findings associated with the faith-based population.

The choice program's adherence to traditional teaching methods was named a close second. Of the 10 responses coded within this subtheme, six directly stated "traditional teaching methods," and four directly stated "no technology." Again, interestingly, these results were in direct conflict with the findings associated with Survey Items 21-28, in which parents indicated that modern teaching methods through technology integration was the most relevant pull factor associated with the choice alternative (Table 17). Therefore, I decided to explore this contradiction also during the focus group interviews. However, it was only further examined through the faith-based lens and is reported separately in the study.

Responses pertaining to the positive relationships at the choice program appeared in analysis of Survey Item 29 second most frequently (23 codes). I also divided this theme into subthemes for a more detailed analysis. The three subthemes within the larger theme of positive relationships were parent-teacher relationships (10 codes), teacher-student relationships (six codes), and family relationships (four codes). Each of the responses within all the subthemes was highly complimentary of the choice program's overall environment, describing it as "a family atmosphere," a place where teachers "truly care for my child," and an "extension of home."

Survey Item 30 asked parents to indicate the negative factors associated with the TPS where their child was zoned to attend at the time of the study. During analysis of the 47 total responses, seven themes emerged. Table 19 outlines the seven themes and total

codes within each theme.

**Table 19**

*Negative Factors of the TPS*

Theme	Total codes
Academics/curriculum/methods	28
Negative relationships	11
District/state policies	10
Pandemic response	8
Religious beliefs	7
Class size	6
Safety/discipline	3

A total of 73 codes were drawn from the 47 responses, provided some responses crossed multiple themes and were therefore counted twice. Other responses contained multiple statements that were coded separately. Responses pertaining to the TPSs' academics, curriculum, and teaching methods, again, appeared most frequently during analysis, followed by negative relationships.

These findings were in direct alignment with the findings associated with Survey Item 29; however, as previously determined, the data associated with Survey Items 9-20 were in direct contradiction. The data from Survey Items 9-20 (Table 15) named academics, curriculum, and methods as the least relevant factor used in the decision-making process, whereas the same factor was named most relevant in the data associated with Survey Item 30. I planned to explore this contradiction during the focus group interviews; however, it could only be examined through the faith-based lens, the results of which are reported separately from the whole.

To gain a better understanding of parent claims that the TPSs' academics, curriculum, and teaching methods were the most relevant push factor, I divided the larger

theme into five subthemes for a more detailed analysis. The five subthemes included (in order of the greatest to least number of codes) were low expectations/rigor (11 codes), a progressive agenda/curriculum (five codes), lack of individualization (four codes), technology dependency (three codes), and common core (two codes). Each of the responses within all of the subthemes was highly critical of the TPSs' expectations and academic rigor, describing the TPS as a place where kids are taught "what to think, rather than how to think," they "seem unhappy" and "bored," and they "are pushed through the system."

Further, I found the mention of a progressive agenda and curriculum to be of interest, especially given the broader setting and timeline in which this study occurred. Again, the responses coded under this subtheme were also highly critical of TPSs. Statements of interest included, "too much social justice indoctrination," "liberal teachings, teacher bias, and attempts to indoctrinate our children," and "too liberal." However, given the potential controversy, I decided it would be inappropriate to discuss this during the focus group interviews.

Finally, Survey Item 31 asked parents to determine whether they felt their decision to choose an alternative to TPSs was based more on the positive factors of the choice program or the negative factors of the TPS. The item elicited 83 total responses, with 52 (62.65%) naming the answer to be the positive factors of the choice program, 17 (20.48%) naming the answer to be the negative factors of the TPS, and 14 (16.87%) claiming to be neutral on the matter.

**Survey Data Analysis Summary.** Research Question 1 asked, "Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to

traditional public schooling?” Both quantitative data produced from multiple choice and Likert scale items were considered alongside qualitative data collected from open-response items included in the survey. The parent survey produced some very clear and contradictory findings alike.

First, it was determined that a large percentage of parents (34%) did not decide to enroll their child in the current choice program until after the local effects of the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in the area; however, another 66% were previously enrolled. These results were further examined during the focus group interviews.

Next, a series of Likert scale items determined the highest- and lowest-ranking push and pull factors associated with the zoned TPSs and the choice program that were most relevant in parent decisions. A total of four push factors (or negative factors associated with the zoned TPS) received a mean of 4 or more: inconveniently located (4.72 mean, 0.84 SD); unpleasant experiences with the students (4.36 mean, 1.21 SD); unpleasant experiences with the staff (4.19 mean, 1.39 SD); and outdated teaching methods (4.06 mean, 1.26 SD).

The lowest-ranking push factor in terms of relevance as determined by the Likert scale items was a personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at the TPSs (2.81 mean, 1.33 SD). This finding was in direct contradiction with the data collected from the open-response survey items, which named the same factor as the most relevant. Therefore, the contradiction would be further examined during the focus group interviews.

The pull factor associated with the choice program that was named most relevant in parent decisions was the choice program’s modern teaching methods and technology

integration. It was the only factor in the series to receive a mean of 3 or more (3.10 mean, 1.51 SD); therefore, it was the only one considered for further analysis. Interestingly, this finding was also in direct contradiction with the data collected from the open-response survey items, which determined that the choice program's adherence to traditional teaching methods was named a close second-most relevant positive factor. Several statements collected from parents named "traditional teaching methods" and "no technology" drew them to consider choice alternatives. This contradiction warranted examination during the focus group interviews.

The two lowest-ranking pull factors in terms of relevance were the choice program's support of family religious beliefs (1.88 mean, 1.35 SD) and support of family values (1.57 mean, 0.93 SD). Provided the large number of faith-based participants in this study (68.27%), this contradiction in the data would also be further examined during the focus group interviews.

**The Focus Group Interview.** In keeping with the explanatory sequential design of this study, the results of the Phase 1 data analysis informed the planning of Phase 2, the parent focus groups. Despite having created a list of potential questions previously in the process, new questions emerged from Phase 1 data analysis. Many of the questions and contradictions that emerged during analysis were specific to particular subgroups; therefore, four different question lists (one for each of the planned focus group interviews) were created to guide the interviews. However, given the lack of participation, only the faith-based focus group occurred. Therefore, I understood that with regard to Research Question 1, the Phase 2 focus group data were limited to a single perspective (the faith-based subgroup). As such, the results may or may not be



generalizable to the school choice population as a whole. The results of the faith-based focus group with regard to Phase 1 findings are provided later in the study's findings.

### ***Research Question 2***

Research Question 2 asked, "What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling?"

**The Parent Survey.** Survey Items 9-20 and 21-28 served to assess the levels of relevance of a provided list of push and pull factors in parent decision-making. Survey Items 9-20 pertained to the child's zoned TPS, while Items 21-28 pertained to the child's current education arrangement (the choice program). Parents were asked to rate each factor according to its level of relevance on a Likert scale (5=extremely relevant, 4=very relevant, 3=relevant, 2=slightly relevant, or 1=not at all relevant). I assigned numerical values to the Likert scale to calculate the means and SDs of the responses. Therefore, the responses scoring means closer to 5 represent extremely relevant factors, whereas those responses scoring closer to 1 represent irrelevant factors. Survey Items 29 and 30 allowed for open responses in terms of push and pull factors involved in the decision, and Item 31 asked participants to summarize their motivation for choosing the alternative as mostly push or mostly pull.

To answer Research Question 2, the data were first aggregated into three separate reports according to subgroup—homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling. Next, analysis procedures similar to Research Question 1 were employed; however, the data were analyzed by individual subgroup to identify emerging themes, contradictions, and/or obscure results.

**Homeschooling.** A total of 12 homeschooling parents provided consent to participate and qualified for the study. The subgroup of 12 reportedly had 15 total children homeschooled in Grades 1-5. Eight of 12 parents (72.73%) had one homeschooled child, two parents had two homeschooled children (18.18%), and one parent had three homeschooled children (9.09%). Eleven of the 12 initial homeschooling participants reported the type of school their child/children attended before they were enrolled as homeschoolers. Of the 11, five (45.45%) were previously enrolled in TPSs, one (9.09%) was enrolled in a brick-and-mortar charter school, one (9.09%) was enrolled in a virtual charter school, and one (9.09%) was enrolled in a different homeschooling program.

Survey Items 32-34 assessed the basic demographics of the population, including race/ethnicity, age, and level of education completed. A total of eight homeschooling parents reported their race for Survey Item 32. The clear majority of homeschooling participants were White (7 of 8, 87.50%), and the remaining one identified as being from multiple races (one of eight, 12.50%).

A total of eight parents reported their age for Survey Item 33. Table 20 provides a profile of the participants according to age.

**Table 20**

*Profile of the Homeschooling Participants According to Age*

Age	Total number	Total percentage
24 Years or younger	0	0.00%
25 to 29 Years	0	0.00%
30 to 34 Years	1	12.50%
35 to 39 Years	3	37.50%
40 to 44 Years	2	25.00%
45 to 49 Years	2	25.00%
50 to 54 Years	0	0.00%
55 Years or better	0	0.00%

According to the data, most homeschooling participants were between 35 and 44 years old, with three (37.50%) between 35 and 39 years old and two (25.00%) between 40 and 44 years old. These two groups represented roughly two thirds of the participating homeschooling parents.

Last, a total of eight homeschooling parents reported their education level for Survey Item 34. Table 21 provides a profile of the participants according to their level of education.

**Table 21**

*Profile of the Homeschooling Participants According to Level of Education*

Level of education	Total number	Total percentage
Less than a high school diploma	0	0.00%
High school diploma or equivalent	0	0.00%
Some college but no degree	0	0.00%
Associate degree	0	0.00%
Bachelor degree	6	75.00%
Graduate degree	2	25.00%

The data showed that all homeschooling parents participating in this study possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. In summary, based on the data compiled from Survey Items 32-34, the majority of study participants were college-educated White parents in their late 30s to early 40s.

When asked when they decided to enroll their child/children as homeschoolers, 11 participants responded. Of the 11, six (54.55%) claimed to have made the decision prior to March 2020 (before the local effects of COVID-19), and five (45.45%) claimed to have decided after March 2020 (following the effects of COVID-19). When asked to report the predicted permanence of their choice, 11 participants responded. Of the 11, six (54.55%) claimed the decision is permanent (2 school years or more), four (36.36%)

claimed they were undecided, and one (9.09%) claimed their decision was temporary (1 school year or less).

A total of eight homeschooling participants proceeded to Survey Items 9-28, the Likert scale items. Table 22 shows the results of Survey Items 9-20 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means. As a reminder, means closer to 5 represent extremely relevant factors, whereas means closer to 1 represent irrelevant factors.

**Table 22**

*The Zoned School Means and SDs of Homeschoolers*

Push factor	Mean	SD
The zoned school was inconveniently located	4.88	0.33
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with staff at the zoned school	4.88	0.33
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with the students at the zoned school	4.63	0.48
The student body makeup at the zoned school was not what my child nor I wanted	4.63	0.48
The zoned school utilized outdated teaching methods	4.50	0.71
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual social/emotional needs	4.38	0.99
Personal dissatisfaction with teacher quality at my child's zoned school	4.38	0.99
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual learning needs	4.13	0.78
The class size was too large at the zoned school	4.00	1.32
Personal dissatisfaction with discipline, safety, and/or bullying at my child's zoned school	3.88	1.17
Personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's zoned school	3.75	0.97
Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's zoned school	3.38	1.73

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the homeschooling participants.

The results indicated that an inconvenient location, unpleasant experiences with students at the zoned TPS, unpleasant experiences with the staff at the zoned TPS, and a

student body unlike what the parent or the child wanted were among the top-ranking push factors reported by parents. Each had means above 4. All factors had SDs between 0.33 and 1.73. It is worth noting that an inconvenient location and unpleasant experiences with staff at the zoned school had both the highest mean and the lowest SD. While the data showed that the homeschooling population was seemingly in sync in their responses, I also understood that the small sample size (eight total respondents) and having drawn participation from a single homeschooling association most likely impacted the generalizability of the results.

One discrepancy in the data was noted. Of 11 respondents, five (45.45%) reportedly decided to homeschool after March 2020 following the local impacts of COVID-19. However, the data drawn from Items 9-20 showed that a concern with the effects of COVID-19 at the zoned school was of lowest relevance with regard to parent decisions to homeschool. I decided that further explanation and clarity were needed to better understand this discrepancy. This would have been explored during the homeschooling focus group interview; however, that interview did not occur due to the lack of participation.

Table 23 shows the results of Survey Items 21-28 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 23***The Choice School Means and SDs of Homeschoolers*

Pull factor	Mean	SD
The current program utilizes modern teaching methods through technology integration	3.38	0.86
Good teacher quality of the current program	2.75	1.20
The current school will do a better job of teaching basic reading, writing, and math	2.63	0.86
The current school supports our family's religious beliefs	2.50	1.58
High academic expectations/rigor of the current program	2.50	1.00
The current school supports our family's values	2.25	1.39
The current program allows more flexibility in scheduling	1.75	0.97
The current program individualizes learning for my child	1.50	0.50

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the homeschooling participants.

Much like when these data were analyzed for the larger population, the homeschooling data for Items 21-28 had lower means overall. The highest-ranking pull factor reported by parents was the choice alternative's use of modern teaching methods through technology integration with a mean of 3.38 and an SD of 0.86. This was the only factor to score a mean of 3 or more, which indicates a neutral response.

The two lowest-ranking pull factors reported by parents were the school's flexibility in scheduling (1.75 mean, 0.97 SD) and individualized learning for the child (1.50 mean, 0.50 SD). The SDs between all factors ranged from 0.50 to 1.58. Provided all the factors listed on the survey and COVID-19 were not highly influential in parent decisions to homeschool, I decided this finding was worth further examination, should

the open responses not produce clarity. Therefore, this question would have been added to the list of discussion points with homeschooling parents, but the lack of participation hindered further examination.

Survey Items 29 and 30 were formatted as opportunities for open responses and asked parents to indicate other positive (pull) and negative (push) factors they considered to be extremely relevant or very relevant in their decision to enroll their child in the current choice alternative. Item 29 elicited eight total homeschooling responses, and Item 30 elicited four total responses. These qualitative data were coded separately (push and pull) to identify themes unique to homeschoolers. Quirkos, an online data analysis program, assisted in this process.

Survey Item 29 asked parents to indicate the positive factors associated with the choice program. During analysis of the eight responses, five themes emerged. Table 24 shows the five themes and total codes within each theme.

**Table 24**

*Positive Factors of Homeschooling*

Theme	Total codes
Academics/curriculum/methods	5
Positive relationships	3
Convenience	3
Pandemic response	1
Religious beliefs	1

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the homeschooling participants.

A total of 13 codes were drawn from the eight responses because some responses crossed multiple themes and were therefore counted twice. Other responses contained multiple statements that were coded separately. Responses pertaining to homeschooling

academics, curriculum, and teaching methods appeared most frequently during analysis, followed by positive relationships. This finding mirrored analysis of the school choice population as a whole.

Despite the variety of homeschooling responses, given the small number, subthemes could not be identified. Based on the positive factors identified by this subgroup, the top motivator for selecting to homeschool was the program's academics, curriculum, and teaching methods. These data were in direct alignment with the findings associated with Survey Items 9-28. Responses pertaining to the positive relationships and convenience of homeschooling appeared second most frequently (three codes each). Given the small number of responses, I decided these data could not be divided into subthemes either.

I can report that each of the homeschooling responses was highly complimentary of the program. It was described by one parent as "safe from multiple influences." Another parent claimed that the curriculum is "tailored to my child's interests and needs." One other called the movement "a co-op community."

Survey Item 30 asked parents to share the negative factors associated with the TPS where their child was zoned to attend. Only four open responses were received:

- "Classroom sizes."
- "It isn't the school. It's the state policies and excessive standardized testing and disregard of 504s and IEPs."
- "Diluted virtual learning experience. Lack of trust in school district decisions."
- "Instructional time wasted on discipline."



Given such minimal data, no further conclusions or questions could be drawn.

Finally, Survey Item 31 asked parents whether their decision was based more on the positive factors of homeschooling or the negative factors of the TPS. The item elicited eight total responses, with five (62.50%) claiming it to be the positive factors of homeschooling, two (25.00%) claiming it to be the negative factors of the TPS, and one (12.50%) remaining neutral on the matter. Although the responses to Item 31 indicated the homeschooling parents based their decisions on the positive factors of the choice alternative, these data contradict their responses to the previous Likert scale items. The Likert scale items suggested a higher relevance and higher consistency among responses pertaining to the relevancy of the push factors over the pull factors.

The intent of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to use the subsequent qualitative phase (the focus group interviews) to help explain the initial quantitative phase (the parent survey). As reported, the homeschooling focus group did not occur due to the lack of participation, thus limiting my ability to merge the findings of the two phases and draw conclusions specific to this subgroup. While questions still remained due to the lack of focus group data, I triangulated the quantitative survey findings with the qualitative survey findings where possible. Further, I have added ideas for future research to address some of the topics that needed additional clarity from a focus group interview of homeschooling parents.

The homeschooling subgroup had a particularly low representation in the study. Twelve homeschooling parents provided consent to participate in Phase 1, the parent survey. Of the 12 who engaged with the survey, eight saw it to completion. Therefore, even the open-response opportunities produced minimal data due to the small sample size

from this subgroup.

Of the 12 homeschooling parents who provided consent to participate in the survey, only one provided consent to participate in the homeschooling focus group interview. The interview was scheduled at the time the sole participant requested; however, the participant neglected to sign into the scheduled Zoom meeting. Therefore, given the minimal participation from the homeschooling population, unfortunately, there was not enough data to clarify the lingering Phase 1 questions or to draw further conclusions regarding the homeschooling parents' motivation for choosing an alternative to TPS.

***Faith-Based Schooling.*** A total of 70 faith-based schooling parents provided consent to participate and qualified for the study. The subgroup of 70 reportedly had 89 total children in Grades 1-5 enrolled in faith-based schools. Fifty-six of 70 faith-based parents (78.87%) had one child, 12 parents had two children (16.90%), and one parent had three children (4.23%).

Seventy faith-based participants reported the type of school their child/children attended before they were enrolled in faith-based schools. Table 25 outlines those results.

**Table 25**

*Profile of the Faith-Based Parents According to Previous Form of Schooling*

Previous type of school	Total number	Total percentage
My child has always attended the current program	26	37.14%
Private, faith-based school	18	25.71%
Traditional public school	18	25.71%
Homeschool	5	7.14%
Private, non-religious school	2	2.86%
Other	1	1.43%
Brick-and-mortar charter school	0	0.00%
Virtual charter school	0	0.00%

*Note.* The other form of schooling reported was a childcare center.

Of the 70 faith-based participants, the majority (26 total, 37.14%) have always attended the current faith-based school. Another 18 (25.71%) claimed to have been previously enrolled in a different private, faith-based school. Another 18 (25.71%) were previously enrolled in TPSs, five (7.14%) were enrolled as homeschoolers, two (2.86%) were enrolled in private, non-religious schools, and one (1.43%) was reportedly enrolled in other forms of schooling.

Survey Items 32-34 assessed the basic demographics of the population, including race/ethnicity, age, and level of education completed. A total of 62 faith-based schooling parents reported their race for Survey Item 32. The clear majority of faith-based participants were White (55 of 62, 88.71%). Of the remaining seven, three (4.84%) identified as being from multiple races, one (1.61%) identified as Black, one (1.61%) identified as Asian, one (1.61%) identified as Hispanic or Latino, and one (1.61%) identified as “other.” The participant who identified as “other” commented that “race is not relevant to this decision.”

A total of 62 parents reported their age for Survey Item 33. Table 26 provides a profile of the faith-based participants according to age.

**Table 26**

*Profile of the Faith-Based Participants According to Age*

Age	Total number	Total percentage
24 Years or younger	0	0.00%
25 to 29 Years	1	1.61%
30 to 34 Years	6	9.68%
35 to 39 Years	19	30.65%
40 to 44 Years	21	33.87%
45 to 49 Years	12	19.35%
50 to 54 Years	1	1.61%
55 Years or better	2	3.23%

According to the data, most faith-based participants were between 35 and 44 years old, with 19 (30.65%) between 35 and 39 years old and 21 (33.87%) between 40 and 44 years old. These two groups represented roughly two thirds of the faith-based population. Logically, since the faith-based population accounts for majority representation in this study, their profile according to age aligns with the age profile of the larger population.

Last, a total of 62 faith-based parents reported their education level for Survey Item 34. Table 27 provides a profile of the faith-based participants according to their level of education.

**Table 27**

*Profile of the Faith-Based Participants According to Level of Education*

Level of education	Total number	Total percentage
Less than a high school diploma	0	0.00%
High school diploma or equivalent	1	1.61%
Some college but no degree	4	6.45%
Associate degree	6	9.68%
Bachelor degree	33	53.23%
Graduate degree	18	29.03%

The data showed that the majority of faith-based parents participating in this study possessed a bachelor's degree (53.23%) or higher (29.03%). In summary, based on the data compiled from Survey Items 32-34, the majority of faith-based participants were college-educated White parents in their late 30s to early 40s—similar to both the homeschooling population and the larger population as a whole.

When asked when they decided to enroll their child/children in faith-based schools, 70 faith-based participants responded. Of the 70, 52 (74.29%) claimed to have made the decision prior to March 2020 (before the local effects of COVID-19), and 18

(25.71%%) claimed to have decided after March 2020 (following the effects of COVID-19). When asked to report the predicted permanence of their choice, 70 participants responded. Of the 70, 63 (90.00%) named the decision permanent (2 school years or more), six (8.57%%) claimed that they were undecided, and one (1.43%) claimed that their decision was temporary (1 school year or less).

Given that one fourth of all faith-based parents enrolled following the effects of COVID-19 and 90% of all faith-based parents claim their decision is permanent, I thought it wise to explore these data further during the faith-based schooling focus group interviews to better understand what specific qualities of the faith-based school have earned their extended loyalty. When asked whether they belonged to the 25% of faith-based parents who considered alternatives to TPSs following the effects of COVID-19, all three focus group participants claimed they were previously enrolled; therefore, for this particular group of faith-based parents, COVID-19 was irrelevant in their decision-making.

However, one of the three faith-based focus group participants shared how the pandemic impacted her choice differently. While her child had been enrolled in the faith-based alternative since preschool, she grew frustrated when the school transitioned to computer-based learning in March 2020. Fearing that the virtual format would carry into the 2020-2021 school year, she admitted that she had considered other faith-based schools and homeschooling as alternatives. However, because the child's school did not remain virtual, she maintained enrollment.

The focus group participants also shared that while it did not influence their decision, there had been drastic enrollment increases at the faith-based school where their

children were enrolled. Each of the three parents had children enrolled at the same faith-based school. One participant shared that her child's first-grade class had 13 students in 2020; the child's second-grade class enrollment increased to 18. The other parents each agreed that this was the case schoolwide between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

A total of 62 faith-based participants proceeded to Survey Items 9-28, the Likert scale items. Table 28 shows the results of Survey Items 9-20 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 28***The Zoned School Means and SDs of Faith-Based Schoolers*

Push Factor	Mean	SD
The zoned school was inconveniently located	4.65	0.95
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with the students at the zoned school	4.44	1.14
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with the staff at the zoned school	4.32	1.30
The zoned school utilized outdated teaching methods	3.98	1.34
Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's zoned school	3.93	1.57
Personal dissatisfaction with teacher quality at my child's zoned school	3.71	1.44
The student body makeup at the zoned school was not what my child nor I wanted	3.64	1.62
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual learning needs	3.44	1.59
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual social/emotional needs	3.29	1.58
Personal dissatisfaction with discipline, safety, and/or bullying at my child's zoned school	3.05	1.58
The class size was too large at the zoned school	2.76	1.44
Personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's zoned school	2.73	1.32

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the faith-based participants.

The results indicated that an inconvenient location, unpleasant experiences with the students at the zoned TPS, and unpleasant experiences with the staff were the top-ranking push factors reported by parents. Each had means above 4. All factors had SDs between 0.95 and 1.62. The SDs that were <1 showed more agreement among the

participants, whereas the SDs that were  $>1$  showed less agreement in the responses.

It is worth noting that an inconvenient location and unpleasant experiences with staff at the zoned school had both the highest mean and the lowest SD; although the SD regarding experiences with the staff at the zoned school (1.62) was  $>1$ , which indicates less agreement among these responses. To better understand why or how the TPSs are inconveniently located, I added this to the list of faith-based focus group questions.

The three faith-based focus group participants were asked why they believed the faith-based population would list an inconvenient location as the most relevant push factor. The parents shared the following:

- Parent 1: “When my son started elementary school, we drove by another school to get to his zoned school. Several people come to our school to attend from far away. The zoning in District ABC is very odd. The way that they have zoned and have even closed three schools next year...their reasoning in interesting.”
- Parent 2: “I did not pick that survey option.”
- Parent 3: “I think growing up in the public school system and having to be bussed 1 hour plus away from my home was a pretty big factor for me in that they continue to do that when they’re assigning schools for our children. Like she [Parent 1] said, I like the schools that are around us, but I was concerned that they [her children] could be assigned to a school that was not in our neighborhood or that I didn’t have confidence in.”

As researcher, and as a former employee of District ABC, I can confirm focus group participant reports regarding school attendance zoning. The district of study has



drawn attendance lines to combat both racial and socioeconomic enrollment imbalances in its schools brought about by the growing interest in school choice; therefore, some children are not enrolled in the school that is geographically closer to their residence.

With regard to the reported unpleasant experiences with students and/or staff at the zoned school, I asked the parents if anyone would like to elaborate on what that meant to them without naming specifics. Two of the three parents responded. They shared the following in the presented order:

- Parent 2: “I can tell you that we recently moved to the area, and we toured several schools, including TPSs. I can just say that the staff at our school was so impressive—head and shoulders above what we experienced while touring the TPSs.
- Parent 1: “I chose this factor first. Without naming specifics, my child’s first-grade teacher at the public school had been at five different schools in six years. When a teacher does that, there’s a reason. She was confusing in her expectations. His second-grade teacher had just graduated the year before. She may be a great teacher one day, but he needed more structure. He wasn’t getting what he needed, and they didn’t seem very interested in providing it.

Parent 1 had one child enrolled in the faith-based school and the other enrolled in a TPS at one time, but she shared that she moved her second child (the one with whom she had the bad experience) to the faith-based school after the unpleasant experience in second grade. None of the parents mentioned unpleasant experiences with students at the TPSs. Their complaints were limited to the TPS staff and the perceived climate of the schools.

Table 29 shows the results of Survey Items 21-28 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 29**

*The Choice School Means and SDs of Faith-Based Schoolers*

Pull factor	Mean	SD
The current program utilizes modern teaching methods through technology integration	3.18	1.57
The current program allows my family more flexibility in scheduling	3.02	1.64
The current program individualizes learning for my child	2.89	1.56
The current school will do a better job of teaching basic reading, writing, and math	2.02	1.26
Good teacher quality of the current program	1.84	1.07
High academic expectations/rigor of the current program	1.81	1.00
The current school supports our family's religious beliefs	1.39	0.75
The current school supports our family values	1.39	0.79

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of all three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling).

The data for Items 21-28 had lower means overall. The highest-ranking pull factor reported by faith-based parents was the school's use of modern teaching methods through technology integration with a mean of 3.18 and a 1.57 SD. The second-highest-ranking pull factor was the flexibility in scheduling offered by the faith-based school. The two highest-ranking pull factors were the only two to score means above 3, a neutral response, indicating that perhaps the push factors of the TPS were more relevant in the decision than the pull factors of the faith-based school.

The two lowest-ranking pull factors reported by parents were the school's support of family religious beliefs (1.39 mean, 0.75 SD) and the school's support of family values (1.39 mean, 0.79 SD). It is worth noting that each of these factors, which are arguably in direct alignment with the faith-based schooling mission, also had the lowest SDs of all (0.75 and 0.79). This contradiction was explored during the faith-based focus group interviews.

The parents were asked to provide their thoughts on why perhaps the survey results showed a contradiction between the faith-based school's mission and the parents' ranking of school support of their religious beliefs and family values as of low relevance in their decision-making. The focus group participant responses were as follows:

- Parent 1: "I think much of this has to do with COVID. People were looking for a safe place for their kid, and they knew this was a quality program. For some of them, I don't think religion played a major role. They may have been thankful for it, but they were more interested in sending their kid to a safe place—health wise. When you start looking at the details, my child needs individualization, smaller class sizes, the comfort of the staff. These are the things she needs to grow, and she wouldn't get that at the TPS. When you start looking at other positives like these and ask yourself if you'd send them to this school without religion, it's something serious to consider. Probably yes. My child gets a good education, with structure too."
- Parent 3: "I think for me, I picked those as the highest-ranking. Religion and family values were very important to my husband and I when we were making this decision."

- Parent 2: “I ranked these high. I can say that in my experiences with talking to other parents that basically getting away from the TPSs was a bigger motivator than some of these other factors listed.”

In talking with the parents, I found that while Parents 1 and 2 admitted that perhaps there were popular secular reasons for choosing a faith-based education, Parent 3 was not in agreement. She ranked the school’s support of religious beliefs and family values to be very relevant and was not in agreement with the survey results based on her multiple years of experience at the school.

In Survey Items 29 and 30, the parents were asked to indicate other positive (or pull) factors they considered to be extremely relevant or very relevant in their decision to enroll their child/children in the current choice alternative. Item 29 (the positive factors) elicited 47 total responses, and Item 30 (the negative factors) elicited 35 total responses. This portion of the survey produced qualitative data; therefore, the open responses were coded separately (push and pull) to identify themes among the faith-based subgroup. Quirkos, an online data analysis program, was used in this part of the data analysis process.

Survey Item 29 asked parents to indicate the positive factors of the faith-based school. During analysis of the 47 total open responses, seven themes emerged—the same themes identified during analysis of the larger populations’ responses. Table 30 outlines the seven themes and 106 total codes within each theme.

**Table 30***Positive Factors of the Faith-Based School*

Theme	Total codes
Academics/curriculum/methods	26
Religious beliefs	17
Positive relationships	16
Class size	13
Safety/discipline	5
Convenience	4
Pandemic response	3

A total of 106 codes were drawn from the 47 responses, provided some responses crossed multiple themes and were therefore counted twice. Other responses contained multiple statements that were coded separately. Responses pertaining to the faith-based school's academics, curriculum, and teaching methods appeared most frequently during analysis, followed by religious beliefs.

Given the significant number and variety of responses pertaining to the positive factors of the faith-based school's academics, curriculum, and teaching methods, that theme was divided into four subthemes for a more detailed analysis. The four subthemes included were high standards/rigor (six codes), traditional teaching methods (six codes), individualized learning (six codes), and no technology (four codes). Based on these data, the top motivators for selecting an alternative to TPSs among the faith-based group are high academic standards and rigor, traditional teaching methods, and individualized learning. Those three factors were mentioned equally during analysis with six codes each.

Interestingly, these data directly contradicted findings associated with Survey Items 9-20. First, it was determined that personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor of the zoned TPS was the lowest-ranking push factor (Table 27).

Second, in the open responses, parents claimed that the faith-based school's adherence to traditional teaching methods with little technology dependency to be top motivators; however, the Likert scale data said otherwise. The data produced from the Likert scale named the outdated teaching methods as the fourth most relevant of 12 push factors associated with the TPSs, and the faith-based school's adherence to modern teaching methods through technology integration was named the most relevant of eight pull factors associated with the faith-based school. Given the discrepancies in the data here, these contradictions were explored during the faith-based focus group interview.

To address these two discrepancies in the data, the parents were first asked if they agreed with the high academic standards/rigor of the faith-based program being ranked first among parents, and why. Focus group parent responses were as follows:

- Parent 2: "This was high-ranking, but we chose individualization first."
- Parent 1: "I chose what was best for the learning of my child—what she needed and what my son needed. They are different."
- Parent 3: No response.

Most likely due to the small size of the focus group, I found the results of this question to contribute very little to my understanding of the discrepancy.

Second, the focus group parents were asked to explain why they believed the open responses showed that the faith-based school's adherence to traditional teaching methods with little technology dependency were top motivators, while the survey's Likert scale data showed that adherence to modern teaching methods through technology integration was named the most relevant of eight pull factors. The responses were as follows:

- Parent 1: "I think here that the words 'traditional' and 'modern' were

confusing—perhaps they linked the words to their beliefs. Perhaps to them ‘traditional’ means ‘religious,’ whereas modern has a different meaning [secular/progressive]. Our school is not afraid to talk about the Bible. That’s tradition.”

- Parents 2 and 3: “Agreed.”

These responses to the contradiction led me to believe that perhaps there could have been a misinterpretation of the survey’s wording. More specifically, the wording could have been problematic for the faith-based group in particular. According to the focus group parents, the faith-based subgroup was pulled toward the choice school’s biblical (traditional) teachings without technology, whereas they were pushed away from the TPSs’ modern (secular/progressive) curriculum. Perhaps as an educator, the words “traditional” and “modern” simply meant something different to them than to me—hence the discrepancy in their responses between the Likert scale and open responses.

After explaining what the words meant to me as an educator, out of curiosity, I asked the focus group parents to explain how the schools’ use of technology played into their decisions. The question elicited one response:

- Parent 1: “For me, it’s the screen time. The last District ABC Superintendent bought everyone iPads, and it seemed like they were just high-tech all the time. They just don’t do that as much at our school. I mean, virtual learning [during COVID] was all technology, and that was trying—making that work.”
- Parents 2 and 3: Nodded in agreement.

Based on this response, I understood the TPSs’ dependency on technology to lack appeal to the faith-based subgroup. On the other hand, the faith-based school’s limited

use of technology was appealing. It was only during analysis of the focus group data that I wondered about the negative stigma attached to technology use at the TPSs. Did they believe the TPS students were not properly monitored while using technology? Did they believe the TPS students were not properly educated through technology? Is there a correlation between the faith-based subgroup and a disapproval of technology? If so, are there religious reasons? Is this disapproval specific to the faith-based subgroup alone? With such a small focus group, it would be difficult to generalize their answers to these questions; therefore, I believe these would be an excellent starting point for future research regarding parent perceptions of instructional technology use in the classroom.

The faith-based school's alignment to family religious beliefs appeared second-most frequently during analysis of the open responses with 17 codes; however, it was noted in the Likert scale data that the faith-based school's support of family religious beliefs (1.39 mean, 0.75 SD) and the support of family values (1.39 mean, 0.79 SD) were the least relevant factors involved in parent decision-making. They also had the lowest SDs of the eight pull factors included in the survey, meaning parent responses were in sync. Given the faith-based nature of the schools in question, this finding was examined during the faith-based focus group interviews.

The focus group parents were asked for their thoughts on why they felt this contradiction could have occurred. Their responses were as follows:

- Parent 2: "I think it's a fluke. I don't think this is significant."
- Parents 1 and 3: "Agreed."

Given the swift and simple response here, I felt as though the parents were sure that the open responses reflected the opinions of the faith-based population more



accurately. They felt as though the school's support of their religious beliefs was an integral part of their decision-making; however, as previous discussion revealed, there were also potentially secular reasons for choosing the faith-based alternative (i.e., a quality education program and/or in response to the TPSs' response to COVID).

Survey Item 30 asked parents to indicate the negative factors associated with the faith-based school where their child was zoned to attend. During analysis of the 35 total responses, the same seven themes emerged as during analysis of the entire population's responses. Table 31 outlines the seven themes and total codes within each theme.

**Table 31**

*Negative Factors of the TPS Reported by Faith-Based Schoolers*

Theme	Total codes
Academics/curriculum/methods	25
Negative relationships	11
Religious beliefs	9
District/state policies	7
Pandemic response	5
Class size	4
Safety/discipline	2

A total of 63 codes were drawn from the 35 responses. Some responses crossed multiple themes and were therefore counted twice. Other responses contained multiple statements that were coded separately. Responses pertaining to the TPSs' academics, curriculum, and teaching methods were most prominent during analysis (25 codes), followed by negative relationships (11 codes).

These findings were in direct alignment with the findings associated with Survey Item 29; however, as previously determined, the data associated with Survey Items 9-20 were in direct contradiction. The data from Survey Items 9-20 (Table 27) named

academics, curriculum, and methods as the least relevant factor used in the decision-making process, whereas the same factor was named most relevant in the data associated with Survey Item 30.

To gain a better understanding of parent claims that the TPSs' academics, curriculum, and teaching methods were the most relevant push factor, I divided the larger theme into five subthemes for a more detailed analysis. The five subthemes included were a progressive agenda/curriculum (eight codes), low expectations/rigor (five codes), lack of individualization (four codes), untraditional teaching methods (five codes), and technology dependency (two codes). Given that the parents' mention of a progressive agenda/curriculum was predominant within the subtheme, several responses were highly critical of the TPSs' perceived progressive agenda and/or curriculum. The TPSs were described as a place of "too much social indoctrination" where "social programming is more important than learning." One parent, in particular, said that they "just do not agree with the selected curriculum."

Also, low academics/rigor appeared second-most frequently with five codes. I found this to be in contradiction with analysis of Survey Items 9-20 where parents named a personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at the zoned school to be the least relevant factor involved in their decision-making. This contradiction was explored during the faith-based focus group at a different point in the conversation with responses as follows:

- Parent 2: "This was high-ranking, but we chose individualization first."
- Parent 1: "I chose what was best for the learning of my child—what she needed and what my son needed. They are different."

- Parent 3: No response.

Due to the small size of the focus group and their minimal response, I found this portion of the conversation contributed very little to my understanding.

Finally, Survey Item 31 asked parents to determine whether they felt their decision to choose a faith-based school over a TPS was based more on the positive factors of the choice program or the negative factors of the TPS. The item elicited 62 total responses, with 40 (64.52%) naming the answer to be the positive factors of the choice program, 12 (19.35%) naming the answer to be the negative factors of the TPS, and 10 (16.13%) claiming to be neutral on the matter.

I asked the focus group participants to summarize their own decision as mostly due to the pull factors of the faith-based school or the push factors of the TPS. Their responses were as follows:

- Parent 1: “Depends on which kid. With my son—push. With my daughter—pull. My son is older and in middle school now, and my daughter is in first grade. With my son, I got a taste of what was available at the faith-based school. My daughter needed something different, and I knew from experience what the faith-based school could offer.”
- Parent 2: “I think they are equally relevant. We were pulled toward the faith-based school but in the same light we were looking at the public schools thinking we didn’t want our kids to go there. So, for us, two sides, same coin.”
- Parent 3: “I was going to say the same thing. I was very much drawn to the positive side of faith-based schooling. However, just being a recipient of public education myself and having friends teaching in public schools, I knew

the negative factors. So, for me it was both push and pull. I had also heard things from friends. Their opinions informed my own. The teacher friends shared district policies—how the teachers are dealt with—and obviously that forms my opinion. It’s not something I want my children subjected to—those types of policies.”

During the conversation, I learned that Parent 1 had two children. Her oldest child completed 3 years of public education before she decided to enroll him at the faith-based school. By the time her daughter was old enough to begin school, Parent 1 was already pleased with the education her son was receiving at the faith-based school; therefore, she classified the decision for her son as mostly a push away from the TPS and the decision for her daughter a pull toward a faith-based education.

I also learned that Parent 2 relocated his family at the start of the 2020-2021 school year from a different part of the state. He and his wife toured several schools, including both TPSs and faith-based schools. He shared during the conversation many times that he was not impressed by the faculty/staff or the hospitality at the TPS but was very impressed by the faith-based school; therefore, he reiterated many times that he viewed the TPSs in a negative light. He classified his decision as equally push and pull—an escape from the TPSs to something “higher quality.”

Parent 3 revealed that her children had been enrolled in the faith-based school since the age of 3. Based on the conversation, as a TPS student herself, she had negative experiences that she did not want to subject her children to. She also revealed that she had several public school teacher friends who shared their complaints about the TPS system with her. These negative opinions played a part in her decision to enroll

elsewhere, and she was happy with the decision. Therefore, similar to Parent 2, Parent 3 classified her decision as equally push and pull—to avoid subjecting her own children to the same negative experiences she had as a child while providing them with a quality education.

Although the faith-based focus group was small, their responses to the questions were profound—their responses to the final question in particular. I learned that while similarities in the responses and themes can be identified, everyone has their own unique reasoning for choosing alternatives to TPSs. Some parents are motivated by the unique needs of their child, some are motivated by their perceptions, and others are motivated by past experiences. The focus group data showed me the value of mixing research methods.

**Charter Schooling.** A total of 21 charter schooling parents provided consent to participate and qualified for the study. The subgroup of 21 reportedly had 26 total children enrolled as charter schoolers in Grades 1-5. Fourteen of 20 (70.00%) parents who responded to this survey item had one child in charter school, and six parents had two children in charter schools (30.00). Twenty-one charter schooling participants reported the type of charter school their child/children currently attend. Twelve of 21 (57.14%) identified with a brick-and-mortar charter school, and nine of 21 (42.86%) identified with a virtual charter school. Nineteen parents reported the type of school their child/children attended before they were enrolled in the charter school of choice. Of the 12, seven (36.84%) were previously enrolled in a brick-and-mortar charter school, five (26.32%) were enrolled in TPSs, and one (5.26%) was enrolled in a faith-based school.

Survey Items 32-34 assessed the basic demographics of the population, including race/ethnicity, age, and level of education completed. A total of 13 charter schooling

parents reported their race for Survey Item 32. The clear majority of homeschooling participants were White (12 total, 92.31%), and the remaining one identified as Black or African American (7.69%).

A total of 13 parents reported their age for Survey Item 33. Table 32 provides a profile of the participants according to age.

**Table 32**

*Profile of the Charter Schooling Participants According to Age*

Age	Total number	Total percentage
24 Years or younger	0	0.00%
25 to 29 Years	0	0.00%
30 to 34 Years	2	15.38%
35 to 39 Years	3	23.08%
40 to 44 Years	3	23.08%
45 to 49 Years	3	23.08%
50 to 54 Years	2	15.38%
55 Years or better	0	0.00%

According to the data, most homeschooling participants were between 35 and 49 years old, with three (23.08%) between 35 and 39 years old, three (23.08%) between 40 and 44 years old, and three (23.08%) between 45 and 49 years old. These three groups represented roughly two thirds of the participating population.

Last, a total of 13 homeschooling parents reported their education level for Survey Item 34. Table 33 provides a profile of the participants according to their level of education.

**Table 33***Profile of the Charter Schooling Participants According to Level of Education*

Level of education	Total number	Total percentage
Less than a high school diploma	0	0.00%
High school diploma or equivalent	1	7.69%
Some college but no degree	2	15.38%
Associate degree	2	15.38%
Bachelor degree	5	38.46%
Graduate degree	3	23.08%

The data showed that most charter schooling parents participating in this study possessed an associate's degree or higher. In summary, based on the data compiled from Survey Items 32-34, the majority of study participants were college-educated White parents in their late 30s to late 40s. This trend was seen across all three subgroups; however, based on the data, the charter population was slightly older with fewer advanced degrees in general than the homeschooling and faith-based populations.

When asked when they decided to enroll their child/children in charter schools, 19 charter participants responded. Of the 19, 11 (57.89%) claimed to have decided after March 2020 (after the local effects of COVID-19), and eight (42.11%) claimed to have decided before March 2020 (prior to the effects of COVID-19). When asked to report the predicted permanence of their choice, 19 participants responded. Of the 19, 15 (78.95%) claimed that the decision was permanent (2 school years or more), three (15.79%) claimed that they were undecided, and one (5.26%) claimed that their decision was temporary (1 school year or less).

Given the trend identified in the literature review pertaining to the increase in virtual charter schooling following the effects of COVID-19, I decided to aggregate these two data sets to further test this theory in District ABC and to see if the two subgroups

(brick-and-mortar versus virtual) differed in any way. Tables 34 and 35 illustrate these comparisons.

**Table 34**

*The Role of COVID-19 in the Charter Decision Timeline*

Type of school	Timeline	Number of parents	Percentage of parents
Brick-and-mortar	Before March 2020 (prior to the local effects of COVID-19)	*7	*63.64% %
	After March 2020 (following the local effects of COVID-19)	4	36.36%
Virtual	Before March 2020 (prior to the local effects of COVID-19)	1	12.50%
	After March 2020 (following the local effects of COVID-19)	*7	*87.50%

*Note.* The items preceded by an asterisk represent the majority within each subgroup.

**Table 35**

*The Predicted Permanence of the Charter Decision*

Type of school	Permanence	Number of parents	Percentage of parents
Brick-and-Mortar	Temporary (1 school year or less)	1	9.09%
	Permanent (2 school years or more)	*10	*90.91
	Unknown/undecided	0	0.00%
Virtual	Temporary (1 school year or less)	2	25.00%
	Permanent (2 school years or more)	*5	*62.50%
	Unknown/undecided	1	12.50%

*Note.* The items preceded by an asterisk represent the majority within each subgroup.

The combined data revealed conflicts within the larger charter school subgroup.

Whereas the majority of brick-and-mortar charter schooling parents (63.64%) claimed to



have made their decision before the local effects of COVID-19, the majority of virtual charter schooling parents (87.50%) claimed to have made the decision following the effects of COVID-19. Further, the majority of both brick-and-mortar charter schooling parents (90.91%) and the majority of virtual charter schooling parents (62.50%) claimed that their decision is permanent (2 school years or more). However, a significant percentage of virtual charter schooling parents (25.00%) claimed that their decision is temporary. This finding seemed logical since the majority claimed that COVID-19 inspired their decision. It led me to believe that this particular group may consider reversing their decision after the pandemic subsides.

A total of 13 charter schooling participants proceeded to Survey Items 9-28, the Likert scale items. Table 36 shows the results of Survey Items 9-20 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 36***The Zoned School Means and SDs of Charter Schoolers*

Push factor	Mean	SD
The zoned school was inconveniently located	5.00	0.00
The zoned school utilized outdated teaching methods	4.15	1.10
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with students at the zoned school	3.85	1.61
Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's zoned school	3.85	1.61
The student body makeup ta the zoned school was not what my child nor I wanted	3.77	1.62
The class size was too large at the zoned school	3.46	1.55
Personal dissatisfaction with teacher quality at my child's zoned school	3.38	1.27
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with the staff at the zoned school	3.15	1.66
Personal dissatisfaction with discipline, safety, and/or bullying at my child's zoned school	3.00	1.57
Personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's zoned school	2.62	1.33
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual learning needs	2.62	1.44
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual social/emotional needs	2.54	1.39

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the charter school participants.

The results indicated that an inconvenient location and the use of outdated teaching methods were the top-ranking push factors reported by parents. Each had means above 4. All factors had SDs between 0.00 and 1.66. It is worth noting that an inconvenient location had a perfect mean score of 5 and a 0.00 SD, meaning all 13

charter school parents rated this factor as most relevant in their decision. Despite identifying the most relevant push factor among the charter schooling parents, I understood that the small sample size (13 total respondents across three organizations) could not produce generalizable results.

Table 37 shows the results of Survey Items 21-28 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 37**

*The Choice School Means and SDs of Charter Schoolers*

Pull factor	Mean	SD
The current school supports our family's religious beliefs	3.85	1.46
The current school will do a better job of teaching basic reading, writing, and math	2.77	1.37
The current program utilizes modern teaching methods through technology integration	2.54	1.39
The current program allows my family more flexibility in scheduling	2.31	1.43
High expectations/rigor of the current program	2.31	1.26
Good teacher quality of the current program	2.23	0.80
The current program individualizes learning for my child	2.15	1.41
The current school supports our family's values	2.00	0.88

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the charter schooling participants.

Much like when these data were analyzed for the larger population, the charter schooling data for Items 21-28 had lower means overall. This trend was evident across all three subgroups. Interestingly, the highest-ranking pull factor reported by parents was the charter school's support of family religious beliefs with a mean of 3.85 and an SD of

1.46. This was the only factor to score a mean of 3 or more. Given that charter schools are public schools with no clear ties to faith of any kind, this data point would have been further explored during the charter school focus group interviews; however, those meetings did not occur due to the lack of participation.

In preparation for the focus group interviews, I decided to aggregate the Likert scale survey items (Items 9-28) during this stage of data analysis to determine questions that should be asked specific to the brick-and-mortar charter schoolers and virtual charter schoolers. Of the 13 total charter participants who responded to the Likert scale items, seven identified with brick-and-mortar charter schools. Table 38 shows the results of Survey Items 9-20 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 38***The Zoned School Means and SDs of Brick-and-Mortar Charter Schoolers*

Push factor	Mean	SD
The zoned school was inconveniently located	5.00	0.00
Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's zoned school	4.00	1.60
The zoned school utilized outdated teaching methods	3.71	1.16
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with the staff at the zoned school	3.43	1.59
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with the students at the zoned school	3.29	1.75
Personal dissatisfaction with teacher quality at my child's zoned school	3.14	1.46
The student body makeup at the zoned school was not what my child nor I wanted	3.00	1.77
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual learning needs	2.86	1.64
The class size was too large at the zoned school	2.71	1.58
Personal dissatisfaction with discipline, safety, and/or bullying at my child's zoned school	2.71	1.58
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual social/emotional needs	2.57	1.59
Personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's zoned school.	2.29	1.28

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the brick-and-mortar charter school participants.

The data indicated that the zoned school's inconvenient location was named the most relevant push factor by the brick-and-mortar charter participants. It is worth noting that this factor had a perfect mean score and SD of 0.00, meaning all seven brick-and-mortar participants indicated that the zoned school's inconvenient location was

“extremely relevant” in their decision-making. Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at the zoned school ranked second-most relevant to the brick-and-mortar charter participants, with a mean of 4.00 and an SD of 1.60. This push factor ranked higher among the brick-and-mortar subgroup than it did among the whole; therefore, this concern as well as the zoned school’s inconvenient location are topics that would have been further explored during the brick-and-mortar focus group interview. That meeting, however, did not occur due to the lack of participation.

Six of the total participants responding to the Likert scale items identified with virtual charter schools. Table 39 shows the results of Survey Items 9-20 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 39***The Zoned School Means and SDs of Virtual Charter Schoolers*

Push factor	Mean	SD
The zoned school was inconveniently located	5.00	0.00
The zoned school utilized outdated teaching methods	4.67	0.75
The student body makeup at the zoned school was not what my child nor I wanted	4.67	0.75
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with students at the zoned school	4.50	1.12
The class size was too large at the zoned school	4.33	0.94
Personal dissatisfaction with teacher quality at my child's zoned school	3.67	0.94
Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's zoned school	3.67	1.60
Personal dissatisfaction with discipline, safety, and/or bullying at my child's zoned school	3.33	1.49
Personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's zoned school	3.00	1.29
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with staff at the zoned school	2.83	1.67
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual social/emotional needs	2.50	1.12
The zoned school did not meet my child's individual learning needs	2.33	1.11

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the virtual charter school participants.

The data indicated that the zoned school's inconvenient location was also named the most relevant push factor by the virtual charter participants. Again, it is worth noting that this factor had a perfect mean score and SD of 0.00, meaning all six virtual charter participants indicated that the zoned school's inconvenient location was "extremely relevant" in their decision-making. The zoned school's use of outdated teaching methods

and a student body makeup unlike what was wanted each ranked second (4.67 means, 0.75 SDs). While outdated teaching methods also ranked high among the brick-and-mortar participants (third highest), the near-perfect mean and SD here warranted further examination during the virtual charter focus group interview; however, that meeting did not occur due to the lack of participation.

Unlike the brick-and-mortar participants, concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at the zoned school ranked seventh on the list of push factors. I found this data point to be contradictory to earlier findings in which the virtual charter participants indicated that the effects of COVID-19 played a major role in the timing of their decision (Tables 33 and 34). Therefore, this discrepancy would have been analyzed further during the focus group interviews if they would have occurred. In general, it was noted that the overall means associated with the push factors identified by the virtual charter parents were much higher than those identified by the brick-and-mortar charter parents. Therefore, I concluded that the virtual charter parents felt a stronger push away from TPSs and had more reasons to support their decision in general.

Table 40 explains the pull factors identified by the brick-and-mortar charter participants and shows the results of Survey Items 21-28 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.



**Table 40***The Choice School Means and SDs of Brick-and-Mortar Charter Schoolers*

Pull factor	Mean	SD
The current school supports our family's religious beliefs	3.57	1.76
The current school will do a better job of teaching basic reading, writing, and math	2.86	1.25
The current program utilizes modern teaching methods through technology integration	2.86	1.25
The current program individualizes learning for my child	2.86	1.25
The current program allows my family more flexibility in scheduling	2.57	1.40
Good teacher quality of the current program	2.29	0.70
High academic expectations/rigor of the current program	2.14	0.83
The current school supports our family's values	1.86	0.83

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the brick-and-mortar charter schooling participants.

Seven of 13 total respondents to the Likert scale Items 21-28 identified as brick-and-mortar charter parents. During analysis, the findings from this aggregation were very similar to analysis of the entire charter subgroup and therefore required no further investigation.

Table 41 explains the pull factors identified by the virtual charter participants and shows the results of Survey Items 21-28 in order of highest to lowest relevance according to the means.

**Table 41***The Choice School Means and SDs of Virtual Charter Schoolers*

Pull factor	Mean	SD
The current school supports our family's religious beliefs	4.17	0.90
The current school will do a better job of teaching basic reading, writing, and math	2.67	1.49
High academic expectations/rigor of the current program	2.50	1.61
The current school supports our family's values	2.17	0.90
Good teacher quality of the current program	2.17	0.90
The current program utilizes modern teaching methods through technology integration	2.17	1.46
The current program allows my family more flexibility in scheduling	2.00	1.41
The current program individualizes learning for my child	1.33	0.75

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the brick-and-mortar charter schooling participants.

Six of 13 total respondents to the Likert scale Items 21-28 identified as virtual charter parents. Interestingly, modern teaching methods through technology integration ranked low in overall relevancy (2.17 mean, 1.46 SD). Given that this program is the only one of the four explored during this study requiring total technology dependency, I considered this to be a discrepancy of sorts that required further examination during the virtual charter focus group interview, had it occurred. Otherwise, the findings from this aggregation were very similar to my analysis of the entire charter subgroup and required no further investigation.

Survey Item 29 asked parents to indicate the positive factors associated with the

choice program. Twelve parents responded to this survey item. During analysis of the 12 responses, four themes emerged. Table 42 shows the four themes and total codes within each theme.

**Table 42**

*Positive Factors of Charter Schooling*

Theme	Total codes
Academics/curriculum/methods	4
Positive relationships	4
Pandemic response	4
Class size	1

*Note.* The data reflect the responses of the charter schooling participants.

A total of 13 codes were drawn from the 12 responses because one response included multiple comments pertaining to separate factors. Three factors appeared most frequently and equally, including academics, curriculum, and methods; positive relationships; and pandemic response. Similar to both the homeschooling and faith-based populations, academics, curriculum, and methods and positive relationships were ranked as top priorities for the charter schoolers.

One distinction among the charter schoolers, however, was the number of comments pertaining to the school's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the comments from parents included

- The school “has done an incredible job of offering online and in-person options.”
- The school “has remained consistent.”
- “We have not skipped a beat as far as daily instruction. We have not had to navigate ABC days.”

Provided this priority was unique among the charter schooling parents, it would have been explored further during the focus group interview if it had occurred. Given the small number of responses, I decided these data could not be divided into subthemes.

Survey Item 30 asked parents to share the negative factors associated with the TPS where their child is zoned to attend. Only eight open responses were received, including

- “Inconsistency. Family feedback ignored.”
- “Packed classrooms. Overwhelmed teachers. Just pushing kids through the system.”
- “Inconsistency. Lack of planning during COVID.”
- “My oldest child was bored in the TPS and needed another option.”
- “The children just seem unhappy. No consistency.”

Given such minimal data, no further conclusions or questions could be drawn.

Finally, Survey Item 31 asked parents whether their decision was based more on the positive factors of charter schooling or the negative factors of the TPS. The item elicited 13 total responses, with seven (53.85%) claiming it to be the positive factors of charter schooling, three (23.08%) claiming it to be the negative factors of the TPS, and three (23.08%) remaining neutral on the matter.

The explanatory sequential mixed methods design of this study was intended to use the subsequent qualitative phase (the focus group interviews) to help explain the initial quantitative phase (the parent survey). As reported, the two charter schooling focus groups did not occur due to lack of participation, thus limiting my ability to merge the findings of the two phases and draw conclusions specific to this subgroup. While

questions still remained due to the lack of focus group data, I triangulated the quantitative survey findings with the qualitative survey findings where possible.

Much like the homeschooling subgroup, the charter schooling subgroup also had low representation in the study. A total of 21 charter schooling parents provided consent to participate in Phase 1, the parent survey. Of the 21 who engaged with the survey, only 13 saw it to completion; therefore, the charter schooling parents also provided minimal open responses.

One further conclusion was drawn when the quantitative and qualitative survey data were merged. When the charter school Likert scale data were analyzed as a whole (brick-and-mortar with virtual), the parents reported concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at the zoned school to be of neutral relevance (3.85 mean, 1.61 SD) among the list of TPS push factors. However, when the same data were aggregated into two subgroups (brick-and-mortar and virtual) and then analyzed separately, the brick-and-mortar subgroup ranked COVID-19 concerns as the second-highest push factor (4.00 mean, 1.60 SD), whereas the virtual charter subgroup ranked it seventh-highest (3.67 mean, 1.60 SD). Provided the difference in formatting between these two forms of charter schooling, I was disappointed that I could not explore this finding further during the focus group interviews.

While statistically speaking, an  $SD > 1$  equated to inconsistency across the parents' Likert scale responses, the open responses confirmed my initial conclusions. The charter school participants, as a whole, named the charter schools' pandemic response as one of three equally ranked positive factors of the choice program. With four of 13 total codes, roughly one third of the open responses expressed concern over the TPSs'

handling of the pandemic. A concern with the effects of COVID-19 was seemingly unique to the charter schooling population.

**Survey Data Analysis Summary.** Research Question 2 asked, “What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling?” To answer this question, mixed methods were employed in two phases of data collection. Phase 1 consisted of an electronic parent survey that produced mostly quantitative data; however, two open-response items included in the survey’s design produced some qualitative data about the perceived push and pull factors associated with the zoned TPS and choice alternative. Given the explanatory sequential design of the study, I understood the survey data alone provided an incomplete answer. To fully answer Research Question 2, survey data were further aggregated into two separate groups, such as brick-and-mortar charter and virtual charter.

The top two push factors associated with the TPSs reported by all four subgroups in the Likert scale items are outlined in Table 43.

**Table 43**

*Most Relevant Push Factors Summary*

Homeschooling	Faith-Based	Brick-and-mortar charter	Virtual charter
1. Inconvenient location (4.88 mean, 0.33 SD)	1. Inconvenient location (4.65 mean, 0.98 SD)	1. Inconvenient location (5.00 mean, 0.00 SD)	1. Inconvenient location (5.00 mean, 0.00 SD)
2. Unpleasant experience with the staff (4.88 mean, 0.33 SD)	2. Unpleasant experience with the students (4.44 mean, 1.14 SD)	2. COVID-19 concerns (4.00 mean, 1.60 SD)	2. Outdated teaching methods (4.67 mean, 0.75 SD)

The inconvenient location of the zoned TPS was reported to be of highest

relevance in the decision to enroll in an alternative choice program across all four subgroups; however, each subgroup reported something different as the factor of second-highest relevance.

The top two pull factors associated with the choice program reported by all four subgroups in the Likert scale items are outlined in Table 44.

**Table 44**

*Most Relevant Pull Factors Summary*

Homeschooling	Faith-based	Brick-and-mortar charter	Virtual charter
1. Modern teaching through tech integration (3.38 mean, 0.86 SD)	1. Modern teaching through tech integration (3.18 mean, 1.57 SD)	1. Support of religious beliefs (3.57 mean, 1.76 SD)	1. Support of religious beliefs (4.17 mean, 0.90 SD)
2. Good teacher quality (2.75 mean, 1.20 SD)	2. Flexible schedule (3.02 mean, 1.64 SD)	2. Superior reading, writing, and math instruction (2.86 mean, 1.25 SD)	2. Superior reading, writing, and math instruction (2.67 mean, 1.49 SD)
		3. Modern teaching through tech integration (2.86 mean, 1.25 SD)	
		4. Individualized learning (2.86 mean, 1.25 SD)	

The results of this analysis showed that both homeschooling and faith-based schooling participants reported the choice alternative's use of modern teaching methods through technology integration to be the most relevant factor involved in their decision; however, the mean scores of both groups (3.38 and 3.18) showed that the top pull factor was less relevant overall than the top push factor. In general, the push factor means were higher, and most of the SDs were lower.

Both charter groups also reported the same pull factor as most relevant.

Interestingly, the charter groups reported the program's support of their religious beliefs was most relevant in their decision-making. Each of these findings was contradictory to what I expected to find, given the virtual charter school's technology-based curriculum and the faith-based schools' religious missions.

The survey's two open-response items asked parents to identify other extremely relevant and very relevant positive and negative factors associated with the choice alternative and zoned TPS. The top positive factors associated with the choice program reported by the study's three subgroups (homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling parents) are outlined in Table 45 by subgroup, the top factors, and the percent representation among the total number of codes identified during analysis.

**Table 45**

*Summary of Other Positive Factors of the Choice Program*

Subgroup	Factor	Percent
Homeschooling	Academics, methods, and curriculum	38.46%
	Positive relationships	23.07%
	Convenience	23.07%
Faith-based schooling	Academics, methods, and curriculum	24.52%
	Support of religious beliefs	16.03%
Charter schooling	Academics, methods, and curriculum	30.76%
	Positive relationships	30.76%
	Pandemic response	30.76%

All three subgroups reported that the choice alternative's academics, teaching methods, and curriculum were highly influential in their decision to enroll there. Also, given the high number of faith-based responses, this data point was further analyzed to identify subthemes. During analysis, it was determined that in terms of the academics, methods, and curriculum that pulled these parents toward enrollment with the faith-based



school, the program's high academic standards and rigor, traditional teaching methods, and individualized learning were of highest relevance in particular.

The top negative factors associated with the zoned TPS reported by the homeschooling and charter schooling participants were difficult to analyze, given minimal responses; however, given the number of faith-based participant responses, it was determined that the academics, curriculum, and methods of the zoned TPS were highly influential in their decision to enroll elsewhere (38.68% of codes). During further analysis of this response, it was determined that in terms of the academics, methods, and curriculum that pushed these parents toward enrollment in the faith-based school, the perceived progressive agenda and low academic expectations and rigor were of highest relevance to this subgroup.

### **Summary of the Results**

The data pertaining to the push and pull factors produced by the parent survey could be divided into two distinct data sets: the quantitative Likert scale data and the qualitative open-response data. The two data sets were often conflicting, unveiling the need for clarification through focus group interviews. Focus group interviews were not possible due to the lack of participation from all but the faith-based subgroup.

Based on the quantitative Likert scale data, as a whole, parent decisions to enroll in alternatives were more influenced by the push factors associated with the TPSs than the pull factors of the choice school. To arrive at this conclusion, I calculated the average means of both the push and pull factors and compared the two figures. Table 46 compares the two figures. As previously noted, parents were asked to rate each factor according to its level of relevance on a Likert scale (5=extremely relevant, 4=very relevant,

3=relevant, 2=slightly relevant, or 1=not at all relevant). The responses scoring means closer to 5 represent extremely relevant factors, whereas those responses scoring closer to 1 represent irrelevant factors.

**Table 46**

*A Summary of the Average Means of the Push and Pull Factors by Subgroup*

Subgroup	Average means of the push factors	Average means of the pull factors	Difference
Homeschooling	4.29	2.41	1.88
Faith-based schooling	3.66	2.19	1.47
Charter schooling (as a whole)	3.44	2.52	0.92
Brick-and-mortar charter schooling	3.23	2.63	0.60
Virtual charter schooling	3.71	2.40	1.31

Based on these data, I concluded that the homeschooling subgroup was more motivated by the push factors associated with the TPSs than the other subgroups. The average homeschooling means, push versus pull, also had the biggest difference between the two figures, further supporting my conclusion. The homeschooling subgroup was also the only subgroup to score an average mean above 4, meaning that as a group, they ranked more factors included in the survey as extremely or very relevant in their decision than the other subgroups.

The other subgroups' average means of the push factors were between 3 and 4, indicating that the factors included in the survey were only slightly above neutral relevance. Of all the subgroups, the brick-and-mortar charter schoolers scored the lowest average mean of the push factors, meaning they were the least motivated by the negative factors associated with the TPSs.

Across all subgroups, the average means of the pull factors associated with the school alternative were much lower. Each subgroup scored between 2 and 3, indicating

that the pull factors were only slightly relevant in their decision. The faith-based schoolers scored the lowest average mean of the pull factors, meaning that as a group (having the majority representation in this study), their decision was not likely influenced by the positive factors of the choice alternative; however, when the parents asked to summarize their decision as either mostly influenced by the positive factors of the choice alternative or the negative factors of the zoned TPS in Survey Item 31, all three subgroups reported that their choice was more so due to the positive factors of the choice alternative. Table 47 outlines the results of Survey Item 31 by subgroup.

**Table 47**

*A Summary of the Decision by Subgroup*

Subgroup	Total responses	Influenced by positive factors (percent)	Influenced by negative factors (percent)	Neutral (percent)
Homeschooling	8	62.50%	25.00%	12.50%
Faith-based schooling	62	64.52%	19.35%	16.13%
Charter schooling	13	53.85%	23.08%	23.08%

I found these data to be in direct contradiction with the Likert scale findings. According to Survey Item 31, the parents reported their decision was due mostly to the positive factors (the pull factors) of the choice alternative. The majority of each subgroup made this claim. While the results from all subgroups were contradictory, the results of the faith-based subgroup were the most contradictory.

As previously reported, the faith-based subgroup's average mean of the push factors associated with the TPS scored 3.66 (fairly neutral/of average relevance in the decision) in the Likert scale analysis. Further, their average mean of the pull factors associated with the choice alternative scored 2.19 (only slightly relevant), which was the

lowest average mean across all subgroups. According to the data drawn from Survey Item 31, however, the majority of faith-based parents (64.52%) summarized their decision as mainly due to the positive (pull) factors of the faith-based school.

Despite the contradiction in these two data sets, the focus group interview perhaps brings clarity here. All three faith-based focus group participants reported that their decision was a result of weighing both sides (push and pull). According to them, the push and pull factors were of equal relevance, each parent reporting reasoning unique to their individual circumstances.

Given these mixed results, I concluded that perhaps the same could be said of the other subgroups. Perhaps the data conflicted because both push and pull are equal players in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, without sufficient focus group data, my assumptions could not be confirmed and remain as they are—purely assumptions.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the study's data collection processes, including the parent survey and the focus group interview. I provided a detailed profile of the participants according to the survey data. The profile was presented to reflect the characteristics of the participating school choice population as a whole; however, it was also presented by subgroup. Next, the research findings were presented according to each research question. The data were presented as a whole and then were aggregated to identify similarities and differences in motivation across the subgroups. The focus group data were used to explain the survey data when possible. Finally, a summary of the results provided a detailed comparison of the study's findings pertaining to the two research questions.

Chapter 1 explained why this study was needed. Chapter 2 provided present-day, historical, and debatable descriptions of the three types of schooling included in this study. Chapter 3 explained how this study was conducted. Chapter 4 outlined the results. The last chapter, Chapter 5, provides a discussion of the study's implications and findings as well as recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Overview of the Study

This study explored parental motivation for selecting alternatives to TPSs across three subgroups—homeschooling parents, charter schooling parents, and faith-based schooling parents. The research occurred at a critical juncture in education when the school choice movement was perceived as a threat to TPSs by opponents and as an opportunity for improved education by advocates. Perhaps due to the clear dichotomy, school choice is among the most salient of themes in modern education reform initiatives (Reynolds, 2016). The framework for this study was The Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice, which was adapted from elements of Lee's (1966) Theory of Migration and Friedman and Hechter's (1988) The Various Paths to Social Outcomes.

An explanatory mixed methods design was employed and included a 2-phase QUAN>qual approach. Phase 1, the parent survey, was distributed to parents of first-through fifth-grade students at seven organizations, including one homeschooling association, one brick-and-mortar charter school, two virtual charter schools, and three faith-based schools. Phase 2 was designed to include four focus group interviews—one homeschooling, one brick-and-mortar charter schooling, one virtual charter schooling, and one faith-based schooling focus group. Due to a lack of participation, only the faith-based focus group interview occurred, thus limiting my ability to draw conclusions beyond those drawn from Phase 1. The small sample size of participants in Phase 2 also limits the generalizability of these findings.

The previous chapter outlined the results of the study. This chapter details the study's two research questions, the findings and implications, the limitations and

delimitations of the study, and the recommendations for future research. Finally, the conclusion of the study is presented.

### **Research Questions**

1. Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?
2. What are the similarities and differences among parental motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling?

### **Review of Conceptual Framework**

Lee's (1966) Model of Migration inspired this study's Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice. Lee argued that a number of factors lead to an actor's (the parent's in this study) decision to migrate from origin (the TPS) to the destination (the schools of choice). Further, Lee explained that both origin and destination possess factors that repel (push) and/or attract (pull) the actors. Lee added that while some actors have compelling reasons for migration, others need little provocation.

Friedman and Hechter (1988) explained that rational choice models, such as the one that inspired the creation of this study's framework, assume that consumers (the parents) have given preferences and work to attain a predetermined goal. Since RCT is based on the premise that individuals act and choose in the interest of self in order to maximize their available resources, it can be used to examine parental motivation (Sato, 2013; Zey, 2001).

While the Theory of Migration can be used as the lens for understanding why parents choose to leave a TPS, RCT can be used as the lens for understanding how

parents engage in the choice process. This study's Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice (Figure 3) merged the two theories to intertwine the essential tenets of both. However, push and pull factors associated with both origin (the TPSs) and destination (the school of choice) bookend the framework and initiate parental engagement in the choice process. The Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice assisted me in answering this study's two research questions.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings are presented in alignment with the study's Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice. They are intended to answer the study's two research questions and reflect the results of a 2-phase investigation of the phenomenon of school choice that included an electronic survey and a focus group interview. The quantitative survey results received emphasis during analysis; however, the focus group interview brought some clarity.

### ***Research Question 1***

I collected quantitative and qualitative data in the form of a parent survey and a focus group interview to answer Research Question 1, "Why do parents select homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling as alternatives to traditional public schooling?" The intent of the subsequent focus group interview was to explain the initial quantitative findings in keeping with the study's explanatory sequential design.

**Push Over Pull.** Overall, the push factors associated with the TPSs scored much higher means than the pull factors, according to participant responses; therefore, one can assume that the parents were more motivated by a push away from TPSs than they were pulled toward the choice alternative. The average means of the push factors across the subgroups were between 3.23 and 4.29 (relevant to very relevant); however, the average



means of the pull factors across the subgroups were between 2.19 and 2.63 (slightly relevant).

**Most Relevant Push Factor.** As a whole, the subgroups were in agreement that the TPSs' inconvenient location was the most relevant push factor considered in their decision-making, according to the Likert scale data. This factor received mean scores of 4.65 or greater across the subgroups, meaning it was very relevant to extremely relevant in the decision. Further, the responses for this factor had SDs of  $<1$ , meaning the scores were consistent among the parents across the subgroups.

When this finding was further analyzed during the faith-based focus group interview, I discovered that two of three participants were dissatisfied with how District ABC drew the attendance lines for its TPSs. Data obtained from District ABC confirmed that its attendance lines were drawn to consider the racial and socioeconomic enrollment imbalances across the district. Therefore, some students do not attend the TPS that is geographically closer to their residence in District ABC.

**Most Relevant Pull Factors.** Two different factors were reported as the most relevant pull factors considered in parent decision-making, according to the Likert scale data. First, the homeschooling and faith-based participants ranked modern teaching methods through technology integration as the highest-ranking pull factor. However, the mean scores for this factor were much lower than the push factor at 3.18 (homeschooling) and 3.38 (faith-based schooling). Further, the responses were less consistent with SDs ranging from 0.86 (homeschooling) to 1.57 (faith-based schooling). This finding was in alignment with the research of Dwyer and Peters (2019) who reported that a new generation of tech-savvy parents choose to homeschool because they find traditional, less

tech-dependent education models to be outdated and ineffective in a modern world.

Next, both the brick-and-mortar and virtual charter schooling parents ranked the schools' support of their religious beliefs as the highest-ranking pull factor involved in their decision. However, despite being the highest-ranking pull factor, the mean scores (3.57 and 4.17) were still lower than the highest-ranking push factors reported by these groups (relevant to very relevant). Further, the responses here were less consistent than the push factors, with SDs ranging from 0.90 to 1.76.

**Other Positive Factors of Choice.** The survey's two open-response opportunities produced qualitative data that could be triangulated with the survey's quantitative data. As a whole, the subgroups agreed that the choice programs' academics, teaching methods, and curriculum were considered highly influential positive factors. When this result was further analyzed for subthemes, I determined that the high academic standards/rigor, traditional teaching methods, and individualized learning opportunities offered by the choice programs were of particular relevance. This finding was in alignment with the previous research included in this study's review of literature, where multiple studies cited the choice program's ability to provide a superior education as a prominent pull factor (Bartholet, 2019; Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Hall, 2009; Hollenbeck, 2008; Lockwood, 2014; Schultz, 2009; Wagner, 2008; Wright, 2014).

**Other Negative Factors of TPSs.** The open responses pertaining to other negative factors associated with the TPSs were difficult to analyze, given the lack of responses from the homeschooling and charter schooling subgroups. I did find, however, that the faith-based subgroup reported that the academics, curriculum, and methods at the TPSs were considered highly influential push factors. This finding, among several others,

was in direct contradiction with the Likert scale data which suggested that a personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at the TPS was the lowest-ranking push factor reported by the faith-based parents (2.73 mean, 1.32 SD).

**Contradictions in the Data.** I encountered numerous contradictions throughout data analysis between the quantitative Likert scale data, the qualitative open-response data, and the qualitative focus group data. Unfortunately, I was only able to explore and clarify these contradictions with the faith-based subgroup during the focus group interview; therefore, some of these lingering contradictions are listed as suggestions for future research.

Perhaps the most obvious contradiction in the data uncovered during this study occurred between the Likert scale survey items and the open-response survey items. Across the subgroups, according to the Likert scale data, the push factors were more relevant in the decision to choose an alternative to TPS; however, according to the open-response data, the pull factors were more relevant in the decision to choose an alternative.

I was puzzled by this contradiction until the faith-based focus group participants brought clarity. All three parents claimed it was an equal push and pull that brought them to their final decision—each for very distinct reasons. One parent felt as though her decision was motivated by push factors for one child but by pull factors for her other child. Another parent claimed that he was pulled toward the choice alternative but was repelled from the TPS in the same light. Yet another parent turned to her previous experiences as a public school student and her friends' positive opinions of the choice program as the push and pull that she needed to make her decision.

Lee (1966) believed that the factors that hold or repel are defined differently for

every actor (the parents); however, some groups react similarly to a given set of factors at origin and destination. Lee said,

We can never specify the exact set of factors which impels or prohibits migration for a given person, we can, in general, only set forth a few which seem of special importance and note the general or average reaction of a considerable group. (p. 50)

Therefore, while Research Question 1 was used to better understand the phenomenon of parent motivation and school choice as a whole, Research Question 2 was used to understand each individual subgroup in order to draw comparisons.

### ***Research Question 2***

To answer the second research question, “What are the similarities and differences among parent motivators for choosing between homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling,” I used both quantitative and qualitative data in the form of a parent survey and a focus group interview. The initial quantitative data were further clarified and explained by the subsequent qualitative phase in keeping with the study’s explanatory sequential design.

**Most Relevant Push Factor.** During analysis of the Likert scale data, I determined that the inconvenient location of the TPSs was the highest-ranking push factor across the subgroups, with mean scores of 4.65 or higher (extremely relevant) and SDs of <1 (Table 43). Two of three faith-based focus group participants agreed that the zoning within District ABC is not ideal and tends to repel prospective families; however, the other subgroups did not participate in the Phase 2 focus group interviews. Based on the data provided, the responses pertaining to the most relevant push factor were very

similar. I found no previous research indicating that TPS zoning had an impact on parent choice. Therefore, I was led to wonder if these circumstances were unique to District ABC, a suburban school district where choice is abundant and increasing in popularity.

**Most Relevant Pull Factor.** Also, during analysis of the Likert scale data, I found agreement among the homeschooling and faith-based parents and agreement among the brick-and-mortar and virtual charter parents regarding the highest-ranking pull factor (Table 44). Whereas the homeschooling and faith-based schooling parents reported modern teaching methods through technology integration as the highest-ranking pull factor, the brick-and-mortar and virtual charter schooling parents reported the school's support of their religious beliefs as the highest-ranking pull factor. However, across the subgroups, the mean scores were much lower, indicating that the pull factors were less relevant in the decision overall.

In contrast, I found that whereas the brick-and-mortar and virtual charter parents reported the school's support of their religious beliefs as the most relevant pull factor, the faith-based parents ranked the school's support of their family's religious beliefs and family values as the least relevant pull factors with mean scores of 1.39 (slightly relevant) and SDs of <1 (Table 29). None of the charter schools note religious orientation; therefore, the pull for religious purposes is still unclear. As previously discussed, I was only able to explore this unexpected finding with the faith-based population during the focus group interview. They suggested that there are relevant secular reasons for faith-based enrollment including smaller class sizes, individualized curriculum, safety from the effects of COVID-19, and just a general push away from TPSs.

**Other Positive Factors of Choice.** During analysis of the survey's open-response

data, I found that all three subgroups reported that academics, curriculum, and methods were the most influential in their decision in terms of positive factors related to the choice alternative. Consequently, I found that academics, curriculum, and methods were also the most influential in terms of negative factors related to the TPSs, according to the faith-based parents.

**Pull Over Push.** Finally, during analysis of the survey data, all three subgroups summarized their decision as mostly influenced by the positive (pull) factors of the choice alternative. These data conflicted with the Likert scale data that indicated the opposite. The Likert scale data indicated that parent decisions were mostly influenced by the push (negative) factors of the TPSs. Therefore, throughout the study, much like the larger debate, the findings were oftentimes dichotomous.

## **Discussion**

School choice opponents have warned us of the potential negative impacts the movement may have on the TPSs. Researchers have found that increased competition negatively impacts TPS enrollment and thereby negatively impacts the funding those schools receive (Krull, 2016; Lindle, 2014). Others claim that school choice increases segregation because parents tend to select the schools for their own children that enroll students of similar race, ethnicity, and economic status (Krull, 2016). Based on this research, District ABC may be experiencing these anticipated effects. In combatting these effects, the district may have found itself to be in a paradoxical situation.

### ***The Impact of School Choice***

Much changed within District ABC from the beginning to the end of this study. Perhaps the most telling sign of the impact of school choice in the area was that district

leadership voted in February 2021 to close three elementary schools beginning in fall 2021 due to decreased enrollment. Data presented to the community showed that whereas 7,114 students (kindergarten-Grade 5) were zoned to attend District ABC elementary schools during the 2020-2021 school year, a total of 1,860 (26%) were enrolled elsewhere at the end of this study. An average of 116 students living within the zone per school had selected alternatives to District ABC's TPSs during the 2020-2021 school year.

Therefore, District ABC presented new attendance lines in February 2021 with the intent to accommodate the imbalances brought about by the impacts of school choice in the area. When asked about the new attendance lines, the superintendent of schools cited a balance of socioeconomics and diversity as priorities. The school board also said the decision would help bring the remaining elementary schools back up to optimum capacity (75-85%).

### ***Who Chooses?***

Ravitch (2010) argued that a free-market system of education is a terrible idea. She explained that advocates of choice give little thought to its consequences and contended that the resulting inequities would parallel those found in a 1950s segregated America. Other critics have suggested that this de facto segregation isolates disadvantaged students, given their parents' lack of resources and/or know-how to make the best choice for their child. Further, researchers such as Krull (2016) have found that parents typically select schools enrolling students of similar race, ethnicity, and economic status of their own child.

It is understood that similar studies occurring in different settings could produce

very different results. Also, it is understood that the participants in this study may or may not be truly representative of the larger choice population in the area. However, with nearly 90% representation in the study, the results suggest that those parents choosing alternatives in District ABC were college-educated White parents. This finding led me to believe that this is who chooses, and consequently, this is who does not attend TPSs in increasing numbers in District ABC.

Schools of choice are oftentimes accused of elitism, given the result of the market effects associated with privatization. Carpenter and Kafer (2012) said that the schools of choice charging tuition (i.e., the faith-based schools involved in this study) serve the select few who can afford it. This study also included tuition-free schools of choice; however, the faith-based population had majority representation (68.27%). Therefore, I wondered if perhaps District ABC is experiencing a “creaming” effect in which more affluent families choose the schools that are less accessible to other income brackets (Wong, 2018).

Lindle (2014) implied that this trend has little to do with socioeconomics. He said that parents simply choose the schools where they are more represented; therefore, White families choose schools where they have predominant representation, and families of underrepresented ethnicities choose schools where they have predominant representation. Whatever the case may be, based on this study’s findings, a certain population is taking advantage of the education marketplace more so than others. I could not confirm that the student bodies at the schools of choice involved in this study were also composed of mainly White students, because I was not made privy to that data.

This study did not directly explore race and ethnicity as determinants of school



choice; however, I did ponder the potential correlation and recognized the opportunity for future studies, particularly provided the social climate of the nation at the time when race relations were headline news. Therefore, the topic of race will be discussed in my recommendations for future research.

### ***The Role of Religion in the Decision***

The school of choice movement has long been synonymous with religious motivation—faith-based schooling and homeschooling in particular. Faith-based schools, with roots beginning with the Catholic church hundreds of years ago (Hall, 2009), were one of the fastest-growing segments in American education at the time of this study. According to Hall (2009), faith-based schools seek to attract “believers” who are interested in attending a school built on common religious values.

The faith-based parents in this study expressed their concerns about the TPSs’ academics, curriculum, and teaching methods in the open responses. During analysis, I found that eight of 25 codes pertained directly to the perception that TPSs have adopted a progressive agenda and curriculum. The parents described them as places of “too much social indoctrination” where “social programming is more important than learning.” In reflection, I interpreted the responses of the faith-based parents to be in direct alignment with Hall (2009), who also found that these parents are in search of an organization with a familiar set of values and beliefs.

Kan (2015) justified homeschooling by claiming that children are subjected to a variety of negative influences in TPSs. Dwyer and Peters (2019) found that a significant portion of homeschooling parents believe that TPSs pose a threat to their faith and parental authority. Conservative Christians composed the clear majority of

homeschooling families in the nation at the time of this study (Bartholet, 2019; Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Wagner, 2008; Walters, 2015).

Despite extensive investigation, I found no connection between charter schools and religion—perhaps because charter schools, although operating independently from public school districts, are still in fact public schools. I also found no previous research indicating that charter school parents are motivated by religion; therefore, I was surprised to learn that the charter school parents in this study (both brick-and-mortar and virtual) named the charter school’s support of their families’ religious beliefs as the most relevant pull factor.

My reflections on this finding led me back to the review of literature. Previous research indicated that faith-based schools (Catholic schools in particular) saw a decline in enrollment as charter schools gained momentum in the 1990s. Not only do charter schools offer a new alternative to TPSs, but they also offer a tuition-free alternative to the faith-based schools (Peterson, 2006; Ravitch, 2010). Could the charter schooling parents involved in this study represent a unique segment of the population searching for a tuition-free substitute for a faith-based education? It is unfortunate that this finding could not be explored further during the charter school focus group interviews due to the lack of participation.

On the contrary, the faith-based parents reported that the school’s support of their religious beliefs and values were the least relevant factors. Lockwood (2014) found that students enrolled in faith-based schools did not attend because of the religious component, but rather because they were fleeing the TPSs. Hollenbeck (2008) found that the faith-based school’s academics were most influential in the decision. All three

studies, Lockwood, Hollenbeck, and this one, suggest that parents can be motivated to enroll in faith-based schools for reasons unrelated to religion. When the faith-based parents in this study were asked to provide insight into this finding during the focus group interview, they confirmed that secular reasoning can take precedence over religion. Other reasons for enrollment in faith-based education, as cited by the parents, included the TPSs' response to COVID-19 and parent perceptions that the faith-based program was better than a public education in general.

### ***Discussion Summary***

In keeping with the economic foundation of school choice, economist Albert O. Hirschman (1970) suggested that while loyalty delays a customer's exit, it will not do so indefinitely in the absence of improvements. Eventually, a loyalist exits when they feel the organization's decline is irreversible (Reynolds, 2016). Clearly, a thriving education marketplace has had profound effects on District ABC's TPSs.

As is the case elsewhere around the nation, as the movement continues to increase in popularity, the parents are the ones who shape the terrain in District ABC by the choices they make for their children. Research suggests that customers (parents) exit an organization, such as a TPS, and seek alternatives when they are no longer satisfied with the services offered (Reynolds, 2016)—hence the demand for alternatives (schools of choice). Therefore, where should one cast blame for these circumstances? Should it be the parents for their disloyalty to the TPSs? Should it be the TPSs for failing to improve, or should it be District ABC for its response to the exodus?

### **Study Implications**

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings led me to create research-based

recommendations divided into three sections. While these implications may be of interest to other districts and parties, they are specifically geared toward the unique data collected from parents in District ABC. First, the results of the study are used to inform public school officials of the reasons parents are choosing alternatives. Second, and alternately, the recommendations for the TPSs can be used to inform the schools of choice, which rely on parent interest. Additional recommendations specific to the schools of choice are also provided. Third, recommendations are made to the school of choice parents.

### ***Implications for TPSs***

This research showed that school of choice parents were equally motivated to enroll in alternatives to TPSs by push and pull factors. In other words, the parents were as much repelled by the TPSs as they were attracted to the choice programs. Specifically, the parents were repelled by District ABC's attendance lines. The intent of drawing the attendance lines in such a way 20 years ago was to address the racial and socioeconomic enrollment imbalances across the district. Interestingly, the data show that this decision is what pushed these parents most. Furthermore, District ABC has chosen to close schools and redraw the attendance lines to address the racial and socioeconomic enrollment imbalances, this time due to the heavy exodus of school of choice families.

I recommend that District ABC consider how other districts have addressed the issues of racial and/or socioeconomic enrollment imbalances and the loss of students to schools of choice. Have alternative measures been taken to combat the imbalances? Would allowing students to attend the school closest to their home remedy or exacerbate the issue? Would asking the parents who are withdrawing their children to engage in an exit interview or take a survey to better understand their reasoning benefit the situation?

All three subgroups were attracted to the choice program's academics, curriculum, and teaching methods. Ravitch (2010), an outspoken opponent of choice, made the pressing accusation that school choice seeks to destroy public education on the unfounded claims that TPSs are inferior to the alternatives. Based on this research, the perception among these school of choice parents is that the homeschool, faith-based, and charter programs in the area of study are superior to the TPSs; therefore, I recommend that District ABC investigate this issue in the manner previously discussed. Are the parents savvy consumers of facts, or is hearsay the information source of choice (Lindle, 2014)? Sato (2013) suggested that interactions with other consumers (other parents) weigh heavily in the decision, as learning about others' choices is oftentimes reciprocated.

Finally, District ABC should consider alternative marketing strategies in order to compete with the schools of choice. It is no secret that school choice models education after American business in order to promote competition and to attract consumers (parents; Peterson, 2006). Clearly, the schools of choice have found their niche and distinguish themselves from public schools to attract support (Wilson, 2016). Until very recently in the history of education, TPSs, as a monopoly, had no incentive to improve or to compete with alternatives (Ravitch, 2010). Perhaps the time has come for TPSs to think of themselves less as the standard and more as a potential choice in the growing list—an equal player in the education marketplace. Perhaps a shifted reliance on market principles rather than a guaranteed clientele would unleash the productive potential Chubb and Moe (1990) referenced in their research.

### *Implications for Schools of Choice*

The schools of choice and the TPSs in this study have opposing motivations in the education marketplace, specifically in District ABC. Whereas the goal of District ABC as of late is to retain its students and cope with the effects of school choice, the schools of choice seek to continue nurturing and growing the movement in the area. In order to achieve their goal, the schools of choice should also take into consideration that parents are equally motivated by push and pull factors when enrolling their child in schools.

First, I recommend that the schools of choice seek to understand parent perceptions that the high academic expectations/rigor of their programs are highly relevant pull factors. Where are the parents obtaining this information? Is it from a credible source (i.e., the school's website or the South Carolina Department of Education), or is it by word of mouth? Are the perceptions rooted in facts? If so, how can marketing be adapted to further emphasize this appeal?

Second, I recommend that the schools of choice seek to understand who is attracted to their programs. District ABC, as a community, is very diverse, with 54.5% of people identifying as White and 45.5% of people identifying with underrepresented races/ethnicities in the area at the time of this study. However, nearly 90% of the participants in this study identified as White. If the schools of choice do indeed enroll a disproportionate number of White students, why is this so? What deters or hinders a more diverse clientele from considering these schools?

Last, the results of this study showed that nearly one third of the participants decided to enroll in an alternative to TPS following the local effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, 84% of the participants claimed that their decision would be

permanent. Ray (2020c) concluded that tremendous growth occurred in the homeschooling movement in 2020 following the effects of COVID-19. At that time, given the restrictive lockdowns, students and parents realized they no longer needed the TPSs (Ray, 2020c). Benson (2020) claimed that parents were lured to the faith-based schools in record numbers, considering that many faith-based schools continued with full-time, in-person learning. Similarly, Koeske (2020) believed that a pandemic-fueled exodus of TPS students accounted for unprecedented growth in charter school enrollment.

Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic may also account for the growth of the school of choice movement in District ABC; therefore, I recommend the schools of choice determine the permanence of parent decisions. As the 2020-2021 school year ends, as does the pandemic, will the 84% continue their child's enrollment, or was the increased enrollment at the schools of choice a sort of knee-jerk reaction to the crisis? Whether or not the trend of increased enrollment continues into the 2021-2022 school year is yet to be determined (Koeske, 2020). The answer to the question will impact school of choice enrollment and is worth investigation as the effects of COVID-19 subside.

### ***Implications for School of Choice Parents***

Whether an advocate or opponent of the movement, schools of choice undeniably impact the TPSs, as evidenced in District ABC. During the 2020-2021 school year, the time of this study, 1,860 (26%) of 7,114 kindergarten through fifth-grade students living within District ABC were enrolled in choice alternatives. As a result, three of District ABC's elementary schools were scheduled to close the following year due to decreased enrollment and budget constraints. It was no longer logical for these schools to maintain

operation.

The consumers (the parents) in this study selected the alternative they believed would best optimize their circumstances. Friedman and Hechter (1988) believed that while researchers can work to understand rational choice, such as choosing an alternative to TPSs, the quantity and quality of information involved in the decision should be taken as a significant variable. Simply put, according to Hall (2009), “meaningful information is essential in order to make rational choices” (p. 35).

During this study, I worked to control my personal bias as a public school teacher. I reported the results of the analysis and reflected on their application to this phenomenon; however, during the focus group interviews, two of three parents mentioned that their conversations with other school of choice parents were very relevant factors in their decision.

Given the high stakes for all involved—the TPSs, the schools of choice, and the students—I first recommend that parents do their due diligence and seek the facts. They should pursue credible sources for information weighing heavily in their decision, such as the perceived academic expectations and rigor at both the schools of choice and the TPSs. The school’s leadership, the school’s website, and the South Carolina Department of Education can each provide an accurate portrayal of student achievement in numerical terms, which can in turn be compared to the TPSs. Are their perceptions accurate or inaccurate? Are there perhaps other factors that weigh heavily in the decision that should be investigated in the same manner? Should the TPSs be reconsidered as options?

Second, I recommend that parents who have recently decided to withdraw their child from TPS share their reasoning with the teachers, administrators, and other



leadership at both the TPS and the choice alternative. For example, District ABC should understand that the TPSs' inconvenient location and the attendance lines serve as deterrents. The schools of choice should understand that parents perceive their academics to be superior to the TPSs. Having an understanding of the motivation behind the choice and recent exodus from TPSs would benefit both parties (the TPSs and the schools of choice) in achieving their goal of either retaining or attracting clientele.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations have an effect on the study but are beyond the control of the researcher. Five limitations were identified before executing this study of parental motivation and school choice. Those five limitations were as follows:

1. As a District ABC parent, I had prior experience with engaging in the education marketplace, ultimately choosing on the basis of convenience.
2. As a former employee of District ABC and resident of the area, I was very familiar with the community in which the study occurred.
3. Parent participation in the study was voluntary.
4. COVID-19 most likely impacted the results.
5. Social media (Facebook) was used as a supplemental platform for recruitment.

To address these five limitations, I recognized my personal bias as both a former employee of District ABC and a school choice parent. I reflected on my personal choice and determined that it was made based on convenience and the other pull factors associated with the two schools of choice. I acknowledged my bias throughout the process and participated in this study as only researcher and facilitator.

Given that study participation was voluntary, I acknowledged that the participants

involved may or may not have been representative of school choice parents as a whole; therefore, I understood that the results may not be generalizable to other settings, people, or populations. I employed mixed methods, allowing me to triangulate data sources. I also involved multiple peer debriefers, including two colleagues, to assist in reviewing my findings. These measures increased the validity of my findings.

To decrease bias in my sampling, consistent measures were attempted across subgroups. In addition to an emailed request for study participation, social media (Facebook) was selected to serve as a supplemental platform for recruitment. I requested that each of the organizations involved post the study's details to their Facebook pages to increase awareness of the study.

Six additional limitations were identified during the study's execution:

1. Two of seven organizations (both charter schools) agreed to the use of social media (Facebook) as a supplemental platform for recruitment.
2. Faith-based schooling representation was disproportionately higher than the other subgroups during the parent survey (68.27%).
3. Only the faith-based focus group occurred, due to the lack of participation from the other subgroups.
4. A disproportionate number of the study's participants identified as being White (74 of 83, or 89.16% of survey participants) and 100% of focus group participants identified as being White.
5. The response rates across the subgroups were disproportionate (faith-based 24.18%, homeschooling 11.54%, and charter schooling 7.26%).
6. Mean and SD were used to analyze and report the quantitative survey results

and guide the planning of the focus group interview.

Only two of seven participating organizations agreed to post the study's details to social media to increase study participation at their organizations. While this is unfortunate, I concluded that it did not impact the study in the way one might expect. Despite the additional means for recruitment among the charter schools, the subgroup still had the lowest response rate of the three (7.26%). To address the disproportionate representation of faith-based and White parents in the study, I continually acknowledged the potential impact when summarizing the results. Further, I considered the disproportionate representation to be a data point in itself and discussed it in the implications for schools of choice. Finally, I recognized that using and/or including other methods for statistical analysis could have impacted the final results.

Given the 10 limitations, one can conclude that the study's results may not be generalizable to other settings. The limitations were considered in the recommendations for future studies, with hopes that future studies may address the gaps in the data and the contradictions in my findings and thereby continue adding to the existing literature pertaining to school choice and parent motivation.

Delimitations are the variables the researcher has selected to limit the study (Simon & Goes, 2011). I selected to control the study with the following five delimitations:

1. The study was set in one suburban South Carolina school district—District ABC.
2. The study only included participants living within the boundaries of District ABC.

3. The study was limited to parents of first- through fifth-grade school of choice students.
4. All study participants had experience engaging with the education marketplace.
5. The study included only the three school choice options available in District ABC—homeschooling, faith-based schooling, and charter schooling.

These delimitations ensured that as the researcher, I could (a) code the data thoroughly and promptly, and (b) better ensure consistency across the subgroups in terms of the age of the children, how recently the choice occurred, and the factors associated with the location of the choice.

### **Future Studies**

The findings from this study allowed me to create recommendations for future studies.

### ***Readability of the Instrument***

First, if this study were to be replicated, one recommendation should be incorporated to improve the readability of the instrument. Prior to this study, TPSs (in general) did not offer a virtual format. At the time, as a result of COVID-19, several schools across the nation adopted a virtual format similar to that of the virtual charter schools. Therefore, while many children were technically enrolled in TPSs, they attended classes online. Because of this, Survey Item 5 which was designed to aggregate brick-and-mortar and virtual charter schooling parents, received a disproportionate number of responses. To remedy this problem, the instrument should be designed to direct and allow only parents identifying with charter schools to answer Survey Item 5.

### ***Replicating the Study***

Second, I recommend this study be replicated in other districts where choice is abundant; the goal being to garner enough participation to conduct focus groups for each subgroup. This study suffered from a lack of participation from the homeschooling and charter schooling populations in particular. In this explanatory sequential mixed methods study, the qualitative focus group data were intended to help explain the quantitative survey data; however, only the faith-based focus group occurred with very limited participation, thus limiting my ability to build on the findings associated with the survey. As a result, several lingering questions exist pertaining to each of the subgroups; however, analysis of the homeschooling and charter schooling subgroups' survey data showed several contradictions that could not be clarified without focus group participation. Replicating this study would assist in answering these lingering questions.

### ***Examining Discrepancies Through Mean and Mode***

One such lingering question pertains to a contradiction identified between the Likert scale and open-response data. Whereas high academic standards/rigor was named the highest-ranking pull factor associated with the schools of choice in the open-response data, a personal dissatisfaction with the academic standards/rigor was named the lowest-ranking push factor associated with the TPSs in the Likert scale data. I was able to clarify this finding with the faith-based parents; however, I was unable to get the homeschooling and charter perspective. Should a similar study be conducted, I recommend researchers attempt to understand this discrepancy.

Another lingering question I have is whether the homeschooling and charter schooling decision was more influenced by push or pull factors. When triangulating the

survey data, I found the responses of these two subgroups to be contradictory. Whereas the parents summarized their decision as ultimately based on the positive factors of the choice program (Survey Item 31), the Likert scale data suggested otherwise. I was able to clarify a similar finding with the faith-based focus group but was unable to do so with the homeschooling and charter schooling parents. Should a similar study be conducted, this contradiction warrants examination.

Also, the charter school parents in this study (both brick-and-mortar and virtual) named the charter school's support of their families' religious beliefs as the most relevant pull factor. Having identified no connection between charter schools and religious motivation in the review of literature, I wondered if perhaps charter schooling parents represent a segment of the population searching for a tuition-free substitute for faith-based education. Further, I wondered if the curriculum-related push factor was religiously rooted in their perceptions of the TPSs' progressive curriculum. Since this finding could not be explored further during the charter school focus group interviews due to the lack of participation, I recommend future studies examine this potential correlation.

In retrospect, I wondered if the results would have been different if another method for statistical analysis had been employed. Therefore, in an attempt to better understand such discrepancies in the data, I recommend future researchers examine and report the mean in conjunction with the mode to gain a broader view of the phenomenon before conducting the focus group interviews.

### ***Interviews Versus Focus Groups***

I designed this study to include focus group interviews before knowing the results of Phase 1. Phase 1 survey data (the open responses in particular), previous research

uncovered during the review of literature, and an understanding of the study's participants (90% college-educated White parents) led me to ponder race as an unspoken motivating factor behind the phenomenon in District ABC. However, I consciously decided to avoid the topic in the context of the focus group interview, because it is very sensitive and politically charged in nature—particularly at the time of this study. Therefore, I recommend future researchers who may choose to explore segregation and school choice consider conducting interviews with individuals rather than focus groups. Doing so would provide a safer space for expressing views and opinions without fear of judgment and thereby increase the reliability of the responses.

### ***The Impact of COVID-19***

Finally, 34% of parents claimed their decision to consider alternatives was made following the local effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering that this study occurred at a time when all schools, both the TPSs and the schools of choice, were still coping with the effects in their own way, I believe this study was directly impacted. I believe similar studies, if conducted in the near future, could provide insight into the actual scope of the impacts COVID-19 truly had on public education and the school of choice movement. Did the pandemic truly serve as a catalyst for increased choice enrollment, or is this an anomaly?

### **Conclusion**

The school of choice movement has created a dichotomy in the nation's perceptions of education. Consider a pendulum, oscillating between one extreme and another. Throughout our nation's history, the pendulum (education trends) has swung steadily back-and-forth between choice and standardization. From the missionary church

schools of the 1600s, to the homeschools of the American Frontier, to Horace Mann's Common Schools for all, to compulsory attendance, to the thriving education marketplace of today, the pendulum swings from one side to the other. Given the impacts of a growing school choice movement in the district of study, it seems as though the pendulum has recently swung in favor of choice.

This study was conducted to better understand this phenomenon from the perspective of those who are arguably swinging the pendulum—the parents. It was built on The Push-Pull Model for Parent Choice, which was created based on the research of Lee (1966) and Friedman and Hechter (1988). The research explains which factors (push and pull) are most relevant in the decision to choose homeschooling, faith-based schooling, or charter schooling over TPSs. The research also compared findings across the three subgroups. The results showed that parents are equally motivated by a push away from TPSs and a pull toward schools of choice.



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## Appendix A

### Phase 1 Instrument

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:** Survey participation is completely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. The survey is for parents of students in grades 1 through 5 living within the Rock Hill School District and enrolled in homeschooling, charter schooling, or faith-based schooling programs. The information obtained will be protected by the researcher and can never be associated with you or your child.

Agreement to participate indicates that you:

- \* have read all information contained in the attached letter;*
- \* voluntarily agree to participate;*
- \* live within the Rock Hill School District*
- \* are a parent of a student in grades 1 – 5;*
- \* have selected homeschooling, charter schooling, or faith-based schooling as an alternative to public schools.*

If you choose to participate in the research study, please accept by clicking "agree" below.

☐ Agree

Do you currently reside within the boundary of Rock Hill School District?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please keep in mind your YOUNGEST child enrolled in homeschooling, charter schooling, or faith-based schooling as you proceed through the survey. What grade level is your YOUNGEST child?

☐ 1st

☐ 2nd

☐ 3rd

☐ 4th

☐ 5th

☐ 6th grade or older

For the purposes of this study, the definitions of homeschooling, charter schooling, and faith-based schooling are as follows:

**Homeschooling:** An education alternative to traditional public schools in which parents/guardians accept sole responsibility for their child/children's education

**Charter Schooling:** Tuition-free, public, nonreligious, and nonprofit schools operating by sponsorship of a public school district, the South Carolina Public Charter School District, or a public or independent institution of higher learning either in brick-and-mortar or virtual format

**Faith-Based Schooling:** Private organizations that do not receive state or local funding, but rather charge tuition and have a religious mission

Based on the definitions above, what best describes your YOUNGEST child's CURRENT schooling?

☐ Homeschooling

☐ Charter Schooling

☐ Faith-Based Schooling

If your YOUNGEST child CURRENTLY attends a charter school, select the format of that organization below.

☐ Brick-and-mortar (students attend face-to-face classes at the school's physical facility)

☐ Virtual/Online (students attend classes virtually, through electronic means)



What type of school did your child attend BEFORE enrolling in their current program?

- ☐ Traditional public school
- ☐ Brick-and-mortar charter school
- ☐ Virtual charter school
- ☐ Private, faith-based school
- ☐ Private, non-religious school
- ☐ Homeschool
- ☐ My child has always attended the current program
- ☐ Other (please specify)

When did you make the decision regarding your child's CURRENT education arrangement?

- ☐ Prior to March 2020 (before the local impacts of COVID-19)
- ☐ After March 2020 (after the local impacts of COVID-19 took effect)

Of the choices below, which best describes the predicted duration of your child's enrollment in the CURRENT program of choice?

- ☐ Temporary (1 school year or less)
- ☐ Permanent (2 school years or more)
- ☐ Unknown/Undecided at this time

Indicate the level of relevance each factor related to your child's ZONED school had in determining your decision to choose an alternative education arrangement. Please note that for the purposes of the following survey items, your child's *ZONED* school is where he/she would be slated to attend public school according to boundaries determined by Rock Hill School District.

	Level of Relevance				
	Extremely Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	Slightly Relevant	Not at all Relevant
Personal dissatisfaction with the academic expectations/rigor at my child's ZONED school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal dissatisfaction with discipline, safety, and/or bullying at my child's ZONED school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal dissatisfaction with teacher quality at my child's ZONED school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ZONED school did not meet my child's individual learning needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ZONED school did not meet my child's individual social/emotional needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ZONED school utilized outdated teaching methods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ZONED school was inconveniently located	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student body make-up at the ZONED school was not what my child nor I wanted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The class size was too large at the ZONED school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with staff at the ZONED school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child or I had an unpleasant experience with students at the ZONED school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concerns with the effects of COVID-19 at my child's ZONED school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicate the level of relevance each factor related to your child's CURRENT education arrangement had in determining your decision to choose an alternative to traditional public schools. Please note that for the purposes of the following survey items, your child's CURRENT education arrangement (as you previously indicated) is either homeschooling, charter schooling, or faith-based schooling.

	Level of Relevance				
	Extremely Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	Slightly Relevant	Not at all Relevant
High academic expectations/rigor of the CURRENT program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good teacher quality of the CURRENT program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CURRENT school supports our family values	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CURRENT school supports our family's religious beliefs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CURRENT program allows my family more flexibility in scheduling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CURRENT program individualizes learning for my child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CURRENT program utilizes modern teaching methods through technology integration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CURRENT school will do a better job of teaching basic reading, writing, and math	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please use the space below to indicate other POSITIVE factors you consider to be "extremely relevant" or "very relevant" in your decision to enroll your child in their current education program.

☐ POSITIVE factors of the CURRENT program

☐ Not relevant

Please use the space below to indicate other NEGATIVE factors associated with the ZONED school that you consider to be "extremely relevant" or "very relevant" in your decision to enroll your child in their current education program.

☐ NEGATIVE factors of the ZONED school

☐ Not relevant

Generally speaking, would you say your decision was ultimately based on the positive factors of the CURRENT program or the negative factors of the ZONED school?

☐ Positive factors of the CURRENT program

☐ Negative factors of the ZONED school

☐ Neutral

For classification purposes, please indicate YOUR race.  
Remember, all responses are anonymous.

☐ White

☐ Black or African American

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native

☐ Asian

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐ Hispanic or Latino

☐ From multiple races

☐ Other (please specify)

For classification purposes, please indicate YOUR age.  
Remember, all responses are anonymous.

☐ 24 years or younger

☐ 25 to 29 years

☐ 30–34 years

☐ 35–39 years

☐ 40–44 years

☐ 45–49 years

☐ 50–54 years

☐ 55 years or better

For classification purposes, what is the highest level of school you have completed? Remember, all responses are anonymous.

☐ Less than a high school diploma

☐ High school diploma or equivalent

☐ Some college but no degree

☐ Associate degree

☐ Bachelor degree

☐ Graduate degree

The second phase of this study will involve focus group interviews using Zoom (an online video conferencing tool). Focus groups will include parents of homeschoolers, charter schoolers, and faith-based schoolers in grades 1 – 5. The goal of the second phase of research is to further explain the results of this initial survey data and increase understanding of parent motivation for selecting alternatives to traditional public schools. If you are willing to continue participation in this study through representing parents of homeschoolers, charter schoolers, or faith-based schoolers, follow the link to the Google Form, "Focus Group Participation," to indicate intent to participate in phase two of research.

You will need to come back to submit this survey so your responses will be recorded.

#### [Focus Group Participation Link](#)

If you are not interested in further participation, please select "I am not interested in focus group participation at this time" below to end the survey.

☐ I am not interested in focus group participation at this time.

☐ I followed the "Focus Group Participation" link, left my email address to express intent to participate in phase two of research, and need to end the survey now.

## Focus Group Participation: Parent Choice

The second phase of this study will involve focus group interviews using Zoom (an online video conferencing tool). Focus groups will include parents of homeschoolers, charter schoolers, or faith-based schoolers in grades 1 - 5. The goal of the second phase of research is to further explain the results of this initial survey data and increase understanding of parent motivation for selecting alternatives to traditional public schools. If you are willing to continue participation in this study through representing parents of homeschoolers, charter schoolers, or faith-based schoolers, please express your intent by leaving your email address beneath the category you wish to represent.

**HOMESCHOOLERS:** If you would like to participate in a focus group that represents HOMESCHOOLERS, please express your intent to participate by leaving your email address below. The email address you leave will be used to contact you at a later date.

Your answer

**CHARTER SCHOOLERS:** If you would like to participate in a focus group that represents CHARTER SCHOOLERS, please express your intent to participate by leaving your email address below. The email address you leave will be used to contact you at a later date.

Your answer

**FAITH-BASED SCHOOLERS:** If you would like to participate in a focus group that represents FAITH-BASED SCHOOLERS, please express your intent to participate by leaving your email address below. The email address you leave will be used to contact you at a later date.

Your answer

**After expressing intent to participate, please press SUBMIT. Also, make sure you submitted the previous survey, "Survey of Factors Influencing Parent Motivation and School Choice."**

Submit



## Appendix B

### Focus Group Interview Questions

### Focus Group Questions

1. Roughly 25% of faith-based parents considered alternatives to TPSs following the effects of COVID-19. Do any of you fall into that category? If so, can you elaborate on your reasoning?
2. Enrollment at faith-based schools saw a huge uptick following COVID based on research. Is this true at your school?
3. Inconvenient location - Why do you assume that the faith-based population listed an inconvenient location as most relevant?
4. Unpleasant experiences - Without specifics, does anyone want to elaborate on what that meant to you?
5. Lowest ranking factor - support of religious beliefs/family values. Given the clear contradiction with the school's mission, any thoughts on why we may see these results?
6. Other positive factors of the FB school - High academic standards/rigor ranked first, traditional teaching methods ranked second. Do you agree that high standards ranked first?
7. Contradiction - Teaching methods - modern vs. traditional. Discuss why you feel this contradiction in the data may have occurred.
8. Contradiction - Support of religious beliefs appeared second-most frequently. Discuss why you feel this contradiction in the data may have occurred.
9. Other negative factors associated with the TPSs - parents said that low academics, curriculum, and methods were the most influential push factors. A progressive agenda/curriculum was also high-ranking. What does this mean to you?
10. How did technology play into your decision?
11. How would you summarize your choice - mainly push or pull?