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## A Delayed Birth of Freedom? Public School Graduates' Perceptions of School Choice Viewed through the Pragmatic Lenses of the American Ideal

Donald B. Porter

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## A DELAYED BIRTH OF FREEDOM?

Public School Graduates' Perceptions of School Choice  
Viewed Through the Pragmatic Lenses of the American Ideal

by

DONALD B. PORTER

(Under the Direction of Julie Garlen Maudlin)

### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to identify public school graduates' perceptions regarding school choice options and their preparedness for success after high school. This is accomplished by presenting a historical and contextual overview of education as it specifically relates to low socioeconomic and minority populations. It analyzes governmental controls that may serve to restrict access to a quality education. This study seeks to promote equity through education as viewed through a social justice perspective. While governmental mandates, societal changes, and legal remedies have evolved and shaped America's education history, it has yet to fully empower parents and guardians to freely choose their children's K-12 public education. Research shows this condition can lead to isolation, oppression, and various forms of inequity for poorer parents and their children.

This study triangulates qualitative and quantitative data of student perceptions from a mini-focus group of five young adults from southeastern public schools to gauge their observations six years removed from their high school graduations and filtered through their life experiences in post-secondary education and the workplace. Moreover, students detail how school choice options benefited them and how they believe the widespread availability of school choices may significantly

improve public school outputs and achievement opportunities for future generations of all populations of people.

The four anticipated themes in this research are: future educational aspirations and goals; perceptions of support by the school; student learning and peer interaction; and citizenship and democratic principles. The findings of this study document that the five graduates participating in this study favorably reflect on their public high school experiences; yet they decry oppressive school attendance zone policies as having negative impacts on low socioeconomic, minority students to include their prospects for economic and/or social mobility later in life. The graduates favor implementing school choice options because they believe it will improve K-12 education in America for all students from all economic and ethnic backgrounds- including their own.

**INDEX WORDS:** School Choice, Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research, Survey, Focus Group, Dissertation, Desegregation, Education Equity, Student Perceptions, Magnet Schools, Comprehensive High Schools, Low Socioeconomic Students, Social Justice, No Child Left Behind, NCLB, Vouchers, African American Students, Georgia Southern University

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2011

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my three children: Nicklaus Adrian Porter, Hogan Malone Porter, and Sarazen Elizabeth Porter. Their zest for life serves as a rejuvenating source of inspiration for me!

As a father, I am proud to watch each of my darling “critters” outrageously surpass my grandest expectations every day. My ongoing promise to each is to help prepare them for a life full of love, laughter, and discovery. I will also continue to encourage them to embrace and learn from the inevitable occasions of loss, pain, and disappointment for they are teachable moments that serve to develop them into more well-rounded and empathetic citizens.

To Nick, Hogan, and Sarazen: I love you more than you'll ever know :^)

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The phrase, “a delayed birth of freedom” in this dissertation’s title comes from President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. His spirit keenly served as an inspiration throughout this research, and his messages embrace hope for further impartiality as it relates to educational opportunities for children from all walks of life.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

"Upon the subject of education, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject in which we as a people may be engaged." Abraham Lincoln

School choice is a type of reform offered as an option designed to equalize educational opportunities for all children. Dewey (1901) believed that education reform ultimately fails because although people may be drawn toward new possibilities in education, eventually that enthusiasm wanes at the initial signs of poor performance whether they are genuine or perceived. So what began as an idea of reform that swelled into a groundswell of support, momentum, and implementation, quickly loses its luster at the first signs of academic trouble causing a hasty retreat to the status quo.

This study explores education as an equalizer between the racial and economic divisions inherent in a nation of different peoples from the world over. This research shows whether or not school choice options are a natural extension toward equity for low-socioeconomic, minority parents, and students. The best educational settings should not be reserved for an enlightened few. Dr. King famously said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Perhaps this point of view holds the key to helping all citizens understand the importance of banding together to make public education a more accommodating place for peoples of all races, classes, and religions in America.

James Whitson (1988) argues there needs to be an effort to break from the status quo and work toward a more free society where students from all socioeconomic

and minority backgrounds can learn through more than one discourse to make for a better rounded citizen. Watkins (2005) found that African Americans were an oppressed people racially, socially, economically, and politically in America through the years; moreover, this subjugation is why some vestiges of this oppression remain for many causing undeniable distrust between the races. He contends that America would be well-served to envision solutions to the types of ethnic problems that have dogged generations of thoughtful citizens since our country was conceived. Clowes (2004) found that the average 17-year-old African American student reads on about the same level as the average 13-year-old White student and on the 2003 Urban NAEP math test only seven percent of American eighth graders scored proficient or above on the reading skills. In Cleveland the figure is 5%, Chicago, 4%, and in the District of Columbia only 3% of African Americans in the eighth grade scored proficient or better. The disparity is larger than simply an influx of money. Since 1965, the federal government has directed over \$120 billion through Title 1 funding with little evidence that it has shown improvements in the academic areas of reading, mathematics, and science among low-socioeconomic students (Walberg, 1997).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study presents a historical and contextual overview of education as it specifically relates to low socioeconomic and minority populations and investigates governmental controls that may serve to restrict access to a quality education. This effort examines historical injustices and seeks solutions in ways that promote social justice through education. While governmental mandates, societal changes, and legal

remedies have evolved and shaped America's public education history, it has yet to fully empower parents and guardians to choose freely their children's K-12 public education.

This study examines the impact and outcomes of school choice options on the low-socioeconomic, minority student populations as well as gauges the perceptions of students in a public school system in the southeastern United States. More important, this study advances the debate of school choice by interviewing students who have recently graduated from public schools and are now, as adults, reflecting on their experiences as they are beginning to consider the best educational settings for their own children. Their public school experiences have shaped their attitudes. This study gauges these attitudes regarding their preparedness for success in today's society, 66 years following the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* declared separate but equals schools inherently unconstitutional in addition to their opinions regarding how and where they want their own children educated. Last, this study determines whether these students believe they or the government are the best ones to make those decisions regarding public education.

### **Background of the Problem**

This study examines the current state of public education as it relates to low socioeconomic, minority populations of students in addition to the educational options that may be made available to them through school choice alternatives. Specifically how have historical, political, ideological, religious, parental, socioeconomic, and ethnic convergences produced the public schools in America today and do they best make good use of available resources to maximize student achievement? This as local school



systems have wide latitude in creating and mandating attendance zones to families within a district-defined area, this study explores the changing landscape of public education toward greater educational opportunities for parents and students regardless of mitigating factors such as poverty, and largely by extension, race.

This study focuses on one southeastern public school system with a high minority, low-socioeconomic urban population. This school district remains under the protections of a 39-year-old federal desegregation order. Further it compares perceptions of high school juniors from 2004 to their views six years removed after graduation. Specifically, what they want from their public schools in the way of options relating to curriculum, student achievement, expectations, and opportunities today as each contemplates sending their children to school someday. This research provides an overview of varying school choice options as it seeks to determine if public school graduates believe that school choice models may provide desired opportunities for low-socioeconomic, minority students as compared to the current educational model.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Current educational models allow local school systems the power to set attendance zones as they deem appropriate. Although children are guaranteed access to a free and appropriate public education in America, local school systems determine where that education is to take place. These arbitrary assignments are usually controlled by a home address. This means that affluent neighborhood children attend affluent neighborhood schools while low-socioeconomic children attend low-socioeconomic schools populated by their peers. This research is not suggesting that

children living in poorer communities are inherently receiving an inferior education that their more affluent counterparts; however, this research analyzes student perceptions of these issues and seek to determine whether school choice options are desired or needed as a way of improving educational opportunities for children of all economic backgrounds.

### **Significance of This Study**

Gant (2005) found that low and moderate income parents simply do not ordinarily possess the financial means to have access to these better schools. Instead low and moderate income parents are held at the mercy of the school system's monopoly through designated attendance zones and respectively assigned schools. Poorer parents have virtually no viable choices in their children's education (Gant, 2005). Public school attendance zones may be facilitating economic discrimination as former students judge their high school experiences and describe how they believe current policies can be improved for future generations of students in an effort to provide viable options to improve the disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

This study examines qualitative and quantitative research to see if school choice options serve to improve educational options for low-income, minority populations. This research includes a student survey, a graduate survey, and a focus group. Data collected from these quantitative and qualitative research methods is triangulated and analyzed. Students reflect on their school experiences and their shared views on the opportunities they encountered and the possibilities of implementing expanded school choice options several years following their graduation.

This study considers and analyzes research that contends school choice options serve to lessen the effectiveness of public schools as well as explore if school choice models are capable of providing equitable educational choices for a large majority of underserved, low-socioeconomic and minority students. Utilizing pre- and post-analysis of graduates from three southeastern public schools in a district under a federal desegregation order, this research shows how high school juniors in 2004 judged their schooling experiences at that time. The areas considered are school staff assistance and support, self-reported preparedness for post-graduation work or school, their overall perceptions regarding interacting with those from a different background than themselves. In the six years since their graduation, this study reexamines these areas to see if their opinions have changed with their life experiences since entering adulthood. Further, this study explores how the availability of school choice options may influence their views as it relates to what they perceive as better educational opportunities for public school children today, especially for low income, minority populations.

This is significant because as Kozol (2006) found, poor, minority students populate most inner-city schools and the schools are failing academically and socially. Gant (2005) shows a direct relationship exists between students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds who were zoned and attended high poverty schools. They demonstrated greatly limited academic success. This is relevant because socioeconomics are often pointed out to explain-and sometimes justify- the low academic performance and adverse social behavior of these children. Gant (2005) also found that the more and better education a person has, the more abundant their options

are. This includes the theory that the caliber of the education is directly dependent on the purchasing power of the buyer; therefore, the quality education can be either purchased through higher mortgages and property taxes in zones with high-performing public schools, or it can be purchased by paying tuition to high-performing private schools.

### **Research Questions and Inquiries**

Guiding this research are the two primary research questions:

1. How do public school student perceive school choice options?
2. How do graduates describe their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences?

This research considers the resulting opportunities born through desegregation implementation as a result of a variety of school choice options set to provide challenging curricula as well as stem the migration of White students from one southeastern public school system to surrounding counties or private schools. Selected high school graduates view their preparation from their high schools in the areas of setting educational/career goals, perceptions of support by their school's staff, student learning opportunities and experiences, peer interactions, and citizenship and democratic principles. Each will consider if these areas of preparation were sufficient in order to succeed in their adult lives in the six years following his or her graduation. More purposely, do these graduates believe school choice options could improve opportunities for low-socioeconomic, minority children?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study presents a historical and contextual overview of education as it specifically relates to low socioeconomic and minority populations and challenge governmental controls that may serve to restrict access to a quality education. This effort examines documented injustices and seeks solutions in ways that promote social justice through education. While governmental mandates, societal changes, and legal remedies have evolved and shaped America's public education history, it has yet to fully empower parents and guardians to choose their children's K-12 public education.

These structures are oppressive to poorer families because they are financially limited in: a) where they can afford to live, and b) deciding whether private school options are viable. The challenge is to design a study that illustrates the historical perspectives, current and evolving educational movements, and encourages other voices to contribute ideas and solutions in the construction of a public education system that provides social justice for all students without regard to their demographic or socioeconomic statuses. From a social justice perspective, it is paramount that all children are provided access to a high quality education. This evolution of accessibility has seen public schools go from segregated, separate but equal, desegregated, and in many cases segregated again.

The evolving nature of public education seems to be a concerted attempt for justice, fairness, and equalizing opportunities; however, the solutions are a process of dialogues, policies, and mandates that continually change the application of public education. Utilizing a social justice perspective, this research examines where public education has been, analyze also where it is currently, and chart a course to where

graduates want it to go to achieve equity of access for all children. While the solutions for social justice equity must continually adjust as additional forms of oppression are identified, it is an ongoing process. This study continues the discourse by not only illustrating forms of oppression but also encouraging input from other stakeholders regarding their viewpoints of the public education they received and their expectations of public education for their children. This is the manner by which any “(D)elayed Birth of Freedom” from oppressive public school policies can be eradicated in order to provide educational options that parents covet for their children and should be reasonably and equitably offered.

### **Explanation of School Choice Terms**

There are many forms and variations of school choice. For clarity, the following types of school choice options and terms are introduced and explained below in an effort to have them available for reference. Please note that this list is not intended to detail every available option and term associated with school choice. Instead these terms are provided as an overview resource of common terms for research orientation.

- School choice (open enrollment) options: a way of providing students with multiple options to attend good schools, and potentially, to mitigate the effects of residential segregation within the educational process. The role of geography is often not considered when analyzing the effectiveness of school choice policies (Theobald, 2005, p. 92).
- Intradistrict school choice: Allows parents to select among schools within their home districts; (Cookson, 1994).

- Interdistrict school choice: Allows parents to select from schools not only in their home districts but also schools across district lines; (Cookson, 1994).
- Controlled school choice: Requires families to choose a school within a community but choices can be restricted so as to ensure the racial, gender, and socioeconomic balance of each school; (Cookson, 1994).
- Magnet schools: Public schools that offer specialized programs, often deliberately designed and located so as to attract students to otherwise unpopular areas or schools; (Cookson, 1994).
- Charter schools: Publicly sponsored schools substantially free of direct administrative control by the government but are held accountable for achieving certain levels of student performance; (Cookson, 1994).
- Voucher plans: Federal funds that enable public school students to attend schools of their choice- public or private (Cookson, 1994).

### **Summary**

The landmark decision *Brown I* (1954) ended the separate but equal public schools, thus allowing African American children the opportunity to pursue the same quality schools enjoyed by his or her White counterparts. Today a large percentage of minority populations are still discriminated against under the guise of school zones that allow governments to restrict educational opportunities by dictating where students are allowed to attend schools (Kozol, 2006). Instead of skin color, the divisions are drawn based largely on the economics of where a parent or guardian can afford to live. Kozol (2006) found that “racial isolation and the concentrated poverty of children in a public

school go hand in hand... A segregated inner-city school is 'almost six times as likely' to be a school of concentrated poverty as is a school that has an overwhelmingly White population" (p. 20). With limited economic resources, are these segregated populations unfairly being subjected to restrictive and substandard educational options under the current national, state, and local public school policies?

This research looks at these issues and surveys school students who attended desegregated public schools to consider and understand their beliefs first as students and later with a more worldly perspective as young adults regarding existing and possible impact that school choice options might have on low-socioeconomic, minority students. This research documents these students' attitudes regarding their individual preparation and life skills development through his or her schooling experiences that may serve to further the discussion of improving educational opportunities through thoughtful reflection and meaningful public policy for this- and future- generations of learners from every walk of life. Education still may be, as Abraham Lincoln stated more than 150 years ago, the most important subject in which a people may be engaged.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The focus group students were surveyed and interviewed regarding their feelings about school choice and their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences were schooled in a public system under a federal desegregation order. This fact may serve as a significant variable bearing in mind that desegregation sought to equalize opportunities for minority populations. With this as a guide, this study explores the background and evolution of minority education in America and more specifically, how well desegregation fulfilled the goals it set out to achieve as told by students in 2004 and graduates in 2011.

#### **Through the years: historical background of minority education in America**

In the 1820s, abolitionist David Walker, a free African American man and writer, outlined four principal factors responsible for the inferior situation of African Americans: 1) slavery; 2) the use of religion to justify slavery and prejudice; 3) the African colonization movement designed to send free African Americans back to Africa, and 4) the lack of educational opportunity. Spring (2005) cited the example that South Carolina had laws against educating slaves (p. 113). These reasons included a list of circumstances that could be taken, one at a time, and critically worked to break the oppressive nature of each. While not comprehensive enough to expunge the lingering vestiges of racial hatred and prejudice, it seemed to have served as a useful roadmap

to helping African Americans elevate their people to a more equal status in society (Spring, 2005).

The Supreme Court, through *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), allowed states to establish racial segregation only if the accommodations and public facilities were equal; yet one of the country's most significant segregation cases- *Cumming v. School Board of Richmond County* (1899)- resulted in decades of legalized discrimination against African American students seeking a high school education. The foundations of the *Cumming* (1899) case began when the school board in Richmond County, Georgia, agreed in 1880 to establish the Georgia's first public African American high school. In 1897, the Board declared a financial hardship and voted to close Ware High School. African Americans rallied together and sued the Richmond County Board of Education to keep Ware High School open. The suit questioned why they had to pay taxes to support the two "White" high schools, when they no longer had a high school for their children. The plaintiffs claimed that the Richmond County School Board's action was not permissible citing both the 14th Amendment and the taxation clause (no taxation without representation) in the US Constitution. The Georgia Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Board. *Cummings* (1899) eventually was appealed to the US Supreme Court. The justices ultimately determined that the Supreme Court did not have any jurisdiction to interfere in the decision of the state court.

Under the circumstances disclosed, we cannot say that this action of the state court was, within the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment, a denial by the state to the plaintiffs and to those associated with them of the equal protection of the laws or of any privileges belonging to them as

citizens of the United States.... (T)he education of the people in schools maintained by state taxation is a matter belonging to the respective states, and any interference on the part of Federal authority with the management of such schools cannot be justified except in the case of a clear and unmistakable disregard of rights secured by the supreme law of the land (Cumming v. Board of Education of Richmond County, 1899).

Moreover, the Supreme Court narrowed its decision strictly on the legal merits being presented, which in effect allowed statutory segregation in public schools. In the end the Supreme Court declined to consider an Equal Protection charge against the school board because of the way the case was presented and the form of relief requested. As such they concluded:

If, in some appropriate proceeding instituted directly for that purpose, the plaintiffs had sought to compel the board of education, out of the funds in its hands or under its control, to establish and maintain a high school for colored children, and if it appeared that the board's refusal to maintain such a school was in fact an abuse of its discretion and in hostility to the colored population because of their race, different questions might have arisen in the state court. (Cumming v. Board of Education of Richmond County, 1899)

Thus, Ware High School, the state's only public African American high school, closed. Richmond County would not have another public African American high school until 1937- a full 40 years following the closing of Ware High School (Cashin, 1985).

On the national level, W. E. B. Dubois, a contemporary of Booker T. Washington, is not only credited with helping found the NAACP but also working throughout his life to see that full educational opportunities were afforded to his people. He is not only the first African American man to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard; he also fought to have African Americans realize true and meaningful equality through intellectual training and professional skills (Kliebard, 2004). Throughout history, there are leaders who inspired peoples of all races by publicly expressing the injustices that hinder the advancement of America achieving her full potential. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led his nonviolent movement with the express purpose of exposing the injustices that hindered the advancement of not only African American America, but peoples of all ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds (Spring, 2005). The hatred that fueled the times was largely equalized by the religious teachings of this preacher born in Atlanta, Georgia, whose pacifistic leadership during the pivotal times of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s were paramount in laying the groundwork to the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

Foundations of division were laid years before as some of America's founding fathers had what some people today may consider some very radical ideas regarding African Americans and their participation in our country. Thomas Jefferson strongly believed that slavery should be abolished and that the African Americans should be completely removed from American society as soon as possible (Takaki, 1994). Frederick Douglas, the product of biracial ancestry, longed for "an integrated and interracial America, a society without racial borders." In his essay, "The Future of the Colored Race" he envisioned that African Americans would be "absorbed" and

“assimilated” into American society (Takaki, 1994, p. 126). The road to this assimilation was never going to be easy or without notable and brave pioneers. In 1850, Pati Delany and two other African American students were conditionally admitted into Harvard Medical School with the promise that he or she would emigrate and practice medicine in Africa upon graduation. Their inclusion predictably was met by Whites protesting and complaining that admitting African Americans would lower the reputation of the institution’s good name and lessen the value of the Ivy League degree (Takaki, 1994).

Jo Ann Williamson (2005) found that the eventual success of desegregation has not produced the desired results for the African American community. When analyzing the integration of the races, opportunities for advanced curricula, and the genesis of the acceptance and blending of ethnic and socioeconomic races, the conclusion must be that in an objective comparison of student achievement between the various ethnic groups there remains a marked difference with African Americans routinely behind their peers (Williamson, 2005). The African American Panthers sought to fill the perceived void in leadership among African Americans and set out to create schools that offered students an alternative to the ideologies of White racial supremacy and economic oppressions (Watkins, 2005). Some critics maintained that the curriculum and pedagogy of these schools perpetuated racism and other forms of social inequality. Even as America sought to assimilate African Americans into society (as Fredrick Douglas had hope for) others sought for the African American community to disassociate from other races and perpetuate racial borders that Douglas sought to dismantle (Watkins, 2005).

Marcus Garvey, whose allegiance to his proclaimed “race first” movement and his influence regarding the power of racial education and history within the African

American community, is quoted as saying he wanted the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), “to unite the African race through an educational program that focused on race pride and unity, economic development, and redemption of Africa” (Watkins, 2005, pp. 8-11). Garvey’s belief in supporting African American-owned businesses to stimulate the economic motor within their communities was visionary and a financially sound practice. This leadership style was dependent on educating people on the benefits of and perhaps more important, by raising individual consciousness within the African American population (Watkins, 2005). His simple conclusion was that people with money have many more choices than those who do not. In Garvey’s mind, why should not African Americans keep the money at “home” whenever possible? The obvious problem was that this mindset of Garvey’s “home” did nothing to foster open and trusting communications between the races; however, it does provide choices for those who share his vision (Watkins, 2005).

### **‘Sorting’ through Choice**

One theory, the social efficiency theory, aims to control a student’s predicted destiny based on scientific indicators such as IQ tests (Kliebard, 2004). This plan of “social utility” would capitalize on an individual’s strongest capabilities and thus reduce wastefulness and inefficiencies. This view grew out of a socially efficient curriculum that taught toward these predicted functions; however, the emphasis on the sorting of students based on testing drew many critics to this curriculum model (Kliebard, 2004). Choices being made in education may go a long way toward providing equitable distribution of knowledge and opportunity for these opportunities should be closely aligned with the quest of a person’s fullest potential which, by extension, is an

exploration for personal fidelity (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1990). Pragmatism is the practical search for meaning and truth in America through democratic traditions that promote experimentation, invention, and education: A democracy is all about choices (Menand, 1997). As Menand (1997) concludes, “today the nation’s democratic creed as well as its pragmatic tradition rely upon a consensus of beliefs about reality and the possibility of arriving at common goals” (p. 468). Because a part of each of us is pragmatic, we seek to do something about the concerns that arise through the different forms of critical inquiry and multiculturalism. It is undoubtedly not enough for a citizenry to see and acknowledge disenfranchisement based on race, gender, and class (Menand, 1997).

The concept of an evenhanded society whereas each citizen is heavily invested and believes in the possibility of a more equitable society through our public schools if improved curriculum and instructional techniques focused on social justice might be the impetus to ignite real reform that could change the world (Peterkin & Jackson, 1994). This vision of social justice seeks to support individuals being treated fairly, while consciously developing opportunities to participate in the distribution of resources and benefits of the larger society. These lessons can be shared through links with community projects and activities where reflection and action are important components of learning (Nieto, 2004).

Hershkoff & Cohen (1992) found that parental school choice plans lead to further separation of the races and possibly more unequal educational opportunities for poor and minority populations and conclude that subsidies for private school choice have served to reallocate money from public schools, thus creating a “dual system that has

had a devastating impact on the public school and the children left behind in them” (Hershkoff & Cohen, 1992, p. 3). This system, they contend, serves to sort and divide children along racial and class lines.

Ratteray (1992) found that the first independent African American schools were “created as a natural response to the revolutionary ideals of the new republic that became the United States” and operated openly in the northern cities of Philadelphia and New York and operated “subterfuge” in the slave states of Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina toward the end of the 1790s (p. 138). Primarily urban schools are a representation of ethnic power and identity among the minority groups who wanted to have access to quality education for their children (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987). During the late 1960s and through the 1970s there were many Southern states that funded “segregation academies” that only accepted White students as a way to avoid the desegregation of public schools (Hershkoff & Cohen, 1992). This research underscored its point that litigation is only able to achieve reform because true reform requires the engagement of a broad alliance of education stakeholders. Otherwise, some schools will continue to find ways to maintain a majority White population, thus maintaining discriminatory practices (Hershkoff & Cohen, 1992).

Regardless of race, educational environment and quality of programs were the most frequently mentioned reasons for selecting particular schools; however, cultural and religious affiliations were also cited as important (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987). According to Ratteray (1992), American reforms have been developed in an attempt to have all students become productive citizens in the global community; yet they often have not succeeded because they are designed and controlled by groups that serve



that group's own cultural, political, and economic interests. Greene (2000) concludes that possibly the most conspicuous finding from the review of school choice research and literature is the lack of data about how school choice harms students or society, especially given that vouchers cost about half as much as traditional public education and in the absence of harm, improved student achievement, parental satisfaction, and lower rates of discipline problems all combine to make school choice is an attractive educational option.

### **Home Sweet Home and the Shifting Color of Choice**

Where parents choose to live is in itself, a choice. Most American children attend a public school to which they are assigned based on where they live and as Henig and Sugarman (1999) stated, a world of no choice would be one where families were told where they had to live or where the federal government gathered up all of America's students and sent them off to boarding schools. Without these governmental interventions, more families could theoretically determine which public school their children can attend. Through choosing the school zone in which they live they concluded that upward of half of the families in America exercise 'choice' to some degree. In essence parents are making a 'choice' by not moving somewhere else; however, the reality is that families with limited financial means are largely dependent upon the public school system to provide the types of schools they desire for their children. Charter schools and school voucher proponents, by contrast, operate under the assumption that schools will form wherever there is demand and offer the types of programs that the parents desire (Henig & Sugarman, *The Nature and Extent of School*

Choice, 1999). Parents looking to buy a new home exercise school choice as they decide whether the public school district and attendance zones associated with a particular location matches their standards (Dougherty, et al., 2009). While test scores and racial makeup serve to explain home prices, Dougherty, et al. (2009) found that the influence of test scores declined precipitously as race became nearly seven times more influential over their decade-long period of study.

School choice has a changing color. “White flight” refers to a consistent, decreasing White student enrollment in poor-performing, inner-city public schools. Private school enrollments are also sensitive to academic achievement and the racial composition of the neighborhood (Zhang, 2008). Greene (2000) found that school choice contributes to elevated levels of racial integration and civic principles, which are common throughout several studies with suitable analytical designs. If public school choice becomes a reality, there is fear that there might be a massive “Black flight” away from public school toward other nonpublic options (Jones-Wilson, Arnez, & Asbury, 1992).

Desegregation in large urban school districts has shown to contribute to declines in White enrollment; moreover, African American enrollment figures increased due to a White migration to private school settings, which is an important force in generating changes in the racial composition of outlying central district neighborhoods (Baum-Snow & Lutz, 2008). Since desegregation, urban schools populated by loyal African Americans are “of poor quality, have inordinately high dropout rates, and consistently produce dismal academic results” (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1988, p. 184). For this reason, many parents choose independent schools that concentrate on academic fundamentals

and the ability to challenge a student academically- qualities not necessarily found in their neighborhood public schools (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1988). According to Jones-Wilson, Arnez, and Asbury (1992), African American parents cite a lack of discipline as a major rationale for not enrolling their children in public schools. They believe improved discipline would help overcome many of the schools' problems.

Ratteray & Shujaa (1988) found that parents choose independent schools because they want nurturing environments in which their children get exceptional learning opportunities by educators who have a firsthand appreciation of religious or cultural contexts of knowledge. More specifically, they say,

(E)ach of these criteria for a good education is precisely what African Americans are able to do best for each other, and it has been true throughout our long tradition of independent education... Parents are leading the way, and education policymakers should follow, for only then can African American children understand what they have to offer America and world (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1988, p. 197).

Peterkin & Jackson (1994) found that successes of certain urban school districts must be organized in a way that excellence and equity is delivered to all students. Their culture can be enhanced with the implementation of controlled school choice (choices within school district or intradistrict choice) education models. The Cambridge Controlled Choice School Desegregation Plan was an attempt by a public school district to voluntarily desegregate the schools using parental choices of schools as a core goal (Tan, 1990). The Cambridge plan expands the concept of attendance zones from a small area to the entire district. A parent is freely able to request any school, and the

child is assigned, on a first-come, first-served basis, to a school of choice provided there is space in that school and the assignment has a positive effect on the racial balance of the relevant grade in the school (Peterkin & Jackson, 1994). Tan (1990) concluded that the Cambridge program was successful in achieving voluntary desegregation, improved community relations, and a gradual overall increase in student achievement levels. The study did not declare that the intradistrict model was exclusively responsible for the gains. Tan (1990) showed that following the implementation of the Cambridge Public Schools Plan, the district realized significant improvements to include:

1. In 1978-79, 78% of Cambridge's school-age population was attending local public schools. By 1987, that figure was 89%;
2. In 1984-85, 54% of the public elementary students in Cambridge passed all three statewide mandated tests. By 1988, that figure had risen to 87%;
3. In 1989-90, 90% of Cambridge's public school parents received their first choice of school assignment; 95% of all parents received one of their top three choices (Tan, 1990).

Evidence exists that the school choice design features may minimize some of the inherent risks and impacts on racial and ethnic minorities. Levin (1999) explored whether choice serves to enhance opportunities for racial justice or aggravate the separatism that currently exists in America's public education. This study found that the proportion of minorities in a public school affects whether or not Whites choose to enroll in public school. She concluded that Whites will consistently choose schools with lower

percentages of minority students. Moreover, African American parents would choose schools that are more racially homogeneous, thus leading to greater racial and socioeconomic isolation.

Jones-Wilson, Arnez, & Asbury (1992) concluded that African American parents do not believe that public schools are most clearly committed to serving their children well. Regardless of socioeconomic standing, African American parents decisively point to education as the vehicle for upward mobility (Arnez & Jones-Wilson, 1988). It realistically cannot be conclusively determined that the implementation of school choice options will solve all that hampers schools; however, evidence suggests that it has served as an integral catalyst toward improved outcomes. As more research is conducted and the school choice component is better isolated its impact can more accurately be determined. McGroarty (2001) found that choice students have parent(s) and grandparent(s) who are interested and engaged in their child's education and work to find the right school for them. To be sure, there exist ardent supporters and opponents to school choice. McGroarty (1994) challenged the myth that private schools siphon off the best students from the public schools by providing evidence that rather than skimming off the best students they simply take those through self-selection, apply and are accepted.

As Gay and Kirkland (2003) found, the real power of culturally responsive teaching is as a conduit to greater political and social justice. Just as education is virtually essential for active and meaningful participation in a democratic society, minority populations must increasingly grow their influence and impact in this social order. This control is only going to transpire as more and more minorities are inspired by

educators who help them develop into the kind of people who not only desire to alter the balance of power but also possess the skills required to effect real change in the societal and political arenas. This multiculturalism that Gay (2003) appealed for is a clarion call for social justice for peoples of all races and backgrounds where she promotes the idea that the era of dominant race politics and oppressive pedagogy should be gone.

### **A 'critical race' toward 'social justice'**

Before this study measures how public school students perceive school choice options, it is necessary to consider related equity issues and philosophies. One such perspective, multiculturalism, represents an effort in schools to “acknowledge cultural diversity in the curriculum” (Pinar, 2004, p. 323) and is ideally designed for teachers to lead their students through instruction that shows how they can strive for and realize, social justice. Multicultural proponents emphasize: a) cultural understanding, b) cultural competence, and c) cultural emancipation (Pinar, 2004, p. 323). Multiculturalism is an essential component in social justice and political inquiry. As Nieto (2004) noted,

Although the connection of multicultural education with students' rights and responsibilities in a democracy is unmistakable, many young people do not learn about these responsibilities, the challenges of democracy, or the central role of citizens in ensuring and maintaining the privileges of democracy... A multicultural perspective presumes that classrooms should not simply allow discussions that focus on social justice, but, in fact

welcome them and even plan actively for such discussions to take place (pp. 355-356).

Perhaps awareness is a logical first step to achieving real justice for America's diverse ethnic populations. Gay (2003) delineates the core issue facing our schools and why multicultural education is important for students to understand how multicultural issues shape the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric of this country as well as how such issues fundamentally influence their lives. Gay (2003) also considered how the effects of teachers who are unconvinced of the worth of multicultural education may impact student achievement. Are they party to a bigger set of impediments to helping these children achieve their rightful place in society? Gay (2002) found there is no middle ground as it compared education with health care: treating obvious symptoms of a problem does nothing to eradicate or cure the underlying diseases. In education, merely highlighting achievement deficits in student groups does not lead to their proper solution (Gay, 2002). "Scores on standardized tests and grades students receive on classroom learning tasks do not explain why they are not performing at acceptable levels. These are symptoms, not the causes, of the problems" (Gay, 2002, p. 16).

### **The American Experience: From Segregation to Desegregation**

To understand the history of the evolution of today's governmentally and judicially implemented public schools, it is historically relevant to detail how each has sought to improve education for African Americans in America. The long and winding road from segregation to desegregation begins with *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), when

the Supreme Court upheld a Louisiana law requiring separate railroad facilities, on the grounds that if equality of accommodations existed African Americans had no recourse under the equal protection of the laws clause of the Fourteenth Amendment meaning that equality of treatment is accorded when the races are provided substantially equal facilities, even though these facilities are separate. In *Brown I* (1954), the Supreme Court unanimously reversed *Plessy*. The 1954 ruling held that even if educational opportunities for African Americans were equal to those for Whites, African Americans nevertheless deprived under the same clause of the same amendment. One year later, school systems were ordered to desegregate with “deliberate speed” in *Brown II* (1955). Several other cases challenged the “separate but equal” ruling. Some of those included a South Carolina case, *Briggs v. Elliott* (1942), a Virginia case, *Davis v. County School Board* (1952), and a Delaware case, *Gebhart v. Belton* (1952). In each of these cases, minors of the Negro race sought to obtain admission to the public schools of their community without regard to segregation of the races. In each of these court cases, African American students had been denied admission to schools attended by White students under laws requiring or permitting segregation according to race. This segregation was alleged to deprive the plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment.

### **Going ‘Green’**

As of 2011, many school systems remain under court-ordered desegregation and are still under the affirmative duty to take the necessary steps to eliminate racial discrimination “root and branch” (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*,



Virginia, 1968) that is used to determine whether a school district is in compliance by applying a standard known as “unitary status.” This term, unitary status, determines if and when a school district should be released from court ordered desegregation. Hence, the term “unitary,” and what is necessary to become unitary, have become important inquiries for such school systems. It has become an evolving term with the passage of time, changes in communities and as school districts have petitioned courts from release of court desegregation orders (Fletcher, 2004).

According to The Civil Rights Project (2002), four distinct areas of inquiry (future educational aspirations and goals, perceptions of support by the school, student learning and peer interaction, and citizenship and democratic principles) are well established as important goals of education, and build essential skills that students need to achieve academic and professional success, and to become responsible citizens. Since *Brown I* (1954) and *Brown II* (1955) more than 55 years ago, school desegregation cases have taken on an extended life of their own. To obtain unitary status, school systems have sometimes had to take extreme steps and implement, at times unfavorable remedies. What remains is that one of the fundamental foundations of our country is that no person will be discriminated against on the basis of race.

One of the first school systems to be brought before the Supreme Court for consideration of whether the school system was meeting the burden of *Brown II* (1955) was New Kent County in Virginia. In this case, *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia*, (1968), the Court had to decide whether a “freedom-of-choice” plan implemented, which allowed students to choose which of the two schools in the

county they wished to attend, met the adequate compliance standard set forth in Brown II. The Court found it did not.

With desegregation, the American judicial system has routinely applied these so-called “Green” factors (Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia, 1968) that represents six federally recognized areas of equalization. Those areas are Student Assignment, Faculty, Staff, Transportation, Extracurricular Activities, and Facilities. Each of these areas must be sufficiently achieved before the order can be lifted, thus securing what is commonly deemed “unitary status” meaning the school system can be run without the judicial requirements of monitoring, implementation, and oversight (Fletcher, 2004). However, unitary status is a complex issue, which must be analyzed according to the Green factors, although other factors may be considered, e.g., quality of education, the good faith compliance of the school system and whether substantial compliance has been achieved to rid the system of all of the vestiges of de jure segregation. All of this must be achieved considering changing demographics and educational theories. As school systems attain unitary status, one of the basic foundations of our country, our belief against racial discrimination, is once again reaffirmed (Fletcher, 2004).

Thus the framework was laid upon which school systems could rely on achieving unitary status. According to Fletcher (2004), student assignment is probably the most complex and difficult factor to prove. Although this is the factor that brought the issue of desegregation before the court initially, school systems will inevitably encounter circumstances that affect student assignment not within its control. However, the Court has recognized this fact and will not hold a school system accountable for

circumstances that cause segregation that legitimately are beyond the school system's control. The percentage of majority and minority students at each school will be thoroughly reviewed.

In reviewing whether the student assignment in fact has reached unitary status, the court will focus on whether of the vestiges of past discrimination have been completely eliminated (*Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 1971). To this end, the Court began weighing heavily whether or not the remedies implemented by the school system have indeed been effective. *Swann* set forth the equitable remedies available to the courts that are often viewed as the "nuts and bolts" of a case. One such remedy *Swann* approved was the use of pairing and grouping of noncontiguous school zones. If there are still racially identifiable schools within a district, this factor alone will not prevent a finding of unitary status provided the school system can demonstrate the causal link between past discrimination and current racial makeup has been cleanly broken. Further, discrimination must not be the cause of the current racial make-up of the school or district. Fletcher (2004) more comprehensively outlines the six "Green factors" that routinely determine whether or not a school system has achieved unitary status:

1. One way this burden can be overcome is by presenting proof establishing that demographics, instead of actions or inactions by the school district, have caused the one-race or predominantly one-race school. In *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992), the DeKalb County School System demonstrated such evidence is valid. If a school system contends demographic factors affected the racial make-up of schools, it should present a clear history of how demographics

changed the racial composition of the school or schools. The school system must also establish any steps taken to combat the changes, which could include but would not be limited to boundary zone changes or the use of magnet schools. It must be clearly shown that the changes that occurred to cause the racially identifiable school are completely beyond the control of the school system (Freeman v. Pitts, 1992). The court will review the history of attendance zones and how these zones have been changed over the years as well as why. Information of the closing of old schools and location of new schools will also be thoroughly examined. This issue will be discussed in more detail under facilities, but it is mentioned here as it inevitably will affect student assignment. Establishment of the above factors requires continual hard work, hard numbers, and persistent monitoring; however, the good news is if a school system demonstrates fairness in student assignments, it is not expected to readjust attendance zones on an annual basis,

2. One should not be able to identify the majority racial composition of a school by the racial make-up of faculty, and
3. Staff. The racial composition of the faculty (certified)/staff (classified) should be shown system wide, by individual schools, and broken down by elementary, middle, and high schools. If there are any schools from which the racial make-up of the faculty/staff can be determine the racial compositions of the students, the school system must be ready to explain why. The ratio of each faculty/staff at each school must reflect the entire ratio of race for the whole school district. Again the court will only determine the system unitary if

- all vestiges of past racial discrimination have been eliminated. The school system should be prepared to present how it actively recruited, hired, and promoted minorities. A breakdown of the minorities hired and promoted, and the hiring applicant pools will be thoroughly reviewed. Faculty and staff hiring, recruiting, and assignment policies and practices will also be thoroughly reviewed. If there have been any complaints based on race from faculty or staff members, each complaint should be reviewed to determine if the complaint was valid. If the complaint is valid, what was done to correct the situation? If it was invalid, solid evidence should be presented by the district to prove nondiscrimination,
4. All students- including students attending magnet schools- must be provided transportation on the same basis regardless of race. The school system must ensure that all service and maintenance of school buses is uniform throughout the county. Buses must be available to all students participating in extracurricular activities. The age of the student is an important factor when looking at the length of travel needed. It can and should be considered,
  5. All students must have equal access to extracurricular activities including clubs and sports. The court will want to review the actual participation by students, broken down by race. Students under a busing plan must be provided transportation to aid them in participating in after school activities,
  6. All public school facilities must be equal. This requires schools that are predominately African American must have facilities that are equal to schools that are predominately White. Further, policies regarding the availability of

facilities to third parties must show such facilities are offered on a non-discriminatory basis. For instance, if the school system has county-wide stadiums, such stadiums must be placed in locations that make the stadium or facilities available to everyone regardless of race. Closing schools and building of new schools present several issues for review. First and foremost, the school system must show that such closing of a school or the building of new school is not used and does not serve to either perpetuate or re-establish a dual system. The construction of new schools presents many issues such as site availability, financing, land values, expectation of population growth, etc. A school system under a desegregation order, it also presents the issue of student assignment. The location of the new school must be carefully considered, as the racial make-up will be determined from it. Thus, construction of new schools will always effect student assignment (Fletcher, 2004).

As previously noted, the court has recognized that the school system has no control over residential movement. Residential segregation is a private decision that almost always will affect the racial make-up of a school. Thus a court carefully reviews new sites and student assignments for such new schools (Fletcher, 2004). *Brown II* (1955) made it clear the lower courts would have the power to monitor, review, and guide school systems toward achieving unitary status. The Supreme Court ruled:

The burden rests upon the defendants to establish that such time is necessary in the public interest and is consistent with good faith compliance at the earliest practicable date. To that end, the courts

may consider problems related to administration, arising from the physical condition of the school plant, the school transportation system, personnel, revision of school districts and attendance areas into compact units to achieve a system of determining admission to the public schools on a nonracial basis, and revision of local laws and regulations, which may be necessary in solving the foregoing problems. They will also consider the adequacy of any plans the defendants may propose to meet these problems and to effectuate a transition to a racially nondiscriminatory school system. During this period of transition, the courts will retain jurisdiction of these cases (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 1955*).

At the present time, school systems are burdened to prove unitary status while acting in good faith as they are to be monitored by their respective district court each step of the way. To obtain unitary status, school systems have sometimes had to take extreme steps and implement, at times unfavorable remedies. One of the fundamental foundations of our country is that no person will be discriminated against on the basis of race. Fletcher (2004) observes that in desegregation cases, school systems have been given an affirmative duty to impose race-conscious remedies.

### **‘Courting’ choice**

Gay (2004) found that *Brown I* (1954) served as a “momentous occasion” in America’s effort to promoting racial equality by the U.S. Supreme Court, even though it

clearly did not solve all of the racial inequities in our schools, yet it has evolved into more than simply desegregation of the races into America's classrooms. Moreover, White America had to readjust their perceptions of African Americans because they would have to "see them as individuals rather than racial symbols" (Gay, 2004, p. 197).

The Supreme Court has shown that it will exert its influence in public school on a variety of issues. Parental rights advocates have cited *Board of Education v. Pico* (1982) where the Supreme Court deemed it acceptable for schools to remove books and materials from its buildings, which are framed as a form of suppression. In allowing the object that happened to "house" the idea to be removed by schools, the Supreme Court also allowed parents the right to reject materials as well that some took as a nod to parental choice. The Supreme Court, it is argued, needs guidance in making these, and other decisions that impact education.

Insofar as classroom realities may be transformed through the application and influence of the theories that support legal and political decision, it is important that judges, lawyers, and politicians not be left on their own, theorizing in the dark without the benefit of what is known and understood by those actually engaged in education (Whitson, 1991, p. 120).

The Supreme Court has been quite clear that it will assert its interpretation regarding curriculum matters and public schools. In the early 1960s, the Court decided two important cases that cast a blanket judicial mandate that imposed strict separation of church and publically funded schools. In the first, the Supreme Court found that the New York Public Schools' daily recitation of a nondenominational prayer violated the



establishment clause of the Constitution (*Engle v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 1962). The second ruling came the following year, where they decided that a Pennsylvania statute requiring that a minimum of 10 Bible verses be read to the students- without comment- at the beginning of each school day (*School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374, 1963). These Supreme Court decisions were based on a three-part Constitutional assessment to determine whether laws, policies, and practices directly relating to religion in the public sector. This litmus test, although not formalized until 1971, was to become known as the Lemon Test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602, 1971). The three tests that had to be met in order for a government law or practice to be considered constitutional were: 1) the government act that bears on religion must reflect a secular purpose, 2) it may neither advance nor inhibit religion as its primary effect, and 3) it must avoid excessive government entanglement with religion (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602, 1971). It continues to be used as a guide for courts to employ when considering reviews of religious activities in school curriculum, which has emblazoned right-wing and fundamentalist groups to contend that control of their religious beliefs have been thwarted in public schools by these cases. These rulings serve to keep parents who may choose to have their faith recognized in a public school to have this option.

### **The School Choice Divide: The ‘Haves’ v. the ‘Have-nots’**

In reality there exists considerable school choice in the United States for those with the financial resources to pursue them; however, what should be done about schools that fail to meet the needs of low-socioeconomic children? Moreover, who

should decide: The local school system? The federal government? The parents? These questions serve as the basis for research into the equity of public education and its potential bias against low-socioeconomic, minority students.

In 2003, students in public schools offering choice were the least likely to be White and the least likely to live in two-parent families, compared with students enrolled in other type schools (Tice, Princiotta, Chapman, & Bielick, 2006). The separation between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is further divided when religious and non-sectarian private schools are reviewed as students attending are less likely to be living at or near poverty and much more likely to be at or above 200% of the poverty line than were students in assigned public schools, in chosen public schools, or being homeschooled (Tice, Princiotta, Chapman, & Bielick, 2006). The discussion of school choice today is becoming more about how much is acceptable instead of whether it is an acceptable alternative to school assigned by attendance zones, in the wake of charter schools, magnet schools, vouchers, home schools, educational choices via the Internet, or even the federally mandated choice options for parents of children zoned for schools failing to meet standards through the tenants of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Are choice options simply an extension of parental rights or a direct threat to public schools’ survival. School choice opponents worry that the implementation of options for parents would lead to a stratification of schools by race, class, and religion at the same time making them less accountable to the public (National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2004). NCLB, enacted in 2002, provides for consequences for schools that fail to meet state standards. Escalating consequences range from provision of technical assistance and counseling, through providing funds for parents to

use to purchase tutoring services for their children, to enrollment in other public or private schools of the parents' choice (National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2004, p. 41).

A Zogby International public opinion poll found that 76% of respondents either "strongly" or "somewhat" supported "providing parents with the option of enrolling their children to the school of their choice to include either public, private, or parochial instead of to the school to which they are assigned based on home address (Center for Education Reform, 2002). The study also found that 63% of respondents were in favor of allowing poor parents to be given the tax dollars allotted for their child's education and permitting him or her to use those dollars in the form of a scholarship to attend a private, public, or parochial school of their choosing (Center for Education Reform, 2002). Students enrolled in assigned public schools tended to have parents who were less content with the schools than students enrolled in either a 'choice' public or private school (Tice, Princiotta, Chapman, & Bielick, 2006).

Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program was the United States' first publicly financed private school choice experiment that was designed to provide real opportunities for low-socioeconomic students to attend private schools for increased academic rigor and reduced discipline troubles (McGroarty, 1994). This research also found that parents at these schools serve also have high parental involvement coming into the programs and even higher involvement once there an overwhelming (97%) responded that the program should continue (McGroarty, 1994, p. 110). Some disadvantaged parents may withdraw from participation in their child's education because of lack of time, energy, understanding, or confidence (Dodenhoff, 2007).

### **Who's Choosing Choice?**

As of February 2009, there are approximately 24 school choice programs in 14 states and the District of Columbia serving more than 160,000 students attending private schools using public monies. To date, five empirical studies have been conducted on the Milwaukee public schools, which was the first large scale implementation of vouchers. All of these studies concluded that vouchers improved Milwaukee public schools. Eleven similar studies have been performed in Florida, Ohio, Texas, Maine, and Vermont, which found that voucher programs in these circumstances improved public schools (Forster, 2009).

In 1990, during its first year of operation, the MPCP enrolled 341 students in the seven secular private schools participating in the program. In 1995, when Wisconsin lawmakers allowed religious schools to participate, the enrollment cap increased from 1.5% to 15% of K-12 students. By 1998, enrollment in the MPCP had jumped more than 400%. The MPCP was quickly transformed from a small pilot initiative to a large and maturing parental school choice program (Wolf, 2008).

In Washington, D.C., with a voucher system specifically designed to shield public schools from the impact of competition, found that there was no visible impact (Forster, 2009). What researchers also found is that public schools where school choice options were offered, improved student achievement led some to speculate that it may have been due to “dredging,” or having the worst students take the vouchers to private schools, leaving the better students behind in the public schools (Forster, 2009). This theory would prove counter to the “creaming” effect of the best students utilizing the vouchers and leaving their underperforming peers behind. What of the schools that can

choose the “cream of the crop” students to enroll and walk their halls? This is a common criticism from school choice opponents (McGroarty, 2001, p. 147). Greene (2000) found that all studies of existing choice programs show that participating families have very low incomes, largely come from single-mother households, and have a preceding record of low academic achievement.

In 2003, African American students were more likely than White students to be enrolled in choice public schools, and higher socioeconomic students were more likely than poor or near-poor students to be enrolled in private schools with no religious affiliation (Tice, Princiotta, Chapman, & Bielick, 2006). African American adults from all socioeconomic levels say the crucial reason they choose nonpublic schools for his or her children is the desire for smaller student-teacher ratios, a greater sense of caring, and a better quality education (Arnez & Jones-Wilson, 1988). Are the families taking advantage of choice programs simply the privileged ones seeking monetary subsidies for their chosen private school pursuits? Research does not seem to support that theory. In 1999-2000 dollars, the average income of choice families was \$18,750 in Cleveland, \$15,990 in San Antonio, and in Milwaukee only \$10,860 (McGroarty, 2001, p. 149). Seventy-six percent of Milwaukee choice students lived with single parent, female-headed households with approximately 60% receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children or public assistance (Witte, Thorn, Pritchard, & Claibourn, 1994).

The desire for parents to take advantage of this opportunity did little to sway then-Wisconsin State School Superintendent Herbert Grover who criticized the state legislature for approving vouchers for the nearly 1,000 students who took advantage of the school choice opportunity (Peterkin R., 1990-1991). In reality, empirical studies have

become more numerous and sophisticated that trends are beginning to surface such as the likelihood that demand for school choice options appears to increase after choice plans have been in place for a while (Henig, 1999). Belfield & Levin (2005) recommends a framework for continued growth, enhancement, and sustainability of certain choice options that include greater freedom of choice, productive efficiency, equity, and social cohesion for the desired educational structure in a democratic America.

### **Does School Choice Work for Poor, Minority Students?**

Test scores in Milwaukee showed significant improvements in early comparisons following the implementation of school choice options (Rouse, 1998). Standardized test scores were appreciably higher in San Antonio (Martinez, Godwin, & Kemerer, 1995), Cleveland (Peterson, Howell, & Greene, 1998), and Milwaukee (Greene & Peterson, 1997). These studies say that the implementation of school choice was the determining factor. In contrast, the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2004) concluded that the school choice options are hardly the universal remedy as declared by its advocates nor is it the death of American public schools as feared by its critics. The links between school choice and any outcomes are dependent on how communities organize and implement school choice models. However, if disadvantaged students are to benefit from choice options, their parents must be permitted to have first opportunity to choose and those schools must be willing to accept the allocated public funding as full payment for tuition (National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2004). There is evidence that personal barriers may exist to impede this opportunity for many minority students.

Milwaukee's voucher program requires private schools to select qualified students indiscriminately and accept vouchers as full payment for tuition, which serves to prohibit schools from "topping up," or charging additional fees for enhanced revenues that serves to prevent sorting by socioeconomic status (Chakrabarti, 2005). The study also noted that the level of a mother's education attainment is significantly higher among voucher applicants than qualified non applicants; additionally, voucher applicants are more involved in school activities and have higher educational expectations for their children than non applicant parents (Chakrabarti, 2005). McGroarty (2001) showed how six low socioeconomic families from various cities across the US- Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Cleveland, Ohio, and San Antonio, Texas, could use vouchers to bypass their zoned public schools. Moreover, it found a "remarkable amount of consensus" on the positive difference that school choice had with these families who utilized school choice options (p. 125). The school choice variables chosen for this study were parental satisfaction, test score gains, impact of racial segregation, and choice as a catalyst for improving public schools.

For school choice options to be effective there are a variety of considerations that must collaborate for successful outcomes materialize. These include student targeting, funding, parent information, performance measurement, student access, regulation, and accountability. Additionally, there are the behavior factors such as parental preferences, student effort, school options, and teacher responses (National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2004). Research on the efficacy of parental choice confirms that students do as well or better at choice schools, parents are more satisfied, and public schools improve with competition (Kafer & Butcher, 2003).

### **Open to Choosing Choice**

School choice (or open enrollment as it is sometimes called) options have emerged in many school districts around the country as a way of providing students with multiple options to attend good schools, and potentially, to mitigate the effects of residential segregation within the educational process. The role of geography is often not considered when analyzing the effectiveness of school choice policies (Theobald, 2005, p. 92). Of course this must be an important concern when taking into account the school choice landscape. The fact that schools are typically geographically based and children usually live at home while attending primary and secondary schools, the choice of schools is limited to a reasonable distance (Bondi & Matthews, 1988). As Godwin (2004) explains,

“the gravamen of any educational policy is that it decreases social equality. Therefore, regardless of which choice option a government selects, it is likely to maintain that the policy increases equality of opportunity. Liberal democracies traditionally have seen education as the mechanism through which the state could reduce the inequalities caused by family circumstances” (Godwin, Kemerer, Martinez, & Ruderman, 1998, p. 503).

This concept led to the building of support from both major political parties in America. In the 1990s, the nation began to see public school boards offering choice plans as a result of constant pressure from the religious right. Minnesota offered choice among its public schools in 1992. Other states that followed were Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio, Utah, and Washington. The New York City Board of Education,



one of the largest school systems in the country, unanimously adopted a plan in the fall of 1992 that allowed parents to choose any public school within its system (Spring, 2005). Public schools systems in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Berkeley, California, and San Francisco, California, do not assign students to school using attendance zones. Instead, they allow families to choose (Sugarman, 2004). In Milwaukee, after the first four years of the nation's first tax-funded school choice program, the average reading and math scores of school choice students, of which 70% were African American, were five and 12 percentile points higher, respectively than those of comparable low-income public school students. According to a study conducted at Harvard University's Program in Education Policy and Governance that serves to show that this demonstrated success does not ensure long-term viability without political support, which recently has not been a problem (Reiland, 1997).

School choice plans were supported in the 90s by liberals concerned about the education of children from low-income homes, who, they said had been failed by their public schools (Spring, 2005). In response to this contention, the Wisconsin state legislature in 1990 passed a law that allowed children whose parents' income was less than 75% of the poverty level, as established by the federal government, to choose nonsectarian, private schools. This legislation was trumpeted by then- Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson who said, "Choice gives poor students the ability to select the best school that they possibly can. The plan allows for choice and competition, and I believe competition will make both the public and private schools that much stronger" (Spring, 2005, p. 459).

A survey by the Foundation for Florida's Future revealed that no less than 68% of the state's African Americans supported school choice at the same time a poll by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute showed that a whopping 95% of African Americans in Milwaukee support the city's school choice program (Reiland, 1997). The 2004 Phi Delta Kappa International/Gallup Poll found that 57% of parents with children attending public schools would send their children to private schools if vouchers were offered the choice (Clowes, 2004). Sixty-seven percent of inner-city parents of public school students would opt for private schools if tuition was not a barrier to this educational option (Public Agenda, 1999). Nearly 80% of African American families would choose private schools if vouchers would offset the costs (Harwood Group, 1995).

Theobald (2005) found that even given complete choice among all schools in a school district, the bulk of student movement is still geographically limited. Many parents and guardians are reluctant or unable to send their children to schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods, even if the quality of education is higher at that distant school. These conclusions may lead to questions about whether public school choice and voucher funding policies, currently envisioned as being guided by the free market will have the planned effect of improving education for all children.

The problem of concentrating higher performing students in certain schools not only means that there will be a greater division by ethnicity and class among schools due to choice patterns, but also those enrollment limitations will prevent other parents from being able to choose the education they wish for their children. It is difficult to overlook that most families want a good neighborhood school down the street (Theobald, 2005). Godwin (1998) found that the most important consideration for

parents as they choose schools is selecting a place to live, which means that housing markets continue to segregate students by ethnicity and income. Coons (1998) said “it is because of that respect for the person that these ideas (correct and not) deserve expression through independent institutions that are administered by educators who believe in them and are attended by families who freely choose them” (p. 540).

### **Accountability and the School Choice Movement**

The George W. Bush Administration, through NCLB, sought to give parents of children in low performing schools more choices about where they could have their children gain a top-quality public education (U.S. Department of Education). Under the provisions of NCLB, schools that do not meet state standards for at least two consecutive years must allow parents to transfer their children to a better performing school within their district. The school system must also shoulder the burden of providing transportation. Further, students from low-income families that remain in under-performing schools are eligible to receive supplemental education services in the form of tutoring, after-school services, and even summer school. Academics, however, are not the only consideration of parental choices as NCLB also allows for parents of a child who has been the victim of a violent crime at school the option to transfer to a safe school within the school system.

Is educational quality easily defined based on performance on state-mandated assessments, or achieving Adequate Yearly Performance (AYP) in the areas of test participation, academic achievement in reading and mathematics, and a second indicator such as student attendance or graduation rate as defined by NCLB (U.S.

Department of Education)? Giroux (2006) believes that NCLB legislation pressures “school administrators to get rid of those students who test poorly and might threaten the school’s survival” (p. 196). They are specifically addressing the minority and poor children who find the prospects of attending higher education “rapidly worsening” (Giroux H. A., 2006, p. 196).

Spring (2005) found that NCLB serves to benefit the “backward” children in schools- referring to the specialized education for students with learning, behavioral, emotional, and physical disabilities and their inclusion into regular classrooms. This is helpful because many teachers do not want these children in their classes because they would have to “deal with problem children.” While the emphasis was on maintaining an orderly school environment, it seems that compulsory attendance laws meant that some schools creatively sidestepped the requirements by segregating the special needs students into rooms away from the “regular” students (p. 303).

### **School Choice v. Bureaucratic Control**

The control of the curriculum in public schools is certainly not a new debate in our country as our founding fathers wrestled with this issue as well. Thomas Jefferson believed that education should provide the average American citizen with the skills to read and write, but he also believed in the identification and education of future Republican leadership in their early years of schooling that would lead to giving them a quality education all the way through college. This belief was reserved for the White children. This selection and nurturing process would form a “natural aristocracy” (Spring, 2005). Noah Webster through his early works including his spelling books,

promoted the idea that nationalism through the teachings of patriotism and virtue as the essential curriculum elements for the children for they represented the representative American government and its history as opposed to a democratic government. Spring (2005) noted that Webster's literary works would later serve as the basis for the creation of the dominant Anglo-American culture with the inherent rejection of the multicultural society. This would lead to considerable challenges due to the exclusion of the Native American, Latino, and African American cultures in the late twentieth century.

Califano and Bennett (2000) argue that school choice is one of the most essential rights that parents should have for if parents are not in charge of the school that their child attends, the subjects taught, or the teachers, he or she are not really in charge of anything. This idea of control over curriculum and its evaluation has spawned a large amount of reactions as some fear the power it provides to central authorities just as local communities are frustrated that the government offers seeming autonomy while demanding that the schools be evaluated by standardized tests. This control, some teachers believe, serve as inadequate measures for diagnosing and motivation students (McNeil, 2006).

While Freire loathed the "banking" model of instruction, he indicated a degenerative path of faux scholarship emerged when these methods were engaged. The banking concept of education transforms student into receptacles to be filled with information by the teachers like making deposits at a bank. With this model, students are expected to receive, memorize, and repeat what they are taught. Freire (2006) said that "it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system" (p. 72). Moreover,

the educational governing body is relegated to an oppressive force when it no longer considers salient alternatives to imaginative schooling. "The moment the new regime hardens into a dominating bureaucracy, the humanist dimension of the struggle is lost and it is no longer possible to speak of liberation" (Freire, 2006, p. 57).

School choice has been positioned as a viable alternative to local public schools in that it provides for "market-based reform" whereas the anticipated benefits of this inter-school competition would create more options and efficiency and greater outcomes for more students (Adnett & Davies, 2005). Public school systems limit choices further by placing mandatory compulsory core curriculum on students. Choices within schools are further reduced depending on whether the student is pursuing an academic or vocational path, which is oftentimes determined by a particular student's abilities or interests but can be dictated by available resources within the school (Adnett & Davies, 2005). This attention to financial assets is a necessary activity because no school enjoys unlimited spending. Educational policies mandate a state control over the required core curriculum and compel that a common set of principles be taught that diminish racial diversity and directly disregard parental rights over the education of their children (Godwin K., Kemerer, Martinez, & Ruderman, 1998).

For minorities, this mandated curriculum allows for a suppression of their views that may conflict with the required programs of study. Findings seem to be inconclusive regarding school choice and inventive curriculum offerings. Despite promising to offer meaningful curriculum reform and pedagogy, free market schools may tend to concentrate on easily tested, short-term curricular goals and outcomes in a concerted effort to enhance their marketing image (Fecho, 2001).

Curriculum issues are critically important to the school choice movement. However, today in public schools, we see a passive acceptance of the textbook-dominated curriculum. This domination includes scripted behavior that serves to deskill innovative teachers (Lewis, 2002). It is this idea that the politicians and those in all levels of governmental seats of power have a better idea of what children should know and how they are to be taught than not only parents but also teachers. In Georgia, public school students have been guided by essentially three different state curricula over the last two decades. The Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act of 1985 led to the establishment of the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). A major revision of the QCCs was undertaken and implemented over the next several years. In 2001, the Georgia State Board of Education requested an audit of QCC and Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum. In January 2002, Phi Delta Kappa was selected to conduct an audit and concluded that several areas the curriculum lacked rigor and was inadequate to guide instruction and to improve student achievement for all students based on national standards. Thus, based primarily on the curriculum audit, the state embarked on completely overhauling Georgia's curricula (Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2008).

### **National Results and Analysis**

So what do the results reflect in the 50-plus years following the landmark decision in *Brown I* (1954)? The U. S. Supreme Court ordered that students of public schools be desegregation by ethnicity. Naturally there was opposition to this decision but school districts eventually began to become creative in complying with this decree. These efforts have created a movement for equality of opportunity. Some argue that this

recent focus on accountability has shifted efforts away from racial equity toward the very racial discrimination in our public schools that Brown I (1954) sought to overcome (Daniel, 2004).

Attendance zones have long been at the core of the solution in achieving racial desegregation. After the courts lifted the desegregation order in Nashville, Tennessee, the district agreed to implement new attendance zones that provided for school zones closer to student's homes. This effort aligned with the notion that a return to neighborhood schools would promote and realize widespread school improvement and community involvement. These data found that geographic proximity does not achieve the supportive communal structure that had been anticipated. Instead, African American students were much more prone to be reassigned to schools in at-risk neighborhoods as cross-town busing was eliminated (Goldring, Cohen-Vogel, Smrekar, & Taylor, 2006).

The achievement gap in standardized test scores between Whites and African Americans is a hotly debated educational issue in United States politics. Some argue that this gap is a result of an accumulated "education debt" over time that encompasses historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Parents of school choices are often times forced to decide between many important and sometimes competing considerations such as location, academic offerings, athletics, and perhaps even the racial make-up of the school. If parents are more concerned about nonacademic considerations, student achievement may not be improved at all (Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2006).



Harris (2007) found that in the ongoing pursuit of educational equity, state and national accountability efforts are credited with highlighting the consistent high academic successes of a large number of low-poverty schools at a rate of 22 times that of their high-poverty counterparts. This study included more than 60,000 schools and also found that schools serving student populations of both low poverty as well as low minority are 89 times more likely to be consistently high-achieving as compared with schools of high-poverty and high-minority schools (Harris, 2007).

### **The High Costs of a Redistributed Public Education**

Then-Senator Barack Obama (2008) on the campaign trail for the presidency stated that segregated schools were, and are inferior schools, which helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's White and African American students. Kozol (2006) agrees, saying that our governments (local, state, and national) are clearly not providing the superior educational opportunities that they should as the recognized greatest nation on this earth for children of color. He calls it a "shame" how inner-city students are forced to attend the most dilapidated schools with the most inexperienced teachers and the most inadequate textbooks and supplies imaginable. Kozol gathered his research through experiences as he embedded himself into the inner cities classrooms and got to know the teachers and students. Further, he got them to know, trust, and confide in him, which he says revealed a much more engaging narrative. Kozol's (2006) ethnographic study produced firsthand insights into what is so very wrong with many disadvantaged student populations, which outlines the need to change an educational system that blatantly differentiates between the "haves" and the "have

not's." As Kozol (2006) found, this organizational delineation is programmed to repeat the atrocities that imprison an overwhelming percentage of one particular class of people- overwhelmingly composed of minorities- to an educational bureaucracy that segregates children depending on their socioeconomic condition creating numerous reported voids of inspiring educational choices.

School choices can be influenced by the economic condition of the parents. Studies show that parents on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale have a proclivity toward school curricula that stress traditional values and basic learning skills. Parents at the higher end of the socioeconomic scale tend to favor schools with a strong emphasis on abstract thinking and problem-solving skills and abilities (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002). Kozol (2006) declared that the drilling information through the use of rigid lesson plans and strict disciplinary structures under the roofs of deplorably unfit buildings masquerading as schools is likely not the soundest recipe for success for our inner-city youth. Kozol (2006) condemns the inequalities and segregation that governments have perpetuated over long stretches of time; moreover, he contends, the authority it exerts passively permits discrimination of low income, minority populations and concludes that an equalization of educational opportunities is needed.

As The Civil Rights Project (2002) highlighted, the achievement gains from economic integration suggested that the logical course forward should focus less on redistributing educational resources in the form of dollars (the school finance approach) and more on what Brown I (1954) proposed: redistributing educational resources in the form of classmates. There exists one key difference. Brown I focused on the social stigma resulting from explicit, government-mandated segregation. Those mandates are

gone, and with them presumably any stigma associated with single-race schools. Children, however can suffer a lack of educational opportunity in a single race school. Not because it a single race poor school, but because of the high poverty level of the students. As a result, the purpose of this remedy is not to achieve numerical integration comparable to the metropolitan area, but to alleviate the overwhelming concentration of poor students in one school district. In particular, an economic integration remedy would focus on the elimination of high-poverty school districts, those with over 50% low-income children (Orfield & Lee, 2006).

Archbald (1996) says that voluntary school desegregation may create inequities beyond what they were designed to address such as the unintended segregation due to social classes differences, access to information, academic support, and transportation obstacles. This situation is exasperated due to trend of parents with higher levels of education that choose to take advantage of choice options. School choice options tend to attract families from neighborhoods based on geographic convenience creating greater social separation while creating successful magnet schools and leaving the remaining neighborhood schools behind academically (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999).

### **What Does 'Choice' Look Like?**

According to a report by the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2004), there exist eight varying levels of choice ranging from none to absolute choice:

1. All students are assigned to schools by the district- no choice;

2. District allows some families to choose among district-run alternative or magnet schools;
3. District allows all families to choose among all district-run schools;
4. District also allows families to choose some district-authorized schools operated by independent parties (charters);
5. Families may choose among district-run and chartered schools and also schools chartered by other government entities;
6. Families may choose among many publicly funded schools, all of which are operated by independent parties (charter districts);
7. Families receive vouchers but must use them only in approved schools that must employ admissions lotteries and accept vouchers as full payment of tuition;
8. Families receive vouchers that they may use in any school, while schools set their own admissions and tuition policies (National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2004, p. 17).

It is reasonable for stakeholders to have concerns regarding implementation of any choice alternative. Protections must be considered and employed to provide equitable opportunity for all students. The National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2004) warns that cautions must be considered with school choice options:

1. Protections must be in place to protect learning for children of parents slow to choose;

2. Avoiding segregation so that fair admission practices exist in all schools for all students, which includes a withdrawal of public funding for schools that target poor or minority students for discipline or expulsion;
3. Avoiding harm to social cohesion, meaning that choice must not be allowed to lead to the establishment of schools that teach hatred or discrimination or serve to separate student by income, class, or race (National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2004).

There are a growing number of school choice options including: public schools, private schools, charter schools, religious schools, military academies, etc. If no school is acceptable, parents could start a new school or decide that home schooling is the most appropriate alternative (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002). With many of these educational alternatives are the accompanying financial obligations that usually are shouldered by the parents/guardians while the national, state, and local governments allocate a substantial portion of tax revenue to support public education (Paquette, 2005). Who should decide where the money is spent?

Freire (2006) states that “from the outset, efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization... To achieve this, they (teachers) must be partners of the students in their relations with them” (p. 75). Forster & D’Andrea (2009) found that public school choices are made by teachers as well. A major national survey of teachers conducted by the U. S. Department of Education breaks down observational data for public and private schoolteachers, which finds that public schoolteachers say they do not work in systems that provide the best environments for teaching. Some of the reasons for these

deficiencies include the perception that teachers feel they are mired in dysfunctional, and controlled environments that serve to deskill them and keep them from achieving to the best of their abilities to produce successful student achievement outcomes. More specifically:

- Private schoolteachers are much more likely to have a great deal of control over selection of textbooks and instructional materials (53% v. 32%) and content, topics, and skills to be taught (60% v. 36%);
- Private schoolteachers are much more likely to have a great deal of influence on performance standards for students (40% v. 18%), curriculum (47% v. 22%) (Forster & D'Andrea, 2009, p. 4).

Coleman (1981) found that most public schools are grounded in no community whatsoever. They create arbitrary attendance zones that may serve to militate against the development of either functional or value communities. Indeed, most public schools have lost their base of community support. This loss of support may lead some to a proactive call for competition to support the values important to parents and students. A supporter of school choice, the Center for Education Reform (2002) proposes that competition leads to a much more student-centered learning environment. This improvement is a result of the accountability measures that will guide better course offerings along with creative educational approaches that nurture and push the students being taught to achieve their best (Raywig, 1992).

## **Opposing Views of School Choice**

There are many who are adamantly opposed to school choice for a variety of reasons. There are those who believe that the economic-based free-market philosophy will cripple the public education realm because some schools cannot compete and would ultimately fail (Henig, 1997). Others argue that school choice structures will cause a wave of students not lucky enough to land into a better educational setting thus, “Pit student against student and family against family in the struggle for educational survival” (Cookson, 1992). Then there is the issue of “lost” per-pupil funding taken from the failing schools and school systems as parents opt to move their children to what they perceive to be higher academically achieving schools that may be in neighboring counties. This choice purportedly exacerbates an already struggling situation (Lyons, 1995).

One of the more controversial choices is vouchers, which allow for public funding to go to private or religious schools. Of course, parents choosing these schools highlight some concerns regarding the separation of church and state as well as the ultimate survival of public schools. The overarching consideration must be in allowing parents the option of transferring their children out of lower performing public schools to higher performing educational options (Cookson P. W., 1994), but some challengers of school choice question whether urban students will realistically have enough viable options to improve their condition.

Some opponents argue that certain types of vouchers require parents to add money to pay for education, known as tuition “add-ons,” but researchers have found that it may present the benefit of persuading parents and guardians to become more involved in their children’s education (Coulson, 1999). Opponents worry that these add-

ons might worsen socioeconomic stratification and racial segregation in schools (Witte, 2000). Peterson et al. (2001) found that public schools are more segregated than private schools.

Opting out of failing schools does not automatically guarantee a better option (Ross, 2002). That notwithstanding, Pinar (1995) says that, "The intensity and complexity of debates regarding religion in the public school curriculum lead some to conclude that 'choice' represents the only possible resolution of the issue, and of the wider crisis in public education. Many states and local school districts are experimenting with 'choice'" (p. 620). The Harvard Civil Rights Project (2002) found that school choice could be harmful for minority populations for many reasons, especially because it does not adequately address the needs of the most disadvantaged student populations. "Choice, left to itself," he said, "will increase stratification. Nothing in the way choice systems actually work favors class or racial integration" (Kozol, 2006, p. 225). Additionally, they argue firmly against charter schools and other programs of school choice that do not have specific stipulations that will lessen segregation rather than increase it, but there are conditions that if met could achieve the objectives desired by school choice proponents.

First, obstacles such as costs, means of transportation, and information access for parents must be broken down. Additionally, explicit policies to guarantee racially mixed student population must be devised and implemented as well as a prohibition against all requirements for entrance to a school that could exclude a child based on a) disability; b) behavior; or c) low levels of achievement (Kozol, 2006, p. 226). Cobb & Glass (2009) concluded that unregulated choice programs do not necessarily lead to



improved academic achievement or curriculum innovation; likewise, the study concluded that unregulated school choice plans may tend to further the divisions between the socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, and achievement levels of students.

### **Supporting Views of School Choice**

In general, there are three general justifications for choice. The first is characterized as “reaction to the present” that points “to student underachievement, bureaucratic unresponsiveness, and the failure of past reform efforts in their justifications for parental choice.” The second justification is a “means for desegregating schools” that has proponents saying that it “allows poorer families to select schools that richer families now select by moving into neighborhoods with exceptional schools or by paying to send their children to highly regarded private schools.” An example is that “a voucher plan would permit minority parents to choose these alternatives... “Opponents counter that such plans have resulted in segregation in the past.” The third justification cited in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1990) study is called “choice as a catalyst for change” whereas proponents insist that variety, options, self-direction, flexibility, and responsiveness will be the primary benefits of choice. Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore (1981) found that private schools- most of these were religious schools- are closer to the America ideal of the common school than are public schools; moreover, while comparing school systems, they also determined that private schools appear to have teachers who are more committed to seeing that students learn, spend more time on academic subjects, demand stricter discipline, assign more homework, enjoy greater support from parents and although they do not safeguard

students rights as carefully as do public school, the students themselves believe they are treated more fairly.

This research was not without its naysayers, especially regarding the finding that student in private schools consistently outperformed public school students. Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore (1981) stated that most public schools are grounded in no community at all, and that subjective attendance zones actually work against the development of either practical or value communities. They concluded that most public schools have lost their base of community support, which may lead some to a proactive call for competition to support the values important to parents and students. One supporting group of school choice proposed that competition leads to a positive transformation of public education (Center for Education Reform, 2002). This improvement is a result of the accountability measures that will guide better course offerings along with creative educational approaches that nurture and push the students being taught to achieve their best (Raywig, 1992).

There are also school choice supporters that argue they should be able to gain tax advantages if they send their children to private schools.

Proponents of tuition tax credits argue that parents of children who attend private and religious schools have a double tax burden because they pay tuition as well as taxes for public schools. Opponents argue... that all citizens receive benefits from public education. Additionally, the tax credit would only serve to reward those who currently choose to send their children to private schools, thereby depleting resources that could be available to support the majority of children. Proponents counter that

without incentives such as tax credits, families of private and parochial school students will be less inclined to support additional funding for public schools, perhaps creating gridlock in the political realm (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, pp. 620-621).

### **Recent School Choice Options**

In Georgia, the school choice movement is growing beyond simple home schooling, charter schools, and magnet schools to include vouchers and tuition tax credits in recent years. Enacted in 2007, Georgia's Special Need Scholarship Program offers state-funded vouchers to children with disabilities to transfer to the private school of their choice. During the 2008-09 school year, almost 1,600 students used the program with an average scholarship of \$6,331. A survey by the Center for an Educated Georgia released last summer showed overwhelming parent satisfaction with the program. The Georgia Tuition Tax Credit Program is a \$50-million program that allows corporations, couples, and individuals to take a tax credit on Georgia income taxes when they donate to one of Georgia's 26 student scholarship organizations. With more than \$33 million in tax credits approved for 2009, taxpayers show they would rather provide scholarships to kids than write another check to the government. As of 2011, the Georgia Senate is debating a popular proposal called the Early Hope Scholarship Program that would give scholarships ranging from \$5,000 to \$9,000 to children of military families and foster children to attend the public or private school of their choice. Military and foster children can get behind in their studies due to frequent moves or when a parent is out of the country. With 14 military installations in the state, there is much support for aiding these families (Enlow, 2010).

## Summary

In an effort to measure how graduates of public schools perceive school choice options, it is essential to review the historical background of public school education in general and the evolution of public education to include and promote equity opportunities for all students generally and more specifically for African American students. In concluding this review of research and related literature concerning school choice as an equity issue for low-income, minority students, the researcher considered five areas of investigation:

1. The history of education for African Americans in America in general and more specifically one southeastern public school system with a high minority, low-socioeconomic urban population, which remains under the protections of a nearly four decades old federal desegregation order enacted to ensure equality of educational opportunities for minority students.
  - o In these two areas of investigation, the related literature reviewed information on the evolution of educational opportunities for African Americans from inconsistent, non-formal, and generally nonacademic offerings to publically funded separate schools to the desegregation of America's schools for all students. In the chosen southeastern public school district, it was home to the state's first public high school for African Americans in 1880 until the local Board ceased funding it in 1897. Even an appeal to the US Supreme Court could not force the district to keep the school open.

It would be 40 years later until the school district would publically fund another high school for African Americans and 45 years after that would find the county under federally court-ordered desegregation in 1972, which the school district is still bound by. The research also outlines the conditions that still need to be met to emerge from the desegregation order. This research analyzes the court cases that have shaped public education for African Americans in America in general and the chosen southeastern school district in particular to see the effect these judicial remedies have had in providing equality of educational opportunities for minority students.

2. School choice defined and the curriculum considerations of these options. This area of investigation examined the issues associated with control of the curriculum and the importance of not only what is taught but also the significance of multicultural considerations in attempting to teach minority populations.
3. The research that shows who is taking advantage of school choices. This area of study considered the populations of parents and students taking advantage of school choice options and the reasons they chose these opportunities for their children.
4. The effects of attendance zones for purposes of school enrollment and the effect on minority populations specifically that examined the effects of attendance zones for the purposes of school enrollment and the

conditions of facilities, teacher quality, supplies, and safety issues that many low-socioeconomic families face in public schools.

5. Whether there are documented data that reveal improvements in student achievement in which school choice options are available. This area of investigation examined the academic achievement results of school choice students demonstrating an abundance of research that shows that under the studied conditions, minority students participating in school choice options tended to improve academically.

None of these areas of consideration are should be designed specifically nor wholly applicable for the benefit of low-socioeconomic, minority student populations for as Friedman (1998) cautioned, these types of programs will be shunned by upper-income voters leaving them without the support needed to sustain safe and effective schools for all parents to choose. These considerations were the foundation of expanding research conducted in 2004 where high school juniors from three high schools in a southeastern school district documented their reflective perceptions regarding their preparedness for a success in the six years following their graduations from their public high schools.

Through their lived experiences, these public school graduates rate and explain their perceptions of their preparation for post-high school graduation success and what would they like to see in the way of public schools in the way of options relating to curriculum, student achievement, expectations, and opportunities today as he or she send- or prepare to send- their children to public schools. As with social issues in general, there are no conclusive solutions necessitating the need for flexibility in the

methods, techniques, and procedures in a determined effort to best understand any research of school choice. "Truth" is an elusive concept dependent on many variables, not least of which is what works at the time that necessitates an adaptable methodology (Cherryholmes, 1992).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This research continues the investigation of public education as an attempt for justice, fairness, and equalizing opportunities for all children without regard for ethnic or socioeconomic circumstances. Utilizing a social justice perspective, this research analyzes student perceptions regarding their high school experiences and preparation for success after high school and examines his or her ideas of further establishing equitable access to high quality education for all children. This study gathered input from five stakeholders regarding their viewpoints of the public education they received and their expectations of public education henceforth.

This research is guided by the social justice aspect embedded into the pragmatic perspective, which is a problem-centered, pluralistic, real-world, and practice-oriented (Murphey & Rorty, 1990). This study pays specific attention to the social, historical, and political perspectives to explain and expound on the intentions as compared to the eventual outcomes. As pragmatism was intended to furnish a method for the analysis of concepts, researchers have different ways of thinking about issues. Moreover, pragmatic frameworks respect the time, location, and situations that influence particular concepts as they are considered making it uniquely structured to consider the view plight of poor, minority students over the course of time as it considers alternatives to current realities that may well serve to empower disenfranchised populations of Americans (Menand, 1997).

This research draws from previous literature and studies regarding school choice concepts and employs a mixed-methods approach utilizing quantitative methods to



achieve a more well-rounded understanding of school choice to include its successes and opportunities- real and perceived- as it relates to low-socioeconomic, minority populations. The theoretical framework and methodology is expressly structured toward exposing real or perceived educational discriminations such as oppression, isolation, or other social justice inequities.

### **Research Questions and Inquiries**

Guiding this research are two principal research questions:

1. How do public school students perceive school choice options?
2. How do graduates describe their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences?

This research considers the resulting opportunities born through desegregation implementation as a result of a variety of school choice options set to provide challenging curricula as well as stem the migration of White students from one southeastern public school system to surrounding counties or private schools. Selected high school graduates view their preparation from their high schools in the areas of setting educational/career goals, perceptions of support by their school's staff, student learning opportunities and experiences, peer interactions, citizenship, and democratic principles as sufficient in order for him or her to succeed in their adult lives in the six years following his or her graduations. More purposely, do these graduates believe school choice models could improve opportunities for low-socioeconomic, minority children?

This research explores observations of high school juniors in 2004 in one of three selected schools in a southeastern public school system that has been under a federal desegregation order since 1972. This research examines their perceived outcomes of their educational experience six years following their graduation as well as their views regarding the continuing application of the desegregation order and the resulting school choice options that came into existence as an indirect result of the federal order. Additionally this research draws specific conclusions regarding the success and opportunities of each by synthesizing these data to establish deeper understandings of the school choice phenomena, results, and perceptions.

This research lends a voice to student stories of what it was like to live with the consequences of evolving educational reform efforts and ongoing desegregation in the southeastern public school system; however, this district is not alone. Today, many public school systems remain under court-ordered desegregation and are still under the affirmative duty to take the necessary steps to eliminate racial discrimination (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia, 1968*). At its core desegregation sought to remedy this by equalizing racial and economic segregation in our public schools by providing choices in public education. This study investigates- from the student perspective- the personal interpretation and application of opportunities provided by the courts as well as their preferences of school choices for their children.

This study is guided using the sequential mixed methods study design to examine a variety of factors influencing student perceptions and perspectives of school choice. This research method allows the researcher to gather, analyze, and utilize quantitative and qualitative data from participants (Creswell, 2003). The sequential

mixed methods approach is a pragmatic approach to researching these variables to obtain and more fully process results as it seeks to address the research questions by allowing this researcher to select the techniques, procedures, and measures of research best suited to address the research inquiries (Creswell, 2003). Quantitative data was collected from a 2004 student survey conducted in a large southeastern public school system specifically designed to gauge how sampled students who come from diverse and more segregated schools learn both in specific content areas and in preparation for adult life and work (Porter, 2005). Students provided basic responses, by race, to a number of questions from the survey. Four anticipated themes were explored through this research.

1. Future educational aspirations and goals: Providing access to college is an important goal for most high schools. Students who do not receive post-secondary education have little chance for mobility in the job market and are likely to face a life of low and uncertain incomes. Moreover, being qualified and prepared for a good college are central goals for students and their families. If one indicator of successful desegregation is defined as equalizing opportunity among different racial/ethnic groups, then raising aspirations of all students to similar levels is a first step (The Civil Rights Project, 2002). Overwhelming majorities of students in the United States want to go to college, and a large majority of recent high school graduates enroll in college (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).
2. Perceptions of support by the school: Research conducted by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard (2002) found that institutional support occurs

when schools provide students with the conditions and skills necessary for diverse groups to live, work, and function together in workplace and civic environments. These may include: encouraging students of all races/ethnic groups to take advanced classes or attend college; providing information to help students pursue higher education; providing students with the skills to be comfortable living, working, and interacting with members of different racial/ethnic groups; providing an environment in which all students think they are supported and fairly treated.

According to The Civil Rights Project at Harvard (2002), this type of institutional support is critically important because it equalizes levels of institutional support for educational aspirations between racial groups ensure that all students have the same opportunities to strive to reach a high level of academic achievement and ultimately enter higher education. If schools do not provide this level of support, any of the benefits that accrue from diversity cannot occur, and ultimately the school would be participating in creating inequitable educational conditions based on race. It also is beneficial if students do not have the skills to interact across racial groups, the work of democratic institutions or businesses that serve diverse communities cannot be realized. Therefore, schools that support and achieve equitable levels of support and comfort between racial groups are reaching the goals for which they may be held accountable—the goals of providing the skills and experiences necessary for democratic discourse (The Civil Rights Project, 2002).

According to the Civil Rights Project (2002), encouragement by teachers, counselors, and administrators to enroll in more rigorous coursework or pursue post-secondary education are vital components of any attempt to equalize the opportunity for educational attainment across different groups. Education policies can have little control over what students will do but can have significant control over how the school applies its mission to all students.

3. Student learning and peer interaction: One basic theory concerning the educational impact of diversity is that interaction with peers from diverse racial backgrounds both in the classroom and informally has major educational importance, particularly when the interaction is done in positive ways. By exposing students to multiple perspectives, students learn to think more critically and to understand more complex issues (Gurin, 1999).
4. Citizenship and democratic principles: Discussing racial or political issues are essential to the work of a functioning democracy (The Civil Rights Project, 2002). As Kozol (2006) pointed out, governments have shown over long stretches of time that they are willing to allow discrimination among its people until they are willing to stand up in large numbers and demand change.

The quantitative data includes the identical survey used in the 2004 to gauge preferences and opinions of Grade 11 students from three high schools in a

southeastern school district under a federal desegregation order. Qualitative data utilizes the same survey, which was updated to measure their reflections as graduates rather than the original survey administered to current students. The updated survey was administered to five students from the surveyed school populations included six years following their graduations. The other qualitative method was a mini-focus group inclusive of the five students participated in the survey.

These three data results were triangulated. The qualitative techniques of the focus group allowed for participants and the researcher to further explore perceptions gained from both the 2004 Student Survey results and the identical survey administered prior to the focus group meeting to facilitate greater data reliability. The mixed methods procedure allows for multiple approaches in answering the research questions in a more interactive form rather than limiting the research options (Burke-Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

### **Research Questions: Focus Group Inquiries**

- The focus group questions were intended to more specifically address the principal research questions of student perceptions of his or her public school experiences and preparation and of school choice. Focus group questions 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, and 1g were purposely designed to provide insight about individual perceptions of their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences (See Appendix A).
- Focus group questions 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 2g, 2i, 3c, 4a, 4b, and 4c were specifically designed to provide detailed explanations regarding

individual perceptions of their views regarding school choice options and impacts on education (See Appendix A).

- From a social justice perspective, focus group questions 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1i, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 2g, 3c, 4a, 4b, and 4c were deliberately structured to gauge participant perceptions of oppression, isolation, and equity of public school education (See Appendix A).

### **Southeastern Public School System**

The students to be interviewed for this study have graduated from a southeastern public school system that was, and still is, under a federal desegregation order. In 2011, the school system serves more than 33,000 pre-K-12 students, which is more than 73% free/reduced lunch and over 75% minority student population. Since the implementation of its desegregation order in 1972, many choice options have been implemented in the school system to include three magnet school programs, an International Baccalaureate Program, an Advanced Placement Academy, and two district-controlled charter schools. Currently there exists a concerted effort to expand the magnet school offerings in the district. Thanks to the magnet schools, the district has some of the highest achieving schools in the state and nation; yet it is also home to several of the lowest performing schools when compared to others using standardized assessments. Since desegregation, the percentage population of the southeastern public school system has changed its racial mix over the last four decades (See Table 3-1).

Table 3-1 - *Racial Makeup of the Desegregated Southeastern Public School System*

Ethnicity	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>African American</b>	35	45	54	61	74
<b>White</b>	65	54	43	33	20
<b>Other</b>	0	1	3	6	6



## **Data Collection Phases**

This study had three data collection phases:

1. Phase 1, quantitative data collection phase. Consisted of the survey results from the 2004 Student Survey of juniors from three high schools in a large southeastern public school system.
2. Phase 2, qualitative data collection phase. Consisted of an updated participant survey consisting of the same questions posed to the high school juniors from 2004. This survey was appropriately updated to measure their reflections as graduates rather than the original survey administered to current students.
3. Phase 3, qualitative data collection phase. Consisted of a mini-focus group interview session.

The researcher submitted and was granted approval from the IRB of Georgia Southern University and the school district to identify a sampling of up to six students to administer a survey identical to the one from 2004 and conduct a focus group of graduates to further explore their perceptions of school choice options and their perceptions of their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences.

### **Phase 1**

Quantitative research gathering and analysis of pre-analysis of high school juniors survey results from three southeastern public schools in a district under a federal

desegregation order. The students were high school juniors in 2004 when they were surveyed to gauge their observations of their respective public schools including services offered to them, school staff assistance, and their perceived opportunities for success. At the time, these three distinct Grade 11 student populations were chosen because one school in the district contained the highest percentage of African American students, one contained the highest percentage of White students, and the third was chosen because its enrollment criteria used a formula to ensure racially comparable populations.

### **Phase 2**

In this qualitative research collection phase, five graduates who were high school juniors in 2004 were surveyed to gauge their observations of their respective public schools including services offered to them, school staff assistance, and their perceived opportunities for success. This study compares results from 2004 to graduate responses from 2011 to see if how opinions have changed considering life experiences since entering adulthood. The graduate participants were randomly selected by using graduate rosters from 2005 from the three previously surveyed schools from the same large southeastern public school system surveyed in 2004. The participants depended on the ability of the researcher to locate the graduates via telephone and verbally gain permission from each for participation in both this survey and focus group (phase 3).

### **Phase 3**

In this qualitative research phase, a mini-focus group of five graduates examined their perceptions of their respective public schools including services offered to them, school staff assistance, and their perceived opportunities for success. More important

for purposes of this research, the graduates considered how school choice options might provide greater equity and less oppression and isolation for low-socioeconomic, minority populations. This study examined these areas in-depth to analyze changes and determine how these graduates' opinions may have changed with their life experiences since entering adulthood. The focus group measured whether they believe the availability of school choice options may impact their views by discussing both the survey results from 2004 and the survey results these graduates provided. The focus group session was guided using open-ended questions specifically designed to prompt more insight into how these public school graduates perceive school choice options and their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences. The intent of this qualitative method was to elicit participant perceptions to ascertain a greater understanding of how public school graduates view school choice options and life skills preparation from their public schools. The focus group session allowed individuals to more openly express their perceptions as well as more fully articulate in detail what they believe than is inherently available through a restrictive survey. The graduates in Phase 3 of this research were the same participants in Phase 2.

### **Phase 2 and Phase 3 Participant Profiles (Pseudonym Names)**

**Adrian** is a 23-year-old African American male. He is currently employed at a federal government facility in technology. After high school, he attended and graduated from a respected state university in the southeastern United States. The student graduated with a college preparatory diploma from "School 1." In 2005, its student population was (rounded percentages):

- 41% African American; 48% White; 5% Asian; 2% Hispanic; 4% Multi-racial;

- 20% qualified for free and reduced lunch;
- 100% graduation rate.

**Byron** is a 24-year-old African American male. He is currently employed at a state government agency as a case manager. He is currently engaged to be married by the end of this year. After high school, the student attended and graduated from a respected state university in the southeastern United States. The student graduated with a college preparatory diploma from "School 2." In 2005, its student population was (rounded percentages):

- 94% African American and 6% white;
- 82% qualified for free and reduced lunch;
- 71.5% graduation rate.

**Christina** is a 24-year-old multi-racial female. She is currently employed at a federal government facility in technology. After high school, The student attended and graduated from a respected state university in the southeastern United States. The student graduated with a college preparatory diploma from "School 1." In 2005, its student population was (rounded percentages):

- 41% African American; 48% White; 5% Asian; 2% Hispanic; 4% Multi-racial;
- 20% qualified for free and reduced lunch;
- 100% graduation rate.

**Diane** is a 24-year old, white female. She applied for enrollment in a magnet school in the fourth grade but was not accepted. After high school, the student attended and graduated from one of the nation's top technology research universities. She said

that while in high school she had to adjust to her parent's divorce and the economic shock of going from a high socioeconomic environment to a much lower standard of living. .

The student graduated from high school in 2005 with a college preparatory diploma from "School 3." In 2005, its student population was (rounded percentages):

- 48% African American, 48% white; 2% multi-racial; 1% Asian; 1% Hispanic
- 32% qualified for free and reduced lunch;
- 72.8% graduation rate.

**Elaine** is a 24-year-old White female. She is currently employed at a state technical college in admissions. After high school, she attended and graduated from a respected state university in the southeastern United States that she says enrolled an overwhelmingly White student population. The student graduated with a college preparatory diploma from "School 1." In 2005, its student population was (rounded percentages):

- 41% African American; 48% White; 5% Asian; 2% Hispanic; 4% Multi-racial;
- 20% qualified for free and reduced lunch;
- 100% graduation rate.

The phase 2 and phase 3 graduates were a participatory group. While they were amenable to sharing their thoughts and perspectives during the mini-focus group session, they generally waited to be prompted to respond but did so willingly when asked. There was occasional laughter at lighthearted moments during the discussion that helped keep the mood mostly relaxed, but there were also serious moments in which the participants opened up about disappointments they encountered.

The researcher consciously varied his selection of participants to answer new questions first to elicit fresh perspectives during the questioning process. The researcher did not observe where an obvious leader of the group emerged; however, because three of the graduates were from the same school, they had shared or similar experiences that largely influenced the discussions at times, depending on the questions. Overall the respondents not only provided their perceptions of school choice and their high school experiences, but also their expressive reactions additionally injected colorful richness to the findings that helped the researcher better understand their intent and emphasis.

### **Research Sample**

The targeted population for this research was a random sampling of five graduates from the three selected high schools during the research survey conducted in 2004 by the researcher. The purpose of the random selection was to provide opportunity for inclusion in the research without prejudice or prejudged participation criteria so that the results could be valid and reliable. The participants' participation was contingent on the ability of the researcher to locate each via phone and gain permission from each graduate for inclusion in both the newly administered survey and the mini-focus group. The focus group session was conducted on October 17, 2011 at a mutually agreeable location and lasted a little more than one-hour. The researcher documented and recorded the responses of the participants. Both an audio and a video recording were created for analysis and archival purposes. Selected participant responses were transcribed and archived following the focus group. The accumulated research results

and analysis includes all applicants and their responses, which has been disaggregated by school they attended and self-reported ethnicity. No other personally identifiable data was solicited or accepted. This research reports findings collectively, by school, and individually.

### **Research Populations**

A 2004 analysis sought to determine if racial attitudes mirrored the ideals of the desegregation movement (Porter, 2005). Today, do 2005 graduates perceive their public school experiences as suitable preparation and life skills development? More specifically, how do these students perceive school choice options as positive or negative impacts on these issues? The overall racial makeup of the southeastern school district has changed since the federal court order was put in place in the early 1970s- transforming from a majority White student population to a majority African American student population (See Table 3-1). The ethnicity of the schools from the original survey in 2004 to 2010 has changed little with the African American student population increasing by two percent and the White population decreasing by three percent (See Table 3-2).

School 1 was chosen because it is a magnet school created as a direct result of a desegregation order in an attempt to stem “White flight” from the district (Cashin, 1985). Although it is a competitive public school choice option available to any student in the large, southeastern public school district without regard to attendance zones, enrollment is regulated by ethnicity (45% African American; 45% White, and 10% other), which provides allowances for population shifts (See Table 3-3). School 1 is regularly

cited as one of the top high schools not only in the state but also enjoys national recognition and accolades (Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2010).

The two other schools surveyed in 2004 were chosen specifically because of their racial composition- School 2 because it was, at the time, the school with the highest percentage of African American students (See Table 3-4). School 3 was chosen because it was, at the time, the school with the highest percentage of White students (See Table 3-5) yet it has also seen the largest changes in both the increase in the African American student population and the decrease in the White student population.

Graduation rates at the district level as well as at each of the three schools have risen since the administration of the student survey in 2004 (See Table 3-6).



Table 3-2: District Student Population Percentages

Ethnicity - DISTRICT STUDENT POPULATION PERCENTAGES									
Asian		African American		Multi-Racial		White		Other	
2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010
1	1	71	73	2	2	24	21	2	2

Table 3-3: School 1 Student Population Percentages

Ethnicity - School 1 Student Population Percentages									
Asian		African American		Multi-Racial		White		Other	
2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010
5	6	39	42	5	5	49	46	2	2

Table 3-4: School 2 Student Population Percentages

Ethnicity - School 2 Student Population Percentages									
Asian		African American		Multi-Racial		White		Other	
2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010
0	0	92	96	0	0	6	2	1	1

Table 3-5: School 3 Student Population Percentages

Ethnicity - School 3 Student Population Percentages									
Asian		African American		Multi-Racial		White		Other	
2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010	2004	2010
1	1	46	58	1	4	51	34	1	3

Table 3-6: District and School-Level Graduation Rates Since 2004

Graduation Rates							
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
District	62.2	72	66.1	66.3	63.8	70.4	77.5
School 1	98.9	100	98.9	100	100	100	100
School 2	47.1	71.5	67.3	57.8	46.2	63.3	72.2
School 3	65.8	72.8	67.6	71.2	70.8	74.4	78.4

### **Instrumentation**

Qualitative data was obtained through an updated re-administration of the 2004 Student Survey to the graduates in this study as described in Phase 2 (See Appendix B). In Phase 3, open-ended questions were utilized to further explore the findings from the survey and expand the knowledge of school choice options and the perceived effectiveness of life skills preparedness from participating graduates from 2005 (See Appendix C). The researcher ensured the validity and accuracy of the focus group questions by having committee members review them to verify that the questions capture appropriate graduate perceptions as it relates to school choice options and life skills preparedness by the graduates respective schools. Committee members were also asked to review and offer necessary feedback and possible modification suggestions to the open-ended questions to be used in the focus group. The goal was to prompt discussions to gain meaningful insight into whether or not the participants have enough of an understanding of school choice options. The objective was to discuss potential benefits or possible detriments so that important perspectives would emerge. Based on the recommendations of the committee members and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University, changes were made to the focus group questions so that the researcher can obtain meaningful data to answer the research questions acceptably.

### **Data Analysis**

Because this research encourages other voices to contribute ideas and solutions to further the dialogue in the construction of a public education system that provides

social justice for all students without regard to their demographic or socioeconomic status, these data are filtered through an educational social justice perspective. This research examines where public education has been, analyzes where it is currently, and charts a reasoned course regarding where these stakeholders want it to go to achieve equity of access for all children. To accomplish this effort, these quantitative and qualitative data of student perceptions are triangulated to identify patterns and themes regarding school choice and preparedness for success after high school. This study critically examines these data to see how their opinions may have changed when filtered through their lives experiences since becoming adults. The four anticipated themes of the research are future educational aspirations and goals, perceptions of support by the school, student learning and peer interaction, and citizenship and democratic principles.

The findings of these data collection methods are illustrated in descriptive statistics to report participant perceptions of school choice options and the perceived impact they could have on academic preparedness and life skills development for success after high school graduation. The information presented shows evidence to support that school choice options are perceived to be a desired choice of young adults.

### **Reporting the Results**

The results of this study are reported in narrative, numerical, and chart forms. The researcher compared the results from the initial phase of the 2004 Student Survey with the qualitative data from the focus group discussions to show a correlation relationship between the research questions and the three phases of the study.

Narrative reports analyze the focus group participants' perceptions of school choice options and their perceptions of preparedness and acquisition of life skills through their public school experiences. Numerical and chart data compares pre- and post-data results, observations, and focus group discussions and compares them to anticipated themes.

### **Research Limitations/Delimitations**

Limitations:

1. Students may not have responded thoughtfully to the survey depending on school conditions, climate, presentation, etc. in 2004.
2. Students may have misrepresented their self-reported ethnicity on purpose.
3. The focus group participants may not accurately reveal their true beliefs regarding school choice options and their perceived lives skills preparation from their high schools due to limited data gathering timeframe.
4. The focus group participants may feel uncomfortable, inhibited, or embarrassed answering questions regarding race, socioeconomic status, experiences, etc. (Note: This focus group qualitative method was recommended as a preferred approach by dissertation committee methodologist.)

Delimitation

- I. The sample participants represent graduates from each of the three out of 10 district high schools that were specifically selected by the researcher and may not include alternative views from excluded populations.

## Summary

This study explores public education as an equalizer between the racial and economic divisions inherent in a nation of different peoples from the world over. This research finds that five young adults who graduated from public schools under a federal desegregation order and eventually attended and graduated from public colleges believe school choice options are a natural extension toward equity for low-socioeconomic, minority parents, and students. This conclusion is drawn even though each generally reflects fondly on their own high school experiences and life skills preparation. This study advances the debate of school choice by presenting student voices as he or she recall and assess their experiences as they meaningfully consider the best educational settings for his or her own children.

From a more global perspective they also consider school choice options as a proactive way to eradicate inequities and oppressive policies for all student populations. As they do, each describes the conditions necessary for them to expand school choice options. The researcher reports the findings of this research study in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER FOUR - RESEARCH

### **Student Survey, Graduate Survey, Focus Group Discussion–Triangulated Evidence**

Quantitative data from the 2004 student survey, qualitative data from the 2011 graduate survey, and a mini-focus group gauged how students distinguish the education and support he or she received as students as well as perceptions of preparation for adult life and work. All graduates provided basic responses to a number of questions from the surveys. Both surveys utilized the Likert scale: 1) the student survey was administered to all high school juniors at his or her schools in 2004, and 2) the graduate survey was essentially the same survey taken in 2004 except it was modified to reflect participant reflections of how well they perceived their preparations for success in their post-secondary endeavors.

The findings from these two surveys were triangulated to include data collected from the mini-focus group. These data were analyzed utilizing a social justice perspective in education and reported in this study to determine how students perceived their lives skills development through their schooling experiences as well as how they view school choice options. Four anticipated themes were explored and where appropriate, reported by individual, group, and school. They are:

- Future educational aspirations and goals;
- Perceptions of support by the school;
- Student learning and peer interaction;
- Citizenship and democratic principles.

## **Evidence**

Tables 4-1 and 4-1A show the overall racial breakdowns from the participants in the 2004 student survey and the five graduates in both the 2011 graduate survey and focus group. The self-reported ethnicity of participants in 2004 student survey showed more than half identified him or herself as African American (52%). Less than one out of three identified themselves as White (29%), while nine-percent chose not to respond (Table 4-1). The 2011 graduates were evenly split between African American and White (40% each). One participant identified herself as Multi-racial (Table 4-1A).

**Table 4-1: Student Respondents' Self-Reported Ethnicity - 2004 Student Survey**

	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Respondents
School 1 (Magnet)	25	3	4	31	7	4	74
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	128	2	6	5	0	14	155
School 3 (Majority White)	53	4	11	80	3	18	169
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>398</b>
<b>Total %</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4-1A: Student Respondents' Self-Reported Ethnicity - 2011 Focus Group**

	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Respondents
School 1 (Magnet)	1 (Adrian)		1 (Christina)	1 (Elaine)			3
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	1 (Byron)						1
School 3 (Majority White)				1 (Diane)			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total %</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>



## FUTURE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND GOALS - RESULTS

Student and graduate perceptions of educational aspirations and goals are germane to the discussion of social justice in education because it provides documented evidence regarding perceived existence or absence of oppression and equity. Moreover, it provides firsthand data that examines whether public schools may serve to inhibit individual ambitions to pursue a post-secondary education.

The 2004 student survey found that surveyed students from a southeastern public school system wanted to attend a college or vocational school. This finding is consistent with both African American and White populations' at all three surveyed high schools (See Table 4-2). The 2011 graduate survey showed that four of the five graduates "Strongly Agreed" they had wanted to go on to post-secondary education immediately after high school. Byron, who graduated from the predominately African American high school, "disagreed." He said he did not initially intend on furthering his formal education after his high school graduation although he did eventually attend and graduate from a state research university (See Table 4-2A).

**Table 4-2:** Future Educational Aspirations and Goals – 2004 Student Survey

After high school, I want to go to a college or a vocational school. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	89	100	67	100	N/A	86	88
School 3 (Majority White)	92	100	82	93	67	83	91

**Table 4-2A:** Educational Aspirations and Goals – 2011 Focus Group

After high school, I wanted to go to a college or a vocational school.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Strongly Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Disagree (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			

## STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT BY THE SCHOOL - RESULTS

From a social justice perspective regarding education, this study considered whether public schools are proactively pushing students to engage in more rigorous curricula. This level of academic rigor may improve the critical thinking abilities of the students, thus encouraging the growth of academic foundation necessary for post-secondary ambition and success. Not imparting this type of support may serve to limit students in their post-secondary options creating conditions of isolation, oppression, and inequity.

Surveyed students in 2004 were asked if they believed they have been given ample information regarding post-secondary admissions by teachers, counselors, and other adults in this school. Porter (2005) found mixed results regarding adequate access to information about college. Overall school results place School 3's percentage ahead of School 1's by seven percentage points with no statistically significant difference between School 3's African American and White populations. African American students from School 1 reported the most encouragement (72%) while White School 1 students reported the least amounts of encouragement (61%) to take Honors and AP classes. Conversely, less than half of School 2's surveyed students reported receiving ample post-secondary information is available to them (See Table 4-3).

The graduates all Strongly Agreed (3) or Agreed (2) they were adequately supported and encouraged to seek options for post-secondary education (See Table 4-3A). In describing the quality of the public school education they received, the focus group members were asked to use words or phrases to best express their impressions.

**Table 4-3:** Availability of Post-Secondary Information – 2004 Student Survey

I have been given ample information regarding post-secondary admissions by teachers, counselors, and/or other adults in this school. (This information includes SAT, ACT, financial aid, college fairs, college applications, etc.) (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	72	67	75	61	71	50	66
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	50	50	17	20	N/A	64	49
School 3 (Majority White)	72	75	82	75	33	72	73

**Table 4-3A:** Availability of Post-Secondary Information – 2011 Focus Group

I was given ample information regarding post-secondary admissions by teachers, counselors, and/or other adults in High School. (This information includes SAT, ACT, financial aid, college fairs, college applications, etc.)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Agree (Christina)	Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Strongly Agree (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			

Porter (2005) found overall students' perceptions of institutional support for taking AP or honors courses are similar in both comprehensive high schools, while 86% of the overall magnet school juniors reported this type of institutional encouragement. Student perceptions at the comprehensive high schools did not perceive the same high level of support for AP or honors courses. At School 3, only about half of the White population said they were encouraged to pursue AP or honors courses, while less than one out of three African Americans reported similar institutional support (See Table 4-4) suggesting perceptions of oppression within this student population. The graduates all Strongly Agreed (5) they were pushed to challenge themselves to enroll in more rigorous curriculum offerings (See Table 4-4A).

**Table 4-4:** Staff Encouragement for Enrollment in more Rigorous Curriculum-2004 Student Survey

I have been encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to enroll in AP or honors courses. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	88	100	100	84	100	50	86
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	48	100	17	40	N/A	36	46
School 3 (Majority White)	31	25	45	54	33	56	46

**Table 4-4A:** Staff Encouragement for Enrollment in more Rigorous Curriculum-2011 Focus Group

In high school, I was encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to enroll in AP or honors courses.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Strongly Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Strongly Agree (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			

When it came to receiving encouragement from teachers, counselors, and administrators to attend college or vocational schools, Porter (2005) found that school totals showed African Americans at School 1 (88%) and School 2 (76%) surveyed below their White counterparts (School 1 97%; School 2 80%). Student preferences of African Americans and Whites at School 3 were both 87%. The overall school totals were significantly higher in the area of school encouragement to attend post-secondary education at the magnet school (93%) when compared to the inner city school (76%) (See Table 4-5). The focus group members all Strongly Agreed (5) they received encouragement to pursue education beyond high school (See Table 4-5A).

**Table 4-5: Encouragement by Schools to pursue Post-Secondary Education -2004 Student Survey**

I have been encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to attend college or vocational school. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	88	100	100	97	86	100	93
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	76	100	67	80	N/A	71	76
School 3 (Majority White)	87	75	82	87	67	83	86

**Table 4-5A: Encouragement by Schools to pursue Post-Secondary Education-2011 Focus Group**

I was encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to attend college or vocational school.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Strongly Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Strongly Agree (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			



## STUDENT LEARNING AND PEER INTERACTION - RESULTS

Student perceptions regarding engagement with race as a form of social justice is significant as it relates to student learning and peer interactions. This study examined how opinions may lead to isolation between peoples of different ethnicities in both school settings and other social or employment situations. Data generally shows a pattern of acceptance; however, there were unmistakable variances among student populations.

Porter (2005) found when surveyed students in 2004 were asked whether school experiences had helped them work more effectively and to get along better with members of other races and ethnic groups, School 1 students overwhelming said “yes” across all racial lines. While a majority of surveyed students at both School 2 and School 3 agreed, the percentages were much lower: School 2 (65% African American, 60% White) and School 3 (69% African American, 70% White). Overall school totals at School 2 (66%) and School 3 (68%) were statistically similar. These survey findings found that School 1’s surveyed students believe their school experiences have increased students’ desire to live and work with members of different racial and ethnic group, which is significantly higher than either of the comprehensive high schools (See Table 4-6). Focus group participants all Strongly Agreed (5) they benefited through their school experiences in dealing with peoples from races or ethnic groups other than their own (See Table 4-6).

**Table 4-6:** Student Learning and Peer Interaction – 2004 Student Survey

I think that my school experiences have helped me work more effectively and to get along better with members of other races and ethnic groups. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	92	100	100	94	100	75	93
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	65	100	50	60	N/A	79	66
School 3 (Majority White)	69	50	73	70	67	53	68

**Table 4-6A:** Student Learning and Peer Interaction -2011 Focus Group

I think my school experiences have helped me work more effectively and to get along better with members of other races and ethnic groups.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Strongly Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Strongly Agree (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			

Porter (2005) found that most African Americans at both School 1 and School 3 are comfortable discussing racial issues; however, nearly half of the entire student population at the predominately African American school (School 2) was not. Overall, 86% of magnet school juniors were at-ease discussing controversial issues related to race. That compares to three out of four (76%) at School 3 and about one out of two (51%) at School 2 (See Table 4-7).

Four of the five graduates Strongly Agreed they were comfortable discussing race-related issues (See Table 4-7A).

**Table 4-7:** Discussion of Race-Related Issues – 2004 Student Survey

I am at-ease discussing controversial issues related to race. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	96	100	75	77	100	75	86
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	50	50	67	60	N/A	57	51
School 3 (Majority White)	89	100	73	67	33	83	76

**Table 4-7A:** Discussion of Race-Related Issues – 2011 Focus Group

I am at-ease discussing controversial issues related to race.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Strongly Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Neutral (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			

Porter (2005) found that when students were asked if they learned better when taught by a teacher of the same race, nearly one out of three African Americans at the magnet school, (School 1) 32% supported this assertion. The numbers of African Americans at the comprehensive high schools were far less supportive of this belief: School 2 (12%) and School 3 (17%). One out of four Whites at School 3 and Multi-Racial at School 1 believed they learn better when taught by a member of his or her own race (See Table 4-8). The focus group members were mostly Neutral (3), but two of the five either Disagreed (1) or Strongly Disagreed (1) about learning better from teachers within their own race (See Table 4-8A).

**Table 4-8:** Student Taught by Teachers of Same Race – 2004 Student Survey

I believe that I learn better when I am taught by someone of my own race. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	32	0	25	3	0	25	15
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	12	0	17	20	N/A	21	13
School 3 (Majority White)	17	25	0	25	0	22	20

**Table 4-8A:** Student Taught by Teachers of Same Race – 2011 Focus Group

I believe that I learn better when I am taught by someone of my own race.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Neutral (Adrian)		Disagree (Christina)	Neutral (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Neutral (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Disagree (Diane)			

## CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES - RESULTS

The structural role of citizenship and democratic principles through governmental and judicial policies may play a significant function in providing social justice in education. Student perceptions discerning established hierarchy in schools and society may reveal insights about how to dismantle perceived inequities, isolation, and oppression therefore allowing for greater critical thinking, understanding of complex issues, and citizen engagement.

Porter (2005) found when students were asked if they thought that court-ordered desegregation of schools has provided better opportunities for people of their race, a majority of African Americans at all three schools said yes. The large majority of Whites, on the other hand, did not believe that their race benefited from the desegregation of schools (See Table 4-9). Four graduates of the focus group either Strongly Agreed (3) or Agreed (1) that desegregation remedies have benefited people of their race. Adrian, an African American from School 1 (a magnet school established as a result of the federal desegregation order) judged the effect of the court-order as Neutral (See Table 4-9A).

**Table 4-9: Benefits from Desegregation Order – 2004 Student Survey**

I believe court-ordered desegregation of schools has provided better opportunities for people of my race. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	72	33	75	45	86	75	61
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	54	100	50	20	N/A	43	52
School 3 (Majority White)	63	25	27	33	67	44	43

**Table 4-9A: Benefits from Desegregation Order – 2011 Focus Group**

I believe court-ordered desegregation of schools has provided better opportunities for people of my race.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Neutral (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Strongly Agree (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			



Porter (2005) showed a majority of students at all three schools also said they would be comfortable working for a supervisor who was of a different racial or ethnic background. In every ethnic category, School 1 juniors said they are overwhelmingly comfortable working for a supervisor of a different ethnic background. On the other hand, School 2's juniors- both African American (56%) and White (40%) - were least likely to be comfortable in similar circumstances. School 3's ethnic population is statistically similar in its response to this question (See Table 4-10). All members of the focus group Strongly Agreed (4) or Agreed (1) they were comfortable working for supervisors of a different racial or ethnicity than their own (See Table 4-10A).

**Table 4-10:** Working for Supervisor of a Different Race – 2004 Student Survey

I would be comfortable working for a supervisor who was of a different racial or ethnic background than me. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	100	100	100	93	100	100	97
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	56	100	33	40	N/A	43	54
School 3 (Majority White)	62	100	64	69	67	72	67

**Table 4-10A:** Working for Supervisor of a Different Race – 2011 Focus Group

I would be comfortable working for a supervisor who was of a different racial or ethnic background than me.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Strongly Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Agree (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			

As far as simply working in a job setting with people of a different racial or ethnic background is concerned, Porter (2005) found the large majority of African American and White students think they are prepared to do so. School 1 students (93%) had the highest overall totals followed by School 3 (84%); then School 2 (80%) (See Table 4-11). Four of the five graduates Strongly Agreed they were prepared to work in a job setting with peers from different racial or ethnic backgrounds than themselves (See Table 4-11A). The lone exception was School 2 graduate, Byron, who judged his preparation as Neutral.

**Table 4-11: Working with Different Races – 2004 Student Survey**

After high school, I feel prepared to work in a job setting where there are people of a different racial or ethnic background than myself. (% indicating “strongly agree” or “agree”)							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other	No Ethnic Response	Overall School Total
School 1 (Magnet)	96	67	100	90	100	100	93
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	79	100	67	100	N/A	86	80
School 3 (Majority White)	87	100	100	81	67	78	84

**Table 4-11A: Working with Different Races – 2011 Focus Group**

After high school, I felt prepared to work in a job setting where there are people of a different racial or ethnic background than myself.							
	African American	Asian	Multi Racial	White	Other		
School 1 (Magnet)	Strongly Agree (Adrian)		Strongly Agree (Christina)	Strongly Agree (Elaine)			
School 2 (Majority African-Amer.)	Neutral (Byron)						
School 3 (Majority White)				Strongly Agree (Diane)			

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY

“Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them.” Frederick Douglass

The purpose of this study was to examine and gauge student and young adult perceptions regarding his or her public school experiences and preparation for success after high school and how he or she believe the availability of school choices may meaningfully improve public school outputs and achievement opportunities for future generations of all populations of people. The significance of this study is that even though findings from this research show these recent public school graduates from schools in a southeastern public school system under a federal desegregation order share their experiences and perceptions as generally favorable, they nonetheless want school choices options available to low-socioeconomic, minority populations- and themselves. The researcher gathered quantitative data in the form of student survey results from 2005 (See Appendix B) and two forms of qualitative data from 2011: a graduate survey (See Appendix C), and conducting a mini-focus group (See Appendix A).

Each of the five graduates in the qualitative data completed the graduate survey and participated in the focus group session. The graduates in the focus group provided detailed insights into the anticipated themes of future educational aspirations and goals, perceptions of support by the school, student learning and peer interaction, citizenship

and democratic principles. This led to the identification and documented of perceived advantages and disadvantages of their schooling experiences as well as the impacts of school choice options. Chapter Four provided a discussion of the findings for each of the above areas.

In the present chapter, the researcher used the findings related to the research questions to draw conclusions and to consider the implications from the study. The two principal research questions:

1. How do public school students perceive school choice options?
2. How do graduates describe their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences?

#### Analysis of Research Findings

In first anticipated theme, Future Educational Aspirations and goals, students overwhelmingly saw themselves attending post-secondary education options (See Table 4-2) as did the graduates (See Table 4-2A). All five graduates earned a college preparatory high school diploma from their respective schools and each of the five did eventually attend and graduate from a college or university located in the southeastern United States. Triangulated data findings do not reveal any significant discrepancies between the student survey, the graduate survey, or focus group interviews.

In second anticipated theme, Perceptions of Support by the School, triangulated data revealed wide-ranging findings illustrate variations of perceptions that suggest sometimes significantly different conclusions regarding perceptions depending on who is surveyed and when her or she is asked. All of the graduates said the encouragement and information regarding post-secondary education as well as the necessary academic

support preparation they received was both adequate and appropriate for their successes following high school. The 2004 student survey found less than half of the junior populations at the two comprehensive high schools (Schools 2 and 3) indicated they were encouraged to enroll in more rigorous classes compared to over 85% from School 1- the race-controlled magnet school populations Magnet School (Table 4-4).

In the third anticipated theme, Student Learning and Peer Interaction, these data show that students at the race-controlled magnet school populations have a much higher percentage of them perceive that their school experiences helped them work more effectively and to get along better with members of other races and ethnic groups, while less than 70% of students at the two comprehensive high schools believed so (See Table 4-6). The graduates universally said their high school experiences helped prepare them to work with members of other races and ethnic groups (See Table 4-6A).

Triangulated data further reveal school populations may prove a greater variable than ethnicity when it investigates comfort levels discussing controversial issues related to race. Students at the predominately African American student population at School 2 were much lower (51%) than the percentages of African American students at both the magnet school (96%) and the predominately white high school (89%) (See Table 4-7). This research found that four out of the five graduates were comfortable discussing race-related issues (See Table 4-7A), yet neither students nor graduates perceived they learn better when taught from people from their own race or ethnicity (See Table 4-8).

In the fourth anticipated theme, Citizenship and Democratic Principles, student perceptions differ from graduate experiences. These triangulated findings indicate

desegregation processes may have directly or indirectly provided greater opportunities and enhanced levels of support to prepare these populations to work for and together with, peoples of other races. More specifically, a little over half of the students believed court-ordered desegregation of schools provided better opportunities for people of their race (See Table 4-9, page ); however, a significantly higher percentage of focus group members (80%) believed desegregation improved opportunities for their race (See Table 4-9A). As a group, African American students at the comprehensive high schools had the lowest comfort levels about working for supervisors from a different racial or ethnic background, graduates were largely comfortable having a supervisor or merely working in a job setting with people of a different racial or ethnic background.

#### Research Question 1

How do public school students perceive school choice options?

The respondents' answers to in-depth focus group interview questions 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 2g, 2i, 3c, 4a, 4b, and 4c were used to answer this research question. Below is a discussion of the findings presented in chapter 4.

#### Discussion

The Center for Education Reform (2002) found that 76% of respondents supported providing parents with the option of sending their children to the school of their choice. Clowes (2004) found that 57% of parents with children presently attending public schools would send their kids to private schools if vouchers were offered the choice. Overall, the prevailing consensus among all five graduates was that school



choice options are viewed as viable and desired opportunities to improve schools. Diane emphatically said it is time for the United States to “quit settling” with regard to inferior public education, and Byron agreed. He perceives the current state of public education as being “low” on achievement levels and has to improve. Christina said the state of public education must provide more options to benefit students from every socioeconomic and ethnic background because “ultimately education affects us all.”

Adrian admitted he came to the focus group discussion with preconceived ideas of how school choice might work to benefit low socioeconomic, minority students. The discussions helped him realize that, “Even though three of us (in this focus group) went to the same college, we have different views and got different experiences because we weren’t the same people.” He said students can- and do- receive vastly different experiences attending the same school so “choices” already exist in schools, but he still supports the implementation of school choice options for students in grades K-12 paid for with funding already allocated for public school students. Research shows how school choice structures can cause a wave of students not lucky enough to land into a better educational setting that may create a situation of student against student and family against family in the attempt to access a quality education (Cookson, 1992).

Further discussion in this area revealed that graduates have strong opinions and lingering questions regarding school choice. Christina declared she was already strong proponent of school choice options. “I am a product mainly of school choice... and I know what I gained from that experience... I’d rather be able to choose which school my child goes to.” Byron said he appreciated the discussions and reflections on the topic because, “I see that school choice can make a difference in the lives’ of the

students and parents.” Diane, on the other hand, worried about the overall education a child might receive outside a public school setting. “I’m torn. Private schools may not give students enough of a worldly perspective.” Research shows however, that graduates of private schools are much more likely to enter college (Falsey & Heyns, 1984).

Even though she is a product of school choice, Elaine still wants more information on how school choice options would be offered and implemented. She was clear in wanting every student, “to have what I had at (School 1)... it’s a good option to have.” Although none of the focus group participants are married or have children, all strongly agree they want school choices for their children’s education. They all believe school choice options would compel existing public schools to get better to survive. As Adrian concluded, “Competition would improve public schools absolutely.” Aguirre (2000) found another component that improves schools: parental involvement, which is shown to be an important variable toward higher student achievement. When considering a particular school over another, the focus group members said they would look for a variety of factors but student achievement would be a primary factor. For Diane, she would weigh the availability of after-school programs and a variety of extracurricular activities.

Jones-Wilson, Arnez, & Asbury (1992) found that African American parents cite a lack of discipline as a major rationale for not enrolling his or her children in public schools. Byron said he desires a “good school climate,” while Elaine and Christina mentioned safe schools and high academic standards. Christina also placed a strong

emphasis on social experiences and fine arts. Adrian said “good teachers” and the quality and upkeep of the school should play a part in his school choice decisions.

In this study’s literature review, Godwin & Kemerer (2002) found that parents on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale have a proclivity toward school curricula that stress traditional values and basic learning skills whereas parents at the higher end of the socioeconomic scale tend to favor schools with a strong emphasis on abstract thinking and problem-solving skills and abilities. All focus group participants said they believe children of high socioeconomic parents receive a superior secondary education to kids of low-socioeconomic parents. Byron said that “rich” kids probably receive a superior education academically; yet he is not convinced they excel “culturally speaking.” Part of the inequity, he explained, is a lack of materials, inferior equipment, outdated textbooks, computers, etc., which should never happen. He advocated the idea of simply making the zoned schools better as a way of achieving equality and minimizing the economically disparities between students in the areas of facilities, equipment, textbooks, and supplies.

Elaine agreed but cautioned against simply putting a “band-aid” on the problem. “How can (schools in low-income areas) have fewer supplies, broken computers, and teachers that don’t care? It should be equal. It is state-funded so it doesn’t make sense to me.... The problem is much deeper than that.” Diane said there must be a way to deal with the problem directly by going back to the parents and seeing how involved they are in their child’s life. “Parents are looking at teachers and schools to fix the problems, while the teachers are looking for the parents to get their children more focused on academics.”

Adrian and Christina both said that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is working to level the playing field for poorer students, yet both also discounted the effect it might have on “rich” kids as they believe parents will readily move their children to schools they believe are better if they can afford to do so. Hastings, Kane, & Staiger (2006) found if parents are more concerned about nonacademic considerations, student achievement may not be improved at all. As Adrian stated in no uncertain terms, “I’m going to send (my kids) to a school where I feel is safe and I feel like they are going to get the best education whether I have to pay for it or not.”

Leaving a zoned school is not because parents are seeking a higher quality education, although it is cited as the critical motivation for parents when deciding to change schools. This concern for educational quality is highly consistent in every race and income grouping, while other concerns include racial equality, class size, safety, location of schools, and students’ friends at the school (Kleitz, 2000). In addressing the research question of how public school students perceive school choice options, the focus group considered several good considerations they experienced.

The graduates were candid and forthright as they contemplated how school choice might produce negative outcomes, too. For example, Adrian said he attended schools with healthy multicultural environments, which allowed students to coexist and cooperate within a healthy “melting pot” atmosphere. He can envision a scenario where too many parents decide to send their children to one particular school leaving classrooms overcrowded and education suffering as a result. Byron agrees and said it is possible for some schools to create a monopoly and skim the highest academically achieving students for themselves.

Christina agreed with the possibility of overcrowding in certain schools. She also believes school choice could lead to more racial segregation as an unintended consequence as some parents will choose to “stick with their own kind.” She explained that this phenomenon exists even today in all schools now, which she referred to as “inner segregation.” Hershkoff & Cohen (1992) found this is a possibility as some parental school choice plans have a segregationist history and did lead to further separation of the races and possibly more unequal educational opportunities for poor and minority populations resulting in sorting and dividing children along racial and class lines. Nonetheless, Christina readily acknowledges her favorable experiences in high school were a direct result of school choice and the involvement of many. “If we are going improve the school system and make sure it is at this certain standard, then we need to make sure everyone is on board: kid, teacher, and parent”

Diane and Elaine expressed worry that school choice enrollment policies might leave some students without suitable schools to attend other than their zoned schools. They want alternatives implemented as a way to uplift all schools and make them better. Diane is hopeful parents would take into account student achievement potential as the overarching determining factor in any school choice decision-making. “Hopefully parents would focus on academics rather than race or other type considerations.”

Some of those other considerations might include arbitrarily create divisions between parents and students into categories of “them” and “us,” according to Adrian. He believes if students were to attend a school that may be judged as being “less” than another school that perception- rightly or wrongly- will carry over into lower student

achievement. He said that is a reality today and believes it could worsen with school choices options for parents.

On the topic of whether public funding should be used to finance parental school choice, the graduates agreed it should. However Elaine wanted a clear set of guidelines of if, how, and when issues such as transportation expenses might be authorized. This example predicated a discussion on potential negative effects of school choice as it particularly relates to possibly being financed utilizing public funding. Elaine said that she has witnessed firsthand how some people take advantage of getting public monies and using them for purposes other than their intended objectives. She works at a state-funded, post-secondary technical college with a predominately African American student population. She admitted to a level of frustration in which several students are “taking advantage” of grants and loans by using funding for other expenses not directly related to their education. The problem is not simply one of individual’s improperly abusing the system as she also pointed out that the schools themselves might be complicit in allowing funding/overpayment issues to occur.

Elaine said that the college where she works regularly allows students to remain on class rosters even though they may never have attended or no longer attends classes. This poor recordkeeping, she said, forces the state to pay for student enrollment that simply does not exist. Adrian, too, has observed abuse with individuals and organizations using allocated monies. He worked on the executive council in student government while in college, where he caught organizations using stipends for purposes outside the scope for which it was issued. He worries this type of behavior could result on a larger scale if public monies were used to fund school choice options.

As Williamson (2005) points out, African American students routinely are behind their peers academically; however, when school choice options have been implemented those populations of students saw marked improvements in student achievement results (Forster, 2009; Peterson, Howell, & Greene, 1998, & Reiland, 1997). If education is not the top priority for this country, Diane adamantly said it should be very close. She said there must be a significant push to improve public education from all levels of government. “(Education) needs to become that much more important to deal with today’s problems today.”

### Research Question 2

How do graduates describe their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences?

The respondents’ answers to in-depth focus group interview questions 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, and 1g were used to answer this research question. Below is a discussion of the finds presented in chapter 4.

#### Discussion:

In describing their individual preparedness for success after high school, most graduates believed they were well equipped for post-graduation; however, some stated they may not have been fully informed of all possibilities available to them upon high school graduation. Crediting his experiences in high school, Adrian said he felt very prepared for the academic and social aspects he encountered while at his university, but he later realized that other post-high school opportunities were not fully disclosed to

him. "At other high schools, military recruiters would offer students options to go straight to work upon graduation," he said. Adrian said at his school (School 1), recruiters were predominantly from colleges and universities. Although he remembered a Navy recruiter was once at his school, his purpose was to promote ROTC as an option in college.

Christina said her high school experiences helped her with time-management and study skills that have aided her success in both college and work settings. Byron (School 2) felt very prepared not just academically, but all that high school life encompasses. Described his high school experiences as an "eye-opener" as he says he found out more about himself. "I struggled with self-esteem, and I guess high school is probably one of those places you wouldn't expect to get self-esteem boost, but I kind of actually did. It taught me about the type of person I wanted to be," Byron said. More specifically, he credits the support he received from counselors, teachers, and even classmates who "made me comfortable about who I was."

Diane said that she was well-prepared academically, but less so socially. "I feel my high school experiences were 'one-sided'. She explained that all of the college prep, AP classes, honors classes she took were populated with White students. I didn't spend as much time with (students of other races) except when she was participating in sports-related activities. Likewise, Elaine learned lessons related to race. She credits her high school scholastic preparation for her excelling in college because her academic load was less challenging there than in high school. Yet socially, she recognizes, "I wasn't prepared for was Black and White cliques because I was used to a multicultural (environment at School 1)... so it (my secondary education) almost oppositely prepared me in a weird way."



During the in-depth focus group interviews where the five graduates discussed their aspirations and goals after high school, each was asked whether they thought they had achieved their personal goals in their career/personal life six years after graduating from high school. Although each eventually earned a college diploma, not one of the five believed their futures had progressed as he or she envisioned. Adrian thought for a few moments and said he dreamed he would be advancing his career in a big city such as Los Angeles, Chicago, or New York until he began working and realized emphatically, “Hey, the job market sucks!” However, he reflected on his situation and concluded, “Naw, I don’t regret anything I’ve done. Yes I could have made other decisions and didn’t, but it’s OK.”

Fate also has yet to deliver what Elaine was forecasting. “I thought I’d be somewhere else. I thought I’d be more successful. I thought I’d have a ring on my finger... but I’m happy.” Christina was more philosophical in her response. “I am comfortable with who I am and accept where I am in life.... Everything happens for a reason.” Byron concurs although he was initially unsure of many things, including going to college. “I’m one of those people who didn’t plan a whole lot (after graduation). I wanted to graduate (from School 2), and I wanted to work somewhere. So I’m pretty OK where I’m at.” Diane believes she has matured since her graduation from School 3. “I’ve learned a lot about myself since high school.”

McGroarty (2001) found that across all socioeconomic groups, parental satisfaction was overwhelming positive in choice schools with regard to the school’s academic rigor, safety, and discipline matters as well as moral values in choice schools. Though not at the time, Elaine recognizes how her high school environment helped

prepare her for success. “I wish I knew then what I know now: how special my experiences were; how blessed I was to be around so many different kinds of people, and to witness things that I didn’t realize were awesome until looking back when I was in college.” Adrian described his high school experience as “very multi-cultural.” He said he never would have enjoyed such a wide variety of fine arts disciplines to include African dance, piano lessons, ballet recitals, violin performances, and acting had he not attended a magnet school. He realizes he chose those activities instead of football and basketball games, but he explained, “I feel like my experiences showed me a broader range of experiences than a traditional high school.” “Very colorful” is how Christina succinctly explained people coming together from a variety of backgrounds and races for a common purpose- a magnet school education. She fondly remembers her high school experiences. “I wouldn’t change my high school experiences for the world.”

“Parallel equivalence” is how Elaine intellectually compared her fine arts education at the magnet school to what other high school students experience preparing, for example, sports. Diane said she was supported by her school, but believes that its availability can go only so far and personal responsibility must take over. “I put myself in a position to benefit from what my high school had to offer. Byron described his high school education as “top notch.” Christina used descriptors such as “memorable” and “beneficial,” while Adrian emphatically said his experiences were “outrageous.”

Greene (2000) found that school choice contributes to elevated levels of racial integration and civic principles and that existing choice programs show that participating families have very low incomes and largely come from single-mother households, and

have a preceding record of low academic achievement. However implementing school choice options must consider ethnic bias as well such as geographical barriers can be psychological as well as physical as there is a general preference of some parents to educate children with others like them (Raab et. al., 1988). Additionally, a parent or guardian who thinks he or she is unwelcome or perceive awkwardness in a particular setting may decide against choosing a different school, even one with superior educational quality. This occurs because access is limited by certain cultural considerations rather than physically (Theobald, 2005). The concept of social distance helps explain how individuals perceive themselves as similar to- or different from- others regarding their particular social position (Bourgeois & Friedkin, 2001, p. 248). Sending children into neighborhoods differing significantly from those of their own family may make parents and guardians at all socioeconomic levels uncomfortable (Theobald, 2005).

Byron, an African American graduate from School 2 with the predominately African American student population, judged discussing issues of race as “Neutral.” In 2004, the surveyed student population at his school was markedly less comfortable than students at either of the other two schools discussing these contentious issues of race. Diane said that although she is grateful for most everything her high school provided to her as a student, she reflected on some things that were missing. “I didn’t get to experience as many worldly things or as many cultural things.” She realizes she could have been a part of several important and meaningful experiences had she been a student in a more diverse student population.

## Conclusions

This study's title spotlights attention on the social justice principles of school choice options focused through the "pragmatic lens of the American ideal." The title is intended to convey a starting point with which to engage a debate regarding how to best provide greater access to high quality educational options for low-socioeconomic, minority student populations. The pragmatic lens is the filter that Menand (1997) discussed whereas democratic traditions promoted experimentation, invention, and education of choices serve to foster consequential dialogue that ideally serves to arrive at a consensus for improving public schools through equity and availability of opportunity. Otherwise, America's public schools may continue to have groups of disenfranchised students based on race, gender, and class (Menand, 1997). As (Peterkin & Jackson, 1994) explained, our nation may realize a more equitable society through our public schools if school reforms improved curriculum and instructional techniques focused on social justice. Public school system policies across the United States are effectively denying thousands of at-risk children the prospect of a more promising tomorrow. Former Education Secretary Rod Paige posed a poignant question in a speech he gave in 2004, "Who among us would condemn a child to an inferior education? Which child? Whose child?" (Paige, 2004).

It was not so long ago *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ended the separate but equal public schools, thus allowing African American children the opportunity to pursue the same quality schools enjoyed by their White counterparts. Today, a large percentage of minority populations are still being discriminated against under the guise of school zones that allow governments to restrict educational opportunities by dictating

where students are allowed to attend schools. Instead of skin color, the divisions are drawn based largely on economics- of where parents or guardians can afford to live.

Kozol (2006) tells us that “Racial isolation and the concentrated poverty of children in a public school go hand in hand... A segregated inner-city school is ‘almost six times as likely’ to be a school of concentrated poverty as is a school that has an overwhelmingly white population” (p. 20). Just as Brown I (1954) legally eliminated the racial discrimination of separation in public schools, school choice options for parents loosen the governmental controls that prevent parents from choosing what they feel are the best and often most appropriate educational opportunities for their children. Three problems currently exist with the present public school educational system.

1. First it denies inner-city children “equality of opportunity” by keeping them from attending better schools where higher expectations are more favorable to academic success.
2. Second it discourages diversity because elected officials typically secure educational funding to the school districts that reflect their educational values.
3. Last it provides the wealthy substantially greater parental rights than to parents with lower incomes (Godwin, 1998, p. 548).

Conclusions drawn from the results of the study are discussed in relation to each research question and anticipated themes of this research based on student and graduate perceptions.

1. The subjects of this qualitative study were five public school graduates from three schools in a southeastern public school system still under a

federal desegregation order. Contained within this sample, the graduates attended three schools with different ethnic populations: one majority African American student population at a comprehensive high school, one majority White student population at a comprehensive high school, and a racially balanced student population at a magnet school whose enrollment is controlled by a race-based formula. From the information gathered, it can be concluded that all graduates, participating in this study, perceived being sufficiently prepared for success after high school as they reflected on their experiences and perceptions while in high school.

2. From the data the researcher gathered with regard to the advantages verses the disadvantages associated with school choice, the major social justice theme was that educational options increases student achievement, parental participation and engagement, and serves to diminish opportunities of isolation and oppression. Therefore, the researcher concludes that school choice is a viable option for parents who desire school choices other than those dictated by local school systems providing more of an equality of opportunity without regard for socioeconomic status.
3. With regard to the overarching research question regarding how public school graduates perceive school choice options, the following perceptions can be concluded from the information received in this study. It can be concluded that public school graduates perceived school choice

options as desired and effective means to promote equity to students from low-socioeconomic, minority backgrounds.

4. With regard to the research question regarding how public school graduates describe their preparation and life skills development through their schooling experiences, the following perceptions can be concluded from the information received in this study. It can be concluded that public school graduates largely believe they received quality, enriching, and meaningful experiences while in high school.

### Implications

The Civil Rights Project (2002) found that American students still suffer from a lack of educational opportunity in a single race school but not because of ethnicity. The mitigating factor is poverty; however, the remedy is not to achieve numerical integration comparable to the metropolitan area, but rather to alleviate the overwhelming concentration of poor students in one school district. In particular, an economic integration remedy would focus on the elimination of high-poverty school districts, those with over 50% low-income children (The Civil Rights Project, 2002). The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will add to the body of knowledge concerning student perceptions of his or her preparation from their high schools for success after graduation and how her or she perceive how the availability of school choice options may serve to provide equity within public education so that low income, minority populations are afforded the same opportunities as children of higher socioeconomic parents.

Several implications resulted as a product on these findings. Two major categories of students were identified and their perceptions were reported and analyzed. The first group was students from 2004 and their collective perceptions were analyzed compared to graduate perceptions in 2011. The perceptions of the graduates were the group for whom the implications are deemed most significant to this study. From these data, the researcher revealed the perceptions of students and graduates from three different schools within the same southeastern school district. Their individual and collective perceptions may have an impact on a broader population of educators and policymakers. Based on the findings of the study, the following implications should be considered:

1. This study gauges the evolution of thinking from the student perspective as juniors in high school to graduate perceptions as he or she recall his or her preparation for subsequent post-secondary success in their personal and professional lives. The graduates imply that although they were generally pleased with the education they received throughout their time in high school, they nonetheless viewed school choice options as necessary to provide equity for students from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.
2. This study implies that the convolution of lived experiences has the capacity to mold a more tolerant citizen open to the ideas of rethinking the traditional public school models of school assignments based on where a student's parent lives due to a variety of circumstances that may include socioeconomic, familial, and other personal considerations.



3. As this research analyzes the growth and development of school choice considerations as priorities and responsibilities change in each student's personal and professional lives. This implies that as young adults begin to consider families of their own they covet more educational options.
4. In considering citizenship and democratic principles, graduates' perceptions say they have experienced comfort in working with- and for- peoples of ethnicities other than their own. This implies equity of access to schools for minority populations sought through Brown 1 (1954) may have been realized by these graduates of these schools under a desegregation order.
5. In considering student learning and peer interaction, most graduates believed he or she were comfortable discussing race-related issues, and all believed their high school experiences helped prepare them to work with members of other races and ethnic groups. The implication may be that not only graduating from high school but also graduating from an ethnically diverse college/university and perhaps working in multicultural settings may foster a greater comfort with interacting with people from other ethnic backgrounds.
6. In considering perceptions of support by the school, all graduates believed he or she received appropriate levels of encouragement to enroll in more rigorous courses and received suitable encouragement and information regarding post-secondary education, which significantly differs from student perceptions. This implies schools may need to reevaluate how

they support all students and not just those who they deem are interested in post-secondary educational options.

7. In considering perceptions of support by the school, all graduates expressed sufficient levels of support by the school. This significantly differs from student perceptions from 2004. As with the previous implication, schools may need to reevaluate how they support all students and make a deliberate effort to provide appropriate encouragement to all students.

### Recommendations

After reviewing the literature review, evaluating graduate perceptions, and analyzing their desired outcomes, this researcher concludes that the findings clearly show that parents of all economic and ethnic backgrounds should be allowed opportunity to access the primary and secondary schools of their choice. This fundamental change could lead to:

1. Public schools serving the interests of a participatory community without the undue and unnecessary interference of overbearing external forces with agendas that do not serve the best interests of quality education and reasonable accountability.
2. Public schools becoming more relevant in ways that develop and more intrinsically motivate all students with particular attention paid to low-socioeconomically, minority society members.
3. School choice options systematically and methodically re-engaging more of our young people back into educational growth.

4. Parents engaging, recognizing, and appreciating the importance of superior instruction and the opportunities it frequently can create.

### Dissemination

This study will be bound and published for reference purposes in the library of Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. A copy of the completed dissertation will be made available to Dissertation Abstracts International. The researcher has securely stored all electronic and written transcripts and other data used to produce this body of study. These collected data will be destroyed six months after completion of the study. The researcher welcomes the opportunity to present this information to appropriate educational interests and may seek publication in local, state, regional, or national educational publications.

### Concluding Thoughts

This researcher concludes that America's public schools should allow all families- regardless of socioeconomic status- the same inalienable rights to decide the education they consider is in the best interests of their children utilizing allocated public funding with as little governmental interference as possible. This study finds that just because our local, state, and national governments distribute the funding, it is still the peoples' money already allocated for public education. Where school choice is concerned, this study found that less government interference is preferred by graduates. This position is supported by a large body of scholarly research contained in this study's literature review that documented support for school choice within the minority community,

especially in areas of the nation where school choice models are in effect and are working for the benefit of its students.

As this study noted earlier, Menand (1997) showed how pragmatic frameworks respect the time, location, and situations that influence particular concepts as they are considered. As this study has shown, public education has evolved and changed throughout American history. If this pragmatic lens were to filter decisions with equity for all students as an overarching consideration, more governmental and societal barriers could be dismantled allowing for greater opportunity for many more students in public schools. If we subscribe to the notion that America is undeniably the Land of Opportunity, this idea must embrace the notion that the availability of a quality education is a core value from which to build upon. It is improbable that students will excel academically and socially in deteriorating buildings while being taught by educators teaching out of their certified area, and led by administrators who are unresponsive to parental concerns. Absent illegal or immoral conduct from the parent or guardian, political leaders, administrators, and educators must learn to trust that parents and guardian can help decide the best and most appropriate education for their children.

This ideal of empowering an underserved cultural population into believing they can- and should- be a significant part of this society should evolve into nothing short of what should be expected. This precept should never be limited to an economically privileged few, which serves to lead to oppression, isolation, and unequal access to desired educational options for low-socioeconomic, largely minority populations. The fact is that any American can be elevated to the highest political office in the world, the American presidency, without regard to bloodline is but one example of the possibilities

that exist without regard for gender, class, or ethnicity. This is not to imply that significant challenges do not exist; however, the first step is to reach the child and help him or her to dream of lofty, achievable outcomes. Although this behavior must continually be nurtured, it originates in homes and classrooms filled with imaginative, bountiful expectations.

From an equity perspective, these findings consistently demonstrate that public school graduates want school choice options available for low-income, minority students. They conclude that by allowing parents more control over their children's education, public schools being subjected to a competitive marketplace will force them to improve in order to survive as they contend with other educational options. This fundamental shift in how public education is delivered may serve to break down barriers that serve to oppress and isolate these populations.

Future research may expand this study on a national and state level by continued monitoring of school choice initiatives on a national level and its impact on student achievement and parental support for all peoples. For greater context, it may be helpful to continue revisiting focus group members as they age, get married, continue in their careers, and begin having children of their own. Through their lived experiences, it may be helpful to measure how their views of school choice options develop as their needs and priorities adjust as they assume the role of parent.

This researcher believes that years from now, we as a nation will look back and wonder how governmental controls such as attendance zones policies were allowed to exist for as long as they did; yet that hindsight is still in our future. This research may contribute to furthering the discussion to what this researcher believes is its inevitable

conclusion. Whether school choice will be available in public schools across this great land is a not a question of “if” but rather “when” it will become a reality. As the greatest nation on Earth, it should find a way to resolve this delayed birth of freedom so that America’s parents and students have this foundationally essential opportunity to realize the American Dream; however they envision it for themselves.

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Appendix A

**FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS - DONALD PORTER**  
**IRB TRACKING NUMBER H12071**

**1. Quality of Education:**

- a. What type of high school diploma did you receive? (College prep, vocational prep, dual, etc.)
- b. After high school, did you continue into post-secondary education (i.e. college, vocational school, etc?)
- c. Reflecting on your own experiences, what are some of the words you would use to describe your time in high school?
- d. How would you rate the quality of the public school education you received?
- e. How would you describe your preparedness for success after high school?
- f. Would you want your children to have the same experiences in high school you received?
- g. Are you where you thought you'd be in your career/personal life six years after graduating high school?
- h. When you were in school, did you want to attend a different school?
- i. Looking back now, do you think you might choose to attend a different school- perhaps in a different county or state- knowing what you know now?

**2. School Choice:**

- a. When you hear the term "school choice", what's the first thing you think of?
- b. Generally speaking, do you think children of "rich" parents receive a better education than children of "poor" parents?
- c. If you believe children of "rich" parents receive a better education than children of "poor" parents, what might "level the playing field" for lower socioeconomic parents?
- d. If you don't believe children of "rich" parents receive a better education than children of "poor" parents, why do you feel this way?
- e. Should parents be able to decide where their children attend schools in grades K-12, or should this be left to the school system to decide?

f. What conditions might change your mind and allow parents to decide where their children attend schools in grades K-12?

d. If you were to consider choosing a school for your children, what would be some of the things you would want to know about a school before making a selection?

e. What might be some things that might improve public schools if parents were allowed school choice options?

f. What might be some things that might be bad for public schools if parents were allowed school choice options?

g. If parents decided to choose a school other than their “zoned” school, should public funding be used to pay for it?

h. Do you have children?

i. Do you want school choice options available to you for your children’s education?

**3. Public Policy:**

a. Do you vote?

b. How regularly?

c. Might a politician’s stance regarding school choice play any part in you deciding whether or not to vote for them?

**4. Conclusion:**

a. Any issues discussed in this focus group make you rethink or reexamine your views on school choice?

b. If so, which one(s)?

c. How so?

APPENDIX B

**STUDENT SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS**

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	After high school, I feel prepared to work in a job setting where there are people of a different racial or ethnic background than myself.	5	4	3	2	1
2	After high school, I want to go to a college or a vocational school.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I believe court-ordered desegregation of schools has provided better opportunities for people of my race.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I am/would be comfortable working for a supervisor who was of a different racial or ethnic background than me.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I have been given ample information regarding post-secondary admissions by teachers, counselors, and/or other adults. <i>(This information includes SAT, ACT, financial aid, college fairs, college applications, etc.)</i>	5	4	3	2	1
6	I think that my school experiences have helped me work more effectively and to get along better with members of other races and ethnic groups.	5	4	3	2	1
7	I have been encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to enroll in AP or honors courses.	5	4	3	2	1
8	I believe that I learn better when I am taught by someone of my own race.	5	4	3	2	1
9	I have been encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to attend college or vocational school.	5	4	3	2	1
10	I am at-ease discussing controversial issues related to race.	5	4	3	2	1

***My ethnic background is: (Please circle one)***

African American	Asian	Multi-Racial	White	Other
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APPENDIX C

**Graduate Survey of High School Experiences and Perceptions**

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	After high school, I felt prepared to work in a job setting where there are people of a different racial or ethnic background than myself.	5	4	3	2	1
2	After high school, I wanted to go to a college or a vocational school.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I believe court-ordered desegregation has provided better opportunities for people of my race.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I am/would be comfortable working for a supervisor who was of a different racial or ethnic background than me.	5	4	3	2	1
5	In high school, I was given ample information regarding post-secondary admissions by teachers, counselors, and/or other adults. <i>(This information includes SAT, ACT, financial aid, college fairs, college applications, etc.)</i>	5	4	3	2	1
6	I think that my school experiences helped me work more effectively and to get along better with members of other races and ethnic groups.	5	4	3	2	1
7	In high school, I was encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to enroll in AP or honors courses.	5	4	3	2	1
8	I believe that I learn better when I am taught by someone of my own race.	5	4	3	2	1
9	In high school, I was encouraged by teachers, counselors, and/or administrators in this school to attend college or vocational school.	5	4	3	2	1
10	I am at-ease discussing controversial issues related to race.	5	4	3	2	1

***My ethnic background is: (Please circle one)***

African American	Asian	Multi-Racial	White	Other
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APPENDIX D

LITERATURE REVIEW CHART				
STUDY/RESEARCH	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Adnett & Davies, 2005	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	School choices within schools are reduced depending on whether the student is pursuing an academic or vocational path, which is oftentimes determined by a particular student's abilities or interests, but can be dictated by available resources within the school.
Aguirre, 2000	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	School choice has shown that it can actually increase parental involvement, which is an important variable toward higher student achievement.
Arnez & Jones-Wilson, 1988	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	1) African American parents decisively point to education as the vehicle for upward mobility, 2) African American adults from all socioeconomic levels say the crucial reason they choose nonpublic schools for their young is because they desire smaller student-teacher ratios, a greater sense of caring, and a better quality education.
Baum-Snow & Lutz, 2008	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	African American enrollment figures increased due to a White migration to private school settings which is an important force in generating changes in the racial composition of outlying central district neighborhoods

<p>Center for Education Reform, 2002</p>	<p>Investigated Education Reform Support</p>	<p>National study</p>	<p>Quantitative (Questionnaire)</p>	<p>1) 76% of respondents either “strongly” or “somewhat” supported “providing parents with the option of sending their children to the school of their choice--either public, private, or parochial--rather than only to the school to which they are assigned; 2) 63% of respondents were in favor of allowing poor parents to be given the tax dollars allotted for their child's education and permitting them to use those dollars in the form of a scholarship to attend a private, public, or parochial school of their choosing.</p>
<p>Chakrabarti, 2005</p>	<p>Examined empirical data on school choice</p>	<p>Synthesized data</p>	<p>Meta-analyses</p>	<p>1) Noted that the level of a mother’s education attainment is significantly higher among voucher applicants than qualified non-applicants, 2) Voucher applicants are more involved in school activities and have higher educational expectations for their children, than non-applicant parents.</p>
<p>Clowes, 2004</p>	<p>Investigated student achievement levels and school choice preferences</p>	<p>Grade 8 Students</p>	<p>Quantitative (2003 Urban NAEP Math Test)</p>	<p>1) Only seven percent of African American eighth graders overall scored proficient or above on the reading skills, 2) 2004 Phi Delta Kappa International/Gallup Poll found that 57% of parents with children now attending public schools would send their kids to private schools if vouchers were offered the choice.</p>



Cobb & Glass, 2009	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	1) Concluded that unregulated choice programs do not necessarily lead to improved academic achievement or curriculum innovation, 2) Found that unregulated school choice plans may tend to further the divisions between the socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, and achievement levels of students.
Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1981	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	1) Found that private schools are closer to the America ideal of the common school than are public schools, 2) When comparing school systems, determined that private schools appear to have teachers who are more committed to seeing that students learn, spend more time on academic subjects, demand stricter discipline, assign more homework, enjoy greater support from parents.
Coulson, 1999	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Found vouchers may persuade parents and guardians to become more involved in their children's education.
Dodenhoff, 2007	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Some disadvantaged parents may withdraw from participation in their child's education because of lack of time, energy, understanding, or confidence.
Dougherty, et al., 2009	Examined empirical data on Parental motivations	National study	Quantitative	Parents looking to buy a new home exercise school choice as they decide whether the public school district and attendance zones associated with a particular location matches their standards.
Falsey & Heyns, 1984	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Found that graduates of private schools are much more likely to enter college.

Fecho, 2001	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Despite promising to offer meaningful curriculum reform and pedagogy, free market schools may tend to concentrate on easily tested, short-term curricular goals and outcomes in a concerted effort to enhance their marketing image.
Forster & D'Andrea, 2009	Examined Teacher preferences	National Study	Quantitative	Found that public school choices are made by teachers as well. A major national survey of teachers conducted by the U. S. Department of Education breaks down observational data for public and private school teachers, which finds that public school teachers say they do not work in systems that provide the best environments for teaching.
Forster, 2009	Examined empirical data on school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Studies concluded that vouchers improved public schools.
Gant, 2005	Economic conditions and impact on education choices	Families with reported income.	Quantitative Reports (i.e. Census)	1) Low and moderate income parents do not ordinarily possess the financial means to have access to better schools, 2) the more and better education a person has the more abundant their options are.
Godwin & Kemerer, 2002	Examined empirical data on student achievement and Parental Preferences	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Studies show that parents on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale have a proclivity toward school curriculums that stress traditional values and basic learning skills whereas parents at the higher end of the socioeconomic scale tend to favor schools with a strong emphasis on abstract thinking and problem-solving skills and abilities.
Godwin, 1998	Examined empirical data on Parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Found the most important consideration for parents as they choose schools is selecting a place to live, which means that housing markets continue to segregate students by ethnicity and income.

A DELAYED BIRTH OF FREEDOM

Goldring, Cohen-Vogel, Smrekar, & Taylor, 2006	Examined empirical data on student assignment	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	African American students were much more prone to be reassigned to schools in at-risk neighborhoods as cross-town busing was eliminated
Greene & Peterson, 1997	Examined empirical data on student achievement following implementation of school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Standardized test scores were appreciably higher in Milwaukee.
Greene, 2000	Examined empirical data on implementation of school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	1) School choice contributes to elevated levels of racial integration and civic principles, 2) existing choice programs show that participating families have very low incomes, largely come from single-mother households, and have a preceding record of low academic achievement.
Harris, 2007	Examined empirical data on student achievement and the effects of accountability	Synthesized data of over 60,000 Schools	Meta-analyses	1) Found that in the ongoing pursuit of educational equity, state and national accountability efforts are credited with highlighting the consistent high academic successes of a large number of low-poverty schools at a rate of 22 times that of their high-poverty counterparts, 2) also found that schools serving student populations of both low poverty as well as low minority are 89 times more likely to be consistently high-achieving as compared with schools of high-poverty and high-minority schools.
Harwood Group, 1995	Economic conditions and impact on education choices	Survey Participants	Quantitative Reports (Questionnaire)	Nearly 80% of African American families would choose private schools if vouchers would offset the costs
Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2006	Examined empirical data on student achievement and the effects of parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	If parents are more concerned about non-academic considerations, student achievement may not be improved at all.

Henig, 1999	Examined empirical data on demand for School Choice	Synthesized data collected over nine years	Meta-analyses	Studies have become more numerous and sophisticated that now trends are beginning to surface such as the likelihood that demand for school choice options appears to increase after choice plans have been in place for awhile
Hershkoff & Cohen, 1992	Review effects of school choice plans	National study	Quantitative	Parental school choice plans have a segregationist history and will lead to further separation of the races and possibly more unequal educational opportunities for poor and minority populations. This system, they contend, serves to sort and divide children along racial and class lines.
Jones-Wilson, Arnez, & Asbury, 1992	Investigated motivators among minority populations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	1) Historically, African Americans have been major supporters of public education for their young, and have for generations fought for equality of opportunity and quality schools, 2) If public school choice becomes a reality, there is fear that there might be a massive “Black flight” away from public school toward other nonpublic options, 3) African American parents cite a lack of discipline as a major rationale for not enrolling their children in public schools. They believe improved discipline would help overcome many of the schools’ problems.
Kafer & Butcher, 2003	Examined empirical data on student achievement and the effects of parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Research on the efficacy of parental choice confirms that students do as well or better at choice schools, parents are more satisfied, and public schools improve with competition.
Kozol, 2006	First-hand account of conditions of inner city schools	Schools	Qualitative	Most inner-city schools are populated by poor, minority students and are failing.

Levin, 1999	Investigated if school choice serves to enhance opportunities for racial justice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Whites will consistently choose schools with lower percentages of minority students and that African American parents, too, would choose schools that are more racially homogeneous, thus leading to greater racial and socioeconomic isolation.
Lewis, 2002	Examined empirical data on student achievement and teacher impact	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Observed a passive acceptance of the textbook-dominated curriculum and the scripted behavior that serves to deskill innovative teachers.
Martinez, Godwin, & Kemerer, 1995	Examined empirical data on student achievement following implementation of school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Standardized test scores were appreciably higher in San Antonio.
McGroarty, 1994	Examined empirical data of parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Parents entering their children into Choice schools demonstrate a high rate of parental involvement coming into the programs and even higher involvement after enrollment, 2) An overwhelming (97%) responded that school choice options should continue.
McGroarty, 2001	Examined empirical data of parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Across all socioeconomic groups, parental satisfaction was overwhelming positive in choice schools with regard to the school's academic rigor, safety and discipline matters, as well as moral values in choice schools.
McGroarty, 2002	Examined empirical data of parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Found private schools don't siphon off the best students from the public schools by providing evidence that rather than skimming off the best students they simply take those through self-selection, apply, and are accepted.

A DELAYED BIRTH OF FREEDOM

McGroarty, 2004	Examined empirical data of parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Choice students have parent(s) and/or grandparent(s) who are interested and engaged in their child's education and work to find the right school for them.
National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2004	Examined empirical data on student achievement following implementation of school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	School choice options are hardly the universal remedy as declared by its advocates nor is it the death of American public schools as feared by its critics as the links between school choice and any outcomes are dependent on how communities organize and implement them.
Peterson et al., 2001	Examined empirical data on student enrollments	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Found that public schools are more segregated than private schools.
Peterson, Howell, & Greene, 1998	Examined empirical data on student achievement following implementation of school choice	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Standardized test scores were appreciably higher in Cleveland.
Public Agenda, 1999	Examined empirical data of parental motivations	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	67% of inner-city parents of public school students would opt for private schools if tuition was not a barrier to this educational option
Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987	Investigated motivators among minority populations	National study	Quantitative	Primarily urban schools are a representation of ethnic power and identity among the minority groups who wanted to have access to quality education for their children.
Ratteray & Shujaa, 1988	Examined empirical data of effects of desegregation	Synthesized data	Meta-analyses	Since desegregation, urban schools populated by African Americans are "of poor quality, have inordinately high dropout rates, and consistently produce dismal academic results"

<p>Reiland, 1997</p>	<p>Examined empirical data on student achievement and Parental Preferences following implementation of school choice</p>	<p>Synthesized data</p>	<p>Meta-analyses</p>	<p>1) In Milwaukee, after the first four years of the nation's first tax-funded school choice program, the average reading and math scores of school choice students, of which 70% were African American, were 5 and 12 percentile points higher, respectively, than those of comparable low-income public school students, 2) a poll by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute showed that 95% of African Americans in Milwaukee support the city's school choice program.</p>
<p>Rouse, 1998</p>	<p>Examined empirical data on student achievement following implementation of school choice</p>	<p>Synthesized data</p>	<p>Meta-analyses</p>	<p>Test scores in Milwaukee showed significant improvements in early comparisons following the implementation of school choice options</p>
<p>Theobald, 2005</p>	<p>Investigated role of geography in school choice policies</p>	<p>National study</p>	<p>Quantitative (Questionnaire)</p>	<p>1) The role of geography is often not considered when analyzing the effectiveness of school choice policies, 2) Sending children into neighborhoods differing significantly from those of their own family may make parents and guardians at all socioeconomic levels uncomfortable.</p>
<p>Tice, Princiotta, Chapman, &amp; Bielick, 2006</p>	<p>Examined empirical data on student enrollment and socioeconomic conditions</p>	<p>Synthesized data</p>	<p>Meta-analyses</p>	<p>Students in public schools offering choice were the least likely to be White and the least likely to live in two-parent families, compared with students enrolled in other type schools.</p>
<p>Williamson, 2005</p>	<p>Comparisons of student achievement levels</p>	<p>National study</p>	<p>Quantitative (Questionnaire)</p>	<p>Student achievement between the various ethnic groups there remains a marked difference with African Americans routinely behind their peers.</p>

<p>Witte, Thorn, Pritchard, &amp; Claibourn, 1994</p>	<p>Examined empirical data on student enrollment and socioeconomic conditions</p>	<p>Synthesized data</p>	<p>Meta-analyses</p>	<p>76% of Milwaukee choice students lived with single parent, female-headed households with approximately 60% receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children or public assistance.</p>
<p>Wolf, 2008</p>	<p>Provide Enrollment Analysis of Impact of Implementation of School Choice</p>	<p>Milwaukee Students</p>	<p>Quantitative (Questionnaire)</p>	<p>From 1990- its first year of operation- the Milwaukee School System enrolled 341 students in the seven secular private schools participating in the program. In 1995, when Wisconsin lawmakers allowed religious schools to participate, the enrollment cap increased from 1.5 to 15% of K-12 students. By 1998 enrollment in the MPCP had jumped more than 400% and the MPCP was quickly transformed from a small pilot initiative to a large and maturing parental school choice program.</p>
<p>Zhang, 2008</p>	<p>Examined empirical data on student enrollment demographics and student achievement</p>	<p>Synthesized data</p>	<p>Meta-analyses</p>	<p>Private school enrollments are also sensitive to academic achievement and the racial composition of the neighborhood.</p>



APPENDIX E

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Donald Porter  
Dr. Julie Maudlin

**CC:** Charles E. Patterson  
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** 10/12/11

**Expiration Date:** 9/20/12

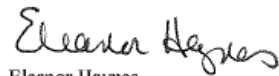
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H12071** and titled **"A Delayed Birth of Freedom? Public School Graduates' Perceptions of School Choice Options: An Analysis of School Choice Opportunities of the People, by the People, and for the People Viewed Through the Pragmatic Lenses of the American Ideal."** it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of 6 subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

  
Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer