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Political Culture and Policy: The Impact of Culture and Values on School Choice Legislation

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POLITICAL CULTURE AND POLICY: THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND VALUES

ON SCHOOL CHOICE LEGISLATION

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL CULTURE AND POLICY: THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND VALUES ON
SCHOOL CHOICE LEGISLATION

Heather Leigh Neal
Old Dominion University, 2019
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Policy actors unite political culture, power, and values to make substantial decisions which are often subjective in nature. Politics and policy are about collective decisions, which rely on the arrangement of a group of people. As values can influence policy actors in their attempt to solve problems, it is important for policymakers to establish a balance among the most essential values. A qualitative case study approach was used to investigate how, and what ways, political culture influenced how state stakeholders interpreted or implemented policy. Power and values were explored as both can connect for the implementation of policy. If values, which are widely subjective, play a part in establishing policy, then it effects all stakeholders. The purpose of this case study was to define how values and political culture impacts the implementation of school choice policy. The theories of power and values are situated within a political culture framework, and used to critically examine whether or not values influenced legislators as they implemented policy. Multiple interviews were conducted, and transcriptions of those conversations revealed that the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion influenced how stakeholders and policy actors view and interpret school choice. In addition, the data also revealed how stakeholders perceive the values of choice, equity and efficiency differently along with the impact of these values on society.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for their unwavering support. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to wonderful husband, David, for his devotion and belief in me during the doctoral process. You have been my biggest champion. This would not have been possible without your love and encouragement. To my son, Evan, thank you for always making me laugh when I felt stressed. You always know how to make me smile. I look forward to watching you pursue your own life goals.

I also dedicate this work to my parents and parents-in-law. Your continued support over these years has meant the world to me. You believed in me when I needed it most. Thank you!

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all those who are in the midst of pursuing their own dreams. Keep the faith! With God on your side, you will succeed!

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Finally, I would like to thank all of the participants of my study for their valuable time. Your insights, honesty, and experiences made this study come to fruition. I will forever be indebted to you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

Charter schools are heavily debatable in our nation. With nationwide budgetary support over the last few decades, charter schools are frequently mentioned in the news. While charter proponents are happy about increased funding and support for school choice, some activists have vocalized concerns about the future of charter schools (Richmond, 2017).

School choice advocates profess that their organizations are centered around the principles of parental choice, autonomy, and accountability (Tell, 2016). These ideologies stem from years of the belief that autonomy leads to greater choice in teaching, hence leading to student growth (Rebora, 2011). In spite of proponents vocalizing the endorsement of school choice, there are opponents who condemn the efforts. As other states had school choice developments that flourished, Virginia was the opposite; charter schools opened very slowly before the entire movement came to a halt.

A report from the *National Alliance for Public Charter Schools* (2019) stated that Virginia's charter school law was considered weak as it ranked at 39 out of 44. Since Virginia only has eight charter schools, I wanted to explore the reasons for the slow growth of charter schools to see if it was connected to the legislative language of charter school policy. I pondered if the legislative language caused conflict and this stymied the process or progress of charter schools. Furthermore, I speculated if the policy actors, individuals who possess the desire to shape events (Heywood, 2015), could pinpoint the reasons for the lack of charter schools in Virginia. Similar to the views of people within society, policymakers rarely are original thinkers (Heywood, 2015). However, their decisions and behavior are guided by current issues, as well as historical or collective circumstances (Heywood, 2015). For these reasons, I decided to

investigate how political culture, values, and power influences the implementation of school choice policy.

Statement of the Problem

In the 1990s, charter schools were formed to promote parental choice and innovation within public education (Kirst, 2007). The success and expansion of charter schools is prevalent in certain areas of the United States. However, in some states, the excitement that came from charters has waned. In Virginia, the charter industry has slowed tremendously (VDOE, 2017).

Charter school policies vary from state-to-state. The language of the legislation can be either inviting or restrictive in terms of creating opportunities for charter schools. With the variations of charter school policies, it is believed that instituting charters are difficult in certain areas of the United States. The research and findings of this study will shed light on the political culture of Virginia and the effects on the legislation. While investigating this case study on political culture and school choice policy, I am examining if political culture influences stakeholders and the way they interpret and implement policy.

This qualitative study is designed around a political cultural framework, with an emphasis on values and power. The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between Virginia's political cultures and state policy around the creation, implementation, and management of charter school policy. I analyzed educational policies through philosophical lenses, specifically values and power. Multiple lenses were utilized to view policies from the perspective of various stakeholders, and gain perspective from those who either implement or feel the effects of school reform legislation. While utilizing these philosophical lenses, I will focus on the following research questions:

Research Questions

- How, and in what ways, do political cultures in Virginia influence how state

  stakeholders interpret and implement state-level school choice related policy?

  - How, and to what extent, do stakeholders exercise power to influence the

    interpretation and implementation of school choice policy?

  - What values motivate, or not motivate, stakeholders to influence the

    interpretation and implementation of school choice policy?

Significance of Study

Due to accountability concerns that center around charter schools, the ability to launch

charters with public tax dollars in the United States is alarming for many people (Shoup &

Studer, 2010). The uncertainties that arise from charter schools vary across the region. I believe

that the political culture of an area can either encourage or deter the implementation of school

choice and charter school policies. Heck (2009) shared that the political culture of a state varies

based on the values upheld within society; therefore, the support or opposition for school choice

can fluctuate. With this belief system, it is perceived that the political culture of a region can

affect the influence of policy actors and legislation that is proposed.

As verified on the website of *Virginia Department of Education*, the Commonwealth of

Virginia has eight charter schools (VDOE, 2017). The number of students in Virginia's charter

schools are 2,263, which is less than 1% of the public-school enrollment (VDOE, 2017).

Virginia was one of the slower states to pass charter school legislation and has among the lowest

percentage of charter schools nationally (VDOE, 2017). A silent implication of this observation

may suggest that, by comparison, charter schools are an arduous undertaking in Virginia.

Policies involved in establishing charter laws differ across states and, in some cases, varies within a single state. Due to the complexity of charter school laws and competing interests in educational policies, legislation is often layered (Wong, 2014). The layering among policy can lead to difficulty in establishing charters schools (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Permissibility, whether high or low, can either enhance or deter charter applicants (Wong, 2014). I believe that the implementation of school choice policies will fluctuate depending on the complexity of the legislation and the political culture of the state. Little is known about the political culture, power, and values of policy makers who interpret or implement state-level school choice policy.

Definition of Key Terms

The key terms associated with this philosophical research design demands that there be a well-defined description for each term. The insight of the following terms is vital to the focus of this research:

1. *Charter school*- Charter schools, also known as choice schools, are created through a formal agreement between a group of individuals and a sponsor/authorizer. They either receive blanket exemptions from most state codes and district rules regarding curriculum, instruction, budget, and personnel, or they may apply to waive requirements one by one. In return, most charter schools are expected to meet certain accountability requirements, such as demonstrating student achievement and participating in state testing programs (Brinson & Rosch, 2010).

2. *Sponsor/authorizer*- An entity designated by state law to oversee charter schools (Brinson & Rosch, 2010).

3. *Autonomy*- Automatic exemption from most district and state regulations (Wong, 2014).

4. *Accountability*- Defined academic and operational performance expectations (Wong, 2014).

5. *Ideology*- A systemic but rather simplified understanding of how the economy, the political system, and society actually work and should ideally work (Fowler, 2013).

6. *Permissibility*- The number and nature of authorizers which controls the establishment of charter schools (Wong, 2014).

7. *Stakeholder*- People who have a vested interest (Patton, 1997).

8. *Political culture*- The particular pattern of orientation to political action in which a political system is embedded (Fowler, 2013).

9. *Actor*- An individual or group of people; participant (Fowler, 2013).

10. *Policy actors*- People who are actively involved in the minor and major roles of policy development, adoption, and implementation (Fowler, 2013).

11. *Policymaker*- Any policy actor who has authority to approve or promulgate a policy (Fowler, 2013).

12. *Policy*- Dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem. It includes a government's expressed intentions and official enactments, as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity (Fowler, 2013).

13. *Statute*- A law passed by a legislative body (Fowler, 2013).

14. *Power*- The ability of an actor to affect the behavior of another actor (Fowler, 2013).

15. *Values*- Moral principles or ideals: that which *should*, *ought to*, or *must* be brought about (Heywood, 2015).

16. *Bureaucracy*- Hierarchical organization in which everyone has a clearly defined role and directives flow from the top down; rules and standard operating procedures are important

show, when culture shifts, political opinions will change too. It is the norm to expect opposition from people with different political views; however, where policymakers are concerned, it is critical to balance values with power. Chapter II addresses collectivism, individualism, and social class- concepts essential to understanding culture and political culture.

In Chapter III, I explain the case and methodology for research. The design was chosen to investigate if political culture impacts the interpretation and implementation of school choice policy. In Chapter IV, I provide a presentation of research findings, and Chapter V includes a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter investigates how culture, society, and values are connected to power and policy legislation. The premise for this chapter is to examine the relationships between culture and society and how they impact political culture and policy implementation. Political culture, which varies from region-to-region and state-to-state, fluctuates depending on the values deemed important in a particular society. All of these pieces connect to the values and power held within government and may complicate legislative policy.

First, the formation of charters and school choice are reviewed. This discussion will include the original vision for charters as well as ideas, evolution, and future of charters. The reformation practices in early America are explored as well as the effects of culture on current policy implementation, such as school choice. Next, a comprehensive look at values and policy in Virginia showcases how political culture effects the policy implementation regarding charter schools.

Thereafter, the three dimensions and two types of power are examined along with political authority. Then, competing and self-interest values are analyzed as values can influence in the implementation of policies. Afterward, culture is defined along with the impact of culture on society. The evolution of culture along with Collectivism and Individualism societies are explored to see how these factors influence politics. Later, political culture, political views, voting parties, and political and economic issues are discussed as I investigate to see how power, policy culture and policy are connected. Finally, current charter school policy in Virginia is reviewed to aid as a foundation for my research.

The Formation of Charters and School Choice

Budde and Shanker propelled the charter school movement forward in the United States (Tell, 2016; Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014; Shoup & Studer, 2010). In this section, I review the fundamental purpose for establishing charter schools from the perspectives of Budde and Shanker. While their ideas are a decade apart, their beliefs for charter schools are similar in design (Tell, 2016). Following the formation and evolvement of charters, the trajectory of charter schools and school choice are discussed (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005).

Budde and transforming schools. The original vision of charters allowed teachers to manage schools and have the autonomy of educational practices within the structure of their school division (Tell, 2016). Budde believed the transformations within school divisions should originate from considerable changes in the roles of teachers, principals, superintendent, school board members, parents, and community members (Tell, 2016). As stated in Kahlenberg & Potter (2014) "it was with this vision that students would have a better chance of building deep knowledge and honing critical-thinking skills in schools where teachers have voice and student bodies are integrated" (p. 2).

Shanker's second reform movement. In 1988, Shanker, a well-known advocate for social democracy, expressed his interest of the charter school movement (Tell, 2016). He had studied research behind socioeconomics and believed that underprivileged students improved when they are combined with higher socioeconomic students (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). He presented a design that would offer teachers and parents an option for a new type of school, a school of choice (Tell, 2016). Shanker expanded on Budde's initial notion of in-district restructuring and shared that teachers could create schools within schools (Tell, 2016). This opportunity for teachers and parents to choose an educational setting was very different from

earlier reformation practices, and it was an ideal way to promote social mobility and cohesion (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014; Tell, 2016). Shanker included an accountability factor and affirmed that the "school within a school would be totally autonomous within the district" (Tell, 2016, p. 257).

   Ideas behind charter schools. Budde and Shanker both agreed that the idea behind the charter design would result in educational settings that operate differently than public schools (Tell, 2016). They felt that schools of choice could do a better job of bringing together children of various backgrounds, so that they could learn from each other (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). The differences in racial, ethnic, economic, and religious creed would serve as a foundation for learning as the vast cultural experiences would promote education. Kahlenberg & Potter (2014) wrote "as schools of choice, charters, like magnet schools, could be accessible to students across a geographic area, rather than limiting enrollment based on what neighborhood a child's family could afford to live in, the way many traditional public schools operate" (p. 4). A school of choice would promote diversity and opportunity for anyone who wanted to partake- no one would be forced to participate (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014).

   How charters have changed. Charter schools were designed to provide parents a choice in their child's education (Shoup & Studer, 2010). Viteritti (2001) stated "charter schools would become the most revolutionary idea in education for the 1990s, a concrete alternative to the factory model of schooling inherited from the nineteenth century" (p.64). While the vision for charters started as an opportunity to allow innovative thinking by teachers, essentially free from educational bureaucracy, charters have since evolved into something different. Charter schools are funded by tax dollars and are governed differently than traditional public schools (Shoup & Studer, 2010). They can operate outside of bureaucratic and traditional laws of local school

boards (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). As charters evolve, they have been hailed as the answer to a stagnant issue in education and then decried as the end of the public education system (Fullan, 2007).

      Trajectory of charters and school choice across the United States. Rethinking K-12 education is an exchange that continues to evolve in legislation as these discussions include ways to improve education for the individual student (Prothero, 2017; Klein, 2017). School choice decisions and expansions are different from state-to-state. Besides state-level funding, some private foundations can contribute to the expansion of school choice. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Foundation continue to provide contributions for the development of charter schools and school choice (Prothero, 2017). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donated 15% of $1.7 billion dollars to charter schools and the efforts to improve special education (Prothero, 2017).

      Also, the Walton Foundation committed $2 million in grants to expand economically and racially diverse charter schools in New York (Prothero, 2017). This donation is supplemental to the $1 billion dollars that was promised in 2016 to be dispersed over the next five years by the Walton Foundation (Prothero, 2017). Similar to Shanker's views of charter schools, the Walton Foundation believes that diverse charter establishments will benefit students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Prothero, 2017; Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). The Walton Foundation desires to establish charter organizations where one race or socioeconomic status is not the majority of a school setting and students learn from each other (Prothero, 2017).

      Another measure for school choice came via the expansion of 529 college savings (Prothero, 2017). This plan allows families to receive tax advantages of money set aside for K-12 expenses, up to $10,000 dollars annually (Prothero, 2017). This tax relief is the first

nationwide initiative toward expanding school choice (Prothero, 2017). The tax plan can be used for elementary or secondary schools, including tuition for private schools (Prothero, 2017). However, some school choice advocates feel this tax effort does not aid economically disadvantaged families (Ujifusa, 2017).

Finally, course access was implemented through the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (Loewus & Ujifusa, 2017). Many states are already implementing course access; it can be budgeted through securing 3% of Title I funds for direct student services (Loewus & Ujifusa, 2017). Students are provided opportunities to expand their knowledge through preapproved courses, outside of what their school district provides (Loewus & Ujifusa, 2017). Examples of these types of courses included SAT prep, university courses, and trade courses (Loewus & Ujifusa, 2017).

In Virginia, course access is known as virtual learning, which was approved by legislators in 2010. *Virtual Virginia* is operated in public school districts across the state to provide classes to students that are not offered within their school (VDOE, 2017). *Virtual Virginia* is offered to middle and high school students and they must meet the certain prerequisites for enrolling. The classes offered through *Virtual Virginia* are taught by highly-qualified licensed instructors who reside throughout Virginia.

Reforming Schools in America

Politically speaking, the parties of Democrats and Republicans have both embraced reformation practices, such as charters, for various reasons (Fullan, 2007). Both political parties felt that improvement were needed (Fullan, 2007). Democrats were trying to end the flood of vouchers, a system of tax-funded scholarships that would allow students to attend private institutes (Ravitch, 2010). Vouchers were viewed as a muddled mess between church and state

and a channel that lacked accountability of public funds (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). In addition, Democrats favored charters because they were an opportunity to level the playing field for equal opportunities (Fullan, 2007; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Conservatives liked the opportunity to deregulate public schools and to create competition among them (Mathews, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). Charters offered parents public dollars to make a private choice (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). School choice was a vehicle to infuse greater competition within schools; this free market mentality was meant to improve schools (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014).

This type of reform was not new (Shoup & Studer, 2010; Fullan, 2007). It has existed in America since the early history of public sectarian schools (Shoup & Studer, 2010). Proponents of charter schools believed the issue of governance was important for reform; it changed the roles and responsibilities away from traditional governing bodies (Tell, 2016). Reformation solutions, much like culture, "must come through the development of shared meaning" (Fullan, 2007, p. 9). The key for change, or reforming of the school system, was understanding *what* should change and *how* it was best accomplished, with the understanding that they are simultaneously connected with individual and social change (Fullan, 2007).

Throughout the ages, the one thing that has not changed was the movement for educational improvement (Fullan, 2007). Cusick (1992) claimed that schools have never been adequately equal, efficient, or excellent. For this reason, "education's reform mill never lacked grist" (Shoup & Studer, 2010, p. 90). With major modifications in mind, charter schools were a compelling argument to the reorganization process (Shoup & Studer, 2010; Ravitch, 2010; Tell, 2016; Fullan, 2007). Pro-charter supporters believed this type of restructuring would breed competition and the rivalry would cause the traditional public schools to improve (Ravitch, 2010). During the surge of school choice and charter schools, advocates were confident that

when "schools competed, all students gained" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 127). Competition seemed to be what motivates growth, innovation, productivity, and progress (Tell, 2016).

     Controversial reformation. The cultural shift from embracing public schools to the supporting of charters in the private sector brought about waves of controversy (Tell, 2016; Shoup & Studer, 2010). Tell (2016) disliked this philosophy and stated, "competition by definition means rivalry, not cooperation and mutual growth" (p. 59). The battle amongst charter schools and traditional public schools has not stimulated improvement in public schools; it should not be justified as natural, or human, to compete (Fullan, 2007; Tell, 2016). Competition brings about a win-lose mentality and it has not worked in the educational system thus far (Fullan, 2007; Tell, 2016). The reformation discussion continues next with the examination of charter policy.

Diversity and Difficulty with Charter School Policy

     Policy arises from the means of which a political system responds to the strains of public issue (Heck, 2009; Heywood, 2015). The demands from the people within society are converted into solutions from those in power (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). This form of policymaking has communal interest (Heck, 2009). The policy actors utilized the "social setting to compete, negotiate, or compromise and cooperate to integrate diverse interests to create coalitions in support of policy actions" (Heck, 2009, p. 7). Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) stated that policy is foundationally formed by cultural values; policy is constructed on these beliefs. The principles that aid in shaping policy range depending on political climate and cultural philosophies (Marshall et al., 1989; Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009).

     The political culture of a state and the power involved in legislation are connected and aligned (Shoup & Studer, 2010). The policy actors involved in charter legislation generally act,

and make decisions, based on the needs of their constituents (Heywood, 2015). These judgements are based on the multifaceted tiers of power and values (Shoup & Studer, 2010). It is often the case that these initiatives to be implemented are not coordinated effectively and often collide (Fullan, 2007). The structural changes implemented or adopted in legislation are easier to handle than any form of cultural change (Shoup & Studer, 2010; Fullan, 2007). Structural changes are policies or mandates, whereas cultural changes include relationships, motivation, and building capacity (Fullan, 2007; Shoup & Studer, 2010). One example of structural change would be accountability mandates (Fullan, 2007; Shoup & Studer, 2010). As referenced in Fullan (2007), the State Department of Kentucky and Vermont share their concerns about accountability mandates because it is hard to change the methods of teachers whom you have no control.

Legislation issues and charter school policy. The variables for creating charter legislation are complex (Wong & Shen, 2006). A study led by Wong and Shen (2006) connected regional political climate to the adoption of charter law. While the legislation among charter law is vast, Wong and Shen (2006) found that the Republican party is associated with the strength of charter law. States with Republican governors were more prone to permit charter school regulations (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Although, this may be common among the Republican party, the vigor of regulations was not uniform across the nation (Wong & Shen, 2006). The power that plays a part of charter school policy varies among states (Wong & Shen, 2006). The diversity among each state's charter policy makes legislation difficult (Wong & Shen, 2006; Wong, 2014; Ravitch, 2010).

State differences. Another issue that complicates charter school legislation is the lack of universal policies. The complexity stems from the lack of homogenous laws as charters opened

across the United States (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). The regulations for charter schools vary per state because each state implements their own legislation (Wong, 2014). As the decrees vary from state-to-state (and sometimes differs in several regions of a single state), it makes the layers of statute difficult to interpret (Wong, 2014). Additionally, factors that complicate the legislative process are the politics involved and the competing interests of multiple stakeholders, such as traditional public schools, teacher unions, educational departments, local politicians, parents, and citizens (Wong, 2014).

With the variations in state legislation, it became difficult to compare from state-to-state. For example, each state controls the number of charter applicants, schools opened or allowed, whether they involve charter management organizations or need local district support, waivers from state or district mandates, operational or fiscal autonomy, per-pupil funding, and collective bargaining agreements (Wong & Shen, 2006). With many intricate layers to charter legislation, each state generally does what is best for them (Wong & Shen, 2006; Wong, 2014). This choice makes it difficult to compare legislation across the nation as each state does something slightly different (Wong, 2014). Furthermore, some states, such as Louisiana, have multiple types of charter schools, so the adopted laws are more complex (Wong & Shen, 2006).

Regulations and federal funds. Accountability, autonomy, and permissibility are three regulations which range significantly in states across our nation (Wong, 2014). Accountability standards, which hold schools liable for student achievement, continue to vary across the states (Wong, 2014). The fluctuation of these standards plays a crucial role in the number of charter schools across the United States. As explained in Renzulli and Roscigno (2005), "these 'strong laws' lessen the restrictions and create easy paths for the establishment of charter schools by a variety of people and groups" (p. 346). The states that grant higher permissibility and autonomy

have an increased number of charter schools (Wong, 2014). In stark contrast, states with higher accountability laws have fewer charter schools (Wong, 2014; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Autonomy, bureaucracy, and the state political culture will impact the future of charter schools (Wong, 2014).

Wong (2014) shared a U.S. Department of Education study (2006) that measured reading and mathematics scores across charters and traditional schools on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The mean scores of the charter school students were lower than the traditional students (Wong, 2014). A 2013 Stanford University Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) showed some improvements in reading and math, yet it was not equal across the states (Wong, 2014). Even though the charters are not showing consistent growth, the federal government continues to support the charter industry as both Democrat and Republican parties have supported charter schools (Wong, 2014; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005).

For example, the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001 encompassed $300 million dollars of federal money for charters (Wong, 2014). In addition, the Obama administration contributed to the charter industry by requiring states' applications for *Race to the Top* funding to include proposals for charters (Wong, 2014). While this money was allotted for school choice programs, such as charter schools, it did not require schools to align with federal accountability mandates (Zaniewski & Higgins, 2017). In the next section, power and political authority will be reviewed.

Power

Politics is all about power (Heywood, 2015). While actors within governmental settings possess various levels of power, power can be easily abused (Fowler, 2013). People "in power" do not merely possess the ability to enforce compliance, but feel they are entitled to do so

(Heywood, 2015). Some policy actors who have a certain energy or conviction can easily stretch their powers (Heywood, 2015). Due to this, Fowler (2013) shared "many have led to conclude that all exercises of power are unethical by nature" (p.42). Nevertheless, elected politicians work within a competitive system and should be held accountable for their actions (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013; Shoup & Studer, 2010).

Types of Power

Power has three faces or dimensions (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). The first dimension of power is directly observable and influences decision-making. The effects from the first dimension of power could be experienced through the use of force, economic dominance, authority, or persuasion (Fowler, 2013). The second face of power is the mobilization of bias, which could prevent the implementation of policy (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). In contrast to the first face of power which is explicit, the second dimension of power is implicit (Fowler, 2013). The second face of power can be enforced without knowing, as it is executed in a vague manner (Fowler, 2013; Heywood, 2015). Some common methods for applying the second face of power are customs, norms, procedures, and traditions (Fowler, 2013).

The third dimension of power is manipulation (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). Power can be utilized to manipulate people, perceptions, and preferences (Heywood, 2015). The mechanisms that can enforce the third face of power are communication practices, symbols, and mythologies (Fowler, 2013; Heywood, 2015). The ability to manipulate others can either elicit messages of being powerful or powerless (Fowler, 2013). The shaping of consciousness can either breed high levels of self-esteem or self-criticism (Fowler, 2013). This third type of power

can infiltrate any source of school, business, or governmental office (Fowler, 2013). In the next section, I will discuss the difference between employing discursive and persuasive power.

Discursive and persuasive power. Many types of power are utilized in daily activities. Two popular types of power used with leaders are discursive and persuasive power (Fowler, 2013; Heywood, 2015). Discursive power is the language shared amongst individuals (Fowler, 2013). This type of power can be implemented at any level and in two forms: written and oral (Fowler, 2013). An example of written discursive power is an agenda (Fowler, 2013). With oral language, conversing is the main path for communication. Naturally discursive power can lead to power struggles in forms of interrupting, talking simultaneously, and raising of voices (Fowler, 2013). While discursive power can get intense, it is important to remember the three values of responsible discourse: respect, commitment to valid information, and freedom of choice (Fowler, 2013).

Discursive power is also implemented with politics (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). When creating policies, discursive power can be implemented through symbolism or imagery (Fowler, 2013). In policymaking, it is not unusual to pry on the values of others to persuade and encourage political ideas (Fowler, 2013). Policy actors will use written, spoken, and graphic texts to move their agenda forward (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). Like discursive power, persuasive power is equally authoritative (Fowler, 2013; Heywood, 2015).

Persuasive power. Persuasive power can come in three forms: socialization, rational persuasion, and manipulative persuasion (Fowler, 2013). All three types of persuasion, simply put, are ways to change someone's thoughts or feelings. Persuasion is "an overt attempt to affect the behavior of others by convincing them that the desired behavior is good" (Fowler, 2013, p.27). Actors who utilize the power of persuasion can advocate, reform, or achieve objectives

easily (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013; Fullan, 2007). The gift of persuasion is a natural asset that comes with confidence and knowledge (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013; Fullan, 2007).

However, the ability to discuss, argue, or persuade people to make decisions is not to enough to implement change (Fullan, 2007; Heywood, 2015). It is not realistic to assume that the world can be reformed by a rational argument (Fullan, 2007). With the ability to influence others, it is easy to confuse the persuasive power to effect change with the process of actual transformation (Fullan, 2007; Heywood, 2015). A fundamental flaw with policymakers is that they do not consider the local context before establishing policies; therefore, many policies fail (Fullan, 2007; Patton, 1997). The policymakers are not aware of the obstacles that constituents face related to the process of implementation (Fullan, 2007; Patton, 1997). Persuasive power works best when policymakers are in check with the "larger culture, structures, or norms- those who react to their efforts" (Patton, 1997; Fullan, 2007, p. 111). Similar to how persuasive power is exercised, political authority is another form of influential power (Heywood, 2015).

Political Authority

Political authority is a method of influencing the behavior of another person through compliance or obedience (Heywood, 2015; Fullan, 2007). Heywood (2015) stated, "whereas power can be defined as the *ability* to influence the behavior of another, authority can be understood as the *right* to do so" (p. 118). Power brings about submission through persuasion, pressure, threats, coercion, or violence; in contrast, authority is based on "perceived right to rule and brings compliance through a moral obligation on the part of the ruled to obey" (Heywood, 2015, p. 118). Political authority can be best understood as a means of gaining submission which avoids all types of uncomfortable conflict: persuasion, arguments, pressure, or coercion (Heywood, 2015; Patton, 1997).

In closing, authority and power should be exercised with caution (Fowler, 2013). Power is central to the understanding of politics, laws, and regulations; therefore, it is important for legislators to exercise this privilege in a manner that is rightful, justified, or acceptable (Heywood, 2015). With authority or power, it is imperative to implement power through a moral compass or with values (Fowler, 2013; Heywood, 2015; Shoup & Studer, 2010). A balance between power and values is important to maintain homeostasis, a desired equilibrium (Shoup & Studer, 2010). In the next section, I will explain the importance of balancing values with power.

Balancing Values

In the same manner as power, values should also be assessed and stabilized. This is critical for policy actors at both the state and local level (Fowler, 2013). As policy actors often vie to push through legislation, these beliefs are often the cause of a clash within policy. Shoup and Studer (2010) described these as "metavalues," which include the values of excellence, equality, efficiency, and choice. Shoup and Studer (2010) shared that legislation is often created to correct an imbalance and these competing beliefs can affect a democratic society; therefore, they must be equalized in order to maintain homeostasis (Shoup & Studer, 2010; Fowler, 2013).

Competing Values in Policy

The competing values of excellence, equality, efficiency, and choice are often viewed in educational policy. The value of excellence inspires individuals to strive for a greater level of success (Shoup & Studer, 2010). Equality is the value that provides opportunities for all individuals without limitations (Shoup & Studer, 2010). Efficiency is the safeguarding of restricted means while attempting to provide meaningful prospects (Shoup & Studer, 2010). Lastly, the value of choice recognizes freedoms and individual rights for all participants (Shoup & Studer, 2010). These principles should be constantly monitored to maintain stability as they

naturally compete to be evaluated as first among the other values (Fowler, 2013; Shoup & Studer, 2010). Historically speaking, the educational system in America has a reputation for some values to dominate as well as an assortment of people, while others are marginalized (Heck, 2009).

In addition to balancing values at state and local school levels, it is important to evaluate the principles within other organizations, such as schools (Shoup & Studer, 2010). This is necessary due to the "constant competition to align educational needs and values according to the values and interests of diverse groups," (Shoup & Studer, 2010, p.91). Furthermore, when evaluating beliefs within schools, it is important to understand the perspective of values for parents. Many parents prioritize values differently (Shoup & Studer, 2010). For example, the value of excellence could be secondary to the ideals of equality or efficiency, depending on the parents' viewpoint (Shoup & Studer, 2010). As principles are subjective, it is important to maintain balance between power and values (Fowler, 2013; Shoup & Studer, 2010).

Self-interest values. Self-interest values undergird most policy actors' practices (Fowler, 2013). Legislators or policy actors who exercise power, naturally, do so for the benefit of their constituents (Chilton, 1988). When power is being implemented, many times there is competition for what politicians believe is best (Fullan, 2007). Likewise, economic interests are values where policies or benefits are questioned (Fowler, 2013). Fowler (2013) shared "very few people act without considering how their behavior affects their economic situation" (p.93). While executing self-interest values for the best-interest of constituents, it is important to do so with respect, a commitment to valid information, and with a freedom of choice (Fowler, 2013). These three values of discourse connect with self-interest values because power and principles are built on relationships (Fowler, 2013).

Values and conflict. As power and values are aligned, it is important to view both carefully. As research has shown, implementing values and power can be tricky (Shober, Manna & Witte, 2006). Instead of privileging one value or another, the nation's policy system often produces laws that embrace many incompatible values concurrently; this creates conflict (Shober et al., 2006). Shober et al. (2006) wrote "even though policy might affirm several values in name, in practice, agency managers and frontline employees must broker the inevitable disputes that arise" (p. 581). It is important for policymakers to establish a balance among the most essential values; this way none are seriously compromised (Fowler, 2013). During times of value-laden conflict, it is crucial to keep in mind the shared vision that brought policymakers together and the desired result (Fowler, 2013; Shoup & Studer, 2010). Let this shared vision be a compass for guiding power with values and not against them (Covey, 1991, Fullan, 2007).

Values and reform. When creating compliance and regulations, policy is decided through the values and perspective of those who are seeking power (Fowler, 2013). Naturally, the increased number of competing values from policy actors inside an organization increases the complexity from within (Shoup & Studer, 2010; Fowler, 2013). For instance, those who are in favor of the "old common school" generally express their policy choices through regulation practices and monitoring (Fowler, 2013, p. 317). This preference has everything planned and observable: procedures, laws, and order (Fowler, 2013). An example of this approach is to hold teaching to professional level like the practices of law and medicine (Fowler, 2013).

In contrast, advocates for school choice try to transfer the power away from educational agents and toward families (Tell, 2016; Fowler, 2013). Hence, the values of promoters of school choice are different. The activists for school choice felt that the government monopolizing the field of education was detrimental (Fowler, 2013; Tell, 2016). They favor the competition and

how it helps the economic market (Tell, 2016; Fowler, 2013). For example, by improving

schools, students will receive a better education; this will produce citizens who are able to

benefit society and compete in the global market (Fowler, 2013; Tell, 2016).

Another core value of educational reform is the significance of freedom (Fowler, 2013).

The freedom of choice benefited parents with the ability to choose their school, but it also

allowed teachers to have autonomy in the classroom (Fowler, 2013; Wong, 2014; Tell, 2016).

Reformers wanted the ability to encourage intellectual discourse, enhance critical thinking, and

stimulating evaluations (Tell, 2016; Wong, 2014; Fowler, 2013). While these two core values

compete for school reform, both are deemed important by school choice advocates (Fowler,

2013; Tell, 2016). The objective for sound public policy is to seek a wise balance between

values (Fowler, 2013; Shoup & Studer, 2010).

The Dynamic Duo: Values and Power

As stated earlier, persuasive power can come in three forms: socialization, rational

persuasion, and manipulative persuasion. All three types of persuasion, simply put, are ways to

change someone's thoughts or feelings. Persuasion is "an overt attempt to affect the behavior of

others by convincing them that the desired behavior is good" (Fowler, 2013, p.27). Actors who

utilize the power of persuasion can advocate, reform, or achieve objectives easily.

As it is a responsibility for policymakers to advocate for their constituents, it is a fatal

mistake to dismiss the feelings of their voters (Fullan, 2007). A fundamental flaw with

policymakers is that they do not consider the local context before establishing policies; therefore,

many policies fail (Fullan, 2007; Patton, 1997). The policymakers are not aware of the obstacles

that constituents face related to the process of implementation (Fullan, 2007). For example,

persuasive power works best when policymakers are in check with the "larger culture, structures, or norms- those who react to their efforts" (Patton, 1997; Fullan, 2007, p. 111).

In addition to monitoring the interests of their voters, legislators also need to monitor their own values (Fowler, 2013). As explained above, self-interest values undergird most policy actors' practices (Fowler, 2013). Legislators or policy actors who exercise power, naturally, do so for the benefit of their constituents. When power is being implemented, many times there is competition for what politicians believe is best (Fullan, 2007). Fowler (2013) explained, "very few people act without considering how their behavior affects their economic situation" (p.93). While executing self-interest values for the best-interest of constituents, it is important to do so with the same values of responsible discourse: respect, commitment to valid information, and freedom of choice (Fowler, 2013). These three values of discourse connect with self-interest values because power and values are built on relationships (Fowler, 2013; Shoup & Studer, 2010).

Balancing Act of Values and Power
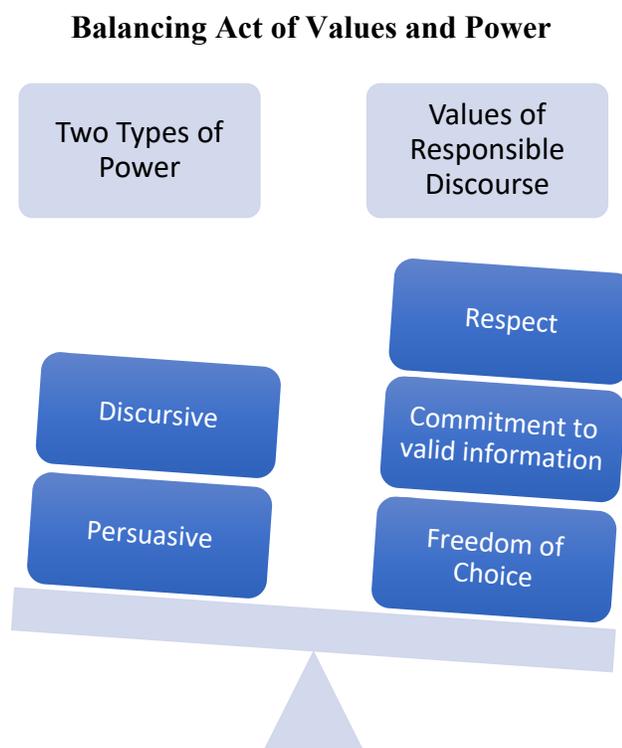
Figure 1. Power and values must be stable in order for effective policy implementation.

Charter School Legislation in Virginia

School choice legislation has been stagnant in Virginia over the last decade. Two charter school applications were received and reviewed over the last three years; seven applications over the last decade. Many applications were rejected for lack of evidence that the applicants had fully covered all their basis; most importantly, that they had established a collaborative relationship with the local school division. The collaboration between the local school division and the charter school applicant is crucial as it is a staple in the Virginia Constitution for the establishment of charter schools. In Virginia's Constitution, the local divisions have power to approve and supervise charter schools. The 1971 Constitutional amendment transferred this power to approve charter schools to the local divisions.

Policy Actors and Legislation

Legislators in Virginia were slower to pass charter school legislation than other parts of the country (VDOE, 2017). In 2013, Virginia reenacted laws in Senate Bill 1131ER, §22.1-212.9 to amend their public charter school application. Virginia's legislators wanted to make sure that this process was clear and concise, which shows values of structure and effectiveness. In addition, this section states the importance of public opinion, parental outreach, feedback, and collaboration among charter school applicants and the public. This action shows that the policy actors in Virginia appreciated collaboration among citizens. It is easy to deduce the value of feedback as it is stated that public opinion is welcomed and to which the opportunities for parents, teachers, citizens, and other interested parties could share their views. Furthermore, in §22.1-212.8 of Senate Bill 734ER, the law states that any person, group, or organization may apply for a charter school. This portion of the law showcases the value of diversity in Virginia.

Virginia's Senate Resolution 256 (2015) allowed charter schools to establish within local school divisions. This amendment shows how innovation and flexibility are valued in the Commonwealth. Likewise, in 2016, Senate Bill 734ER showcased the policy actors' principles for collaboration by stating that a management committee should compose of parents, teachers, administrators, and sponsors. Moreover, legislators applaud rigorous teaching and performance by subjecting charters to abide by the Standards of Learning and Standards of Accreditation. In addition, a performance framework, plus additional rigorous indicators, are utilized to evaluate achievement. Also, disaggregation of all student data is expected. These statements show the high value that Virginia legislators place on learning, transparency, and accountability.

Furthermore, Senate Resolution 256 (2015) backs charters through sustainability. In § 22.1-212.6, Virginia's policy actors stated that property, such as a vacant building owned by a

local school division, could be used free of rent to aid in establishing a charter school. This action shows support of charters. An additional value is in § 22.1-212.8, where public charters must provide a sound facilities plan, including a backup, or contingency plan. This shows the worth of being reliable and financially stable.

As the legislation is written, Virginia legislators honor quality, fairness, equity, and leadership. When establishing charter policy, the law states that charter plans must describe their instructional design, curriculum overview, and teaching methods. In addition, the class size, structure, and learning environment must be clarified. Policy actors in Virginia want to hold charters to the highest expectations. Moreover, charters applicants must identify and explain how to successfully serve students with disabilities, English language learners, at-risk and gifted students. These policies are stated in § 22.1-212.8 of Senate Bill 734ER. Furthermore, plans for recruiting and developing leadership and staff are described as well as all plans for handling discipline.

Additionally, policy actors in Virginia deem honesty, integrity, transparency, and openness. These principles are upheld in § 22.1-212.8 of Senate Bill 734ER by requiring charters who displace pupils, teachers, and other employees, either through conversion or revocation, to prepare a plan for placement. Also, in § 22.1-212.7, public charters are subject to the same civil rights, health, and safety requirements of traditional public schools. In § 22.1-212.13, this clarifies that professional, licensed personnel should be granted the same employment benefits as professionals in a non-chartered school. Lastly, school boards may employ health, mental health, social services, and other related services to at-risk pupils, at the cost of the charter. These statements demonstrate the legislative values of equality for all people in Virginia.

What is Culture?

The shared values that underlie many ideological beliefs are deeply rooted in culture; these principles surge through society and influence opinions and lifestyles (Heywood, 2015). Lehman (1972) identified culture as a supramembership; a group of individuals who emerge together. It is difficult to understand the culture around individuals without taking into consideration their moral reasoning (Chilton, 1988; Heck, 2009). The people who relate to a mutual orientation create a "sharedness" together (Chilton, 1988). Within this defined group, people utilize ethical reasoning as a common way of relating and communicating, since the attitudes and beliefs are alike (Chilton, 1988; Erikson, McIver, & Wright, 1987).

The components of culture are both ideological and sociological (White, 1959). The moral beliefs and values are ideological in nature, whereas the rules, customs, and behavioral patterns are sociological (Heck, 2009). As explained by Heck (2009), "culture is an ideological orientation toward the world that provides a structured set of rules that govern social behavior" (p. 81).

Cultures relate through common understanding (Heck, 2009; Chilton, 1988). It is shared; it is a general knowledge that is known, accepted, and utilized to orient with one another (Chilton, 1988). Heywood (2015) stated "individuals are culturally embedded creatures who derive their understanding of the world and their framework of moral beliefs and sense of personal identity largely from the culture in which they live and develop" (p. 178). Chilton (1988) defines culture as a group of people sharing or relating within society. In addition, culture can only go as far as people choose- once you stop relating with each other, culture changes (Chilton, 1988). With this shift in culture, society revamps (Chilton, 1988; Erikson, McIver, & Wright, 1987; Heywood, 2015).

Furthermore, the normative influences within culture can also have an effect on individual behavior (Burke, Joseph, Pasick, & Barker, 2009). This type of impression can "aid, retard, or undermine efforts at personal change" (Burke et al., 2009). The attitudes within a culture can be the rising factor toward social approval or condemnation (Burke et al., 2009; Heck, 2009; Chilton, 1988). Humans as individuals possess a powerful, yet unknown sense that influences the social and class structures (Burke et al., 2009). Terry and Hogg (2000) explained "people's attitudes are developed and expressed as behaviors in a context that is social; it contains other people who are actually present or who are invisibly present in the social norms that define social groups to which we do or do not belong" (p. 2). Citizens within societies negotiate their environment based on their beliefs (Bandura, 1994). Their principles or values that they act upon aid in their selection of lifestyle or behavior (Bandura, 1994). This freedom to choose, the impact of behavior, and the ever-changing culture can affect the dynamics within the social environment (Burke et al., 2009; Bandura, 1994; Terry & Hogg, 2000).

Cultural Shifts in Society

Even little changes in culture can lead to big differences (Heywood, 2015; Shoup & Studer, 2010). Chilton (1988) explained "social behavior comes not out of fixed behavior, but rather as people engage social situations by interpreting them" (p. 432). Individuals act from the influences of social forces (Heywood, 2015). For example, two citizens wear American flag lapel pins, and both love the United States of America. However, these two individuals can argue constantly about policy and laws within the United States. The opposition and the ways of interpreting topics leads to political differences (Heywood, 2015; Shoup & Studer, 2010). People interpret differently and judge others based on their actions (Chilton, 1988). The "ways

of relating" to each other are deeper than the symbolism presented by the American flag (Chilton, 1988, p. 428).

The change in culture is evident in many areas (Shoup & Studer, 2010; Heywood, 2015). There are various groups who are invested in education and too many to keep silent (Shoup & Studer, 2010). They are monitoring and providing important feedback on the cultural climate in the American educational system (Shoup & Studer, 2010). Shoup and Studer (2010) stated "there will be constant competition to align educational needs and values according to the particular values and interests of diverse groups, who in a democratic society have been allowed a voice" (p. 91). The political differences within society normally produce opposing views (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009; Shoup & Studer, 2010). Consequently, these types of shifts in culture, and their views of education, generated the idea of charter schools (Fullan, 2007; Shoup & Studer, 2010; Tell, 2016; Heywood, 2015).

Personality attributes and culture. Personality traits are connected to the culture that breeds within society (Tams, 2008). Attributes, such as extraversion, agreeableness, and cultural empathy, increase the intercultural interactions among individuals within society (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013). The ability to be socially adaptable is linked to social skills and learning opportunities (Wilson et al., 2013). Tams (2008) stated "extraverts create more opportunities for social learning because they engage in more outgoing, gregarious, active, and excitement-seeking behaviors" (p. 190). Extraverts are more proactive in acquiring culture-specific skills and pursuing feedback, which aids in building rapport (Wilson et al., 2013).

Another interpersonal behavior trait, agreeableness, can positively affect sociocultural adaptation (Wilson et al., 2013; Tams, 2008). The capability to agree with others can be linked to empathy and social interactions of individuals (Tams, 2008; Wilson et al., 2013). The

increased relations between individuals who are agreeable can expand social interactions and encourage supportive feedback (Wilson et al., 2013). The ability to work cohesively with others can promote culture, political culture, and the environment as a whole (Chilton, 1988; Tams, 2008). This interconnectedness is important for improving issues and solving problems (Chilton, 1988; Tams, 2008).

Similarly, cultural empathy is an interpersonal attribute that is important for cultural growth within societies (Wilson et al., 2013; Tams, 2008; Chilton, 1988). Cultural empathy is a predictor of cultural competence (Tams, 2008; Wilson et al., 2013; Chilton, 1988). The ability to empathize with others is important when relating to people within society (Wilson et al., 2013; Tams, 1988; Chilton, 1988). Citizens with cultural empathy are people who have attributes similar to agreeableness, altruism, and tendermindedness, which is a trust and sympathy for others (Wilson et al., 2013). Wilson et al. (2013) shared "cultural empathy refers to the ability to empathize the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals from different cultural backgrounds and to see issues from their perspective" (p. 906). Individuals who are conscious of cultural differences and can adopt another cultural mindset are identified as being culturally empathetic (Tams, 2008; Chilton, 1988; Wilson et al., 2013).

Identity politics. As culture continues to evolve, changes within society, such as identity politics, are becoming the new norm (Eyerman, 2004). Social actors relate to others via the basis of a cultural attribute; this characteristic has priority over other variables of importance (Roosvall, 2013). This transformation with how one identifies within civilization is self-directed as culture is autonomous (Eyerman, 2004). Identity politics builds community, knowledge, and strength among those who classify with these groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Eyerman (2004) explained that culture is a narrative from which individuals act out. The embedded human

behaviors support individual or collective identities; individuals perform these narratives through their "social practices in stable settings" (Eyerman, 2004, p. 27). These actions can directly affect culture as a whole (Crenshaw, 1991; Eyerman, 2004; Roosvall, 2013).

   Collectivism. The social structure within society stems from patterns of interactions, relationships, awareness, and cooperation (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995). Human behavior varies depending on the type of society (Heywood, 2015). Individuals who identify with similar people are known to have a collective identity (Bhawuk, 1995; Heywood, 2015). The members within this type of society often inherit these views and values from the generations before them (Bhawuk, 1995; Heywood, 2015). Bhawuk (1995) explained "they were born into extended families that protect them in exchange for giving their loyalty to the collectives" (p. 37). These relationships are essential in their culture and they treat everyone within these societal structures with integrity (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995).

   Collectivists are interdependent and they put the needs of the group above all (Bhawuk, 1995; Heywood, 2015). These requirements are the basis for survival (Bhawuk, 1995). There is subordination among individual goals for the needs of the collective group (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995). This collectivism showcases that people are willing to work as units in order to achieve their objectives (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995). The actions among people relate to interpersonal concern of others within the group (Bhawuk, 1995; Heywood, 2015). There is a genuine concern- "a sense of oneness with other people, a perception of complex ties and relationships, and a tendency to keep other people in mind" (Bhawuk, 1995, p. 42).

   Collectivism is a condition of emotions and ideologies (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995). For these reasons, behavior among humans generally relates to the morals and outlooks of those within their society (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995; Schwartz, 1992). There are shared values

among collective societies (Bhawuk, 1995; Schwartz, 1992). Based on data reported by

Schwartz (1992), values that are displayed in collective societies include family security, social

order, and honoring elders. As collective units, people find fulfillment from the natural ability to

socialize and make connections amongst their society (Heywood, 2015; Schwartz, 1992).

Collectivists tend to promote values that increases the welfare within their group (Schwartz

1992; Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995). This unites members and establishes bonds (Heywood,

2015; Bhawuk, 1995).

   Individualism/atomistic society. However, not all societies are built on common values

and the bonds of each other (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995). Some societies exist where

members are very much individualist; it is all about their own self-interests (Bhawuk, 1995;

Heywood, 2015). Individualists are "independent-minded, inner-directed, and resentful on

conformity" (Bhawuk, 1995, p. 42). They value the separation from in-groups (Bhawuk, 1995).

The people are emotionally independent of others within the society (Bhawuk, 1995; Heywood,

2015). These atomistic associations are just a collection of people, or atoms (Heywood, 2015).

   In these types of individualistic societies, the social and political behavior stems from

choices that are made by individuals (Heywood, 2015). Individualists find value in opportunities

to promote individual growth (Bhawuk, 1995). Although they do not work together to pursue

goals, they do form associations based on their self-interests (Heywood, 2015). It is actually the

self-interests of the individuals that holds the society together (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995).

They unite together in order to pursue their individualized interests (Heywood, 2015).

   The principles ideally found in individualist's societies are those that extol self-worth and

reverence (Heywood, 2015). Any relationships established amongst individualists are carefully

calculated and measured for their value and worth (Bhawuk, 1995). It is essential to

individualists that they maintain control of their own destiny (Heywood, 2015). They take pride

in being self-reliant (Heywood, 2015; Bhawuk, 1995; Schwartz, 1992). In addition,

individualists value creativity, pleasure-seeking, and excitement (Schwartz, 1992). They enjoy

the freedom to acquire and dispose of property to their own accord (Heywood, 2015; Schwartz,

1992). Individualists believe that they owe society nothing (Heywood, 2015).

Political Culture

Political culture, as explained by Elazar (1972), includes a history of religious and ethnic

migration patterns that move westward across the United States. Elazar (1972) believed that

political culture begins with power and justice, both of which are instrumental in civil societies.

Power is the ability to decide important decisions, such as who/when/how items are distributed

(Elazar, 1972). The elements of power include efficiency and commerce, wherein goals are

achieved with minimum waste (Elazar, 1972). Elazar (1972) also believed that efficiency and

commerce are related to power as they can foster freedom. On the other hand, justice is the

development of a society of equality and fairness (Elazar, 1972). The elements of justice are

legitimacy and agrarianism (Elazar, 1972). Legitimacy and agrarianism are both related to the

values and aspirations of Americans. It is through these beliefs that citizens disperse

information, creed, and decency in hopes to make a substantial impact on their community

(Elazar, 1972). All societies that are fair and balanced have a good working order between

power and justice (Elazar, 1972). As the elements of power and justice can vary depending on

the expansion of culture, Elazar (1972) believed that the similarities and overlapping of values

created three political subcultures across the United States: moralist, individualist, and

traditionalist (Elazar, 1972).

According to Elazar (1972), moralism usually dominates New England and the states in the far North. Zoellick (2000) explained the moralistic subculture as an association of people who measure government as a positive influence and by its commitment to the public; this is determined by its dedication or concern for the community. As a group, the moralist culture welcome interventions from the government in areas of social issues, economics, and politics (Zoellick, 2000). Moralists view the government as a commonwealth- a state in which citizens share morals and interests with each other (Elazar, 1972). Furthermore, moralists believe that democracy is a concern for all, so everyone is responsible to participate in the political process (Zoellick, 2000).

In stark contrast, individualism, typically found in the middle states, see the government as a marketplace (Elazar, 1972). This subculture prefers that the government only acts in areas to improve economics- specifically, to keep the marketplace available for private use (Elazar, 1972). With a sole focus on commerce, individualists are concerned about their own needs; they do not promote community interventions (Zoellick, 2000; Elazar, 1972). In the individualist subculture, politics is seen as a business which can improve finances and social status; however, unlike moralists, individualists believe politics should be reserved for specialized individuals who want to advance themselves- there is no room for an amateur to get involved (Elazar, 1972). With individualist political cultures, politics can be viewed as a dirty business best left to professionals (Elazar, 1972).

Traditionalism dominates the South and focuses on aristocratic legitimacy (Elazar, 1972). The traditionalist subculture is a society that accepts a natural order through the use of a hierarchy (Zoellick, 2000). Similar to the moralistic views, traditionalists are accepting to governmental influence, however, they prefer to limit the power to the citizens of elite status

(Zoellick, 2000). As Elazar (1972) explains, traditionalists believe that without an elite status, one should not be an active citizen; therefore, traditionalists discourage non-elitists to partake in any type of political participation- this includes the right to vote. As a subculture, traditionalists are usually antibureaucratic because bureaucracy tends to lead to changes among the existing order (Elazar, 1972). For these reasons, traditionalists very much try to maintain the status quo instead of requesting governmental change (Zoellick, 2000).

Politics and political culture. Political culture, politics, and policymaking are interrelated (Heck, 2009; Heywood, 2015). Political culture is one part of a political system that is structured to solve problems around the social aspects of culture (Heck, 2009; Heywood, 2015). While culture is a subjective system, it is powerful (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). Some of the components that may be shared within culture include language, rituals, and myths (Heck, 2009; Chilton, 1988). In addition, politics, economics, and social standing are also cultural (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). These subjective views within culture affect policy and policymaking (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009).

Politics have a vast influence on social activities within society (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). The diverse perspectives of people in various communities range in needs, thoughts, interests, and beliefs (Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988). It is through this assortment of assessments that conflict arises (Heywood, 2015). The people involved in political conversations build power to advance their personalized interests or values; the constant variation of opinions spawn irresoluble disparities and competition (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). The political strife leads to a shift in society's views and a harmonious disconnect (Chilton, 1988; Heywood, 2015). Hence, this hints to a change in the political culture (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009).

Political culture is a topic that seems simple to predict; however, it is conceptually complex (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009; Chilton, 1988). Chilton explained its definition has varied over the years from an understanding that it is "a particular pattern of orientations to political action" later to be revised as "the distribution of patterns of orientation" (p. 419-420). Erickson, McIver, and Wright (1987) define political culture as "the particular pattern or orientation to political action in which each political system is imbedded" (p. 798). However, political culture is not defined by all people liking everything about the culture; it is about ways of relating and dealing with certain situations (Chilton, 1988). Politics and society are loosely related- the changes within society reflect the political culture (Heck, 2009; Heywood, 2015). Society changes with rise and fall of social movements (Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988). People may not always support another person's orientation (Chilton, 1988; Heywood, 2015). Chilton (1988) explained "culture is what is publicly expected and subscribed to, not what is individually preferred" (p. 430).

While societal trends ebb and flow, cultural values are deeply rooted in individuals (Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988). All stakeholders, society members and policy actors alike, are affected by values (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). Policy actors are driven by their own values and the beliefs of their constituents (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). These morals are reflected upon for policy implementation (Heck, 2009). Legislators base their decisions on trends, patterns, and the beliefs of the dominant ideology within their environment (Heck, 2009). Garms, Guthrie, and Pierce (1978) shared "the outcomes of public policy can be predicted to some extent by careful examination of the cultural system in which they are made" (p. 12). Cultural values are integrated into public policy (Heck, 2009; Heywood, 2015).

Political views.   The political views of our nation are diverse (Kirst, 2007; Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988). Democratic life looks different from region-to-region and state-to-state, based on the political institutions of party, pressure group, and voting (Kirst, 2007; Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). Political culture "reflects the set of acts, beliefs, and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process, and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system; it encompasses both the political issues and the operating norms" (Kirst, 2007, p.190). Even though political culture transcends with individuals, it does not negate their actions (Chilton, 1988; Heywood, 2015). With political differences, people must use their cultural reasoning to persuade others who are outside their cultural constraints (Chilton, 1988).

Political parties. The political culture can change depending on the views of the people involved in the political party (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). Heywood (2015) stated, "political parties are normally seen as vehicles through which interests are expressed or demands articulated" (p.114). This type of political business can happen when all major parties fundamentally agree or disregard an issue (Heywood, 2015). However, Chilton (1988) explained that the inequality of political intensity can affect the culture. Heywood (2015) explained, "similar biases operate within interest-group politics, favoring the articulation of certain views and interests while restricting the expression of others" (p.114). Kavanagh (1972) found that "political culture is almost certainly differentially determined by individuals according to their political weight and the intensity behind their particular orientations" (p. 61). The behavior related to certain orientations are clues to types of political culture; although, behavior in-and-of-itself cannot necessarily define political culture (Chilton, 1988; Heywood, 2015).

Political role is society. Politics are connected to society and social life (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). The strife and strains felt within societies drive politics (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). As political tensions rise and fall, this brings about issues that impact culture and society (Heck, 2009; Heywood, 2015). The views of society can change the perception of political implications (Heywood, 2015). One of these implications is social division, or cleavages (Heywood, 2015). The social division can be linked to class, race, ethnicity, or religion (Heywood, 2015). For the purpose of this paper, social class will be reviewed in its connection to culture and political culture.

Social Class. Social classes are divisions within society (Heywood, 2015). This partition amongst people reflects the diversity of establishments in groups (Heywood, 2015). Social classes can stem from "unequal distribution of political influence, economic power, or social status" (Heywood, 2015, p. 42). The split that separates social classes within society plays crucial roles in politics (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). Politicians focus on the issues that affect classes and treat these citizens as major political actors (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). These societal bonds, stemmed around the division of classes, can drive conversations and prompt calls for action (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009).

Social classes can be deduced in two ways (Heywood, 2015). The first interpretation is that classes are a permanent division, rooted in a human or organic structure of society (Heywood, 2015). They can be perceived as a form of oppression and evidence of prejudice and inequality (Heywood, 2015). In contrast, the second variation is that social classes are momentary; they can change at any time (Heywood, 2015). This perspective views the class as desirable and healthy (Heywood, 2015). It shows the fluctuation of economic growth and potential for change (Heywood, 2015).

Political Impact. As explained, social classes are unequally divided in regard to wealth, income, or social prominence (Heywood, 2015). The grouping of people in similar economic circumstances create this classification (Heywood, 2015). The social classes are electorally substantial and can play a role in political party alignment (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). The diversity involved in politics stems from the range of "opinions, wants, needs, or interests" (Heywood, 2015, p. 48). For example, the working-class category of individuals is generally united by economic desires for a better future (Heywood, 2015). This classification drives the voting behavior for politicians to assist in redistributing wealth (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). The political impact for policymakers is linked to the people within these categories. The people among the differing social classes elect the policy actors who advertise ideas that will complement or improve their lifestyle (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). Job creation or tax reform, these types of promises drive individuals in varying social classes to vote in elections (Heywood, 2015). This is one type of decision that can lead to changes within one's society or culture (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). Next, political and economic changes will be discussed and the impact they play on policy and political culture will be examined.

Political and economic issues. The political and economic issues that influence a region or state effects the culture in that area (Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988). These issues drive the moral reasoning behind the political culture, which influences society (Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988). In addition, the views of society can also affect the political culture of an atmosphere; as people continue to socialize within their culture, they continuously produce and reproduce it (Chilton, 1988). Heywood (2015) believed, "no human being possesses an entirely independent mind; the ideas, opinions and preferences of all are structured and shaped in social experience, through the influence of family, peer groups, school, workplace, mass media, political parties

and so forth" (p.115). People will continue to influence one's interests, or ideas as society

evolves (Shoup & Studer, 2010). To dismiss the power of local context or culture will only lead

to failed policies and reform (Fullan, 2007). This local perspective will continue to impact the

political culture of an area (Chilton, 1988; Fullan, 2007).

For example, the media can affect how people within society view politics and political

agendas; hence, this can change the political culture (Heywood, 2015). This type of advertising

can distort the message and therefore impact society (Heywood, 2015). Heywood (2015) found

that the media shaped political attitudes, therefore playing a role in the political culture of the

environment. In addition to political culture, the news can be a factor with self-identification

within society (Roosvall, 2013). Roosvall (2013) explained, "the media is an institution of signs,

symbols, and stories; identities are therefore one of its products and identity politics is one of its

practices" (p. 58).

Policy actors attempt to solve social issues within society through legislative policy

(Heck, 2009; Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988). An important part of this process is the ability to

comprehend the concerns and political culture of their area and execute necessary legislation

(Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988; Heck, 2009). While legislators discuss and debate the need for

change, they cannot control the outcome from any change implemented (Heck, 2009). This is

often due to push-back of external mandates from local institutions (Heck, 2009). In addition to

social issues, recurring themes may also be means for policymaking (Heywood, 2015; Heck,

2009). An example of a repeated conversation in the United States was the failure of the public-

school system (Heck, 2009). While many discussions were being held over the growing concern

of public schools, the Carnegie Foundation published *A Nation at Risk*; this publication

revamped the grounds for educational reform (Heck, 2009). One pledge to reform educational

issues came through the means of charter school policy (Wong & Shen, 2006; Wong, 2014; Heywood, 2015).

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, the literature review explored many components that unite and impact policy legislation. First, I began with the formation of charter schools and school choice. I explained the original vision for charter schools and how school choice has evolved over time. Then the trajectory of charter schools and school choice were discussed. The future of school choice varies depending on the state and the expansion efforts by private donors.

Next, a comprehensive look of reformation practices in American were explored. I reviewed controversial practices, such as vouchers, competition between schools, and charter schools. Thereafter, diversity and difficulty between charter policies in the United States were discussed. To review, policy is influenced by political culture and values and is executed through power. As discussed, these variables sway within each state as each state creates their own charter legislation. This makes interpreting the charter laws complicated. For example, individualized charter policies do not have the same accountability measures, yet federal funding is still being provided. This dialogue led into policy legislation, state differences, federal regulations, and funding.

Then, the three dimensions and two types of power were reviewed and connected to policy actors and political authority. Regardless of the type- discursive or persuasive, or the dimension- political influence, mobilization of bias, or manipulation, it is important to utilize power bilaterally with ethics. Afterward, I investigated the significance of ideals within policymaking. Self-interest and competing values were defined and connections between ethics

and power were established. As previously affirmed, power and values must balance in order to maintain homeostasis.

Next, I defined culture, presented relationships between culture and society, and reviewed identity politics, collectivism, and individualism. To review, identity politics refers to the way that a person relates to others within society; the media can play a large part in how people identify with themselves (Roosvall, 2013). In addition, collectivism is a group of people within a society who care and connect with similar members (Heywood, 2015). In contrast, individualists are members of a society who only care about themselves (Heywood, 2015). It was made clear the differences in values among these societies. These principles impact the culture and political culture established within the environment.

Thereafter, political culture was explored as subcultures within political culture can greatly vary and impact societal beliefs. Following political culture, the connections between politics and political culture was introduced as the governmental role in society was addressed. The variables within politics can affect political views, political parties, and the political role in society. Finally, social class, political impact, and political and economic issues were discussed as these beliefs can influence the political culture of a region. To review, political culture, politics, and policymaking are interrelated (Heywood, 2015). In closing, culture and the political culture of an area can deeply impact the implementation of policy legislation (Heywood, 2015; Chilton, 1988; Heck, 2009).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present to the reader the rationale for the research methodology, logic of the study design, and an explanation of decisions made throughout the research process. Also included are the discussions of the validity and credibility of the method and study as well as the limitations of the study, definitions of terms, and a note about the protection of human subjects.

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a case study design. Yin (2014) described a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within the real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). A case study could be designed around a single case or multiple cases (Yin, 2014). A case is what is being explored (Yin, 2014). It could be a person, group, situation, organization, or event (Yin, 2014). Cases are grounded in inquiry as they are the subject of exploration (Yin, 2014).

For this case study design, I investigated how, and what ways, political culture influenced how state stakeholders interpreted or implemented policy. Power and values were explored as both can connect to the implementation of policy (Shoup & Studer, 2010). The purpose of this case study was to define how values and political culture played a part in the implementation of policies.

This case study was designed for the state of Virginia. I investigated how values influenced the implementation of power by stakeholders. In order to execute this study, I completed this study in multiple stages. To begin, I reviewed all the charter school policy in Virginia for the last decade. I coded what I interpreted as values based on how the policy was

written. By reviewing the policy first, it gave me a foundation of the legislation before I interviewed any policy actors or stakeholders.

Following the review of the legislation, I researched newspaper articles while concurrently interviewing participants. The evidence presented in newspapers aided in the historical knowledge and trends within political culture across Virginia, as well as served as commentary that I used with policy actors during the interviews. As I reviewed newspaper articles, I continued to code based on different values or types of power that were evident. In an interesting turn of events, during the evaluation of Richmond Times-Dispatch article, I came across a name that sounded like a potential candidate that would bring a unique angle to my study. I utilized different methods to reach him and my persistence paid off; he granted me an interview. The credentials of this interviewee were different than others within my study and it provided a depth of knowledge that I was missing.

At the conclusion of all of my interviews, I inquired of any additional names that the interviewee would recommend. It was during this process that I received a few additional names. I originally thought that I would interview 10 stakeholders, but I ended up interviewing 14 participants. After all the data collection was done, the interviews, newspaper articles, and charter school legislation were analyzed through philosophical lenses, specifically values and power, to interpret my findings as to the impact that values and political culture has on the implementation of policy.

Research Questions

Yin (2014) explained that explanatory questions such as "how" and "why" will aid in capturing the true purpose for case study research. Utilizing Yin's (2014) explanatory theory of questioning, this study will address the following research questions:

- How, and in what ways, does political culture in Virginia influence how state stakeholders interpret and implement state-level school choice related policy?

  - How, and to what extent, do stakeholders exercise power to influence the interpretation and implementation of school choice policy?

  - What values motivate, or not motivate, stakeholders to influence the interpretation and implementation of school choice policy?

The Case

Yin (2014) explained that a case is the main topic in a case study, or the unit of analysis. The main topics of this case study design are the processes that lead to charter school policy in Virginia. Cultural and societal views impact the political culture of many areas (Heywood, 2015; Shoup & Studer, 2010). It is speculated that the political culture of a climate or region greatly affect the views of the policymakers. This connection between constituents and policy actors impact the legislative movement within government (Heywood, 2015; Heck, 2009). I interviewed 14 participants to investigate how values influence the execution of power and impacts charter school policy.

Data Collection

Participants. I interviewed 14 participants who contributed to the purpose of this study. These stakeholders included members of the Department of Education, Republican and Democratic legislators, members of educational associations, school board members, administrators, and parents from various districts. The voices of these power players are essential to the implementation of educational policy. I wanted to make sure that I had a diverse pool of participants that would fairly represent Virginia.

Interviews. I conducted 14 interviews ranging in length from 20 minutes to 50 minutes; most of which lasted 35 minutes. I conducted these interviews with a broach spectrum of policy actors, such as legislators, members of the Virginia Department of Education and various educational associations, and school board members of multiple districts, and parents. I provided a list of my baseline questions to all of the participants for review before our interview. One participant sent his responses through email, but the rest of my participants were interviewed via by phone or in-person. I sent my recordings of the interviews to online service for transcription. I would ask additional questions as necessary in order to solicit information that I deemed necessary for my research. Throughout the interviewing process, I was respectful of their time and busy schedules.

Interviews are an important source in case studies (Yin, 2014). The interviewees are key to the success of case studies as they can provide critical insights (Yin, 2014). The conversations generated during interviews are guided rather than structured (Yin, 2014). For this reason, the conversation can lead to additional questions and topics (Yin, 2014). It is important to remain fluid rather than rigid in interviews as an unstructured interview can generate lots of data (Yin, 2014). When questioning the selected individuals, remember to pose questions in an unbiased, non-threatening and friendly manner. While collecting data, it is important to strive for the highest ethical standard (Yin, 2014). It is also critical to verify (corroborate or seek contrasting information), so that the data has integrity (Yin, 2014).

Documentation. I reviewed school choice legislation in Virginia. These policy documents are vital to the case study as they were evaluated and coded for values. Yin (2014) shared, "documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case study research" (p. 107). While charter documentation was essential to the case study, it is important to remember

that it is written for other specific purposes (Yin, 2014). The legislation serves as communication amongst policy actors as a means to either implement or deny objectives (Yin, 2014). While any type of legislation can be arduous, I stayed focused (Yin, 2014). I scanned and coded for values as they were recognized in legislation. By sorting the evidence, it will help with organization and concentration (Yin, 2014).

Triangulation. I utilized multiple sources of evidence in the case study: interviews, newspaper articles pertaining to educational policy and school choice, and legislation for the last decade. Yin (2014) references that multiple resources provides an invaluable advantage to case studies. This will aid in the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2014). The converging lines of inquiry helped different reference points intersect. I performed data triangulations from the documents to draw conclusions. Yin (2014) stated that results are more convincing if they are based from different sources.

Field Notes. Field notes were collected after each interview and every document was analyzed. They were quick observations gained from the insights of the interview or document examinations (Yin, 2014). Field notes are important for research as they can document the opinions, conditions, and experiences. These thoughts were taken on a daily basis and converted from informal jottings to a formal note. The field notes were handwritten and saved in a secure binder (Yin, 2014). In addition, they were organized by the interviewee (Yin, 2014).

Plan for Analysis

After I interviewed participants, reviewed legislation, and researched newspaper articles regarding school choice policy, I coded for patterns. I believed that there was a phenomenological connection between the various stakeholders in Virginia. The perspectives of the members of the Virginia Department of Education, school board members, and policymakers

are centered around the values. The *cause* of the "value" will lead to the *effect* of implementing

or not implementing a policy pertaining to school choice. This cause and effect sequence are

linked together with a logic model below.

Cause and Effect of Values and Culture on Policy

Cause- Culture evolves based on trends in society.

Effect- Societal culture impacts political culture.

Cause- Policymakers change based on constituents' desires.

Effect- Policies implemented vary based on values and views.
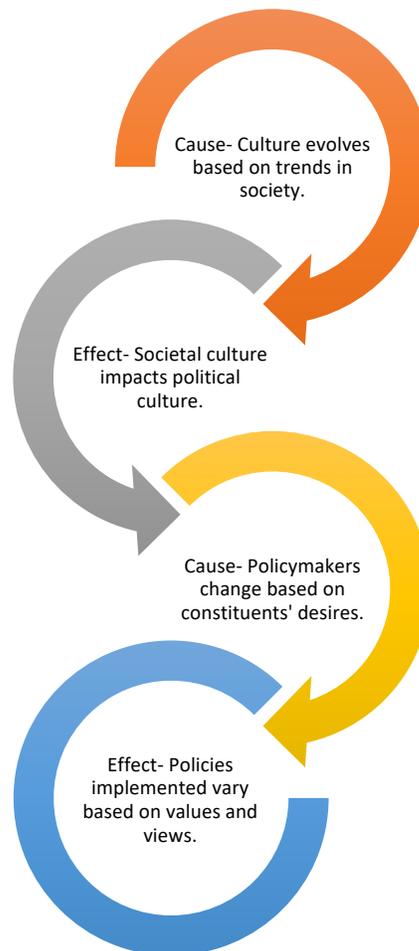
Figure 2. The model above displays how values and the political or societal views effects

legislation.

Logic model. The purpose of this logic model is to show connections between what I

believe impacts policy: trends in societal beliefs (Heywood, 2015). As mentioned earlier, "case

studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within a real-word context" (Yin,

2014, p. 16). This logic model well emphasizes how culture can impact the real-world application of legislation. The short and long-term effects of legislation, whether accepted or rejected, will impact stakeholders.

Summary

Chapter Three delved into the methods that I implemented for the case study. First, I explained the purpose for the case study, which investigated how, and what ways, did political culture influence how state stakeholders interpreted and implemented state-level school choice policy. In addition, I explored how stakeholders exercised power to influence the interpretation and implementation of school choice policy. As well as what values motivate, or not motivate, stakeholders to influence the interpretation and implementation of school choice policy. I explained how societal views lead to political culture and the impact that political culture had on policy implementation. Using political culture as a framework, I connected how culture and societal perceptions effect the political culture in the climate of Virginia. As these views continue to evolve, I believe that the impact will be felt at the state level.

Next, I shared the questions selected for this qualitative case study. I chose the following questions:

- How, and in what ways, does political culture in Virginia influence how state stakeholders interpret and implement state-level school choice related policy?
  - How, and to what extent, do stakeholders exercise power to influence the interpretation and implementation of school choice policy?
  - What values motivate, or not motivate, stakeholders to influence the interpretation and implementation of school choice policy?

Following the research questions, I described the case, participants, and methods for data collection: interviews and documentation analysis. To review, I sent my questions ahead of time to the participants before the interview. During the interview, I took detailed field notes based on connections or references made by the interviewee. After the interview, I sent the recorded interview to an online service for transcription. I kept all of these documents organized by the participant in my secured data-collection binder. During the data analysis stage, the data was triangulated to make sure the best possible outcome was reached. Based on my data, I shared two logic models. One model connected the necessary balance between value and power. The second logic model showcased the cause and effect relationships between cultural views and policy implementation.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data from the interviews of 14 participants across the state of

Virginia. I interviewed legislators, school board members, and various stakeholders, including

high-ranking individuals at the Department of Education, an individual from the Governor's

Cabinet, and elected professionals within numerous state associations. In total, I interviewed

nine Democrats and five Republicans who all contributed to help make my study meaningful.

To present these data, Chapter Four is divided into three sections. The first section presents how

the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion effect school choice policy. The primary

purpose of this section is to lay out how the three main types of power can affect the direction of

policy. The brief overview of how these types of power can shape insights, thoughts, and

observations, which helps the reader understand how monumental the impact of power can be

upon the implementation of policy.

In the second section, I address how the political culture of Virginia sways the

implementation of educational policy, drives the school choice conversation, and the reoccurring

evaluation of school choice in the Commonwealth. Finally, in the third section, I showcase how

various values impact policy actors; these values promote diverse decisions from stakeholders

within society. While the values of choice, equity, and efficiency can greatly differ among

members of society, the third section explores these values through the lens of different

stakeholders as they can often complicate legislation.

Three Types of Power and the Effects on Policy

The three types of power that often effect policy are the powers of perception, discourse,

and persuasion. In this first section, I will share how the power of perception influences

stakeholders and their beliefs. This perception impacts everyday decisions, influences possible propaganda, and drives conversations that reevaluate the topic of school choice.

Power of perception. School choice means something different to people of different political backgrounds. School choice is considered both an educational reform and a prospect for individual learning experiences. For example, most of my participants agree that school choice is the option for parents to choose if they want to participate in public schooling. They believe that students within the public-school system should be afforded access to a quality public education, regardless of race or socio-economic status. What "choice" looks like, however, varies according to participants' perception of school choice. Ms. Hilltop, a state-level retiree, was the first of 14 interviews; when I asked Ms. Hilltop about her thoughts on school choice, she shared that she had never heard of the expression. However, when I followed up the connection to charter schools, she was widely familiar with the charter school movement. The journey of researching the nuances between the two terms unearthed a realization that most of my participants shared a lot of general knowledge of charter schools, although they disagreed on what "choice" looked like across the state of Virginia.

For example, Mr. Ayres, a high-ranking Democrat, explained that school choice options could be gifted education, trade classes, magnet programs, and Governor's schools. My Republican participants believed that school choice is also a consideration of private schools, public charter schools, homeschool, or any opportunity available to parents who wish for an option outside of their zoned school. Per Mr. Saxis, historically speaking, school choice was an option for underprivileged or income-stressed families, but nowadays school choice is aligned to school quality. For example, school choice could be considered as families move from one neighborhood to another due to a reputation for hands-on learning, or a successful track record

for winning academic competitions. Another option could be a relocating family who considers the schools who have the latest technology.

All of the policy actors, who participated in my study, had ideas for providing choice to families; a lot of the differences between them have to do with their perception of how choice should be offered, held accountable, and funded. One of the differences between the two parties has to do with providing choice through magnet schools, charter schools, and Governor's schools. To clarify the differences, magnet and charter schools are similar in that they both provide specialized courses in curriculum, but they are funded differently. Magnet schools are operated by the same district administration and school board as a public school and are held to the same standard as public schools. Charters are also public schools, but may not be held to the same criteria as public schools. Governor's schools and magnet programs, which are more rigorous and competitive, can also focus on certain themes, such as science and technology. Governor's schools, which is another public-school option for parents, is acceptable; however, per some of the Democratic participants in my study, the difference is that free public charters invoke harm on the local school divisions.

In areas throughout Virginia, there are regions where the students continue to struggle in school, and per the Virginia Constitution, everyone should be afforded a quality education. This is where Republican participants in the study argued that the "status quo should not be accepted." A Republican delegate shared his concern for the students in areas such as Petersburg and Richmond. He mentioned that there are two generations of students "who have not even met the minimum standards of learning." Wealthy people with the means can easily opt-out of public schools; they have the option to leave the public-school system if they are not satisfied.

However, the families without the means are the concerns of several of the Republican participants in my study.

   The devil is in the details. While interviewing members within the Democratic Party, I noticed that there are contrasting opinions amongst the members when it comes to school choice and charters. When asked about charter schools and school choice, some of the members shared that the two topics are different from each other. When asked to elaborate, a new delegate, Mr. Abernathy, declared that school choice was more dangerous than charter schools in terms of how it could affect the public-school system. When I questioned him about using the two terms interchangeably, he stated that the two options are similar, but not the same thing. He shared that some people in politics use these the terms synonymously as an intentional move to blur the lines. As Mr. Abernathy explains,

   I actually think some of the reason why that terminology does slip back and forth is partly intentional. It's a political maneuver.

   The power of perception for this Democratic participant is that charters are less dangerous than the school choice movement as a whole. As he articulated his views, he explained to me that school vouchers pave the way to attending private schools, which are more dangerous to public schools than a charter school. This participant restated over and over that the "devil was in the details" meaning that the voucher system was "deadlier" than opening a charter school that is affiliated with a public-school division. Mr. Abernathy elaborates about vouchers

   I think that is a particularly bad policy choice. Charters, on the other hand, when they're distinct, and you're talking about it as a separate thing, I think then the devil's in the details. My problems with charters as the movement currently exists is the tensity that's

kind of like anti-Democratic, school reformer movement that wants to create a series of

schools where they're unaccountable to their local elected board and want to ram through

reforms.

Mr. Abernathy suggested that school divisions could decide to experiment with a charter

school model, as that is their "mandated choice." He says,

I think that model is essentially the model that we have in Virginia because it's under

local control. You know, I think there's probably an argument to be made that some

localities should be a little bit more experimental in that regard.

Mr. Abernathy felt comfortable with local school division's choice to partner with a

charter school, especially if they have some "specific issues to address within their school

division." With the Virginia Constitution granting power to the local school divisions, the

decision to partner with a charter school is within their full control. As this new delegate

expressed, the national concern that he has about charters is that they are not accountable in

many states, but since Virginia's Constitution mandates that charter schools have to partner with

a local school division then charters will be held accountable in the Commonwealth. In the next

section, I elaborate on the effects of perception and propaganda.

Perception and propaganda. When speaking to another interviewee, Mr. Parksley, who

is also in the Democratic party and a Virginia school board member, I heard an echo that charters

could be a way to fix the inequities within Virginia's school systems. This participant disagreed

that charters are a separate issue from school choice movements. When the members of his local

school board are conversing about school choice options, charters are the direct topic of

conversation. However, he agrees with many others in his political party that charter schools

directly impact the public-school budget. Mr. Parksley explained that charters could be more

widely accepted if they were funded differently. Now this differed from how Republicans explain the funding of schools. As reported by Mr. Evans, who is a proponent of charter schools, state funds only follow the students, not local funds. Since the state provides the minimum level for education, per Mr. Evans, the loss should not be traumatic for the local division. The local division has to subsidize the rest of the money to educate their students; depending on the local government, the subsidy could be a significant amount. Mr. Evans expressed his disdain that this kind of misinformation is promotional and intentional, so that the power continues to lie with the local school divisions. Per Mr. Evans, the power of perception can lead to mishandling or withholding information in a deliberate manner- this represents a symbol of power.

The one thing that some of my Democratic and Republican interviewees agreed upon is that there are two world views of school choice. People who argue over school choice see it as an economic versus political reality, unwilling to divorce the two elements from political conversations. For most Democrats, the economic reality is how school choice and charter schools purposefully harm the public-school system. The funds that are taken from public schools, like vouchers for private schools, are detrimental to the public-school system. The political reality, as believed by Republicans in my study, is that it is a right for parents to be afforded the opportunity to send their child to a school of their choice. Democrats fear the removal of public funding from school systems who already have tight budgets. Both parties see this issue from their own political context and only see the things that they rebuke. As explained by my interviewees, you are either for school choice or against it.

Perception of needing school choice. Many school choice conversations, as expressed by my participants and discovered through research, are driven by values and a perception of success. For example, Mr. Ayres, a high-ranking Democrat, believed that school choice

conversations were driven by the quality of education received by students. Per this Democrat, it does not matter if the perception of this "quality" education is accurate or a misconception. This conversation about the perception of needing school choice reminded me of another discussion with a retired Republican, Mr. Evans. Mr. Evans shared that values of parents are often highly regarded when it comes to choosing a school. He referenced that Virginia's public-school systems offers a wide array of curriculum and subject content areas; some families may find certain content areas are improper or offensive. For example, when public schools teach students about family planning, some of parents may prefer not to have that content covered in school. It could be that this is something that they would rather discuss in the privacy of their own homes or protect their children from the content altogether. For these reasons, some families would rather choose a different educational setting, such as a private school or homeschool.

The choice of an alternative setting. For my study, I interviewed two parents who chose an alternate setting for their children. While reflecting on my data, I was reminded of conversations with Ms. Cape and Ms. Tyler. Both of these mothers decided to take matters in their own hands and selected an educational setting that was outside of the realm of public school. Ms. Cape decided to pull her oldest daughter out of public school after she completed the 3rd grade. Her daughter was identified as gifted, yet her needs were not being met in her local public school. Ms. Cape decided to homeschool her daughter to provide her the content that will maximize her true potential. Likewise, Ms. Tyler sent her daughters to a private Christian school. When I inquired the reasons for selecting private over public, Ms. Tyler shared that it was all about the learning environment. She said that with a 1:15 ratio, the smaller classroom setting was best for her girls. She elaborated that her daughters received an excellent education that was not driven by paper and pencil activities; plus, they were exposed to topics

outside of Virginia's SOL driven framework. Both of these parents are proud that they made the decision that worked best for their families. They were both grateful for the school choice options that were available to them.

While these two mothers had options available for their families, several of my Republican participants shared concerns for parents who are not afforded with these school choice options. Like a broken record, over and over, I heard that parents should have a right to send their child somewhere else. I was told stories about schools that have not been accredited for multiple generations. I also heard a lot of reasons as to why this is happening and, unfortunately, the solutions to fixing these issues are few and far between. In the subsequent section, I discuss the findings of how the power of discourse impacts the process, implementation, and execution of legislation.

Power of discourse. I have found through conversations with Republicans and Democrats that the lexicon is different between these political parties. For example, tax credit means something different to a Republican and Democrat. Whether this tactic is utilized intentionally as force of power, it complicates the issue. Mr. Saxis shared that there are synonymous terms that correlates with charter schools and school choice, such as tax credit, higher education grant, and tuition assistance grants (TAG). As Mr. Saxis explained, a tax credit is the same thing as the tuition assistance grant. TAGs have been utilized for decades for higher education and are the same thing as a voucher for college. These terms mean different things amongst Virginians and unnecessarily confuse people.

Discourse and committees. The members of the House Committees and subcommittees are responsible for the dialogue, approval, or denial of legislature. When I inquired about the process for passing legislature in Virginia, I first learned a little bit about the make-up of our

House of Delegates and the budgetary sessions. All committees have the same ratio of Republicans to Democrats as there currently are in the House of Delegates. A full committee has 20 members and a subcommittee has seven members. I was extremely surprised to hear the number items that they have to review in such a quick fashion. The members will review hundreds of bills during session, which only allows about 7-10 minutes for a brief discussion before the bill is either "killed" or passed to the other side for review. The lack of time to engage in essential discourse concerns me whether this is an effective strategy for passing meaningful legislation. The nature of this discourse can either be crucial to the survival, or the inevitable death of a bill.

For example, Virginia has a biannual budget, so the first year of the budget, legislators have 60 days to discuss issues to either pass or "kill." The second year of the budget allows for 45 days. With a bicameral legislature, the bills have to go through in half the time, so that the bills that are passed along can switch over to the other chamber with the time remaining in session. This is an extremely short amount of time to discuss items that are important for Virginians. As explained by Mr. Evans, everything happens with little discussion. In order to make sessions as productive as possible, legislators use help from outside attorneys for drafting bills for upcoming sessions. In the following section, I discuss how the subcommittees are chosen for policymakers.

Process of choosing committees. Mr. Paul shared that the experience and depth of knowledge of the committee lead to the effectiveness of the policy-making process. Mr. Abernathy explained that Virginia utilizes the Jefferson Rule, where majority party and Speaker of the House pick the committee assignments. He shared that the committees were delegated by either of the Speaker of the House (for a full committee) or Chairman of the Committee (for

subcommittees). Per Mr. Abernathy, most of the "heavy-lifting" of the discussion is accomplished in subcommittee. As this power is localized at the committee level, I began to inquire about the knowledge of the members who are deciding on these laws. Are these experts in the field? Per Mr. Evans, an expert in the field can easily argue both sides of a topic, so this made me feel that the legislative members were handpicked based on their professional backgrounds.

However, when I inquired about specific experiences for belonging to a subcommittee, I received mixed answers about the expertise and background knowledge of the members. Several of my participants shared that the committees may not be based on schema of the topic, but by seniority. While legislators can request committees, those requests may not be honored. Sometimes it tends to be more about seniority. When I inquired if the most knowledgeable in the field of education were placed on the Education Committees, I learned that this is not necessarily the case. Less-experienced committee members are voting on these legislative decisions.

Several veteran Republican and Democratic participants shared their concern for how policy is handled in the committees and sub-committees. State-level politicians are making decisions that directly impact students and schools and, per Ms. Accomack, they are making budgetary decisions that may not be in the best interest of students. Ms. Accomack continues by adding "they act as if they are completely in the know of what is best for students, yet they lack an educational background." Three of my participants (Mr. Saxis, Mr. Parksley, and Ms. Accomack) shared that some politicians will allow certain discussions, such as school choice, to pass from the subcommittee to the finance committee, knowing that it will fail there. They are privy to the budget beforehand and this way they look good in the eyes of their constituents. The policy actors look as if they fought "tooth and nail" for the students, and therefore have "no

blood on their hands." This strategy, per Ms. Accomack, Mr. Saxis, and Mr. Parksley, is performed by policy actors as a measure to "save face." As reported by Mr. Parksley, any conversation regarding funding and school choice is politically motivated. The following section shares how the power of persuasion effects legislation.

     Power of persuasion. Per Republicans who participated in the study, the opportunities for charter schools "flatlined" in Virginia. Even when Republicans had the majority in the House of Delegates and Senate, charter school policy and the implementation of charter schools remained the same. The reason that charter schools remained stagnant in Virginia is because there is a deep desire and commitment to the public schools. Many of the members of the General Assembly want Virginia's public education system to work, so no efforts that will detract from the public-school sector will be entertained. Per Mr. Abernathy, unless there is a significant change in culture, (or another change in power), charter schools and/or school choice conversations will continue decrease. Likewise, Mr. Evans stated that school choice is not prominent in Virginia. This participant felt that school choice will never receive any additional support until the Virginia Constitution is amended from delegating local school divisions the power to approve charter schools.

     When I asked about the trajectory of school choice, Ms. Hilltop shared that there is no future for school choice; it is not in the cards right now. Ms. Hilltop elaborated that the new focus for Virginia students is equity and the need to correct inequities within our schools. In addition, Mr. Abernathy, a Democrat, said that the voices in power right now are all public-school advocates with hopes to reinvest in public education. Another high-ranking Democrat, Mr. Ayres, said that he has reviewed 400 educational bills, and none were related to charter schools or school choice. As Mr. Ayres elaborated, he said the future is all about high-school

redesign and workforce development with an emphasis on career training and correcting the misalignment of skills that students display when exiting the K-12 setting.

Mr. Saxis, a retired Republican, bluntly stated that the only way to get a school choice bill passed in Virginia is to have a Republican Governor or persuade a Democratic champion to "buck the system and help influence the votes." The last time Virginia had a Republican Governor was Bob McDonnell in 2010-2014, and during this time, several bills were passed. Specifically, House Bill 1390 and Senate Bill 737 were part of the Governor's 2010 *Opportunity to Learn* education reform legislative agenda. These bills were passed to improve the application and review process for public charter school applications.

In 2014, Democratic Governor Terry McAuliffe took office and charter school opportunities began to stall. House Bill 2342 and Senate Bill 1283 were proposed to create regional charter public school divisions that would authorize charter schools in areas of the state with struggling schools. Bill after bill were continuously vetoed as Governor McAuliffe deemed them unconstitutional. As published on National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Virginia's charter school law has been ranked 39 out of 44, because Virginia allows only district authorizers (school divisions to approve charters). In Virginia's current educational climate, Mr. Abernathy shared that if school choice policy did have enough steam to get out of the General Assembly, it would still be vetoed by Ralph Northam, Virginia's current Democratic Governor. As stated by Mr. Ayres, while charter school conversations are stagnant, Virginia offers "choice" through magnet schools, *Profile of a Graduate*, and *Virtual Virginia*.

To clarify, *Virtual Virginia* is an online option offered to all students, regardless if they are in public schools, charter schools, or being homeschooled. *Virtual Virginia* provides students with the option of taking classes that are not currently taught in their school. These classes are

free for public-school Virginia residents and require enrollment and assistance of the high school guidance counselor. For students in private schools, or who are homeschooled, there is a fee attached to the class. Per Mr. Bloxom, a member of the state association, *Virtual Virginia* or educational policies that enhance the use of technology in school are welcomed; these types of policies will better prepare Virginia students for a competing on a global scale. In the coming section, I share how the vocal groups utilize the power of discourse to advocate for students.

   Power from vocal groups. Other issues that make it harder to establish charter schools are the many nongovernmental entities that are advocates for public education and oppose school choice, such as Virginia Educational Association (VEA), Virginia School Board Association (VSBA), Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS), Virginia Association Elementary School Principals (VAESP), and Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP). As shared by Mr. Abernathy, these main organizations are the most influential and powerful within the state. These groups are the most invested in public school policies and have a lot of sway on the general public, teachers, and politicians. The focus of these entities is that students are provided a high-quality public education where students realize their full potential. These groups advocate that all students are treated equally and have equal opportunities. These opportunities could be offered through excellence in a public-school education, via strong administrative leadership, or active community involvement. In terms of policy and protection of the public schools, the VAESP shares their input on school-related issues directly to VDOE and the VSBA provides feedback to politicians on up and coming policy. The insights that are shared contribute to the influence on policy that directly affects public schools. Both of these groups are extremely powerful and can persuade stakeholders easily.

In addition, governmental groups of power include Virginia's Department of Education and the General Assembly. These governmental sources of power try to find a balance that will benefit all stakeholders in Virginia, to include public, private, and homeschools.

Several of my Republican interviewees shared concerns about how polarized politics have become in terms of what is best for students. The VEA was a hot topic as it is becoming classified as either the "old VEA" or the "new VEA." Per Mr. Leemont, a Republican, the old VEA was extremely concerned about the children and what was happening within the classroom. It was a group of teachers that focused on the issues. However, per Mr. Leemont, the "new" VEA is a very strong organization in terms of educational opinion where members stand together in support of the public schools.

A few of my Republican participants shared that they feel that the VEA has become very political over the last 10 years and taints the image of school choice and charter schools in the eyes of many educators. Per Mr. Leemont,

> I've talk to so many teachers that say, "I am a member of the organization, but I don't agree with what they do." There are a lot of good people in the VEA that I work with, but they would even say that it has become really political in the last 10 years especially. That is dangerous for any professional organization.

Even though the VEA is heavily Democratic, Republicans still seek their endorsement because they are a large group of dedicated and vocal educational professionals. Per Mr. Leemont, school choice conversations are not welcomed with the VEA. With an organization that is built on sharing ideas and collaboration, some of my Republican participants showed concern that there is no room for dialogue or conversations.

When I inquired as to why certain memberships like the VEA are not supportive of school choice and charter schools, two of my interviewees, Mr. Evans and Mr. Leemont, felt that the VEA has concerns that school choice conversations will cause factions within their membership. There are fears that the dissension of school choice will divide their organization, so it is best to stay on one side of this issue. There are also concerns that teachers of public schools will have additional pressure to compete with successful charter schools. This will cause stress on VEA members.

Furthermore, teachers within charter schools (who are also members of the VEA) have different responsibilities than teachers of traditional public schools. These responsibilities include participating in after-school hours, and learning hours on Saturdays, for which the teachers *are* paid additional money. Regardless that the teachers are monetarily reimbursed, per Mr. Evans and Mr. Leemont, it is an issue for the VEA that their members are treated differently. As Mr. Evans shared,

> They don't like bifurcating their base; unions don't like it when they have members being treated differently. At that point you start to cause factions inside your membership base.

My data also supports that some VEA members withhold support for charter schools and school choice because alterative options outside the realm of public schools are condemned. For these reasons, the VEA could ultimately lose members as the opportunity to discuss charters and school choice are topics that are off-the-table. In the bordering section, I discuss how policy actors implemented school choice in Virginia.

Virginia's Design for School Choice

In this section, I present the design for school choice and how the Department of Education has implemented choice in Virginia. I begin by providing the current plan for

implementing school choice in Virginia through the use of *Profile of a Graduate* and updates to

the Standards of Accreditation. Next, the evolution of charter law in Virginia is reviewed along

with amendments to the Virginia Constitution, which permits all the power to be presented to the

local school divisions. Furthermore, the powers presented to local school boards are discussed

along with the influence of political culture. Finally, obstacles for charter schools conclude this

section.

Virginia's Answer for School Choice

School choice in Virginia looks very different as compared to other states across the

nation. As explained by an employee of Virginia's Department of Education, Mr. Salisbury, the

Constitution of Virginia allows the local divisions to make all decisions when it comes to charter

school applications. This is vastly different when compared to other states because Virginia

handed over all its power to the local government. This exchange of power is referenced by

some of the Republican participants as the "Virginia mold." This means that all amendments to

charter school policy must be aligned to the Virginia Constitution. As explained by a high-

powered Republican, Mr. Leemont,

> Well, I think school choice policy has changed in Virginia, one, very slowly. Partly
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> because we do generally have a strong public-school system. But I think it has evolved
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> in that we've tried to look, I think, and support, those of us that are willing to look at and
>
> consider school choice proposals, in a way that fits Virginia, not just what's going on
>
> nationally. For instance, when you look at charter schools or the like, we've tried to
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> tailor legislation to fit the Virginia mold of how we've done things with charters in the
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> past, and with the constitutional requirements that we have for education in general. It's
>
> occurred slowly, but I think in a way that tries to look at things from outside the box

rather than trying to just look at how school choice policies have been adopted in other

states. We try to work within the parameters of not only the Constitution, but the

requirements that charter schools work with, and coordinate with, the local school

systems.

As many of the pro-charter Republicans involved in this study have shared, for this reason, it is

extremely hard to establish charter schools in Virginia.

Virginia shows improvement. In 2018, Virginia's Department of Education (VDOE)

revised the Standards of Accreditation (SOA). This amendment introduces the growth model,

which will improve the school quality profile, as well as draws attention to the areas that need

improvement. This policy amendment is another way to force underperforming schools to

change, but it also highlights the improvements of Virginia schools. The modifications to the

accreditation standards will show if Virginia's students are displaying growth in the areas of

English and math. If the schools are "making the grade" the public perception will be positive.

These changes can showcase the positive improvements in Virginia public schools and reduce

the desire of charter schools. However, some of the Republican participants in my study have

questioned the intentions of this decision.

To clarify, the policy actors and stakeholders at VDOE have immense power in that they

can change the rules and accreditation process. With the new Standards of Accreditation,

schools are showing growth and a step in the right direction. Some of the Republican

participants feel that this was a strategic move as if to say that "schools are making progress;

therefore, Virginia does not need alternative solutions." While Virginia schools are showcasing

growth across the state, several of the Republican interviewees felt that Democratic policy actors

used their power in making this change to promote the success of public schools. Per Mr.

Abernathy, a Democrat,

> But I do think, I mean, the growth model is way better. You know, it's a better model
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> that what we've been doing. I think the reason why people who fight it, fight it because
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> they see it as being essentially, going back to pre-standards. The growth measures do
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> need to include some way of showing that students are learning the broad curriculum that
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> they should learn. And so, I guess it's kind of a cop-out I would say. The devil is really
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> in the details, right? I am both hopeful but also concerned because the time to unroll it's
>
> coming real soon.

Choice in Virginia. Another recent change from VDOE is the implementation of *Profile*

of a Graduate. This policy reduces the number of verified credits for students entering as

freshman in 2018. This amendment impacts students in high school, as much as the community.

Mr. Bloxom, a Democratic member of state associations, believes that *Profile of a Graduate* is

the solution to helping Virginia graduates come out of high school prepared for a choice of

career or college. He continued to explain that *Profile of a Graduate* promotes workplace

expectations and career options as needed by the community. Mr. Bloxom shared that

partnerships have been established between K-12 settings, community colleges, and businesses

for ways to teach students how to support the industry and fulfill the workforce need.

A high-ranking Democrat at the state level, Mr. Ayres, elaborated about the goals of

implementing *Profile of a Graduate*. Per Mr. Ayres, the objective with the implementation of

Profile of a Graduate is that Virginia students will come out of high school with the necessary

workplace skills that are necessary in order to be successful. These skills include critical

thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and citizenship. The goal is that

students coming out of high school will have the necessary skills for being successful in the workplace or higher education. Throughout Virginia, each school division can offer different classes that are important to their own economy. Examples of these types of classes could include nail technician, cosmetology, culinary arts, healthcare, technical classes, etc. These requirements ensure that the schools are providing opportunities for students to learn about workplace expectancies and career choices that will be beneficial in their own communities and elsewhere. As Mr. Ayres explained, by having students fulfilling these roles straight out of high school can make a positive impact on society.

Lastly, Virginia's continued commitment to move the educational system forward is evident in the high school redesign, workforce development, *Virtual Virginia*, and high school/community college dual classes. Several of my Democratic participants feel that school choice is provided through the public-school model via the *Profile of a Graduate*. The Democratic member of state association, Mr. Bloxom, explained that students have a choice in high school because they get to choose what they really want to learn, and they have a choice of where they end up at the completion of high school. As explained by Mr. Bloxom,

> With the recent profile of a graduate that you're going to have more choices within the public system. It's the recognition that colleges aren't for everyone, we want to have more career options, we want to have community college options for graduating students. So, giving them the choices to make sure that they're landing on their feet, that's going to be a particular focus, and you'll see that driven generally by the Department of Education's policy, but I think also a recognition from local school boards and superintendents that that's where we need to go. I see more dynamic public options available.

The State Department requires that students have a certain number of credits across the board in order to graduate. The classes required to graduate may be limited in scope, or a class that a student may really want to take may not be offered. As an internal method to provide school choice, in this case, *Virtual Virginia* may be an option. As explained by a 13-year Republican policy actor, Mr. Paul, *Virtual Virginia* is a cost-effective way to deliver individualized curriculum and instruction through virtual schooling. In the subsequent section, I discuss how the political culture of various regions within Virginia can influence the perspective of choice and need.

> ***Profile of a different student****.* In various regions across the state, English Language Learners, at-risk students, and students with disabilities are also working hard to obtain their high school diploma and achieve success. It is necessary that legislators reflect on the need of students all across the state. Mr. Salisbury, an employee of the Department of Education, expressed his concern on how the law will impact all of the students in Virginia. For example, the issues in southwestern Virginia are not the same as those in northern Virginia, so policy actors cannot generalize the issues when it comes to creating legislation. As these students may face different challenges, they do not require the same solutions. In order to create fair and balanced legislation, designated officials need to reflect on the voices of all teachers, parents, and students, and not only the constituents that got them elected. Legislators need to think about the students across the state and not just their own locality when they propose changes in legislation. In the bordering section, I cover the history of Virginia's charter school legislation.

How has Virginia's Charter Law Evolved?

Many of my Republican participants have shared one thing in common. They all agree that Virginia's charter school law has "flatlined" over the last decade. In fact, every proposal to

revive some aspect of the law has failed, even with the Republicans in power. Virginia's history

of school choice is shorter, as compared to other states; when associated to states with active

charter school laws, Virginia has the fewest number of charters across the nation. Many of my

Democratic participants feel that this is deliberate because of the strong public-school systems,

which means there is no need for alternative schools. However, a few Republican participants

shared concerns that it is related to Virginia's Constitutional amendment that presents the

authority to decide on charter schools to the local school divisions. With this being said, the

powerful public schools push back against the school choice options.

Virginia's charter school law was created in 1998 and has had a few revisions in the last

20 years. Of these changes, the most impact came in 2010 when it was mandated that all charter

school applicants had to submit their applications to the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE).

This amended the 2002 law where applicants had to send their applications directly to the local

school board. With the 2010 adjustments, all applications were to be first sent to VBOE, where

the Charter School Committee could review the applications to make sure that all the criteria are

met for establishing a charter school. As several Democrats and Republicans shared, this process

allowed the committee to discuss the application with the applicants. This way all the areas of

the application are covered, and no one is left "blindsided" throughout this process. As shared

by Mr. Salisbury,

> Applicants know what the criteria is. So, if you know what the application is, the process
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> that it's going to go through, then you as an applicant should have a good understanding
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> of what your applicant needs to have in order to qualify or to meet the requirements. I
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> think that I always enjoy and opportunity to meet and to have a meeting with the
>
> applicant because often times, you'll learn so much more through that conversation. And

not only do you learn more about what their vision is, but you can certainly be able to

help through the department to provide guidelines and guidance, if they want to continue

with the process, on how to better the application.

Now, meeting the criteria of the charter school application does not guarantee that the

application will be accepted as this power is in the hands of the local school division. However,

this process does at least allow the participants to double check that their application is complete

and receive specific feedback from VBOE's Charter School Committee. After the application

clears VBOE Charter School Committee, it continues on to the local school board for approval or

denial. The decision to approve or deny charter schools is a powerful one. Once the local school

divisions had all the power, there were attempts to reverse this decision. In the next section, I

review the failed attempts for amending the Virginia Constitution.

Failed attempts. There have been multiple attempts to amend Virginia's Constitution to

bring some of the power back to the state level in terms of charter schools. As an active

Republican, Mr. Evans explained, in order for something of this magnitude to happen, the bill

has to pass the General Assembly two years in a row- with the same exact language. Everything

has to remain the same, nothing can be added or changed. If the bill passes two years in a row,

then it will be placed on a ballot for voters. Every attempt has failed. As Mr. Evans recalled his

first 2 years in office, he had five charter school bills that died at the subcommittee level. Some

of these failed attempts happened with Republicans having the majority vote and a Republican

Governor. These power struggles happened because there is a deadlock in power within party

lines and across party lines. It is very much motivated by who has the upper hand and what they

feel is important. Those with power can prioritize items based on their own political agenda;

power is utilized to make these items a priority. The wheeling and dealing that happens with

those in control, and the power involved that comes with having the majority of the power, may or may not work out for delegates with an individual agenda that is connected to school choice.

For example, as Mr. Evans expounded, one year a school choice bill "flew" out of the House with party line votes; Republicans had the majority vote with 56 out of 100 in the House of Delegates and 21 in the Senate out of 40. The second year (with even more Republicans in power for a total of 66) the bill failed to get out of the House. Mr. Evans reported that the reason the bill failed is because of suburban Republicans- these "policy actors are representatives of very moderate to almost Democratic areas." Mr. Evans believed that these Republicans have strong ties to unions and the public-school model. When I asked Mr. Evans to elaborate on this example, he stated,

> I think unions have to do with some of it. And so, we have some Republicans that are in very moderate to almost democratic areas and they are going around spreading a message that money is being taking away from your kids in public school to give to kids who go to private school; and by the way, those kids that go to those so-called 'charter schools' are governmentally-funded private schools for the wealthy.

Per a retired Republican delegate, Mr. Saxis, he said that these suburban Republicans "lockstep" with the Virginia Educational Association because these Republican policy actors are afraid of losing the votes of their constituents. For example, he explained that "a Republican delegate in western Fairfax County cannot afford to take on the educational association in Fairfax." He shared that there is a "limited political upside" in taking this risk. The values of these suburban Republican delegates align closer to their Democratic peers in terms of school choice policy; this often results in the suburban Republicans becoming swing votes. The other side of this particular argument is that the suburban Republicans and Democratic party believe in

promoting equity in education. With this push to provide equity in Virginia's schools, the focus

is on providing tiered support to all students in order to showcase growth in public schools. This

aligns with the implementation of student growth model as a measurement of accreditation.

While reviewing the failed attempts of the charter school bill with Mr. Evans, this

Republican believed that the dialogue from union members "infiltrated the mindset" of the

swing-vote, suburban Republicans, which affected the outcome. He believed that union

members persuaded these suburban Republicans that "charter schools steal money from public

schools." These suburban Republicans and Democratic delegates value the public-school system

and believed there is excellence among it; there is no need for school choice in Virginia. Per Mr.

Paul, the VEA and to a lesser extent the School Board and Superintendents Associations have

been successful in stopping or gutting significant school choice legislation. While he spoke, Mr.

Evans shared his frustration with these failed attempts. He shared that the amendments would

have allowed charter applicants the option to appeal to the Virginia Department of Education if

they felt that their application was not given reasonable consideration. As he continued, he

clarified that it would have helped the process for applicants. In later years, Republican-led

legislature proposed House Bill 2342 and Senate Bill 1283 that would have allowed regional

charter public school divisions that could authorize charter schools in areas of the state with

struggling schools; these bills were vetoed.

All of these proposals for charter schools were unsuccessful. Mr. Evans and Mr. Saxis

both argued that the only way to get a bill passed on charter schools is to have a Democratic

champion on your side. But, as Republicans and Democrats shared during this study, the only

way for charters to expand in Virginia is to convince local school boards that charters are not

competition, but another option for students who are struggling in an area. Instead, charters can

be a tool in the metaphorical toolbox. In the adjacent section, I provide information of the impact of local divisions having all the power.

Local power. The local school divisions have all of the authority in approving or denying the opportunities to partner with charter schools. This is a crucial component from the amendment of Virginia's Constitution in 1971 when the power to implement schools shifted to the local government. Local divisions may push-back on charter schools, but a large part of this decision also lies with the community. With any local decisions, the community has to have buy-in and show interest. As the local divisions are held accountable to their communities, the culture and values of their community members plays an impact on the local division's decision. The local communities have immense power in these decisions. With the localities having all the power, many of the stakeholders at the state level can only advise charter school applicants. As Mr. Leemont explained, the culture impacts local divisions and VDOE's decision to tweak policy and legislation.

With this being said, the charters that are established have solidified the partnership between the local division and their own school. A Democratic member of the state association, Mr. Bloxom, shared that while he was "all-in" for public schools, that he supported any local division that wanted to partner with a charter school. While he shared concerns that free public-charters would invoke harm on the school divisions, if a charter school was the answer that solved a local problem, the local division had that right. Per Mr. Bloxom, the solutions should be tailor-made based on the community's needs. As Mr. Bloxom expounded,

> Ultimately, our organizations we're all about local control. If a locality, have local
>
> solutions to local problems, they're tailor made. If localities want to pursue hat model,

that's their choice, but ideally, we provide for the public good by having good public

schools.

This comment showed that while charter schools and school choice are perceived to be bad for

public schools, as long as the local division was accepting of them and if they solved problems

for local students, they should be granted. Per Mr. Abernathy, this is the proper way for

establishing charter schools in Virginia. Furthermore, Mr. Abernathy shared that charters should

only happen if the local school divisions wants to "experiment" with the alternative style for

learning, whether it is curriculum, teaching methodology, etc. In the following section, I discuss

how charter school policy requires collaboration between charter school applicant and the local

school division.

Mandatory partnerships. Charter applicants must have a partnership with a public

school within the division where they would like to open. Several applications over the last few

years have neglected to follow through with this step, which was an issue with the application.

With the way the law is written in Virginia, and the power that the local divisions have due to the

Constitution, charter applicants have to collaborate with the local divisions. Virginia Board of

Education (VBOE) can guide the application process, so that the candidates are not blindsided by

the criteria for a successful submission. Prior to the personalized guidance from the VBOE, the

mandated partnership between the charter school and local division was often overlooked during

the application process. This oversight by the applicant was often the reason that the application

was rejected. It is absolutely critical for the applicants to establish a relationship with the local

school division as it is ultimately the school division that has the power to accept or reject an

application. If the application for charter is approved, the mandatory partnership between charter

school and school division is a solid way to keep the charter school accountable to the local school division and the state of Virginia.

Power of choice. It is important to note here the vast amount of power that the local school divisions possess. Local school divisions/school boards have the power to choose whether or not they want to affiliate or partner with a charter school. As Mr. Bloxom shared, the political culture of a community is a variable for the school board's decision. With that being said, the school board also chooses whether or not to discuss school choice options with their community members or to dismiss these conversations altogether. This power of discourse sits in the hands of local school boards. As Mr. Bloxom explained the importance of local buy-in, he shared,

> I mean, certainly the most important factor is the local buy-in. I mean, you have to have, if you want to create a new system, a new charter, you need the sign-off of the local boards, which who are in turn responsive to the desires and whims of the community. So, if there's not a desire from them to create a new system, then it's going to be exceedingly difficult for a charter to get started.

In the adjoining section, I expand upon difficulties for implementing charters and some of the hurdles after opening a charter school.

Obstacles for implementation and issues after acceptance. As I reflect on the conversations from my Republican and Democratic participants, I understand that the power of charter school policy lies with the local school boards. While Virginia politicians can create new educational policies and review existing school choice mandates, the local school boards have the ability to approve or deny charter applications. This is a major barrier for the charter applicants who are striving to open schools. The application could be absolutely spot-on and

relationships between the applicant and school division could be established, and the application could still be denied. This power is completely up to the local school division. In addition, the voices of opposing political entities, such as unions, can also hinder buy-in for establishing charter schools in Virginia.

Likewise, charter school contenders face additional hurdles during the application process and after the submission has been approved. The first obstacle is finding a partner for this process. The local divisions hold all the power in deciding if a charter school can open. This can make it hard on applicants who are attempting to open a charter school but are finding it difficult to establish a local partnership. Other obstacles for implementation are keeping up with the finances after opening. Per Ms. Pocomoke, the high overhead, maintenance bills, and transportation costs, it is a struggle to keep the budgets balanced.

Overcoming hurdles. In recent years, charter legislation changed that aided charter schools. For example, in 2012, charter schools were allowed to receive student funding which is comparable to students within their local school division. In addition, charters were granted permission to utilize vacant property from their partnered school division. Lastly, a law was overturned that allowed local divisions to "pull the plug" on charter schools with only a short notice of 30 days. This law allowed school boards special authority to close charters at any time. It was a hardship on charters as it affected their finances and created adversity for their students and families. Due to the nature of this local power, the law changed, and the local divisions can no longer close the charter schools in such a quick fashion. In the next section, I will share how the values of choice, equity, and efficiency impact legislation.

Values of Choice, Equity, and Efficiency

In this final section of chapter four, I elaborate how the values of choice, equity, and efficiency influence stakeholders and policy actors. First, I share how the value of choice influences many types of decisions, such as the choice of private, public, or homeschooling. I discuss the beliefs of two parents as they chose one setting over another setting. Next, I expound how the value of equity is contributed through building climate and decreasing inequities. In addition, I explore viewpoints from two groups of minority advocates as they share concerns of growing inequities and seek the value of effectiveness. Lastly, I share a discussion of which is more efficient- the impact of an individual teacher or schools as a whole.

Value of Choice

With the Supreme Court's decision to integrate schools following *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, some Virginia families decided to enroll in private schools instead of integrating into the public-school model. This landmark law pushed some families to self-segregate within society. For many people, school choice is a direct connection to this cultural segregation, whether it is that families are self-segregating to avoid schools and "those kids," or for opportunities to enroll in a school that they (the family) perceive as better, such as private schools. Religious values and racial bias will persuade certain groups of people from enrolling in public schools. Unfortunately, they do not want their children to associate with diverse cultures. For some of my Democratic participants, school choice policies often remind them of "White Flight" and is offensive in nature. As shared by Ms. Accomack,

> I hate to say this, but with *Brown vs. Board of Ed*, what was a clear example was a
> Catholic church nearby had this stone in terms of when it was dedicated, it was 1954- that
> same time. My thought was "White Flight." They're creating now a private school to

move away from the public school now that integration's going to come into play. Who

knows, there may be some interest groups that are concerned about having segregation

again.

For several of my Democratic participants, the decision to choose an option outside of the

public-school sector is detrimental to the very nature of our public schools and the society as a

whole. In the adjacent section, I explain how choice can bring conflict for Virginia schools.

Vouchers are products of bad policy. A quality education is important for all Virginia

students and is extremely valuable. However, where and how the education is received is of

particular interest to all of my participants. Some of my interviewees felt strongly that

governmental vouchers and school choice are products of bad policy. With vouchers, per Mr.

Abernathy, you create two school systems, from which tax payers are funding both. One school

system would be drastically underfunded because it is losing money to the other system, which is

viably unequal because of accessibility.

In addition, Mr. Abernathy shared that regions across the state that have strong school

systems, like Northern Virginia and Henrico County, do not have as many private schools due to

the successful public schools. In areas like these, charter schools are going to have an uphill

battle to convince parents that they are valuable. Furthermore, Mr. Abernathy does not mind that

families prefer to send their children to private schools, but it should not be the responsibility of

the government to pay for it. On the other hand, Mr. Abernathy felt that charter schools were a

separate issue than school choice.

> I actually think at the local level, if schools through the public-school boards wanna
>
> create charter schools, that's the original intent of the charter school movement. The idea
>
> was that teachers within the school system create a charter school and try alternative

pedagogy and then if it worked, you could mainstream it. And I think that model is

essentially the model that we have in Virginia because it's under local control. You

know, I think there's probably an argument to be made that some localities should be a

little more experimental in that regard. And I think, well with that original model where

you still have teachers getting paid for a school board and then saw that there is

Democratic accountability that is something that I'm okay with.

Per this interviewee, if local school divisions want to pursue the possibility of charter schools, let

them; just make sure that there are accountability measures for the taxpayers, who are funding

them. Per Mr. Abernathy, as long as the charters are helping the community and being held

accountable for their actions, we may be able to find a middle ground for charters to coexist

within local school divisions. In the bordering section, I review reasons that some parents prefer

a choice in schools.

Beliefs that affect choice in education. There are families that have personal beliefs

that prevent them from enrolling in public schools. For example, there are 36,897 students who

are homeschooled in Virginia. These families may choose to educate at home for various

reasons, such as school safety, parental choice in curriculum, and avoiding unruly behavior at

school. With homeschooling parents, it may not matter how much money is invested in public

schools, or the choices in classes/career clusters that are offered.

In order to hear first-hand about reasons for choosing an alternative education, I decided

to reach out to a homeschool parent. Ms. Cape, a Republican, is a parent who decided to

homeschool her children after her gifted daughter was repeatedly overlooked in class. She

pulled her oldest daughter out of a high-performing public school eight years ago after she

completed the third grade. I asked her about her decision to homeschool after the exposure of

the public-school system. Ms. Cape said that she wanted something more fulfilling for her daughter. She found that she was supplementing more and more for her daughter at home because at school, her daughter was only getting the basics to pass the SOL. My participant could not let her daughter sit bored in the classroom for another day completing worksheet after worksheet.

> It really was a sink or swim situation; my daughter needed something more fulfilling. My gifted child was overlooked day after day. The basics taught to pass the SOL were not enough for her; this set pattern of information did not meet her needs. Therefore, I decided to homeschool her. I said no to the status quo.

In addition, certain people of means believe that the public schools cannot provide the best opportunities for their children and that they could secure better with their own resources. Money provides them the power to make these personal decisions. Furthermore, religious families may prefer to enroll in parochial schools because the content that is taught in public schools. Public-school systems offer a wide array of curriculum and subject content that some families may find improper or offensive. For example, Virginia public schools teach students about family planning; some parents may prefer not to have that content covered in school. Whether it is curriculum issue or another societal value, some families choose to send their children to a private school. When I asked Mr. Evans to explain the why he thinks some stakeholders approve or oppose charter schools and school choice, he stated,

> In some cases, they want alternatives out there because of what they see being taught, or not being taught, in the school system. It can be everything from, sometimes the issues in regard to sex-ed, it could be issues, or lack of it, teachings around civic engagement in all; and those that don't support charter schools, it's in many cases, there should be that

kind of level playing field. Everyone gets taught the same, and we shouldn't create an environment where some are being put unfairly advantaged over others, especially if they do consider them, that it's already a population that already has an initial advantage to begin with.

Ms. Tyler, a Democratic public-school employee, sent both of her children to a private Christian school. When I inquired the reasons for selecting private over public, my interviewee shared that it was all about the learning environment. She said that with a 1:15 ratio, the smaller classroom setting was best for her girls. She elaborated that her daughters received an excellent education that was not driven by paper and pencil activities; they were exposed to topics outside of the SOL driven framework.

In addition to the small class sizes, Ms. Tyler said that parents and teachers of this private school formed real bonds. The close-knit community feeling amongst the families provided an extra layer of support for her girls. Furthermore, she said that her daughters had all the opportunities through private school that are offered in the public-school system, such as clubs and sports. During our conversation, Ms. Tyler shared that one daughter, while in 5th grade, had started off the year in a public school. After a few weeks, her daughter asked to return to private school. She shared with her mom that public school was "not her setting" as the teachers were always yelling, and the students' behavior caused concern. For these reasons, Ms. Tyler reenrolled her daughter in private school and she continued in private school until she graduated. In the following section, I explain how equity is important for all students.

Equity for all Students

For many years, the focus within the field of education was equality. Everyone was to be treated the same and no one was to feel excluded; inclusion was the key to helping students find

success. In the current educational climate, stakeholders in Virginia have transitioned to understand that equality is not enough for students; the need is to have equity within all schools. Equity is the definition of providing each person exactly what they need in order to be successful. Equitable experiences for students will vary greatly and will be individually tailored for their specific needs.

Several of my participants shared their visions for the trajectory of school choice and the impact on students. Per Ms. Accomack, one change that is on the horizon is a form of a mixed-delivery system. This is where the per-pupil funding has to be delivered by an educator that is certified and qualified to teach. This has the potential to reverse future inequities; this is especially important for students who are taught in private schools without certified teachers. As Ms. Accomack explained,

> They have been talking about a mixed delivery system, and essentially, the money goes with the child wherever they are, but the person who is providing the service delivery has to be qualified to teach.

The inequities of students within Virginia public schools are the utmost concern right now. All of my participants referenced improving equity within Virginia schools in some shape or form. Ms. Hilltop shared concerns of hiring quality teachers, when the profession is in a decline. Ms. Hilltop also shared how difficult it is for smaller divisions to compete with larger divisions when looking to hire outstanding teachers. As Ms. Hilltop expressed,

> There is a lot going on right now, teachers being one, trying to find quality teachers, and students are not going into teaching at colleges. It's really, for us small school divisions, it's very difficult to compete with Chesterfield and Hanover, the big school divisions.

Per Ms. Hilltop, the vision for Virginia students is to make sure that all schools are appropriate for all students and teachers.

Mr. Ayres shared his thoughts about the inequity within Virginia schools. He sees two types of equity issues in Virginia. The first is an equity problem between small and large school divisions but also interdivisional inequities between rural, urban, and affluent divisions. Even within one large school division there are inequities because families have self-segregated which are largely based on school ratings and real estate markets. Mr. Ayres provided an example,

> A large school division like Fairfax is quite affluent, but if you look within that, what I am seeing is that there are some schools that are worlds apart. We have changed some policy recently as far as how schools are accredited, but the accreditation scores have also resulted in families going and moving into certain neighborhoods or looking for specialty programs and not sending their children to the neighborhood schools, but another school.

> So, we're seeing that self-segregation happening that has resulted in serious equity issues.

He believed that parents will continue to self-segregate where they believe a school can offer a high-quality education. Through this process of self-segregation, families unknowingly contribute to the inequities within one single school district, especially when it is based on the real estate market. These decisions can have serious repercussions on schools.

When the real estate market is the basis for selecting schools, Mr. Ayres questioned whether charter schools in urban areas had the proper support systems in place for vulnerable students, such as special education or English language-learners. There were concerns that charters would increase inequities instead of reducing them; however, with Virginia's mandatory partnership between local school divisions and charter schools, these fears should alleviate. If

they do not meet the expectation, they will be held accountable, just like their sister schools; they will have a consequence from Virginia's Department of Education.

While discussing the inequities of many students, Mr. Leemont shared a scenario of an attempt to propose an option for struggling school divisions. As he recalled, the proposal would have partnered an underperforming school with a charter school that has found success. This "outside of the box" suggestion was an idea to bring something innovative to schools that are stressed; as charters serve similar demographics, it was an opportunity to highlight teaching tips and tools that bring success. Per Mr. Leemont,

> It was an opportunity for successful charters to provide insights on how to engage students and parents (as parents are equally important in these scenarios). The Constitution is extremely clear- every child should have the same opportunity to get a solid education. The educational system of the United States has not changed in over the last 70 or 80 years.

If the educational system is struggling with our current teaching methods, as Mr. Leemont shared, charters should not make the situation worse. The public-schools are trying, but some areas across the state still struggle. As Mr. Leemont shared, while this proposal completely aligned with the "Virginia mold" for charter school law, yet the proposition was rejected. In the following section, I discuss the conflicts within equity conversations for policy actors.

Consistency or choice to fix inequities. There are some members on both sides of the aisle that believe that Virginia's educational system is working well. These members are satisfied with the educational outcomes and willingly continue to fund Virginia's public schools. A few of my Republican participants find fault in maintaining the status quo and those stakeholders who resist change and innovation. Per Mr. Paul, the improvements in Virginia's

schools are tepid, and policymakers need to make an educational change that will propel Virginia students on a global scale. While Virginia's Constitution mandates that charter schools have to partner with local divisions, the charter schools could provide an alternative to traditional teaching. The collaboration between public school and charter school could spark new ideas, increase buy-in from students, teachers, and families, and draw interest from the community. However, per Mr. Leemont, the polarization within politics seems to work against the students instead of working together to make Virginia students a priority. In the next section, I connect suspension rates to inequities and discuss a strategy from Ms. Hilltop that may be a possible solution to repeated suspension.

Increase of inequities with suspensions. In schools across Virginia, suspensions seem to rise as students are served with this consequence to serious behavior. The number of young students receiving suspensions are rising each year. Suspensions result in time out-of-school, which is why VDOE has mandated that students in PK-3 can only be suspended for three school days at a time. When reflecting on the reasons that drive school choice conversations, Ms. Accomack shared that the suspension rates could be connected. Since parents can easily view the number of suspensions of a school, it can be an evaluative measure. Suspensions can also be related to inequity issues and show cracks in the relationships between the school and child. The suspension rates could very well show that some schools are better than others, in terms of addressing the needs of children who have specialized behavioral needs, or those students who may feel that they don't connect with a school.

Charters as an alternative setting. Some Virginia school divisions have behavioral schools for students who are suspended from the traditional setting. While these schools focus on reforming behavior, they also provide the academic support to keep students on track.

Charter schools could be another option for students who are struggling in the traditional schools. This would provide a resolution to an issue that is happening across the state. For example, Ms. Hilltop shared her knowledge of an alternative charter school that provides continuous learning as well as opportunities to glean success outside of a classroom. The students assigned to this school continue to learn on their grade level, but they are also provided the social and emotional programs that they need to make positive behavioral growth. As a partner to the local school district, charter schools could potentially be another option to repeated suspension or expulsion. In the next section, I discuss how minorities and parents advocate for equity for their families.

Minorities. As inequities are the focus of education, two groups have been more vocal in terms of supporting school choice. Two of my interviewees, Mr. Parksley and Ms. Accomack, shared how advocates from the NAACP and participants of Hampton's Black Family Conference voiced their concerns about the inequity within Virginia schools. Mr. Parksley explained,

The NAACP fights for equity as there is a struggle to find equity in public school.

As shared by Ms. Accomack, participants from the Black Family Conference were advocating for school choice because they felt their families were not receiving the education that they were promised by Virginia's Constitution. Ms. Accomack recalls the event,

I am a graduate of Hampton University and I attended a Black Family Conference and they were advocating, I was so surprised, for school choice. It really shocked me. But one of the things that I heard them say that really made me feel so sad, is, they said, our kids have been failed. We are not getting the education that we are being promised.

There are groups across the region that are willing to discuss options to reverse these inequities. Throughout the years, many bipartisan supporters have shown that intellect and work ethic

should determine educational opportunities and excellence, not a zip code. In the bordering paragraph, I share the reasons that two parents elected for school choice.

Parents' reasoning for school choice. Parents are observant and watch the activity within their child's school. Naturally, parents want what is best for their children. Some parents will inquire about different types of schools when they feel that their child requires an alternate school setting. Whether parents are looking for excellence in education or a specific type of learning environment, parents will seek these changes. This advocacy lead to the changes of school setting for two of my participants, Ms. Cape and Ms. Tyler.

Ms. Cape, a Republican, decided to homeschool her children. She pulled her oldest daughter out of a high-performing public school eight years ago after she completed the third grade. I asked her about her decision to homeschool after the exposure of the public-school system. Ms. Cape said that she wanted something more fulfilling for her daughter. She found that she was supplementing more and more for her daughter at home because her daughter was only getting the basics to pass the SOL at school. My interviewee's daughter was identified as gifted and she was not the focus on her teachers- only the students who needed interventions in order to pass the SOL. As an attorney, Ms. Cape knew that she needed to take action for her daughter; she referenced this scenario as a "sink or swim" situation. My participant could not let her daughter sit bored in the classroom for another day completing worksheet after worksheet.

Before deciding to homeschool, Ms. Cape first toured all the private schools in the area. With steep tuitions and mundane curriculums, Ms. Cape decided to purchase curriculum that is based on classical education with a focus on art and history. Per Ms. Cape, her daughter has blossomed into an abstract thinker. She enjoys reading cultural books, such as the *Book of Mormon*, as well as classic literature. She has enjoyed many firsthand experiences that coincide

with her curriculum, such as visiting Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina to study history

and ecology. The student is active in many social scenes, such as speech and debate club and

recreational volleyball.

When I asked Ms. Cape to predict the trajectory of school choice and homeschooling, she

said that she felt it was on the rise. My interviewee shared that with the repetitive nature of

teaching to the test and lack of freedom that teachers possess, she feels that more parents are

considering the option of homeschooling. She also referenced that the Homeschool Conference

in Richmond was wall-to-wall this year with parents scoping out curriculum choices. She

elaborated that the dynamic for homeschooling has changed as many of the homeschool parents

that she has met over the last few years are college educated mothers and fathers who have

decided to educate their children at home. This conversation reminded me of my interview with

Mr. Ayres who predicted that there would be a slight transition from public schools to

homeschool in the years ahead. He connects this negative trajectory to the inadequate funding to

support all students, which echoes what Ms. Cape shared- the lack of attention for her gifted

daughter.

Learning environment. Another of my participants chose an alternative setting for her

daughters. Ms. Tyler, a Democratic public-school employee, sent both of her children to a

private Christian school. When I inquired the reasons for selecting private over public, my

interviewee shared that it was all about the learning environment. She said that with a 1:15 ratio,

the smaller classroom setting was best for her girls. She elaborated that her daughters received

an excellent education that was not driven by paper and pencil activities; they were exposed to

topics outside of the SOL driven framework. In addition to the small class sizes, Ms. Tyler said

that parents and teachers of this private school formed real bonds. The close-knit community feeling amongst the families provided an extra layer of support for her girls.

Furthermore, she said that her daughters had all the opportunities through private school that are offered in the public-school system, such as clubs and sports. During our conversation, Ms. Tyler shared that one daughter, while in 5th grade, had started off the year in a public school. After a few weeks, her daughter asked to return to private school. She shared with her mom that public school was "not her setting" as the teachers were always yelling, and the students' behavior caused concern. For these reasons, Ms. Tyler reenrolled her daughter in private school and she continued on in private school until she graduated.

As I reflect on this conversation with Ms. Tyler, I am reminded of the discussion that I had with Mr. Ayres, when he explained that there is a direct correlation between the lack of investments in public schools and their brittle support systems. Per Mr. Ayres, without the proper funding in Virginia's public schools, the components that make a public school strong will continue to suffer; with that being said, parents will continue to consider alternative settings. Mr. Ayres elaborated on his thought with,

> We're not investing adequate resources in our public setting to provide all the support systems, whether social and emotional support systems and other things…class ratio and size is an issue and maintain our capital, infrastructure. So those kinds of things. There's actually a correlation with that.

In the next section, I discuss the viewpoints of efficiency in education in terms of whether an individual can make a bigger impact over an entire school environment.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Efficiency is valued in that it makes things happen with the least amount of wasted time, effort, or money. In this final section, teacher efficacy, clear communication, and appropriate funding are discussed as conciseness is essential for the success of schools and the implementation of legislation. First, I examine the importance of high teacher efficacy in terms of how effectiveness of teachers can reduce inequities within schools. Next, I review how transparency is vital for the application process of charter school applicants. Then, I discuss the importance of clear communication with educational policy for all stakeholders. Finally, I share highlights of the debate held between Republicans and Democrats on whether or not it is efficient to continue to fund public schools; this discussion is followed by the explanation of the Composite Index and how the efficient use of public tax dollars is critical in funding Virginia schools.

Individual impact vs. school impact. While reflecting on the values of effectiveness in education, I am reminded of a conversation with a public school administrator, Ms. Accomack. Ms. Accomack shared that she finds that the individual teacher makes a bigger impact on student learning than the school itself. As Ms. Accomack suggested,

> What is it that one school may offer that perhaps our school can't offer? I've always had the argument that it doesn't come down to the school, it comes down to the teacher as far as who creates an impact for children.

As she claims, the relationship that the teacher has with students, along with effectiveness of the teacher, can have a larger influence on a student's learning than the school as a whole. As she suggests, the school could be falling down, but as long as the teacher is effective, that is all that should be important. Ms. Accomack constantly linked her answers back to the efficacy and

qualifications of teachers. She shares concerns how debilitating ineffective teachers can be on students and their individual success. In the next section, I discuss the importance of teacher efficacy and required certification in order to reduce inequities.

Administration and teacher efficacy. The inequities that are within the schools are certainly on the minds of most of my participants. Administrators have the power to move teachers around where there is a need within the building. At a building level, administrators need to look carefully at the faculty as a whole when selecting staff to teach classes. If teacher effectiveness is of greater importance for student learning, it is important to make these decisions with caution and clear rationale.

Concerns about certification and effectiveness of teachers. Public and private sectors follow different rules for teacher certification. In all public schools in Virginia, teachers must be state certified in order to teach. The same is not true in private schools, as private schools can hire uncertified teachers in the role of an educator. This parental choice may cause their children to be taught by adults who are not certified, or unqualified to teach. This effect can be monumental because uncertified teachers may not have the necessary skills to reach students who are struggling and need tailored interventions.

With that being said, some of my Democratic participants are concerned about the role of educators in charter schools. In Virginia, since the charter schools are directly connected to the local divisions and follow the same accountability measures as public-school divisions, all teachers will be certified. However, per Ms. Accomack, concerns still exist about the effectiveness of private school teachers and whether they are fulfilling the roles where they are the most efficient and effective. As Ms. Accomack explained,

Virginia's got a long way to get there because they've got to fix that part and making sure

the places are accredited and equivalent to public education.

Until the inequities in Virginia schools are completely eliminated, it is understandable to be

cognizant of the effectiveness of all of educators. In the adjoining section, I review the process

for efficiency at the state level.

Efficiency at the State Level

Members of Virginia's Department of Education sought efficiency regarding the process

of applying for a charter school. Ms. Hilltop and Mr. Salisbury shared that the process for

completing an application is tedious, but active members of the Charter School Committee are

available for guidance. It is at the applicants' discretion whether or not they would like to seek

guidance from the Charter School Committee members, but the opportunity is available. The

value of transparency is important to both the committee and applicant. The process for applying

for a charter school has been unclear in the past, so within the last three years, it has been

streamlined into a concise process. As shared by Mr. Salisbury,

You have to really look at the process. This last applicant, I think we informed them

where the application was in the process and give them some options, and then the

applicant chooses whether they want to more forward or just pull it back and do some

work on it.

In order to engage in transparency, the Charter School Committee is willing to walk the

applicant through the application process and criteria; this is in order to make sure everything is

complete prior to evaluating the application. Per Mr. Salisbury, the committee is not "out to

deny" applications, but it often seems that the applicants are missing important steps or did not

do their due diligence. Per Ms. Hilltop, one of the steps that have been overlooked is the

mandated partnership with a local school division. This key component is a nonnegotiable when establishing a charter school. By understanding the process for applying for a charter school, the applicants are better prepared and will not be "blindsided" by missing a step.

Open communication. Open communication is also valued among members of the Virginia Department of Education. As it is important to reach all stakeholders, members seek information and input from Virginia's teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, and students across the state. Mr. Salisbury shared the importance of understanding the issues across the state as each region looks a little different; it is critical to receive fair and balanced information, so that all regions are being heard and one side does not have an advantage over another. Through these open conversations, the inequities within Virginia schools are discussed.

As Mr. Salisbury explained, the regions with resources and a strong support system will thrive in any condition- but those with less support or resources will continue to struggle. Per Mr. Salisbury, it is important to pay careful attention to how policy actors are enforcing legislation that will contribute to more inequities, instead of fixing them. He stated,

> So, when it comes down to looking at how do we improve public education in the state of Virginia, we have to be very careful at what our policies are going to look like and how are they going to benefit our students.

Stakeholders need to continue to dialogue about how mandated laws can attribute to further inequities, such as cutting educational funding. These state laws can make it harder on students in certain regions. Mr. Salisbury reflected aloud on his concerns that legislation can negatively impact students of certain regions. He stated,

> To what extent does your own experience and your own values influence what you want to change. Why do you want to make a change? Who is this going to impact? And

when we think about students, we have to think about students in the state, not just in the

locality that the legislators represent. So, I think that sometimes what really frustrates me

is that we are looking at legislation that is really going to be helping certain kids, but

those same kids are not going to the same in another locality. I think there's a lot of work

to be done in that area.

In the following section, I explain the importance of efficiency with educational spending.

Efficiency of spending tax dollars. Throughout my interviews, I frequently heard

concerns of whether it was a good idea to invest more money into the public-school sector, or

whether it would be better to support private enterprises or the charter models. The persuasion

from both sides of the aisle were littered with statistics and research. The arguments for funding

were solid and centered around efficiency in education. Naturally, the legislators want to see a

return on these investments in Virginia's educational system. Educational policy has mandated

higher levels of accountability for schools due to the large level of investments placed in schools.

As a proponent of the public educational system, Mr. Ayres shared that the focus needs to be on

the traditional setting and that they are best suited to provide a quality education for children,

with the proper resources and staff. Public schools need investments to support students'

social/emotional systems, class sizes, and additional teachers and counselors. Similar to Mr.

Ayres reasoning, Mr. Abernathy shared,

> I think you're going to see a big push to reinvest in public education with safety,
>
> infrastructure, social/emotional learning and counselors, support staff, etc. I don't think
>
> that Virginia is going to be immune to the difficulties that we're seeing across the
>
> country. We need to continue to invest in our schools and our educators.

Mr. Ayres also provided data that supports that the decrease in public education funding has had a direct correlation of the increase in homeschooling students. Per Mr. Ayres, school leaders need to focus on training teachers and providing the proper resources for students. If schools have the resources that they need to educate students, then students will succeed. The money provided for salaries, resources, and professional development is a shared responsibility between the state and local division. Mr. Abernathy, Mr. Ayres, and Ms. Accomack stood committed that continuing to invest in teacher salaries, resources for students, and professional development opportunities for teacher efficacy, that the students will glean from these investments. Democratic legislators feel that if the state of Virginia continues to invest in public schools and build teacher efficacy, there will be no need for school choice. They believe that this power can be controlled through wisely investing stakeholder's public tax dollars.

As most of my Democratic participants felt strongly about only investing in our public schools, Mr. Saxis starkly contrasted this view. He said that policy actors have other options rather than continue to throw more money in the public schools. Mr. Saxis believed that legislators are wasting money as nothing in changing. Per Mr. Saxis, an example of this wasted spending is in the struggling schools in Petersburg and Richmond, where students are failing decade after decade. Mr. Saxis asked how has the reinvestment in public schools helped these students? He suggested the that local school boards could open charter schools that will provide alternative options for these struggling students and families. Per Mr. Evans, Mr. Saxis, and Mr. Leemont the opportunity to provide choice is important for these families. As shared by Mr. Leemont,

> Well, that's good if you can make your system better in your area, but some school systems just aren't doing that, and they've tried, and they've not been successful. And

then we hear from parents who say, I want another option, or this isn't appropriate for me. And I think from my standpoint, I don't think that charters in areas that really would look at that, and really want that, would diminish the public-school system. I think it just provides another option and actually may help the public-school system because they may learn from how the charter school has provided some opportunities for kids and engage parents.

Financing. One discussion that I had with Mr. Leemont was about the Composite Index, which is the funding formula for schools. The Composite Index is a complex formula that decides the amount of money that Virginia pays along with the local divisions for the minimum level of education. When it comes to funding Virginia schools, the state splits the cost with the local school board 50/50. Virginia provides 50% and the local school divisions subsidize the other 50%. As explained by Mr. Evans, the funding is often misunderstood by many stakeholders. He stated,

> Virginia has to fund school systems to a minimum level of education, which is really not all that much considering that the local governments end up subsidizing the rest. In areas like Virginia Beach, Northern Virginia, Richmond, that local subsidy is rather significant. The local portion that the division has to pay does not follow the student if the child goes to another school. In this case, the division could save money.

In many states, local school systems can raise taxes in order to raise money for schools, however, this is not the case in Virginia. When it comes to funding, Virginia allots money based the average daily membership and the rest of the money is budgeted from the local school division's city government. Mr. Leemont explained,

Other states, while very different, in that a lot of states have the local system actually can raise taxes and then can make those determinations. That's not the case in Virginia and the local government. The school board has to go to their local government to get their budget and whatever. That's the difficulty in public education as well in that it is not just a state responsibility, it's a local government responsibility; we can set standard and parameters, but the local school boards and local school system have to implement those and they're also responsible for funding, about 50%.

In order to make ends meet, the local school boards often look for ways to save money. In some areas of the state, the amount that local school divisions have to pay to provide an education can be difficult. In many cases, school divisions are forced to trim budgets where the schools have to sacrifice personnel and resources.

During my conversation with Mr. Leemont, I expressed my concerns about the economically struggling schools and the hardship of maintaining the expenses. My concerns did not fall on deaf ears. While Mr. Leemont agreed that the funding formulas need to be updated, doing so could lead to other problems, such as deciding how to distribute money between rural and urban areas. He elaborated by saying,

It becomes a rural versus urban issue and I represent rural areas, we would probably be losers if we readjusted the funding formulas. What we tried to do was provide additional funding for urban areas based on certain additional requirements or needs that they have and get additional dollars, but even that is not something that has been easy.

This could potentially lead to adversities as one area would receive less money than the other. The geography between rural and urban is the only difference as both areas have their economic concerns. These schools have fewer teachers and resources, but also have less to put toward

infrastructure. In the next section, I share ways that school divisions can receive additional funding from policy actors.

Streamline high salaried personnel. Mr. Leemont suggested another way for schools to receive additional state funding. As he explained, the state of Virginia would consider providing more money to schools if local school divisions reduced the number of high-salaried administrative roles. Mr. Leemont shared that this is a major concern at the state level and that this earmarked money could be directed toward teachers or other support positions. He justified his response by saying,

> When you look at bureaucracies, school education bureaucracies have grown tremendously and that takes away from the main function of education, that is instruction in the classroom. A lot of us would also like to see school boards get serious about looking at streamlining some of their administrative positions, redirecting those dollars back into the classroom.

By streamlining administrative positions and reallocating this money, the students benefit from additional teachers or other necessary items. Mr. Leemont's comment reflects a strong commitment to Virginia's students and he is seeking out options to alleviate financial burdens. In the final section, I conclude with how efficient spending of tax dollars impacts the funding of charter schools.

Funding charters. Based on my data, one of the issues related to the trajectory of school choice is the way that charter schools are funded. Based on the Constitution of Virginia, charter schools have to be created and budgeted within the local school divisions. Several of my Democratic interviewees stated that the financial restraints that come with charter schools contribute to the concern that surrounds them. When I asked Mr. Leemont if charters could be

funded differently (not out of the same fund as public schools), he said that it was possible and had been discussed previously. While this suggestion sounds like an easy fix, it is not. With the shared responsibility for funding schools, anything that the state of Virginia does, the local division has to match. So, this would lead to pre-established charters receiving additional money from the local school divisions. As Mr. Leemont explained,

> But then, you've got the issue where school boards will say, well we don't wanna do that because we're gonna get the additional dollars, but we've gotta put more money up too. And see, that's where it goes back to that kind of 50-50 funding. Whatever the state does, the locality has to come up with half of it.

While charters receive some money from the state and local school division, they are still responsible for other costs that come out of their own operating budget. One of my Democratic participants, Ms. Pocomoke, is an administrator with a Virginia charter school. When it comes to receiving money from the state and local divisions, she said that it is "quite complex." They have to pay out of their operating fund for different types of school services, such as Special Education, plus she is responsible for services like snow removal, transportation, and landscaping.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

In Chapter Four, I presented the reader an overview of the three types of power and their effects on policy. The powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion influence how stakeholders and policy actors view and interpret school choice. In addition, I shared how political culture and execution of state power, i.e. the Virginia "mold" of school choice has been implemented in schools, via *Profile of a Graduate*, Standards of Accreditation, and *Virtual*

Virginia. Finally, I discussed how stakeholders perceive differently the values of choice, equity, and efficiency and the impact on society.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In Chapter Four, I presented how political culture and values impact the perception of school choice, and how the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion effect legislation. The primary purpose of chapter five is to discuss how the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion effect stakeholders and their views of school choice; ultimately, how the three powers impact policy. These data were collected through interviews of 14 stakeholders of both Democratic and Republican backgrounds. In this chapter, I discuss the major connections between my findings categories and their significance by discussing how and in what ways political culture and values influence the perception of school choice, and how the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion impact policy. Finally, I close the study by presenting specific conclusions from the study and implications for research and practice.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, I share how legislators utilize various forms of power to achieve their objective. Next, I will showcase how values can influence power and policy. To begin, I revisit the three dimensions of power as discussed by Fowler (2013). The three dimensions of power can be both explicit and implicit. The first dimension of power is directly observable and influences decision-making. The effects from the first dimension of power could be experienced through the use of force, economic dominance, authority, or persuasion (Fowler, 2013).

The second face of power is the mobilization of bias, which could prevent the implementation of policy (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). In contrast to the first face of power which is explicit, the second dimension of power is implicit (Fowler, 2013). The second face of power can be enforced without knowing, as it is executed in a vague manner (Fowler, 2013;

Heywood, 2015). Some common methods for applying the second face of power are customs, norms, procedures, and traditions (Fowler, 2013).

The third dimension of power is manipulation (Heywood, 2015; Fowler, 2013). Power can be utilized to manipulate people, perceptions, and preferences (Heywood, 2015). The mechanisms that can enforce the third face of power are communication practices, symbols, and mythologies (Fowler, 2013; Heywood, 2015). The ability to manipulate others can either elicit messages of being powerful or powerless (Fowler, 2013).

Execution of powers. Within my study, I recognized these faces of power through observations, actions, and dialogue. The first dimension of power was observed through the influence of decisions, or persuasion. As illustrated from my data, the power of persuasion was recognized through the day-to-day dialogue of politicians. It could be utilized in various ways, such as subcommittee discussion. These conversations may include bargaining, deal-making, and promises. In addition, many of my participants (on both sides of the aisle) shared how vocal that professional organizations, school boards, and constituents can be on the issue of school choice. In terms at the local school district level, the power of persuasion is enforced through the lack of charter schools. To clarify, any school district in the state of Virginia can open charter schools. The reason that there are only eight charter schools in the Commonwealth is because that the local school divisions hold the power to choose if they want to open charters and many divisions in Virginia do not want to open charter schools. They can persuade, or influence their community members, that the public school system is showing growth; therefore, the discussion for charter schools, or the option to open charter schools, is disregarded. For a topic as contentious and subjective as charters or school choice, the power of persuasion definitely influences the implementation, or the lack of implementation, at any level.

I connected the second dimension of power, which is generally associated with norms and procedures, with discursive power. As my data illustrated, stakeholders in my study used certain words in order to shape the policy discussion and to persuade other stakeholders. For example, jargon, such as "tax credit" has a negative effect on the cooperation and collaboration between political parties. It is evident that one expression is less offensive than the other, so the tactic is to use "tuition assistance grant" instead of "tax credit."

I associated discursive power with the second dimension of power because it is an implicit force of power. Politicians appear to utilize discursive power in order to shape policy. It is a norm to invoke this type of power in order to achieve an objective. In order to get people across the aisle on the same page, legislators need to utilize the same vernacular and participate in straight-talk. The dynamic of utilizing discursive power combined with propaganda, tactics, and rhetoric complicates objectives and hinders progress.

The third dimension of power that was observed in my data was through the power of perception. Stated simply, the power of perception varies as it is how someone views an issue. On the topic of school choice, legislators perceive the need for school choice differently. This often complicates policy and the best way to serve school divisions that struggle. Power of perception at the state level can also influence dialogue, actions, and voting, which can influence the outcome of legislation.

Influence of values. In terms of values, efficiency and equity were commonalities across my data. All of my participants desired to see a decrease in inequities and an increase in efficiency among Virginia schools. The tricky part was how to achieve this goal without negatively affecting school budgets. As legislators are elected by their constituents, they are observant of the political culture of their region and generally share those beliefs. As political

culture can vary across the state of Virginia, my data shows that there is an overwhelming desire to support students and increase efficiency in Virginia schools through the implementation of *Profile of a Graduate* and *Virtual Virginia*.

At the state and local level, efficiency was noted as being essential to the success of Virginia students. At the local level, the effective use of budgets and teacher efficacy were vital to the success of schools. The essential components to maintain effectiveness at the state level include proper budgeting and clear communication. In terms of equity, my participants felt that equity for all students was essential for the success of Virginia schools. Every student deserves an equitable opportunity in school; this is a nonnegotiable and is the future of Virginia students.

Influences on Policy
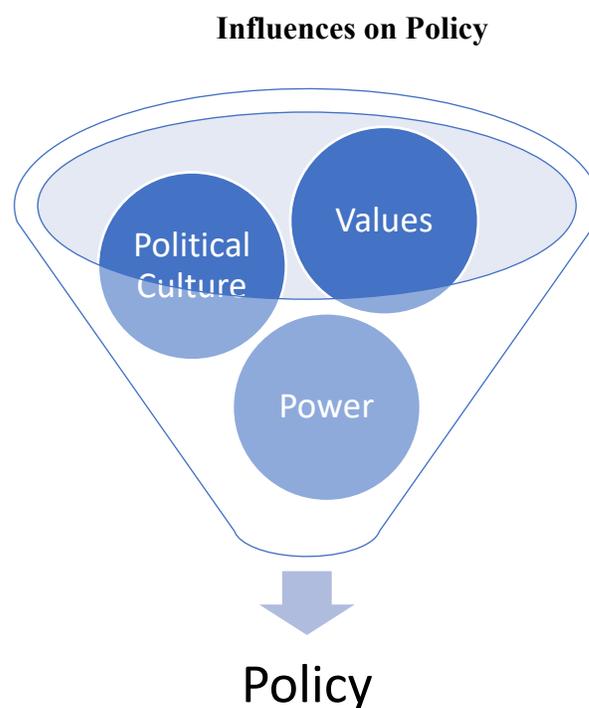
Figure 3. The model above displays how political culture, values, and power can influence and impact policy.

Interpretation of Findings

My intentions for this study were to discover why school choice legislation in Virginia has been stagnant for over the last 10 years. Throughout my 14 interviews, I heard first-hand accounts of how policy is implemented through power, and that the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion can be influenced by values and political culture. The views and values of society can sway political culture and these constituents elect policy actors to implement a shared vision.

Shoup and Studer (2010) shared that legislation is often created to correct an imbalance and these competing beliefs can affect a democratic society; therefore, they must be equalized in order to maintain homeostasis, or balance (Shoup & Studer, 2010; Fowler, 2013). In order to achieve balance, there must be a stability in terms of values and power. As evident in my study, it is easier said than done. Competing values can create complications or slow progress to a halt. Even within the same political party, there is dissension and conflict from time to time. For example, two of the "metavalues" from Shoup and Studer (2010), efficiency and choice, caused conflict in terms of creating policy. In the next paragraph, I will explain examples of how competing values can cause conflict and how these values can impact the progress of policy.

Efficiency is the safeguarding of restricted means while attempting to provide meaningful prospects (Shoup & Studer, 2010). In terms of my study, efficiency was best linked to funding and the best use resources to aid in student success. Policy actors did not always agree on ideas on how to increase efficiency in schools. For example, there were numerous conflicts across party lines, and within parties, on whether to continue to fund public schools or to invest money differently; for these reasons, legislators were in turmoil on how to best support Virginia

students. As one policy actor shared, public schools receive high-dollar investments from the state and politicians are looking for strong and steady returns.

In addition, the value of choice recognizes freedoms and individual rights for all participants (Shoup & Studer, 2010). The perception of choice for many of my participants was seen differently. Shoup and Studer (2010) stated that "choice accommodates the ranges of student interests, motivations, aptitude, and ability" (p. 77). Based on my data, choice was offered through *Profile of a Graduate*, *Virtual Virginia*, and the new Standards of Accreditation. Through these updated programs from the Virginia Department of Education, students are currently offered more choice in public schools than ever before. For these reasons, many of my Democratic participants are pleased with Virginia's progress toward school choice. However, some Republican legislators continue to pursue more charter schools in Virginia in terms of offering parents the ability to choose their child's school. Furthermore, with the redesign of high schools, and through the use of *Profile of a Graduate*, the choice offered in high schools for career-inspired classes are limited in scope that the classes are based on the industry and workforce need of that specific community. With this knowledge of how the options in high school are chosen, the students are allowed a choice that is restricted in nature. As a result, legislative conversations centered around choice are still coated with complexity.

Conclusion

As I reflect on the data, I realize that all of my participants truly want to provide the best education for Virginia's students. The issue that I clearly see for policymakers is that they cannot agree on *what* is best for students. These meaningful, yet complicated, discussions revolve around issues that are prevalent in Virginia. Both parties recognized that equity for all students was necessary in order to fix deficits and catapult Virginia students to the top.

However, the path to the top is hindered by the differences of opinions between the political parties. The tug of war for power between Democrats and Republicans often leads to the inability to effectively communicate or collaborate on policy. It is important for policymakers to establish a balance among the most essential values; this way none are seriously compromised (Fowler, 2013). During times of value-laden conflict, it is crucial to keep in mind the shared vision that brought policymakers together and the desired result (Fowler, 2013; Shoup & Studer, 2010). Let this shared vision be a compass for guiding power with values and not against them (Covey, 1991, Fullan, 2007).

Implications for Research

Two considerations for future research emerged as a result of this study. First, despite that the values of efficiency and choice were observed in the influence of educational policy, the results of this study indicate that more research is necessary in order to identify how, and what ways, choice and efficiency can boost student success across the state of Virginia. This research could provide policymakers a basis for refining a current educational policy or creating a new policy that will best impact all Virginia students.

Second, I noted that many of the policy actors addressed inequities in Virginia schools, but there is no justification that additional funding will reverse inequities. Research will be required to support that allocating extra educational funds will decrease inequities in Virginia schools. It is believed that schools should be dispensed supplementary funding for resources-both human and capital. The research suggests that earmarking funds for the recruitment of high-quality teachers will combat inequities within schools. In addition to retaining teachers, the extra funding could provide routine professional development opportunities. Research in this

area can help identify that additional funds may reduce inequities, which offers legislators the grounds to increase educational funding that will benefit all Virginia students.

Implications for Practice

I combine my discussion of power and values with the impact on policy because the values among society members can influence opinions of legislators and the execution of power and implementation of policy. While political culture is only one variable in the conversation of values and power, I believe it is a significant factor in regard to the perception of constituents and policy actors. The views of many often persuade the opinions of the select few- meaning when a region elects a policy actor, they normally share the same visions. For these reasons, legislators feel the pressure to "save face" in front of their constituents and, per my data, are afraid of losing their seat for changing their minds. Policy actors could have a change of opinion on issues and fear retribution for voicing or voting differently. The political risk for taking a chance to help the students of Virginia should not be dictated by the fear of losing a political seat. A commitment to the students of Virginia should lead a vote of confidence, not fear.

Second, in terms of subcommittees and policy decisions, multiple participants shared that the selection of the subcommittee is delegated by the Chairman of Committee and may reflect seniority among legislators. Seniority, while admirable, may not lead to an individual that is the most knowledgeable in educational practices. As described by several participants, this can mean that a well-informed legislator, in terms of education, can be overlooked for subcommittee. I have had several participants who shared concerns that there are policy actors actively making big decisions regarding schools, yet they are very much removed from present day concerns with education. This process for the selection of committee members contradicts the mentality that legislators effectively use their breadth of knowledge to make the best decisions for Virginians.

In order to have effective conversations about educational policy, this process should be refined in order to select policy actors who possess prior knowledge, or even someone who has been "in the trenches" as an educator.

Third, the high number of legislative bills that are up for discussion during sessions is concerning. With a large number of bills and a short amount of time to review them before they are "passed or killed," there is no way to due diligence for an effective discussion. As explained during my study, with roughly 10 minutes to converse, it is not possible to have comprehensive conversations; the real-world consequences that comes from the lack of dialogue with either the passing or rejecting of a bill affects Virginians. The number of bills during a session should be capped in order to provide an opportunity for meaningful discourse before legislators make a decision.

Lastly, as the state has relinquished the power to open charter schools solely to the local divisions, I would suggest a thorough review of this process. There are several divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia that are persistently struggling; the state of Virginia could require them to make changes pertaining to their educational practices. A charter school could be a solution for this change. Competition breeds excellence at times and this requirement from the state could help produce the necessary changes that are needed in these areas. Furthermore, at the local level, I would recommend reviewing how charter schools can potentially produce effective changes in students' learning. As inequities are a concern across the state, I would suggest that these conversations be held amongst the school board and with community members. Charters in Virginia are monitored by the local school boards, so any charter school opened will be upheld to the highest standard and be accountable to the local school board.

Summary

My study is a reflection of how political culture and values can impact the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion, which ultimately can affect policy implementation. Throughout this study, the powers of perception, discourse, and persuasion were discussed as policymakers shared their views and accounts of how power influences policy. In addition, my study examined how the values of members within society can influence the political culture of a region. Together, values and political culture can change not only the perception of people within society, but influence legislators, which impacts the power to sway policy. My study showcased that people from different sides of the aisle ultimately come to the same conclusions that the students of Virginia deserve an education that is excellent and equitable.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

<u>PROJECT TITLE:</u> Political Culture and Policy: The Impact of Culture and Values on School Choice Legislation

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES.

<u>RESEARCHERS</u>
Jay P. Scribner, Ph.D., Department of Educational Leadership, Old Dominion University
Heather L. Neal, Graduate Student, Old Dominion University

<u>DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY</u>
Several studies have been conducted looking into the subject of values and culture and its impact on political culture. None of them have explained the how culture and values are linked to political culture and policy implementation.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of how, and what ways, that political culture influences how state-level stakeholders interpret and implement state-level school choice related policy.   If you say YES, then your participation will include an interview, and a possible follow-up interview. Each interview would last approximately 45-60 minutes. Approximately 10 state-level policy actors will be participating in this study.

<u>EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA</u>
There are no exclusionary criteria for this study.

<u>RISKS AND BENEFITS</u>
RISKS: There are no unforeseeable risks with this study.   And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: There are no monetary benefits for this study. The main benefit to you for participating in this study is the ability to provide insight and join the educational conversations regarding political culture, values, and educational policy legislation, specifically school choice legislation.

<u>COSTS AND PAYMENTS</u>
The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. Yet they recognize that your participation may pose additional time requirements. All appointments, whether in person or via phone, will be pre-arranged. The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

<u>NEW INFORMATION</u>

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researchers will take "reasonable" steps to keep private information, such as questionnaires, confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from the information, destroy tapes, store information in a locked filing cabinet prior to its processing. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Jay Scribner at 757-683-5163, or Dr. Jill Stefaniak, Chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University, at jstefani@odu.edu, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. If you have any questions pertaining to the study, you may call:

Dr. Jay Scribner, Ph.D., Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations, 757-683-5163
Heather Neal, 757-535-6968

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should contact Dr. Jill Stefaniak, Chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University, at jstefani@odu.edu.This study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Participant's Printed Name & Signature	Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	Date

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

March 4, 2018

The Honorable _____
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear _____,

      I am a graduate student at Old Dominion University in the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership. This spring I will begin collecting data for my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to study how policymakers and policy stakeholders create and shape state-level policy, particularly school choice legislation in Virginia. My study presents minimal risk for participation and was deemed exempt based on Federal law 45 CFR 46.101(b) from Old Dominion University's Human Subjects Review Committee.

      I wanted to apprise you of my desire to interview members of Virginia's Board of Education and General Assembly, in addition to other individuals familiar with Virginia's legislature. I will be contacting you again by email to set up interviews and hope that you are available to participate. I look forward to learning more about Virginia's legislative process and the unique insights you have to offer this study.

Sincerely,

Heather Neal

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Political Culture and Policy: The Impact of Culture and Values on School Choice Legislation

1) How long have you served on the House Education Committee?
2) When it comes to policy-making, especially school choice and other potentially contentious issues, what do you believe makes this committee the most effective? What are the challenges?
3) How has school choice policy changed in Virginia over the last 10 years? What factors influenced these changes in school choice policy?
4) What is the trajectory for school choice/charter schools in Virginia for the next five years?
5) What groups or individuals, if any, are presently the most influential in determining or directing educational policy, specifically school choice policy, for Virginia's public schools?
6) How do variances in culture and values influence legislation, specifically school choice policy?
7) With school choice legislation, how are changes proposed? How do you decide what to include in the law and what to discard? (How do you push back on things that you don't like and promote/push through the items that you do?)
8) If additional questions arise, would it be okay to follow up with you as needed?
9) Can you share a name of someone else who may want to participate in my study?

VITA

Educational Foundations & Leadership
Darden College of Education
Old Dominion University
120 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529

Heather Leigh Neal is an instructional coach in southeast Virginia and Doctoral candidate

at Old Dominion University. Her research interests include educational policy, social justice

practices, servant leadership, political culture, power, and values.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Leadership, May 2019
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA
Dissertation Focus: Political Culture and Policy: Impact of Power and Values on School Choice
Legislation

Educational Specialist, Curriculum, Instruction, Management, and Administration, May 2013
Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, FL
Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education
Certification: Elementary Education, K-6

University of Toledo, Toledo, OH
Certification: Ohio Reading Endorsement, K-12

Master of Science, Brain Research, December 2009
Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, FL
Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education
Certification: Elementary Education, K-6

Bachelor of Arts, Interdisciplinary Studies, April 2007
Western Governors University, Salt Lake City, UT
Teacher Certification: PK-8