More Power to You: Parental Experiences with the Public School Choice Option Provided by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

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MORE POWER TO YOU: PARENTAL EXPERIENCES WITH THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE OPTION PROVIDED BY THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT OF 2001

by

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A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was the federal government’s commitment toward providing an equitable education for all students. Recognizing the impact parents had on the academic achievement of their children, provisions for increased parental involvement were emphasized, especially when children attended low achieving schools. One way parents could exercise their newfound power to improve their children’s educational experience was to use the federal policy’s public school choice option to enroll them into higher performing schools which met or exceeded NCLB standardized testing goals.

This study examined the experiences parents and their middle school aged children had using the NCLB public school choice policy. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What prompted parents to enroll their child in the No Child Left Behind Act’s school choice program? (2) What are parents’ perceptions about the support that the receiving schools and the school district provided them and their child as a result of their NCLB choice transfer? (3) How are parents describing their child’s experience after enrolling in the NCLB school choice program? (4) How are parents describing their own experience with the school and school district after enrolling their child in the NCLB school choice program? and (5) How has parental involvement changed since using the NCLB public school choice option?

Qualitative research methodology was used to investigate parent experiences via an interview guide and documentation. Case study and cross case study analysis provided detailed and descriptive narratives documenting their responses to the research questions and revealing themes critical to their experiences.
All of the study’s parent participants reported having one of three experiences: (1) they loved their experience because of the opportunities it provided; (2) they found the experience satisfactory because of problems; or (3) they disliked their experience because of its negative impact on their children. The issues that accounted for the differences in experiences included the level of support from the districts and receiving schools, varying aspects of receiving school culture, and interactions the NCLB transfer parents and children had with school officials, teachers, and students.
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I specifically want to express my gratitude to my dissertation committee who worked tirelessly to help me conduct a study that could greatly impact education, the cornerstone of American society. Thank you to Dr. Mary W. Scherr for serving as my dissertation committee chairperson. Your guidance, support, and encouragement have been immeasurable throughout this process, and I am very grateful for that. I also extend my gratitude to Dr. Bob Donmoyer for teaching and sharing with me his passion for methodology. A thank you also goes to Dr. Lea Hubbard for helping me to recognize the impact that our work as educators can have on the parents and students served within the public educational system.

Special thanks also goes to my husband, Derek, for keeping me focused and motivated to complete this work. From proofreading sections and solving computer problems, to cheering me on, I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without his love and support. I also want to thank the rest of my immediate family, especially Norma and Roscoe, for instilling in me the belief that I could reach this high achievement. Special thanks also go to Tina who reassured me throughout the process, and Bettye, who often gave me a quiet place to work. Lastly, I want to thank other family members and friends who did their part to pray, encourage, and support me as well. I am grateful to have such wonderful people in my life.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Parents have always understood the value of education in their children’s lives. A quality education was not only something that parents demanded and sought for their children, it was one in which they had a direct say in what was best for their children. For many, communicating with teachers by phone or email, helping with homework, and serving on school committees were only a few of the methods parents used to invest in their children’s education. Over the years, research chronicled the impact that these and other parental decisions and actions had on their children’s success in school. One specific and often controversial aspect of parental involvement discussed in the literature was school choice. Available to parents since the early days of this nation, school choice allowed parents to select public or private learning environments for their children (Ravitch, 2001).

Recognizing the positive effects that parents had on the academic achievement of a child, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 strived to increase parental roles in the public educational system. A reauthorization of the Elementary Education and Secondary Act (ESSA) of 1965, NCLB identified additional parental involvement as one of its means for “leaving no child behind.” Considering NCLB and its “parent-focused” objectives, one of its many provisions, the public school choice option was designed to improve the educational experiences of children, especially those attending underachieving schools as identified by NCLB’s accountability and testing standards. By allowing parents the choice to transfer their children from a low-performing school to one that had met the assessment standards of NCLB, it was important to study parents’
experiences with the public school choice option and whether the use of this provision had truly increased their involvement in their child’s education.

**Background to the Study**

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the federal government pledged its commitment to improving the education of all students. Designed to ultimately improve student proficiency on state educational standards, the goal of NCLB ensured that all children receive a quality education, especially those for which the public educational system had historically failed. Because of the many issues that surfaced around the implementation, accountability, and success of this federal legislation, educators, lawmakers, parents, and so forth, questioned its numerous policies and procedures. While some of these issues were being analyzed, many others had not even been studied and discussed extensively in the professional literature. One particular aspect involved parental choice and a parent’s experience with the public school choice option at the middle school level. To date, there has been limited knowledge about the parents’ perceptions of this policy and whether it had increased their involvement in their children’s education, a main goal of NCLB. Also in question were the parents’ opinions about the effect that this choice option had on them and their children who transferred from a school in need of improvement, a Program Improvement (PI) school, to a high-performing middle school.

No Child Left Behind was based upon four principles for improving public education: accountability, choice, school district and Local Educational Agency (LEA) flexibility, and improved reading. For the purposes of this paper, school choice was the primary focus. Secondarily, accountability on the part of the federal government and the
LEA is discussed to explain its connection to the public school choice option provision. The accountability principle of the law required schools to annually test reading and math skills and knowledge of students in grades 3-8; other content areas, such as science, were included over the years in this accountability system as well. Student performance itself translated into an adequate yearly progress (AYP) score that reflected the school’s overall performance and categorized the scores by poverty level, grade, race, disability, and English language proficiency. Disaggregation of the scores into subgroups allowed school officials to monitor all of the student’s progression toward proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, Overview—Executive Summary, ¶ 4). Any school that did not reach its AYP goal was penalized and underwent certain procedures. For example, if the goal was not met within 2 consecutive years, a school was identified as a school in need of improvement or program improvement (PI) school. Failure to meet annual goals during the third and fourth years then resulted in a school undergoing corrective action and reconstructive planning, respectively. Corrective action involved the replacement of staff, usage of new curriculum, decrease in management in the school, appointment of outside experts, extension of the school day or year, and/or reorganization within the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 29). Reconstructive planning included the implementation of at least one of the following actions: (a) opening as a charter; (b) replacement of school administration and staff; (c) arrangement with a private based educational management company; (d) take over by the state; and (e) other government established arrangements (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 31). In response to accountability and to assist parents’ search for a better educational situation for their children, NCLB contained more specific sub-policies and procedures regarding
school choice designed to ensure that students would not become trapped in their own failing schools.

With three school choice provisions, NCLB established opportunities for students from low performing schools to gain a quality education. Of the three, Public School Choice, also known as the school transfer policy, was created to offer parents at least two designated high performing school enrollment choices for their child. Again, this transfer policy stated that students attending a school that failed to reach its AYP for 2 consecutive years became eligible to attend other public schools that were in good academic standing within the district (Hess & Finn, 2004; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). School districts then orchestrated the move by providing transportation funds out of the Title I funds if necessary. To guarantee appropriate transfers for eligible students, school districts spent up to 20% of their Title I allocations (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, Overview–Executive Summary, ¶6). In the event that receiving schools had extremely limited spaces for eligible choice students, those with the lowest achievement scores and lowest economic status were given priority (U. S. Department of Education, 2002, Eligible Students, p. 8). When school districts were unable to find any available space for eligible students, these students remained at their school site and received Supplemental Educational Services (SES), funded by Title I, geared toward helping students reach content area standard proficiency goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, Overview–Executive Summary, ¶7). Therefore, NCLB attempted to provide parents and students with choices that potentially result in more effective instruction and/or services and construct a quality and equitable education.
Efforts to reform the public educational system so that it served all students had been in the works throughout time. Since the early 1600s, school choice existed as a possible means for providing an appropriate education. From voucher systems and charter schools to private academies and magnet schools, educators, economists, and parents turned to school choice often arguing for its accessibility and influences on student achievement. Adding school choice into the NCLB school reform equation furthered these discussions as to how parental choice might affect student outcomes.

Although NCLB was based upon previous reauthorizations geared toward providing assistance and support to schools so they could better serve the needs of disadvantaged youth, more of an emphasis was placed on the high stakes of standards and assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). Regardless of the situation, all schools, even high performing schools were expected to uphold their academic status. The choices that parents made and their ability to navigate themselves and their child through practices, policies, and procedures at the high performing school were at the heart of this study.

Considering the expectations of NCLB toward school accountability and increased parental choice, it was important to study parental interpretations of the public school choice option, before, during, and after its use, and its effects on them and their children, in hopes of informing more of them about the educational opportunities available for their children, improving parent-school relationships, and increasing student achievement through their increased and active involvement.

No Child Left Behind and the public school choice option had been plagued with numerous questions and problems. Stark demographic changes were one of the issues that greatly influenced education (Jones, 2004). Public schools were working extremely
hard to meet their AYP goals and the question was whether high performing “receiving” schools were better serving the academic and social needs of the increasing numbers of diverse students attending their school campuses. As more schools failed to meet NCLB standards, an increasing number of diverse students and their parents took advantage of the public school choice option to attend schools that had met their AYP goals. Although most of these schools generally had only a few spaces for eligible students, priority was given to students with the lowest achievement and economic status. Therefore, as high performing schools accepted and enrolled students from schools in need of improvement, it seemed likely that the schools would be serving students with academic and socially related needs that may have challenged the current knowledge and skills of its teachers and school administrators. In addition, these host schools had to accommodate the parent who was in a sense transitioning and adjusting to its requirements, culture, and expectations.

In short, it was expected that parents would be directly affected using the public school choice option of NCLB as they sought more desirable educational situations for their children. In question was how parents were treated by the school/district before, during, and after transferring their child to the receiving school. Parent/child preparation and their ability to adjust to the situations and challenges that occurred as a result of the transfer were in question as well. Thus, the need to examine the parents’ overall experiences associated with the use of the public school choice option was necessary. To date, however, the few studies that had been conducted to investigate NCLB and its school transfer option have not included much detail about the parental side of the policy.
These studies are conflicting and prompt further understanding of the aforementioned issues.

Statement of the Problem

The current public educational system has been plagued with many underachieving Title I schools, and many children have been enrolled in these schools where the scholastic performances did not reflect the proficiency expectations identified by the school accountability standards of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. To counteract this problem, NCLB recognized the impact that informed parents had on their children’s educational success (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). With increased parental choice, parents were able to select other public schooling options, where the adequate yearly progress goals had been met. Even though this federal legislation had provided more opportunities for parents to have input in their children’s education, it was unclear whether parents were actually taking advantage of these opportunities. In addition, there was some question as to whether districts and schools had honored their part of the parent/school relationship as stated by NCLB. Research regarding parental choice as it related to the public school choice option is limited; therefore, it is important to study the parents’ experiences as a means of enhancing their involvement within the public educational system while addressing more appropriate enrollment choices for their children who are scheduled to attend or already attending low-performing schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences that parents had with districts and schools before, during, and after using the public school choice option for their children at the middle school level. The levels at which parents actively interacted
with the district, school, and their children have been described in order to determine if
the NCLB goals for increased parental involvement actually occurred.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide the inquiry process, at least at the
outset of the study:

1. What prompted parents to enroll their child in the No Child Left Behind Act’s
   school choice program?

2. What are parents’ perceptions about the support that receiving schools and the
   school district provided them and their child as a result of their NCLB choice
   transfer?

3. How are parents describing their child’s experience after enrolling in the
   NCLB school choice program?

4. How are parents describing their own experience with the school and school
   district after enrolling their child in the NCLB school choice program?

5. How has their parental involvement changed since using the NCLB public
   school choice option?

Together, the research questions were designed to illustrate an overall picture of
the experiences that parents had with the NCLB public school choice option. From each
research question, interview questions were generated to ultimately answer and respond
to the situations mentioned.

Research question number one was included to get a sense of why the parent
chose to use the public school choice option. Identifying this aspect of their experience
not only showed their motivation for selecting a “better” school for their child, it also
explained to some degree how the parent was informed about the policy. Data also showed what parents knew and/or learned about the policy before making a decision to use it. Considering this information, answers also revealed to what extent their knowledge about the policy actually influenced their selection and interaction with the school. The value of understanding the parents’ thinking at the early stages of either considering or opting to use the public school choice option provided insight into how schools and districts can better inform parents seeking more appropriate learning environments for their children.

The second research question described the parent’s relationship with the district and receiving school in terms of the varying degrees of contact and communication that occurred between the two. It revealed the supports, or lack thereof, provided by each entity after the child was enrolled. Findings related to this research question provided schools and districts with more appropriate and tailored solutions for an improved and more involved relationship with parents. Dependent upon the parent experiences, data also extricated additional tips, tools, knowledge, and insight from parents who used the NCLB public school transfer option to better prepare and inform other parents who find their children in similar educational situations in the future.

Although the primary focus of this study was to understand parent experiences and perceptions of the NCLB public school choice option, some analysis of the policy’s effects on their children provided pertinent information related to the specific issues of this study as well. Answers from the associated interview questions also revealed how the parents viewed and interpreted their child’s experience at the receiving school. More specifically, these data offered insight about what the parents considered necessary for
the receiving school to do in order to create a positive learning experience for their children.

Research question number four provided insights about the parents’ overall experience with the NCLB public school choice option. This resulted in opinionated responses that showed whether parent/guardians were satisfied, dissatisfied, or remained neutral about their experiences with the district and/or the school. It was this knowledge, which was gathered from the data that explained why some parents chose to transfer their child and could be a determining factor for other parents considering this federal policy as well.

Lastly, the final research question returned to the principle of the No Child Left Behind Act that related to increased parental involvement and choice. Data regarding this question explained whether use of the public school choice option actually increased parental involvement in the cases studied. Responses exposed issues that districts and schools may need to consider since it is their responsibility, by law, to improve relations with parents.

To explore the research questions above, qualitative research methodology was the most appropriate approach for studying the issues related to this study. A number of parent/guardians, residing in various school districts, were interviewed to share their experiences with the No Child Left Behind Act public school choice option. Data from these interviews, along with documentation from federal, state, and local educational agencies were compiled. From that point, a multiple case studies research design was used. These findings were then cross-analyzed to possibly guide educational agencies and
policy makers and help them understand the experiences that parents may go through when they choose public school choice options for their children.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions and terms were used interchangeably throughout the study. Citations will follow those definitions that originated from the literature.


High Performing School: Schools that have reached their AYP goals as designated by NCLB standards. These schools will also be referred to in this study as “receiving schools.”

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

Parent Involvement: The work that parent/guardians do to support their child’s progress in school encompass parental involvement. This includes actions taken with child (at home and school) to improve his/her academic achievement and the actions taken with the school to improve his/her academic achievement.

School Choice: “Empower parents with the opportunity to choose a safe and effective school by promoting a competitive market of public, private, charter, and home schooling opportunities at the state level. Also referred to as parental choice (The Heritage Foundation, 2008, p. 1).
**Schools in Need of Improvement:** “These schools have failed to make AYP for two consecutive years” (“Summary of Titles,” 2004, p. 6). These schools will also be referenced in this study as Program Improvement (PI) schools, low performing schools, and neighborhood-home schools.

**Supplemental Educational Services (SES):** Additional academic instruction, such as tutoring and other after-school programs, provided to students attending schools that have consecutively under-performed.

**Title I:** “This program provides financial assistance to LEAs and schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, Program Description, ¶ 1).

**Significance of the Study**

Parents were notified when their child’s school had not met adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals as required by NCLB. If available, they were given the option to send their child from the low-performing PI school to a high performing “receiving school” that met the federal government’s accountability standards. The researcher assessed how parents described both their experiences and their child’s as they related to interactions with school districts and schools prior to, during, and after their child’s enrollment in a high-performing “receiving” school. District and school operations, practices and procedures, including administrative and instructional decisions, were reviewed and analyzed to determine the impact the school choice policy had on the newly enrolled students from low performing schools. Parents were asked to focus on their child’s experience and the processes by which the decision was made to participate in the
school choice option. They discussed their dealings with school district/school offices and personnel. They were encouraged to address the effect that this transfer policy had on their child. In addition, they were also asked how the process of transferring and enrolling their child and the experiences at the “receiving school” could be improved. By documenting parent experiences, discussions and practices centered on parent choice, NCLB and parent involvement could prove to have a revealing impact on how schools and school districts include work with parents in order to increase student achievement throughout the public educational system.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Related Literature

The review of the related literature includes four sections. The first section includes an evaluation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and assumptions made regarding its goals to provide a quality education to all students, especially those attending failing schools. The second section is a review of preexisting literature regarding parental involvement prior to NCLB, including its impact on student achievement, as well as the factors that affect parental choice. The third section of this review examines public school choice prior to NCLB. It begins with a brief historical overview of public school choice and a critique of magnet and charter school choice options and their impact on parental experiences and student achievement. The fourth section involves an analysis of the NCLB public school choice provision and its effects on parental involvement and experiences. The final section concludes with a summation of the related literature and research implications for this study and others.

Research Related to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was testament to the need for dealing with the increasing numbers of failing schools and the widening achievement gap occurring in the public school systems in America. Even into its sixth year of implementation, much of the preexisting literature related to NCLB continued to express disappointment and disbelief towards its claims of leaving no child behind. The yearly increase of failing urban schools along with those with high concentrations of low socio-economic and minority students (Stullich, Eisner, & McCrary, 2007) led school reform experts such as Darling-Hammond (2007) to denounce NCLB for its promotion of
inequity toward the very populations it was designated to support. Not all agree, but for Darling-Hammond and Rogers (2006), much of these inequities, due to a lack of resources, were a continuation of separate but equal, which ultimately resulted in an even larger disparity between the achievements of white students compared to that of Black and Hispanic students.

Other perspectives in the research regarded NCLB as a one-sized-fits-all school reform model, detrimental to the aforementioned underrepresented groups of students (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Weaver, 2007). Researchers suggested that NCLB’s stringent practices and requirements did not take into account student differences, as it related to their abilities and learning (Weaver). In concert with this view, Chapman (2007) identified the law as unreasonable in that it “seeks equality in results with no excuses—nobody out of line, everybody arriving at the same destination at the same time” (p. 25). Thus, it seemed that many not only opposed NCLB because of the belief that it was unaccommodating, but they considered it irresponsible to assert that all students, regardless of their knowledge, skill, and language levels, would reach proficiency in designated academic content areas by 2014.

Although this argument was pervasive in the research, the few studies that measured achievement gap trends associated with the implementation of NCLB had shown positive results. Stullich et al. (2007) for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the Center on Educational Policy (CEP; 2007), respectively, examined the academic growth of the targeted populations and found that the achievement gap was narrowing and that African-American and Hispanic scores were closing in on those of white students (CEP, 2007; Stullich et al., 2007). Furthermore, the findings unveiled an overall
increase in student test scores on state assessments since the 2002-2003 school year (CEP, 2007; Stullich et al., 2007). From these results, it appeared that the states had improved their educational systems and that NCLB was positively influencing all student achievement. To determine the reliability of state scores, these researchers used the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to compare achievement trends over the years (CEP, 2007; Stullich et al., 2007), although the two assessments differed. Results from the NAEP suggested that the gains states enjoyed from their self-selected assessments were slightly skewed. Of the results from the 2003 and 2005 school years, CEP (2007) explained that “since 2002, many states with improved scores on state tests have shown declines or flat results on the NAEP” (p. 61). Hence, researchers and educators alike questioned the actual increased achievement attributed to NCLB and NAEP since the state scores indicated conflicting evidence of achievement especially when states were adjusting their standards and tests to respond to NCLB.

The upward trends that occurred with both the achievement gap and student test scores proved to be problematic. As it turned out, the gains made by minority students were not as significant as hoped. Further review of the CEP (2007) study results showed that this gap was far from closing “even for subgroups that showed evidence of gaps narrowing” (p. 51). In fact, these findings suggested that regardless of the gains, closing them required extensive and continuous effort (CEP). Even more problematic was finding the link between higher test scores and NCLB. For many researchers and educators, this issue further clouded the reliability of the increased scores and NCLB’s supposed effect on student achievement.
To believe that the implementation of this federal legislation contributes solely to the increase in testing scores causes many to question the relationship. In fact, each of the aforementioned studies examining student achievement trends on state assessments emphasize that it is difficult to delineate which of the educational reforms that NCLB and state and local educational agencies employs influenced the most gains in student achievement (Stullich et al., 2007) and/or whether these gains occurred prior to or after its implementation (CEP, 2007). To further dispute the accuracy of the student achievement growth, CEP stated the following:

Test scores are not the same thing as achievement. Although tests are often viewed as precise and objective, they are imperfect and incomplete measures of how much students have learned. Still, state tests are the primary measure of achievement used in NCLB and are the best available standardized measures of the curriculum taught in classrooms. (p. 4)

Thus, the raised scores and discrepancies regarding NCLB’s actual effect on student achievement have left many to debate whether its goals for increased student proficiency would ever be met.

*Parental Involvement Under NCLB*

Of the vast amount of parental involvement literature already available, there was limited research that examined parental involvement under NCLB. Much of the literature was informational. For instance, there were numerous papers, brochures, and packets providing general information from the federal government and its affiliated think tanks. Accessible to the public, this literature usually included brief summaries of NCLB and its provisions and simply described expectations for increased parental choice under NCLB. Other existing literature proved to be quite opinionated with very few studies that were empirical in nature.
Unlike the previous reauthorization of ESEA, NCLB championed the ideals of parental involvement by prescribing a more detailed approach for local and state educational agencies to increase parental roles in public schools receiving Title I funds. In addition, it was the first reauthorization to define parental involvement in the following manner:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring—

- that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;
- that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school;
- that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Parental Involvement). [Section 9101(32), ESEA.] (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b, p. 3)

For the bipartisan policy makers who toiled together to pen NCLB, specifying the goals for parents’ to work with their children and the schools was viewed as one of the key forces that would help to narrow the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).

NCLB Responsibilities Toward Increased Parental Involvement

Throughout NCLB’s more than 1,000 pages, parental involvement was carefully threaded. Of this federal legislation, Section 1118 called out the manner in which parental choice would be expanded. The U.S. Department of Education’s Parental Involvement Title I Part A Non-Regulatory Guidelines (2004a) further delineated the responsibilities upon which states, districts, and schools should inform and push parents into a more active role in their children’s schools. State responsibilities to garner parental
involvement included their provision or strategies to LEAs/school districts to write involvement plans with parents and review and monitor these plans for NCLB compliance (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a, p. 8). Local Educational Agency officials were expected to co-write a plan with parents to explain Title I Part A guidelines and LEA expectations for parental improvement, disseminate that plan to all parents with children attending public schools under those guidelines, and implement that plan again with NCLB compliance (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a, p. 11). Finally, NCLB’s expectations at this level called for schools (with some help from the LEA) to write with parents a plan that described how the schools would explain parental involvement and rights, provide accessible and adequate information, and schedule periodic, flexible, and systematic opportunities for all parents to participate in their children’s schooling (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a, p. 22).

Of the already available parental involvement literature related to NCLB, much of the literature applauded NCLB’s plans for expanded parental choice. For example, DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) felt that “the law recognizes that parents are their children’s first and most important teachers, and for students to succeed in school, parents must participate actively in their children’s academic lives” (p. 361). However, many of the similarities stopped there. Arguments for increased parental involvement were steeped in very different causes. While some researchers linked the parental participation with increased student achievement (Epstein, 2005; Keller, 2006), others referenced how this approval for increased parental participation, spawned from the policy narratives of President Bush and Secretary Paige, claimed that America’s
failing public schools were directly related to teachers who lacked motivation and high expectations to teach poor children (Rogers, 2006).

Other literature differed as to whether researchers thought that parental involvement as stated by NCLB could be effectively carried out. According to Keller (2006), “Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher in the area of parental engagement, calls the parent-involvement part of the law ‘absolutely doable’” (p. 12). However, the extent to which effective parental involvement was attainable seemed to rest upon varying views. Although Epstein (2005) held this view, she believed that other actions needed to be taken to result in positive gains for students, parents, schools, and communities. Epstein posited that effective parental involvement was possible as long as “new ways of organizing more equitable and effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships” are implemented (p. 179). Thus, she proposed that enhanced parent/school relationships would need to be established in order to improve the educational experiences of the children served under NCLB. These relationships were not going to happen automatically. Epstein suggested that the expected positive outcomes required of NCLB would occur as if stakeholders would adhere to previous literature that identified teamwork as a means to seeing increases in student achievement and parental involvement. Rogers (2006) agreed with this notion of teamwork, but envisioned it to occur among groups of parents. According to Rogers, NCLB parental involvement actions seemed more individualized, a one parent at a time process; however, he endorsed team-based effort, where groups of parents could have a better chance at making decisions for their children and changing low-performing schools.
As with other aspects of NCLB, implementation issues related to parental involvement and the federal government also challenged the notion that designated policies and programs would be effective. With a more visible role in the public educational system, and its perceived commitment to increased parental choice, the federal government was criticized for its questionable ability to enforce the guidelines specified by the Parent Involvement Title I Part A guidelines. Rogers (2006) reported that the absence of federal government enforcement caused many districts and schools to disregard the intentions of the law, oftentimes limiting parents’ voices and options. Hence, the related literature regarding NCLB once again found the implementation and evaluation of provisions, namely parental involvement, faulty.

Lastly, much of the research placed the success and effectiveness of the parental involvement guidelines upon the number of parents who would actually participate in their children’s education. Again, much of the literature celebrated the steps taken to provide parents with more information and access (Epstein, 2005; Keller, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Per the parental involvement guidelines, states, districts, and schools had obligations to parents that would hopefully help them successfully make the most appropriate choices for their children. In fact, Rogers (2006) explained how President Bush and Secretary Paige described the newfound power parents possessed; however, he was quick to point out that this did not mean parents were using those new powers. Although NCLB guidelines specified the responsibilities that the educational agencies at all levels had toward parental involvement, the agencies’ practices, such as confusing and inadequate information about schools and test scores and late notifications of student scores and choice options, caused many parents to avoid their newly expanded
rights (Keller, 2006; Rogers, 2005). A final reason specified in the literature that may affect the effectiveness of parental involvement guidelines included the idea that NCLB did not take into account needy students and their families’ situations. For some, the problems that the parents and students of targeted populations experienced extended well beyond the educational realm. For these researchers, societal issues impacted their parents’ abilities to perform and participate adequately and consistently (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Keller, 2006; Rogers, 2006).

Accountability, testing, and increased student achievement were definitely needed as educators strive to provide a quality education for low-socioeconomic, minority, and other underrepresented student groups who need it the most. With much of the existing research directed at the testing and implementation aspects of NCLB, many researchers and educators alike did not envision excessive testing, crippling labeling systems, abrupt rescinding of funds, and the haphazard invitation for parents to participate as the means to improving those failing Title I schools. Further research is needed to determine the effects of NCLB on student achievement, school improvement, and more importantly, parental involvement.

Alternative studies from which the findings can be used to effect policy and practical changes are needed. Although it is important to note that the consistent and accurate reporting of data would aid in evaluation of NCLB, further examinations should occur to determine a more standardized method for measuring student performance on test scores. Because each state has its own standards and accountability measures, this makes it all the more difficult to assess and compare growth toward proficiency as it relates to NCLB guidelines.
Research Related to Parental Involvement Prior to NCLB

Parental experiences with the No Child Left Behind public school choice option were at the heart of this study. Therefore, it was necessary to review the literature related to parental involvement. Understanding what did or did not influence a parent’s actions regarding their children’s education was crucial to determining the research participant’s experiences. Although this study was directed at parental experiences at the middle level, much of the current literature focused on parental involvement is at the elementary level. Considering the purpose of this study to study involvement at the middle grade level and the further need in the current research to determine the effect of parental involvement at that level, there is, yet again, a need for this study.

Overall, research points to a link between a parent’s active participatory role and their children’s academic achievement. As stated previously, “parental involvement was considered one means of reducing the achievement gap existing between White students and some racial minority groups” (Jeynes, 2007, p. 103). As a result, many researchers sought to discover how parental involvement affected student outcomes. Considering the varying degrees to which parental involvement could be carried out, researchers such as Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) noted that parental involvement was a “multidimensional construct and should not be treated as a single construct” (p. 129). Observations such as these generated numerous studies; however, multiple meanings of parental involvement have caused similar, yet different findings related to the impact of parental involvement on student achievement.

Much of the research has centered on Joyce Epstein’s framework of the six types of parental involvement. Based upon the caring framework, the six types of parental
involvement included parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995). Children’s learning reflects the involvement of the school, family, and community as assessed by the framework. Although this framework does not consist of all of the existing types of parental involvement, it is a guide by which schools and parents could design effective involvement programs. An essential resource, the framework helped schools develop programs that encouraged parent and school partnerships, but also informed researchers’ study of the effectiveness of these programs and potential methods for improving parental involvement (Epstein).

Factors That Affect Student Achievement

In view of the varying degrees of parental involvement and Epstein’s framework of the six types of parental involvement, researchers found that parents’ participation in their children’s education generally yielded a positive affect on their achievement (Desimone, 2001; Epstein, 1985; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Singh et al., 1995). Increases in student achievement were not specific to any one group of students. Several studies showed that gains, of varying degrees, were made regardless of students’ ages, minority and socioeconomic status, and parent educational levels (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). However, the literature clearly stated that these gains did not just happen because parents randomly participated in their children’s education. Henderson and Mapp’s synthesis of some 51 studies expressed how active rather than passive types of participation all influenced an increase in student achievement and success in school.
Of the various types of parental involvement accessible to parents, numerous studies reported increased achievement as a result of home-based activities (Desimone, 2001; Epstein, 1985; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ingram et al., 2007; Singh et al., 1995). Additionally, high expectations and personal aspirations for educational success proved to have a positive affect on students as well. Research revealed that when parents conveyed the importance of school and the need to do well, their children were more than likely to experience positive gains in their learning, complete school, and pursue education beyond high school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ingram et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Singh et al., 1995).

As with most researchable topics, there were many different opinions and findings associated with the varying practices parents used. For instance, some versions of parental involvement proved to have little to no statistical significance on student outcomes and success in schools. Jeynes’ (2007) study of parental involvement in urban secondary schools revealed that varying degrees “of parental involvement such as having household rules and parental attendance and participation at school functions” had less an impact on student outcomes (p. 100). Other studies showed that parental control coupled with intense supervision could be detrimental to children. Although certain circumstances such as student academic and/or behavioral problems may have initiated this level of parental participation, this degree of parenting seemed to stifle the children’s productivity and attitudes, resulting in lower than expected student outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Singh et al., 1995).

Considering the fact that this study focused on high-performing middle schools, it was important to note what the research stated about the effect of parental involvement
on these schools. In these receiving schools, the benefits that students experienced were not solely the result of parental involvement. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), existing studies identified that the following factors explain why high-performing schools saw gains in achievement:

These include high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, as well as instruction and assessments aligned with those standards . . . effective leadership, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, focused professional development, and high levels of parent and community involvement. (p. 24).

Moreover, achievement in middle schools was not found just because of parental activity in the children’s education. The literature analysis, as presented by Henderson and Mapp (2002), described how a student’s sense of belonging and increasing teacher support, in addition to parental involvement, showed an improvement in student outcomes.

Factors That Affect Parental Involvement

Research from various disciplines examined why parents became involved in their children’s educational lives. From this research, numerous factors had been identified to either encourage or discourage parental involvement. Efficacy was one of the factors that greatly influenced parental involvement. According to various researchers, a parents’ perception of their ability to effect their children’s education was one of the primary factors that caused parents to act (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ingram et al., 2007). Another motivation tool for parental involvement explained in the literature was based upon the way in which a parent viewed his/her role in their children’s educational life. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), parental role construction as determined by their model of parental involvement was “influenced by parents’ belief about how children develop,
what parents should do to rear children effectively, and what parents should do at home to help children succeed in school” (p. 107).

The “invitation to participate” research highlighted a third factor that motivated parents to actively contribute to their children’s education. Parental perceptions about how teachers, schools, and their own children would welcome parent involvement displayed notable links between teacher practices and parental action especially when teachers solicited the support of parents by effectively communicating with them and providing doable strategies for at-home student learning (Epstein, 1985; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ingram et al., 2007). For parents, these acts and others initiated by teachers not only motivated parents but made them an extension of the learning process that was occurring in the classroom. Increased parental involvement was not solely based upon the shoulders of the teacher. Schools, specifically school climate and principals, also served as predictors of active parent participation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2007). When school environments welcomed parents, regardless of their visit, and when principals communicated the importance of parents to the progress of student outcomes and the school, all stakeholders benefitted from this. As a result, everyone associated with the school, from parents, staff, to the teachers, understood the significance of their concerted efforts.

The invitation to become more involved was also based upon the explicit and implicit messages that children relayed to their parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Some of these signals were related to the developmental stages of children moving from childhood to adolescence. Although researchers from all disciplines stated that continued parental involvement research
needed to be conducted at the secondary level, the current literature claimed that younger children wanted and accepted their parents to be a part of their schooling, asking parents to participate. But as children aged and moved into the upper elementary, middle, and high school grades, their need for independence altered their desire and decreased their requests to have their parents involved on and around campus. Either way, feedback from their children was significantly linked to the amount of effort parents put into their children’s schooling.

The personal lives of parents and their families also affected their ability, time, and energy to participate in their children’s schooling. Numerous factors contributed to a parent’s ability to support their child in many ways. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) illustrated this phenomenon of parental context in their parental involvement model. From family structure and culture, and socioeconomic status to time, knowledge, and skill, these factors were critical and often shaped parental involvement, especially for those who were participating in their children’s education (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ingram et al., 2007).

As the current research has revealed, there was certainly a continued need for further study. Although existing parental literature was quite extensive at the elementary level, continued study must be carried out at the secondary levels. In addition, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) suggested that “cautions about limitation in the parental involvement literature are warranted [e.g., much research to date has relied on correlational and non experimental methods]” (p. 106). Other researchers such as Henderson and Mapp (2002) cautioned readers about the findings from studies that had problems related to sample sizes which generated very little to no statistically significant
data. Moreover, much of the reviewed literature used survey methodology and open-ended questioning causing limitations in the fact that actual parental involvement behavior listed by parents, children, teachers, and administrators could not be traced.

Research Related to Public School Choice Prior to NCLB

Research has proven that parents can have a lasting effect on their children’s educational life. From checking homework and asking about school, to calling counselors and visiting teachers, these acts have resulted in positive benefits that translate into student academic progress. Considering the parental involvement goals of No Child Left Behind, it was important to determine how school choice, the parent’s selection of an appropriate learning environment for his/her child, not only affected parental involvement and experiences, but also influenced student achievement. Just as there were factors that influenced parental involvement, I expected that parental choice was just as important to student academic achievement and susceptible to some of the same types of factors. Whether these factors included the parent’s desire to enroll his/her child in a different school because of that school’s safety issues or low test scores, parental choice when exercised may have quite an impact on a child’s educational outcome. While there were additional factors that turn parents to school choice, there were just as many factors that deter parents from practicing school choice. Regardless of the many factors, it could be said that the relationship between the parent and school served as a determining factor in the child’s success at the “new” school. Before discussing the related literature associated with these factors that affected parental involvement and choice, it was important to briefly chronicle the origins of public school choice and how it expanded over the years.
Historical Overview of School Choice—Pre and Post Public Education

Because the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 recognized parental involvement as a crucial tie to improving student achievement and schools, it was important to look at parental choice through the lens of school choice. Parents have always understood the possibilities that education could offer their families, especially their children. Surprisingly, these educational opportunities existed since the founding of this nation. However, schooling options were unlike the choice programs currently available. With the expansion of the nation, school choice grew and, at times, struggled to co-exist with the budding public educational system. Since then, the involvement of parents and educational endeavors of their children have remained. Yet the manner and options, respectively, have been modified as a result of the emergence and effects of the “traditional,” government-run public school systems. Therefore, this overview briefly chronicled the school choice movement as it related to parental choice and public schooling in America.

Colonial Era to the Revolutionary War

Education represented potential power, growth, and stability for many colonies. Due to those reasons, schools were established throughout the young nation to educate a segment of its youth. Early on, educational goals centered on morality and religion; a priority was to teach certain citizens how to read the Bible. As the nation evolved, these educational objectives shifted, and the focus soon turned toward the preparation of those white, elite, male citizens for positions of prominence and leadership. Such changes in the philosophical ideals regarding education caused a demand for more appropriate and
specific education. In the meantime, colonial ideals about the significance of education further developed and so too did parental choice opportunities and alternative forms of schooling.

Parental choice in schools thrived in early America. For many colonists, “the concept of school choice [was] not new,” especially to those who had a stake in the educational lives of their children (Kafer, 2007, p. 2). Being able to influence their children’s educational future was something that these parents considered greatly. To some degree, parents possessed much power when it came to placing their children in learning environments conducive to the needs and resources available to the family. According to Brouillette (1999), these groups of involved parents acted, understanding that they “were responsible for, and had control of, their child’s schooling” (p. 5). In most cases, they used their freedom to choose schooling that would eventually benefit their children. Considering the early school choice options available, Brouillette noted that “no one was forced to pay for education they did not use or approve of”; thus, parents could choose from what seemed to be a free, competitive market of choices available throughout the colony (p. 5). Although, it was also important to remember that parental choices were generally based upon the types and needs of schooling available within a given region as well.

Schooling in the colonies was taking shape. According to Ravitch (2001), “the only way to describe American schooling in the years before 1850 would be in terms of variety and pluralism, for there was no single pattern of schooling in the nation’s rural areas, towns, and cities” (p. 5). With no universal format established for public education, early school choice options, along with increased parental involvement and decision-
making, flourished throughout the colonies. Gryphon (2003) mentioned, "since most parents had at least some degree of control over their children's education, they found arrangements to suit their needs" (p. 4). And now these parents had viable options for schooling their children. Availability and variety were synonymous with the educational movement of this time, and Kafer (2007) noted, "before the mid 19th century, families choose from a variety of autonomous schools" because options were numerous, offering parents a choice in the types of educational institutions most appropriate for their children" (p. 2). As a result, parent choices reflected the view of the parent and what he or she deemed necessary. Gryphon (2003) revealed how many often "sought educational options for their children that harmonized with their religious and cultural traditions" (p. 2). As education for the public expanded across the nation and numerous opportunities became available, schooling was carried out in various manners and settings from kitchens to fields and workshops to one-room classrooms. As stated by Brouillette (1999):

There were common schools (often partially financed by local taxpayers, but primarily funded through private means) and specialized private schools of every sort (church schools, academies that prepared students for college, seminaries, dame schools for primary education, charity schools for the poor, and private tutors). Free schools were established by philanthropists and religious societies throughout the country to meet the educational needs of the very poor. (p. 5)

Regardless, schooling varied from colony to colony, and its availability depended on many factors.

The number of families within a given area as well as the availability of a teacher often affected the opening of a school in various regions. Local perceptions about education and the ideals regarding the degree and level to which education should be offered also determined the type of schools available. Additional factors included the
question to educate based upon gender, race, wealth and status, and at this time, the education of most Blacks (freed or slaves), rural children, and girls was practically nonexistent. Although these factors proved to be beneficial to some parents and hindrances for others, schooling sprawled across the nation. By some accounts, the growth of schooling and parental choice throughout the colonies was influenced by the acts of both local and national governmental agencies. The passage of local and national laws coupled with the allocation of funds for many of these new schools issued in a new brand of education for the “public.” Local laws, such as the 1647 Massachusetts Old Deluder Satan Act, sustained educational opportunities in that colony by requiring public schooling (Delano, 1976, p. 262). Per the law’s order, towns had to establish elementary and secondary schools for a nominal fee dependent upon the numbers of families in those given regions. Time would show that the national government was not systematically involved in the colonies’ efforts to educate its entire public. However, Congress did enact laws in the late 1700s that may have influenced public education’s growth. The Land Ordinance Act of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance Act of 1787 required states to section off land for the building and maintaining of schools. As a result, new townships in the Northwest Territories sectioned and sold off land, using the monies to pay for their public schools (Robelen, 1999, p. 34). Although these laws initially created a more systematic way of allowing states to set land boundaries, the young nation’s government acts of identifying and setting aside land for the purposes of opening schools may have inadvertently encouraged the growth and initial support of education across the nation.

Localized and specialized education soon transformed into the current public educational system for various reasons. When this happened, the plethora of school
choice options dwindled down to a few. Public education, socioeconomic and political unrest from the Civil War period to the Brown vs. Board of Education changed public education but also brought about a resurgence in the ideals of school choice, i.e., Milton Friedman and the competition between schools and more parental say in their children's education. Although various types of school choice currently exist, those associated with pubic education and received local state and federal funds for the maintenance and operation of schools were discussed in this review of the literature.

Ironically, integration resulted in another wave of school choice where many whites avoided desegregation by either closing a district down completely or attending private or neighborhood schools in the suburbs away from most minority students (Wilkerson, 1965). At any rate, the opportunity for a quality education for minority students was better than before, but post-Brown times did not always guarantee an improved education at integrated or minority schools.

*Magnet Schools*

During the late 1950s and 1960s, the call for integration was met with racial and social unrest that permeated into the nation’s public educational system. Schools, especially in urban settings, were required to integrate, and the government used various tactics such as forced bussing to make this happen. Conflict erupted as a result of these forced measures, and in an attempt to implement desegregation in an evasive manner, the magnet school was born. First opened in the late 1960s to mend the rift that school integration had created within public schools, magnet schools served as a method for enforcing desegregation court orders. Named after a Houston school that used the word “magnet” to describe how it attracted students to its programs, magnet schools also
advertised a unique schooling environment that varied by foci and objectives, theme, or even instructional methodology. It was these programs that offered students a more specialized educational experience that also tapped into students’ interest and/or needs (Halquist, 2003). Dependent upon the area, magnet schools were open to students within and sometimes outside of local school district boundaries, drawing from various racial and socioeconomic neighborhoods. These schools proved to be a new form of choice sprouted from the civil rights and school choice movements, providing parents with yet another public school choice alternative and the government with a way of combating the disorder that integration had created. Regarding the animosity associated with the desegregation demands, Halquist asserted how magnet schools and their specialized curriculum were a more positive means of promoting desegregation while providing parents with quality educational choices for their children. Though magnet schooling was much needed to open up education to more racially balanced student populations, their admissions criteria and/or lottery enrollment procedures stimulated questions as to whether their purpose in public education was actually being met.

Choice options had now shifted between the often-controversial private voucher and magnet schools systems. Both minority and white parents continued to seek educational opportunities best suited for their beliefs and children, and by this time, school choice had evolved considerably (Wilkerson, 1965). Many parents rushed to exercise their school choice options, believing that this would result in increased school success for their children. As demand for school integration waned, parents once again began to focus on an equitable education for their children (Gantz, 2004). Meanwhile, numerous schools across the country continued to struggle to provide students with a
strong learning base, which resulted in an increasing need for school reform.

**Charter Schools**

Charter schools, just as magnet schools, emerged as a school reform solution made available in the public school setting. The latest in a slew of public school choice options, charter schools not only catered to the needs of a specific population of students, but also provided parents with yet another chance to select schools that were appropriate and suitable to the needs of their children. Introduced in the 1980s, with the first laws passed in 1991, charter schools gave parents the opportunity to voluntarily choose schools within the public school system regardless of traditional residential boundaries/guidelines specific to enrollment into most traditional public schools. They were aimed at improving and increasing student achievement while providing a more tailored educational experience for parents and students, especially in areas where underperforming schools prevailed. Funded through public tax monies and absent of any tuition requirements, these schools allowed parents to make educational decisions that were in concert with what they believed to be the best educational situation for their child. Charter schools primarily operated autonomously from the rules and regulations set forth by local school districts, although local districts often held the charter and were their authorizing agent. It was the charter that served as the contract which dictated how the school would be organized and managed. Charters were often usually sponsored by various entities such as individuals, state and local educational groups, universities, and even private organizations. Along with the sponsors, teachers, and in some cases, parents, and other groups managed the day-to-day school operations, including personnel, curricular materials, instruction, and so forth, as it related to the guidelines of the charter.
Hence, school choice options, magnet and charter schools proved to be viable options available to parents choosing to identify an improved learning environment for their children.

Research Related to Public School Choice

Research has proven that parents can have a lasting effect on their children’s educational life. From checking homework and asking about school at home, to calling teachers, and visiting the school, positive benefits can be seen in children’s academic progress. Considering the No Child Left Behind goals for increased parental involvement, it was important to determine how making educational decisions, with school choice in mind, not only affected parental involvement and experiences, but also influenced student achievement as well.

After looking at parent involvement and its impact on student achievement, it was necessary to look at how this idea of parent involvement evolved into parent choice. Identified as the parent’s exercised decision-making power when considering or selecting a specific educational program, parental choice has been driven by many factors. Whether these factors included the parent’s desire to enroll their child in different schools to improve their educational experience or to find a safer learning environment, parental choice had quite an impact on their children’s educational social and academic progress. Moreover, parents were just as affected as their children. Due to the circumstances that arose before, during, and/or after school choice occurred, the parent’s experience can greatly influence the outlook he/she has on the public educational system as it relates to particular acts of parent involvement and their exercise of public school choice. Just as these factors may cause parents to seek the choice option, research showed that there are
numerous factors that deter them from using the transfer for their children as well. Either way, it could be determined that these multiple factors, regardless of the choice of the parent, associated with everyday life could determine and influence why a parent opted to move his/her child to a new school.

Few studies have been conducted to determine how student achievement was affected by the NCLB public school choice option; however, numerous studies have been conducted to show how other choice programs such as charter and magnet schools effect student achievement (e.g., Zimmer, Gill, Razquin, Booker, & Lockwood, 2007). Even fewer studies have been written to identify how parents who use the policy are affected as well. As a result, the issues that arise for parents themselves and their children are not captured to explain whether or not the use of the school choice option is beneficial for all involved. From transportation, money, parental obligations, school expectations for their level of participation, jobs, life issues, and even parent-school relationships, there is a need to chronicle the experience of parents if the NCLB policy is going to show that it truly has increased parent involvement as one of its central goals.

Some saw school choice as a means for equalizing public education in a way in which schools could become racially and socioeconomically balanced. However, numerous researchers pointed out how school choice stratified schools based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Raywid, 1985). This was especially the case in large urban districts. In fact, many viewed the stratification of schools as a new breed of segregation, similar to that prior to desegregation in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
Summary of Related Literature and Research Implications

The review of the related literature pointed out the need to further study how the No Child Left Behind school choice policy affected parental choice and involvement. Research prior to the passing of this federal law seemed to have reached its limits because it often presented a limited view of how school choice affected parents. Often, the point of view of the parent in a qualitative fashion was void, whereas most studies regarding parent experiences with schooling in general were answered from the perspective of teachers, administrators, and students/children. If parents were supposed to be one of the most effective factors in increasing student achievement and perceptions of education, then there was definitely a need to study their experiences with school choice especially so that they were better equipped to make sound educational decisions for their children and take on effective participatory measures and efforts to positively affect their child’s academic and social performance. Furthermore, this would be an extraordinary opportunity for the federal and state educational institutions, and schools specifically to recognize the plight of the parent and to offer supports that would make the difference for all involved and ultimately close that achievement gap.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

From the onset of this study, I initially set out to study what teachers and administrators at high performing middle schools were doing to support newly enrolled students who transferred from low achieving schools using the NCLB school choice policy. However, the focus of the study was redirected to parent experiences when access to school districts became a problem. In some cases, potential school district personnel questioned the motives and potential outcomes to be uncovered by the study while other school districts became ineligible once standardized testing data had been released.

Considering the aforementioned issues, the limited review of related literature explaining parent experiences with the same NCLB public school choice option, and a less restrictive availability to gain access to their perspectives, the purpose of this study shifted to reveal the lived experiences of those parents/guardians who used the NCLB school choice policy to transfer their middle-school aged children to high performing schools. In order to gain a detailed and rich understanding of their experiences, I selected qualitative methodology in order to conduct this study.

Research Design

A qualitative methodology was chosen to capture and understand the exact words and descriptive accounts of parents using the federal choice policy (Patton, 2002).

Case Study

I used individual case study analysis to conduct an in-depth study (Patton, 2002) of each parent/guardian’s experience with the public school choice option. It was this type of investigation along with the usage of how and why questioning, according to Yin
(2009), that helped me describe and explain the complexities associated with this significant and controversial educational policy.

Cross Case Study

To compare and contrast the findings across each of the single case studies, I chose a cross case study analysis approach. Similar to the individual case study analysis, a cross case study analysis uncovered commonalities across cases as well as critical distinctions that helped to explain the lived experiences of the parents and children who used this policy. Analysis of a number of cases is known to improve the validity of the findings, and I understood the significance of having an adequate number of individual cases to lead to a greater variation of data across cases and more compelling interpretations of the results (Merriam, 2001) which could possibly translate into increasing opportunities for making parental choice recommendations that may be more applicable to parents, educators, and policy makers or significant interpretations that later lead to more extensive studies (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002).

Data Sources

Patton (2002) suggested that using just one source for data collection places limits on the findings, weakening the study and making it vulnerable to errors and inconsistencies. The issue of reliability and validity of the data proved to be yet another significant issue that needed to be addressed. To deal with the aforementioned concerns, strengthen this study, and gain a more thorough understanding of the research questions, I used the practice of triangulation in this research design. Glesne (1999) explained how qualitative research was more consistent when researchers subscribed to the practice of using multiple methods of data collection when conducting research. And when multiple
data sources, including interviews and document review and analysis, were used within this qualitative study, triangulation served as a checks and balances system to provide what Patton (2002) identified as “cross-data validity checks” (p. 248). The Research Question and Data Source Triangulation Table (see Appendix A) was designed to check the validity of the research data sources to the research questions. On this table, I matched up the interview questions and other potential documentation with the corresponding research question to make sure they were aligned. The more the data sources and research questions were linked, the more I was likely to gather data that addressed the focus of the study, providing multiple ways to monitor whether collected and analyzed data were both reliable and valid (Merriam, 2001).

IRB Approval

After IRB approval, I mailed letters, sent emails, and made presentations to community and parent groups, churches, and other various organizations (see Appendix B). Fliers were also posted in public areas such as grocery stores, libraries, church bulletins, coffee shops, and so forth (see Appendix C). Usage of these methods of mass communication was unsuccessful; no one responded. Therefore, I turned to conversations with individuals who possessed knowledge of and experiences associated with the federal public school choice option. This proved to be more effective because these contacts eventually referred me to family, friends, co-workers, and other individuals who had used the federal school choice policy. In turn, at least 15 or more of these parent/guardians were initially interested in the purpose of the study, and I provided them with an additional formal letter explaining my background and that of the study (see Appendix D). When several of these individuals agreed to participate, I scheduled meeting times to
further discuss and review proposed research procedures and goals, respondent rights as it related to the study, interview protocol, and consent forms (see Appendix E).

Frontloading this information to the parents afforded me the opportunity to share my intentions and eventually set other parameters that aided in the progression of the study. From this point, I began to collect data by interviewing those who qualified for participation in the study.

Data Collection

A critical part of the research design, data collection provided insight into the experiences of parents who used the NCLB school choice policy. In order to capture information rich cases, Patton (2002) suggested that “qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents” (p. 4). For the purposes of this study, observations were inappropriate; therefore, data collection included only interviews and document review and analysis.

This study’s data were collected in one of the most diverse states in America. Emphasis was placed upon one of the largest counties and its numerous public school districts. Of the districts within this county, more than one-third reported to the federal government that one or more of their schools had been identified for improvement, corrective action, and/or restructuring going into the 2004-2005 school year.

To build background knowledge and establish parent/guardian selection criteria, I used the Internet to study the state’s Department of Education data statistics website. Information regarding AYP and PI status and statistics were found and disaggregated by years, districts, and even individual schools. I also used these data to identify a specific
timeframe when parents had to have exercised their choice to participate in the NCLB public school option transferring process within their immediate public educational systems. Additionally, I identified and verified potential school districts and schools that met their AYP requirements and later conducted school district website searches to locate information regarding transferring options under NCLB. If this information was not readily available on the district websites, I contacted these local educational agencies by phone or in person to request specific public information and regulations provided to those parent/guardians who would be interested in enrolling their child in the NCLB school choice program.

Respondents

I used purposeful sampling to select potential respondents for this study. Unlike other forms of sampling, purposeful sampling guided my search for information-rich cases and provided valuable information towards the understanding of the problem (Merriam, 2001). Homogenous sampling helped me to purposefully focus, in a more in-depth manner, on particular subgroups significant to the study (Glesne, 1999). More specifically, snowball sampling introduced me to numerous potential parent respondents, some who were able to later provide perspectives from an extreme point of view as compared to the initial subjects who had been originally selected to participate in the study. Again, this method of identifying potential subjects proved to be more effective because I was able to discuss my study-related needs with others, who, by association and word of mouth, knew someone with whom I could contact regarding usage of the federal choice policy.
Selection Criteria

Those parent/guardians who initiated interest in the NCLB public school choice option and signed application papers to transfer their sixth, seventh, or eighth grade child from a low achieving school to a NCLB recognized, high achieving middle school or K-8 school between the 2003/2004 and 2006/2007 school years were selected for this study. Respondents proved to be instrumental in making educational decisions for their children and used the No Child Left Behind school transfer option in one of the following ways: from an elementary school to a high performing middle school; from a low achieving middle school to a high achieving middle school; or from a high performing middle school to a high performing K-8 school.

Considering the need for adequate data collection and significant interpretation and analysis of the findings, I initially planned to interview up to 15 respondents as stated before. However, only eight of the numerous parent/guardians identified via snowball sampling met selection criteria due to unforeseen obstacles that occurred frequently throughout the study. Difficulty identifying a significant number of subjects beyond the eight chosen mimicked issues discussed in the literature review regarding parents’ lack of knowledge about the policy, as well as insufficient statistical data from states and local educational agencies who did not accurately report those individuals who took advantage of the policy. First of all, some potential parents did not know which type of school choice they were using. Either they were using the NCLB version and did not know it or they were using another type of school choice and thought that it was NCLB. It was also believed that other potential subjects did not understand the purpose of my study and were skeptical of my motives and/or uncomfortable sharing their experiences, further
decreasing the number of subjects available for participation. Secondly, state, county, and districts did not always adhere to the federal guidelines regarding the level of tracking required to monitor the usage of the policy. Because those entities did not follow procedures, this created an even more heightened degree of difficulty for me when reviewing and analyzing related documentation to get an understanding of policy usage and to identify potential respondents, both key aspects of the study.

The eight parent participants were all female, and most of them described themselves as the primary educational decision maker with the exception of two who directly explained that their husbands did have some input in these decisions as well. All of the women were African-American/Black, with the exception of one woman who was white. Lastly, one of the women explained that she was not the biological parent, but had raised the child from a young age.

Researcher Role

My role centered primarily on interviewing potential respondents of this study. As a result, my goal was to establish a rapport with the respondents while making an effort to monitor my personal/professional biases due to the closeness I had to the focus of the study. While immersed in the environment most comfortable for the parent respondent, I interacted so as not to influence and/or guide their verbal answers. This meant that I refrained from showing favor or disfavor with the respondents (Patton, 2002) and avoided revealing personal thoughts about their answers (Merriam, 2001).

Interviews

During interviews, the respondents explained how their use of the NCLB public school choice policy had affected their level of parental involvement, student academic
and/or social progress, and their relationships with districts and schools. Again, I concluded the study with eight respondents. Interviews were conducted until I ran out of subjects due to difficulty finding those that met selection criteria. In all, the intention of the interviews was to prompt participants to address how the NCLB school transfer policy had affected their lives and those of their children.

Location. Dates, times, and interview locations were scheduled and executed at the mutual discretion of the respondent and myself. Locations included public libraries, respondents’ homes, and school classrooms. I initially conducted one interview with each parent respondent; however, some follow-up sessions were required, when necessary, with parent consent.

Protection of subjects. Before the first interview, I provided potential respondents with a consent form (see Appendix E). This form explained the purposes of the study, the right of refusal to participate at any time, procedures and risks involved, and efforts to provide confidentiality, as well as the fact that confidentiality could not be guaranteed. I read and discussed all of the consent form terms with the potential respondent, allowing for time to answer any of their questions or concerns. I also carried multiple copies of the consent form to meetings/interviews with potential respondents so we could sign the contractual agreement for our records prior to the completion of the interview session.

I made every effort to protect the confidentiality of interviewees. Steps were taken to avoid data that would identify any of the parent/guardians, children, schools, districts, or other persons participating or providing information for this study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the names of respondents and all audiotapes were destroyed after
transcription. Transcriptions and all other notes written during the study were locked and will be stored for at least 5 years.

*Time.* Interviewing sessions lasted no longer than 1 hour. Subsequent interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes. These additional meeting times were considered as follow-up sessions to clarify questionable, interesting, or other significant data collected in the field.

*Equipment.* Each interview session was audio taped to capture the interviewee’s verbal language. Notes were also taken to monitor and record the respondents’ body language and gestures. Afterwards, each interview was transcribed verbatim.

*Interview protocol.* I designed an open-ended interviewing protocol (see Appendix F) to ensure that participants answered the same basic questions (Patton, 2002). The guide helped me stay focused; it was used to make sure that all of the necessary questions and topics were covered. I understood that although the guide provided a sense of structure when asking questions, respondents’ answers might have signaled that there was more to know. So I used additional probing questions and comments to get respondents to further explain their understanding (Merriam, 2001). Furthermore, as data collection progressed, I generated more questions as a result of the data gathered from previous interactions with the respondent. Regardless of the data that interviewing provided for this study, there were limitations associated with its usage. Patton (2002) mentioned that one of its greatest limitations is the selective view of the issues that are offered by individual respondents. In order to balance out these selective viewpoints, pertinent documents were used to further review and analyze the data collected.
Documents

I used public and research-generated documents as another means of collecting data for this multiple case study. Public documents from the United States Department of Education provided pre-existing data (Merriam, 2001) and some general listings of improvement schools and students eligible for choice, statewide. I also used school district and/or school site documentation such as the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) to track a school’s standardized test performance and AYP growth as well as its demographic changes over time. Self-generated research documents and my field notes were also used for data collection purposes. Merriam described how these types of documents proved to be beneficial because they exposed additional interesting aspects and thinking about the study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected for this study, I created a systematic audit trail by following two iterations/stages.

Individual Case Analysis

To create each individual case, all data sources, interview transcriptions, and documentation, were bundled and named for the pseudonym of each parent respondent. Coding was used to note actual words, phrases, and other information that referenced parent experiences, thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes regarding the NCLB policy. These markings were then categorized to create a series of topics. By sorting the data by topics, I was able to determine which of the topical findings within each case directly answered the research questions.
Cross Case Analysis

Initially, I conducted a cross case analysis by comparing the ways in which all the parent/guardians answered the research questions. Then I returned to the topics found within each case and worked to identify cross-case emergent themes. Since Merriam (2001) suggested that the integrity of the study and the analysis of the data would be much more manageable with fewer categories/topics, I used the Matrix of Findings and Sources for Data Triangulation Table (see Appendix G) as a means of triangulating the findings in order to report themes/findings that were anchored in the data. Of the numerous themes that surfaced across the cases, the researcher focused on the most dominant of the recurrent themes that seemed to explain the parents’ experiences with school districts and receiving schools, their role and involvement in their children’s education, and their overall experience with the federal school transfer policy.

Presentation of Findings

Individual case study analysis and cross-case analysis by research question were included in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presented parental overall reactions and feelings towards the NCLB public school choice option, as well as the recurrent cross case themes which surfaced to explain some nuances of their experiences with the policy and were used later used along with other analyzed data to make recommendations and implications for further NCLB, parental choice research. Therefore, the following chapter revealed each individual parent’s answer to the research questions and a cross case analysis of all parents’ responses to the research questions.
CHAPTER FOUR
Case Studies and Cross Case Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will present a profile of each of the study participants in order to capture their experiences before, during, and after using the public school choice policy provided by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The profiles, presented in case study format, include parent responses to the five research questions. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis.

Case Study: Marilyn

Marilyn was an African-American mother who used the NCLB public school choice policy to enroll her son in a high performing middle school in School District A. Unlike most of the other study participants, Marilyn lived and breathed the educational system. As a teacher and administrator, she had worked at both high performing and program improvement schools and possessed first-hand experiences of the effects NCLB had on students and parents. She had always used inter-district and other transfer precursors to NCLB in order to find the best educational settings for her son.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

Marilyn used the NCLB choice policy because she “wanted a better education for her son,” and she knew the failing neighborhood-home school would not provide that for him. After reviewing the school’s standardized test scores, Marilyn found low testing scores for the African-American student subgroups which led her to believe that “they [the neighborhood-home school] have no idea how to teach African-American children.” Having also worked at program improvement schools before, she remembered how some
teachers often struggled to motivate and teach their students because of low expectations and the usage of watered-down curriculum which further influenced her decision to use the policy.

Safety and the neighborhood-home school’s location proved to be problematic for Marilyn as well. She noted how she “didn’t feel the home school was safe” and how she refused to send her son to a school where his personal safety would be at risk. With these issues in mind, she stressed:

I am always looking for what’s best for my African-American children. But if I can use the system to get him into a school where maybe he’ll do better because he’s going to be in a room where they’re teaching him everything . . . then, yeah, I’m going to use it.

Because of her concern for her son’s education, it was clear that Marilyn used NCLB and its choice policy to send her son to a better school where she assumed high test scores meant that he would be taught “everything he needed to know.”

Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School

In Marilyn’s opinion, neither the school district nor the receiving school provided her with any specialized support as an NCLB parent. She described how School District A did not offer any additional information that would help her better understand and/or use the federal policy effectively beyond the NCLB eligibility letter or district website. Regarding this lack of contact from the district, Marilyn explained, “Once I registered, it was done; they never asked me about the choice option . . . and nothing was ever sent from the district, addressing me as a parent using NCLB.”

Initially, Marilyn was satisfied with the receiving school’s basic levels of support for all parents, including the newsletters that helped her stay abreast of the school’s
activities and events and the email and phone banks that sent her messages and reminders. But then she began to feel that the receiving school also neglected her special needs as an NCLB parent and provided no further support beyond her son’s enrollment. One of many acts by the receiving school that caused her dissatisfaction was their commitment to those parents using other specialized educational programs such as the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Program. She believed that NCLB parents would have also benefited from similar informational/support meetings as well. Marilyn concluded, “There were no programs catered to me as a parent . . . and they never once called [to say] we need to tell you about the NCLB.” As a result, she was left alone to figure out how to navigate within the school community in support of her son’s educational success. Interestingly, it was suspected that Marilyn’s prior experience as a teacher/educator, as compared to non-educator parents, would have put her at a slight advantage to take additional steps that would improve her child’s academic achievement. However, this was not the case since she still felt that she deserved more of an effort from them both.

*Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience*

Marilyn had always sent her son to schools outside the neighborhood boundaries via other school choice options, and in this case, her son had no input in the decision to use the NCLB transfer policy. From her point of view, Marilyn believed that he was used to attending other schools by the time he got to middle school and was happy with the transfer to the receiving school. She felt that he was content and “took it in stride” even after experiencing some difficult times there.
Marilyn believed that her son enjoyed being at the school because it provided him with numerous opportunities. She noted how “getting [this] decent education” benefited him because he had access to more educational programs such as band and the eighth grade American history trip to Washington, DC. Marilyn also mentioned how his being in the band enabled him to “start forming relationships with kids who are active rather than forming relationships with kids who are just sitting around doing nothing.” Although most of his friends were in the band, Marilyn stated that some of his friends at the receiving school lived in his neighborhood and even went to his elementary school; their parents were using the NCLB transfer policy as well.

Beyond the happiness he had with friends, Marilyn sensed that her son was dealing with being one of a small percentage of African-Americans at the receiving school. Knowing that his feelings were not new, she felt they related to coping issues he had as a result of some incidents that occurred while he was on the receiving school campus. Marilyn explained how he had become somewhat self-conscious about the friends he would hang out with:

When he hangs out with his white friends, no one notices. But several times when he was hanging out with black friends, like three or four together... he’s felt a little uneasy because people are staring like it’s a gang, as opposed to when he’s with his white friends.

She believed that he also struggled to cope in the classroom where he was usually the only African-American male present. For example, Marilyn described a time when she felt that the receiving school’s curriculum “curbed his development” because it was not culturally relevant or sensitive to his life as a Black person. She also described how he was constantly reprimanded by teachers for so-called inappropriate classroom behaviors, such as excessive talking and getting out of his seat. Unfortunately, for her son, Marilyn
thought these and other incidents where unjustified and caused him to constantly try to cope and “fit in” at the same time.

Not overly pleased with the policy, Marilyn was satisfied with the opportunities the policy provided her son. After all, she could send him to a school with more curricular and extra-curricular programs that would expand his learning and experiences and place him in where he could develop positive friendships with others. Beyond this, it became clear that the policy did not work to establish more culturally sensitive guidelines to be followed by the receiving school that would address the diversity and needs of NCLB transfer students like Marilyn’s son. As a result of this neglect, it became evident that her son’s awareness of his ethnic and cultural differences was heightened and often negatively spotlighted, making him feel uncomfortable inside and outside the classroom.

*Parent’s Experience*

Overall, Marilyn had an unpleasant experience using the NCLB policy. First of all, she suspected that the receiving school reluctantly enrolled NCLB transfer students, since the federal policy was designed to transfer the neediest students from program improvement schools to high performing schools first. This led her to believe that the high performing school thought of transfer students, like her son, as low achievers who would bring down their test scores. In this case, however, Marilyn’s son was a high achiever, but their denial about his skill levels may have contributed to the mistreatment and neglect that he experienced in the classroom.

Secondly, Marilyn’s beliefs that neither the school nor the district recognized cultural diversity nor knew how to deal with people of other races and ethnicities, particularly African-Americans, contributed to her negative experience as well. She
expressed unwelcome feelings and confessed, “I do not feel part of the community because I don’t feel they reach out to families of color.” For instance, Marilyn suggested that the receiving school’s inability to hire diverse staff members specifically reflected their disregard for cultural diversity. She stated, “There’s not a lot of diversity at the school; I mean there are no Black teachers and . . . I don’t even know if there are any Latino teachers. So there’s really no one the kids can relate to.” Similarly, Marilyn identified similar disregard for cultural diversity from the school district. She recalled how the district never seemed to gear anything toward culturally diverse groups except in the case of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program. Although this program provided learning opportunities and support for students, in her opinion, it was the only program within the district geared toward African-American and Latino students. Hence, she felt that was not enough of a commitment from the district to recognize the cultural diversity of her African-American son.

Thirdly, the treatment of her son at the receiving school also influenced her negative feelings about using the NCLB transfer policy. Over time, Marilyn’s frustration grew because she believed that her son and the other African-American children were being targeted as behavior problems. She shared the reactions she had when he would often get in trouble:

At first I used to think and say, [son], you’re doing it again, and nail him to the cross and everything. And when I talked to other parents, I find that all the African-American kids seem to be going through the same thing. It seemed like where other people might be cut some slack, they [African-American kids] were nailed on the first time.

Although she admitted that her son was not perfect, Marilyn remained skeptical that he and the others were always causing trouble. Along with this trouble came constant
discipline-related complaints from teachers. Tired of this excessive contact, Marilyn felt those teachers were just looking for things to complain about her son. “I am on call daily because teachers will call me over the silliest of things . . . he’s talking or got out of his seat.” From her perspective, these complaints were the only time the high performing school sought her responses and/or actions, making her think that her input was solicited more so when it benefited the teachers.

Additional issues such as the curriculum and school location also had a negative impact on her experiences at the receiving school. She applauded their commitment to high expectations, but worried about the supplemental curriculum taught in some content area classes. For example, the history teacher used a mainstream, controversial film based on slavery in America. Marilyn felt that the teacher’s presentation of some topics and perspectives related to the film were jaded and culturally insensitive. She recalled how this caused her to carefully monitor what her son was learning and periodically meet with various content area departments to discuss learning objectives and outcomes. Incidentally, Marilyn found it easier to get responses from teachers, administrators, and other school officials when she used her position as an educator to address issues and concerns that initiated from her and her son’s experiences.

Lastly, Marilyn discussed how getting her son to and from school was neither pleasant nor convenient, further influencing her negative view of the policy. The distance from her home to the receiving school was considerably far and she specifically mentioned how traveling “down the hill and across the main street to the adjacent subdivision” was quite an ordeal.
Even though Marilyn and her son faced difficult experiences at the receiving school, she knew that he would still be prepared for high school, college, and beyond because she equated high test scores with a quality school. Thus, the high performing school, from her vantage point, would provide a better education because they had high expectations and knew that their students would excel. Ironically, these high expectations were not placed upon her son, the NCLB transfer student, whom some school officials and teachers assumed had a lower skill level. Still, Marilyn was confident that her usage of the NCLB federal transfer policy guaranteed his access to a better education and optimal learning.

*Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option*

Marilyn was not sure how her level of parent involvement actually affected her son’s educational life, but explained how her commitment to parental involvement was influenced by the following: teachers who focused on her son’s behaviors and were unwilling to help him; the school’s treatment of children and parents of color; and the perception of the school’s expectations for her involvement as a parent. In all, Marilyn felt that the receiving school expected a certain level of participation from her, and she believed that they provided parents with tools (syllabi, email, grade programs) to monitor and support their children. However helpful these tools were, Marilyn figured that she was supposed to know how to use them effectively for the sake of her son’s academic progress. It is believed that in this case her prior experiences as an educator aided in her usage of these tools and active participation at the receiving school, but again she probably would have still welcomed more support.
To ensure that she and her son’s needs were being met, Marilyn discussed the various actions she took at home and at the high performing middle school to support his education. At home, Marilyn established an open line of communication with her son, valuing the time they had to talk with each other. It was during these conversations, that Marilyn had the opportunity to ask about school and discuss the importance of education, self esteem, and even friendships. On numerous occasions, she recalled giving him pointers to help him survive and adjust to the school’s culture. From problem-solving and classroom etiquette to organization and working better with his teachers, Marilyn strived to involve herself in a way that would teach, motivate, and support her son’s efforts at school.

Marilyn’s involvement at the receiving school typically revolved around her talking with teachers, usually in response to discipline-related issues. Weary from this barrage of calls and complaints, Marilyn talked about how she met with teachers who would actually question why she made it her business to understand what was happening with her son at school. She exclaimed, “I’m like, you’re calling me,” showing them that she would advocate for her son especially when they were excessively accusing him of inappropriate classroom behavior. Another instance when Marilyn acted was when her son had gotten into a fight with another student. She described how she had to email the dean in order to get the details regarding this altercation. Marilyn also discussed encounters she had with her son’s teachers about curricular concerns. Regardless of how the receiving school viewed Marilyn’s parental involvement efforts, she reiterated that it was her duty to schedule meetings with school officials and involve herself in other
situations that arose at school to let her son and the school know that she was in the business of actively working to meet his educational needs.

Case Study: Jean

Jean, a white mother from School District B, enrolled her son in a high performing middle school using the NCLB school choice option just before his eighth grade year. A teacher educator who knew quite a lot about NCLB, Jean was excited about the possible future her son would have as a result of the transfer. Thus, she declared education the most important thing that he had to do while growing up and hoped the transfer would help him be successful.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act's School Choice Option

There was no mistaking why Jean used the federal transfer policy to enroll her child in a better school. She exclaimed, “The school in the neighborhood was horrible.” Her concerns were twofold since she and her son had been negatively impacted by the neighborhood-home school. Jean “often felt like many parents and administration did not care about their children and . . . always felt like she was disturbing them if she had concerns.” As for her son, she urgently explained how staying at the neighborhood school could possibly result in educational failure and trouble with the law.

Determined to find a more safe and suitable learning environment where her son would be valued, Jean considered all her options which included moving to another neighborhood or private school. Luckily for Jean, the policy allowed her to send her son to a good school without changing her family’s lifestyle. Not only did she not have to uproot her family to another neighborhood, she did not have to worry about funding a private education. Furthermore, the NCLB policy symbolized her son’s ticket to “a fresh
start” where they would both experience a quality education with high expectations; the right kinds of friendships; and a supportive, caring network of concerned adults interested in his progress and her involvement needs.

Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School

Jean commented on the contrasting levels of support between School District B and the receiving school which impacted her ability to monitor her son’s academic and social progress. First of all, Jean’s contact with School District B was limited to the NCLB eligibility letter, her completion of the application process, and an offer of three to four school choice options. From that point, district support waned leaving Jean alone to decide which school would be best for her son. Considering her background, it can be assumed that her prior knowledge of the public educational system and education colleagues catapulted her decision making process beyond using the basic district and school websites to using more specific documentation like the School Accountability Report Card (SARC), which noted details about school locations, demographics, teacher education levels, and even test score data.

However dismal the district’s support, Jean raved about the direct and specialized help she received from the high performing school’s counselor, other school staff, and traditional communication methods. Jean described how the school counselor “seemed as concerned about him as anyone else” and aided in both their adjustment to the new school. Other school staff, she mentioned, met her son’s individualized needs by monitoring and reviewing his 504 learning plan which designated certain classroom and class work accommodations to aid his learning. Lastly, she commented on how joining the PTA and reading the school’s newsletters provided her with the important events, and
other pieces of information necessary for keeping her up to date with what was happening at the school.

**Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience**

Jean’s son experienced a challenging yet rewarding year at the receiving school. At first, he was reluctant and nervous about switching schools and “being the new student in the class.” He struggled to adjust and “had difficulties being accepted into certain groups of children.” As time passed, he became more comfortable and began to make friends and participate in school sports.

Jean explained how her son’s struggle to fit in was sometimes linked to how others at the receiving school reacted to his enrollment there. Those hardships, according to Jean, occurred in the classroom as well as on the athletic field. While most of the high performing school’s teachers and staff treated her NCLB transfer child fairly, some adults made the following denigrating remarks to him: “Children who live south of [a major] freeway are . . . trouble makers and . . . shouldn’t be up here going to school. If you don’t pay attention, I am going to have you sent back to that bad school of yours.” Ultimately, enrollment in this “excellent” school did not protect him from being labeled as a low achieving, problematic NCLB student by some teachers. Similar discriminatory thinking occurred in the athletic program as well. Jean explained how she and her son speculated that “the . . . coaches were not very fair [because there were no] . . . kids from down here [in our neighborhood] playing up there.” This infuriated them because they could not “imagine that there wasn’t [any] one good enough to play [from their neighborhood],” which disappointed her son but did not negatively affect his overall experience with the policy.
In fact, Jean described how the school year ended exceptionally for her son. She described him as “happy, well adjusted, and friendly . . . with children from up there as well as other children down here.” In addition to participating in the athletic program, Jean highlighted his academic growth and improvement, attributing it to the NCLB transfer and the receiving school:

My son is doing so much better since he is in an environment where his education is valued and the other children have parents who also value their education. [He] has a 4.0 . . . is prepared . . . for high school and is excitedly looking to college.

Despite the negative experiences that her son had at the receiving school, Jean summed up his overall experience as positive by acknowledging how the school environment left him more chances for his academic growth and success.

*Parent’s Experience*

Jean had few reservations about the federal policy because it freed her child from their unsuitable neighborhood-home school. To her, being able to send her son to a high performing school was easy and quite “a blessing.” With his future in mind, Jean was excited about potential opportunities that would become available to him as a result of his enrollment at the school and applauded how his newfound positive attitude toward school, academic success, and high school readiness made her especially happy.

In addition, Jean’s experience was also heightened by the way she and her son were treated by most of the receiving school staff. As opposed to the neighborhood-home school, the receiving school “showed [more] respect for students and parents.” She described how they welcomed her and “did not make [her] feel like a burden to teachers and staff while administration was concerned and worked with parents to get students the best education possible.”
When asked whether her parent involvement habits changed after using the NCLB public school choice option, Jean explained that her “involvement level was no different . . . because she continued to have the same amount of contact she had with the home school.” Jean confessed that her son’s needs and her desire to see him become a successful adult were major factors which influenced her active participation in his education. Furthermore, she was thrilled to have her son in a school that encouraged parents to become a part of the school community and valued parent involvement by providing many opportunities for it to occur. Hence, it can be assumed that the school’s encouragement to actively participate also influenced her need to be involved in her son’s education.

Jean did admit that her work schedule and the distance from her home to the new school inhibited her ability to be more involved. However, she explained how she was still able to do things both at home and school to nurture and support her son’s academic and social life. On the home front, Jean explained how active she was able to be:

I constantly encourage and talk with him to help him understand why the transfer was necessary. I also drive him to the bus stop, talk to him about his day and his classes, pick him up from sports, read newsletters, [and] . . . receive and return phone calls from staff members quickly.

In response to what she did at school, Jean easily mentioned how she joined the PTA and attended open house nights and all other school meetings and functions directly tied to her son. Considering all that she had been through, Jean knew that using NCLB as a tool to move her son to a better school was the ultimate of all actions that she had taken to show her son that she valued his education and future, and she was glad that she had made that choice.
Case Study: Deborah

Deborah was an African-American mother who used the NCLB public school choice policy to transfer her daughter to a high-performing middle school in School District B for her 8th grade school year. A part-time worker, Deborah and her husband decided early on that this work schedule would allow her to frequently attend to her daughter’s educational needs unlike other parents with full-time jobs.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

Deborah decided to use the NCLB transfer policy because the neighborhood-home school’s test scores had dropped. She was also concerned that this school did not have the resources and programs to prepare her daughter for high school. Therefore, Deborah used the choice policy to find her daughter an improved learning environment with higher test scores and more adequate resources.

Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School

School District B failed Deborah because their contact with her was limited to the eligibility letter and, “not really much else but the basics about whatever we needed to fill out or turn in.” As an NCLB parent, Deborah admitted having little knowledge about the policy and how it specifically worked, and without any further support from the school district, she was on her own. Neglect from the district prompted her to exclaim, “I felt like I was actually just doing it [making decisions by myself],” especially when she was required to select one of five schools, she knew nothing about, which would best meet her daughter’s educational needs.

On the other hand, Deborah felt that the receiving school offered an abundance of support that helped her make effective educational decisions for her daughter. She spoke
about how the emails and other notices, letters, and school-sponsored events kept her informed, but she was extremely impressed with the internet-based gradebook programs that allowed her to “plug in and see [her daughter’s] grades and assignments on a daily basis.”

Deborah also raved about the relationships she had developed with the counselors and other school officials. Their immediate feedback positively influenced her experience. Whenever she “needed to talk to them [receiving school officials], they would . . . coordinate their schedules so [she and her husband] could meet with them as soon as possible.” These relationships also benefitted Deborah’s daughter because once she got to know her teacher and the principal better, they would encourage her to build on certain strengths which Deborah believed to have influenced her daughter’s adjustment to the receiving school.

*Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience*

Deborah chuckled, stating that her daughter was “initially unhappy” about the transfer because she left behind her friends at the neighborhood-home school. She described how her daughter’s unhappiness translated into a reluctance to fully participate in class which affected her academic performance. Deborah explained, “She didn’t say a whole lot . . . and the teachers would comment about this.” Increased parental involvement including the checking of due dates and reading over assignments also troubled her daughter. Over time, Deborah noticed a change in her daughter’s outlook once she and her teachers learned more about each other. As a result, her daughter participated more in the classroom and soon received support and praise for her improved academic achievement from teachers and the principal as well. On the social side of her
experience, Deborah’s daughter quickly adjusted to the receiving school by “making new friends easily and reacquainting herself with some old friends.”

Deborah believed that the receiving school’s inopportune scheduling of school-based activities and the school district’s fixed busing schedules for NCLB transfer children negatively impacted her daughter’s experience and reduced her chances to completely integrate into the school’s social community. Because most of the receiving school’s activities were either scheduled after school or operated within the neighboring community, Deborah’s daughter could not fully participate because the buses operated on schedules influenced by traffic patterns and commuting distances. As a result, her daughter had a general disinterest in this part of the school community because of the busing and scheduling issues. However, the few instances when her daughter had positive social experiences were when the receiving school offered a later bus departure time, allowing her to socialize after school. One such example included the infrequent scheduling of school dances which particularly interested Deborah’s daughter because “the deejay would ask her to help out [and] she’d learn a lot about technology and media.”

Deborah attributed her daughter’s overall success to fact that the federal transfer policy exposed her to new learning situations and people. She felt that her daughter especially benefited from the increased exposure to technology and computers. Deborah also commented on the positive effects her daughter experienced in classrooms where college expectations and practices such as working groups and individualized projects were implemented to prepare students for higher academia. Furthermore, Deborah assumed her daughter appreciated the transfer experience because her world view
significantly expanded as a result of “interacting with students from areas [of town] other than her own.” Being around various groups of students who were serious about their academics was another reason why Deborah thought her daughter had an enlightening experience. For Deborah, her daughter’s opportunity to learn alongside “kids . . . who were motivated and maybe a little more mature academically,” positively influenced her daughter’s perception of the importance of performing well academically.

While the NCLB policy proved to be beneficial for Deborah’s daughter because she became a part of an academically-centered environment and seemed to grow as a student and person, the transportation-related aspects of the policy denied her full integration into the school community, thus, limiting her overall experience.

Parent’s Experience

Deborah’s overall experience with the No Child Left Behind public school choice option and the receiving school was like “Wow!” she bluntly stated. She took pleasure in how the experience exposed her and her daughter to a new world. Another aspect of her experience that made her glad that she used the NCLB transfer policy included the fact that the receiving school made it easy for her to stay in touch and informed. Contacting the school and gathering information were efficient and effortless “because of their emphasis on technology and computers [that made it easy to] e-mail them quickly from home . . . and be aware of what was happening at the school and in the classrooms.”

Establishing relationships with certain teachers, counselors, and administration also made Deborah feel good about her experience because she felt comfortable knowing that she could work closely with them to advocate for her daughter’s education. Furthermore, she believed in the connection she had with school staff, since when she
“would call them and leave a message . . . they would generally get back to me in a timely manner.” Another time when Deborah had these feelings was when she visited the school: “the receptionist knew me and my child and this made my experience even more positive.”

However, Deborah did experience some questionable situations that challenged her prior beliefs about support, respect, and relationships. Deborah expressed how getting involved with the public school choice option through the school district was one of the less than desirable experiences she encountered during that school year. She felt alone in the decision making process and with all of the issues that she had to consider, she said, “Actually I felt like I was just doing it.” Luckily, she had friends who had knowledge of the policy and could help her navigate the process.

It also took Deborah some time to deal with the large number of young teachers working at the recently opened receiving school. From her point of view, “they were awfully young,” and their youth represented inexperience. And Deborah worried their inexperience would interfere with the teaching and learning in the classroom “because a couple of teachers didn’t have control.” Seeing the teachers struggle made Deborah prefer seasoned teachers who had been on the job for more than a few years. On the other hand, Deborah associated their youth with enthusiasm and fresh new thinking which may have aided them in the classroom.

Deborah also mentioned the challenge of dealing with a nontraditional, extremely casual school culture. This part of the culture tested her beliefs about adult/student relationships. She described how her daughter and other students were allowed to address the adults on the school campus by their first name, making Deborah feel that this
behavior was just too comfortable for the classroom. Yet, she could see how it might have had something to do with the receiving school’s college prep methodology where “you’re an adult, they’re an adult, and you’re using first names.” The other aspect of this casual school community that challenged her traditional views was her inability to distinguish the adults from the students on the campus. Deborah described how everyone kind of just blended together because “they were all just so comfortable” and felt that “high school shouldn’t be like that because you should be able to tell the difference between the teacher and the students even if the students look older.” In this instance, Deborah felt that the adults should be dressed appropriately instead of wearing faded jeans, flip flops, and t-shirts since they serve as role models for their students. Although these issues made Deborah feel uncomfortable, she still enjoyed her experience.

*Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option*

After enrolling her child in a high achieving middle school using the NCLB public school choice option, Deborah felt that she was slacking in the parent involvement department and confessed, “This year was the least amount of involvement I’ve had, and I feel weird.” Regardless of her feelings, she was still able to act effectively and responsibly in support of her daughter’s education. Deborah shared a family decision she and her husband made when their daughter was in kindergarten. They agreed that Deborah would “work part time with the goal of being home when her daughter returned from school.” Deborah mentioned how her availability made it easy “to be there when her daughter has problems, to pick her up from school, and talk to a teacher if necessary.”

Deborah highlighted the fact that being the first person her daughter talked to at home after school was valuable time for them both. She viewed these moments as the
best time to openly communicate about the school day and “ask specific questions about how she’s doing in this class . . . and social stuff that’s going on too.” For Deborah, these talks represented her access into her daughter’s academic and social life at school.

Deborah’s job also afforded her the opportunity to participate in activities at the receiving school as well. In addition to the meetings she scheduled with teachers and counselors and events such as Open House, Deborah stated, “I went on field trips and I’d volunteer.” Since her goal was to be as knowledgeable, active, and visible, her involvement was her way of knowing “what’s going on and who you’re hanging out with,” while letting her daughter and the receiving school know that she would be fully engaged in her daughter’s education.

Case Study: Wanda

An African-American woman, Wanda was dedicated to providing her children with educational experiences that would be beneficial to their future. A mother of four children, Wanda transferred two of her children, a son and daughter, to a high-performing middle school in School District B as they entered the eighth grade.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

Wanda worried about the educational well-being of her children because they struggled at the neighborhood-home school and needed additional support to meet their academic learning goals. To find an improved learning environment for them, Wanda researched the NCLB public school choice option because of what she had heard about its suggested policy for children. Based on her search, she interpreted that “everyone is supposed to be on the same level playing ground where counseling services . . . pull-out
or extra after school help would be offered to our children that were struggling in school.”

Wanda would eventually use the policy to transfer her children to a high performing middle school in School District B; however, the number of options offered to her by the school district, as well as the time during which she was notified of her option, dramatically diminished her parental choice power as designated by the NCLB transfer policy. According to Wanda, the school district informed her of one choice just weeks before the school year was set to begin, leaving her with little time to decide between the neighborhood-home school that failed her children and another school she had no knowledge of. Pressed for time, yet hoping for a better educational experience for her children, Wanda was practically forced to accept the one school choice option offered to her.

*Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School*

Extremely dissatisfied with the level of support she received prior to and during the transfer, Wanda discussed how neither the school district nor the receiving school helped her meet her children’s special education needs. Wanda explained that she “never received any formal paperwork” beyond the NCLB eligibility letter and had to piece together the limited information she found while researching the policy on her own.

As for the receiving school, Wanda stated that the level of support they provided her children was just as dismal:

They accepted them as students and tried to teach them, but as far as helping them adjust . . . they just didn’t go that extra mile to do anything. I don’t think they made any special arrangements as far as the No Kid Left Behind and actually, they didn’t give the services . . . one-to-one study and counseling support . . . that they say they were going to give the them either.
In the meantime, her children “started falling behind in their schoolwork and were frustrated because they just didn’t get it in the classroom and didn’t get any extra help.” This infuriated Wanda because her children were failing and the high performing middle school never notified her of their inability to provide support to her children even after she brought up NCLB on several occasions in response to the academic difficulties they were experiencing in school.

For Wanda, the NCLB school choice policy created a negative experience in many ways. The school district did not fully inform her about the specifics of the policy and what it could mean in terms of services for her children. If they had this type of support in place, Wanda may have been spared a lot of heartache and frustration because she would not have had to solve the NCLB choice puzzle alone, but would have had resources available to help her make more effective educational decisions for her children.

*Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience*

Before the transfer, Wanda believed that her children were happy to attend the new school and had no objections to being the new students in the classroom. She explained how they socially acclimated themselves to the receiving school within a short matter of time and “didn’t have any problems getting along with their peers, teachers, and staff.” However, Wanda’s spoke of how their social adjustment paled in comparison to the difficulty and disappointment they experienced while in the classroom and traveling to and from the receiving school.

Wanda associated her children’s negative experiences in classroom with the receiving school’s lack of support. As they began to struggle academically, she explained
how they became increasingly frustrated because “they would always ask for help and try to get help, but then come away feeling like the teachers just didn’t care if they failed or not.”

Wanda also recognized the long bus commute as another reason why her children struggled academically at the high performing school. She emphasized how the bus ride was brutal since her children had to wake up at 4:00 each morning and would often not return home until 7:00 due to traffic and numerous student drop-off stops. In essence, their long commute took a toll on them because they were always exhausted and hungry by the end of every day, making it “a horrible experience, really horrible.” Between the early mornings and late evenings that often turned into even later nights with homework, projects, and other responsibilities, her children had difficulty functioning at school. Moreover, riding the bus also eliminated their chances to fully participate in the school community and its many clubs and activities that often met after school. By the end of their transfer year at the receiving school, Wanda recalled her children’s relief when “they passed the eighth grade and were ready to move on,” free of the unbearable classroom and commuting experiences.

Although it was Wanda’s decision to use school choice, the policy failed her children. Had she been given more school choice options located closer to her home or had she been given the time to research more about the receiving school and its busing schedules, she may have been more equipped to make a decision that was beneficial for her children, and her children may have experienced better treatment and more educational success.
Parent’s Experience

“I haven’t had a good experience,” Wanda stated emphatically in regards to the school district and the receiving school. From the application process to the delayed notification of her eligibility and school choice, Wanda became skeptical of the district’s usage of the NCLB application and acceptance process. She explained:

I don’t like the way they do the options because I’m not sure how the children’s names fall out of the lottery. I think it was like a couple of schools that I had checked and [the receiving school] was the only one that accepted them. So I don’t like how you pick schools that’s like close to your house, but [School District B] decides how they place them.

Moreover, the timeline during which she had to accept the one school choice option bothered Wanda even more.

Although, Wanda initially thought the receiving school, as compared to the neighborhood-home school, would be a much better learning environment for her children since it offered many more programs and activities, her disdain grew as her children began to fall behind in their classes. They were “just struggling,” and Wanda felt that she alone could do nothing to help her children.

As a result, Wanda questioned how the receiving school was going to help her since her children were getting Fs, but the school seemed unable and eventually unwilling to support her and her children. Furthermore, Wanda could not understand how her children were being left behind when the premise behind NCLB was to ensure that all students be effectively educated. After all, she was led to believe that the receiving school was “going to give counseling services . . . do pull-out . . . one-on-one study . . . [and] put them in smaller classes but none of that happened.” To make matters worse, Wanda described how they would “tell you one thing when you have a team meeting, make it
look good on paper, and then when it comes back to the services, they’re just not getting the services promised.” For Wanda, the receiving school’s actions were unethical; she felt that they were taking advantage of her and her children by misrepresenting what services they said they would provide to her children. And their excuses of a lack of funding and a shortage of staff upset Wanda even more. Thus, she felt that the school neglected her children’s needs and disregarded her cries for help, making it almost impossible for her to improve their educational outcomes at the high performing school.

However, Wanda’s ignored requests for services did not prevent the receiving school from taking action when there were problems with her children. She described how they finally responded:

The only communication I would get from them is when something bad happened on the bus or something happened with my son in the classroom. But other than that, as far as communication from the school, there was none. You don’t hear from the school until the child is doing something bad. They’re not going to call you and tell you, oh, so-and-so had a good day. That’s not the case. So the calls that you get from the school, they’re all bad.

Their selective responses left Wanda even more skeptical and concerned about the school’s intentions regarding her children’s academic success, again causing her extreme dissatisfaction with the federal transfer policy.

Living so far away from the receiving school and dealing with the transportation issues were of great concern for Wanda. Between the unforgiving bus schedule and traffic, Wanda found it “really hard” getting her children to and from school. She complained:

First of all, I used to get up really, really early in the morning because the bus came at 5:02. And I would stand out there with my children in the rain, sleet, snow and shine because I wasn’t going to leave them on [the corner] at 5:02 in the morning by themselves. The bus would leave at 5; it was about a two-hour ride.
Many days they were late for school because the bus got caught up in traffic and I’m thinking how can y’all be late for school and y’all left here at 5:03? Wanda also attributed their late arrival to school to the numerous stops the bus had to make each morning. Instead of stopping in strategic areas, Wanda stated that “they drove almost all over the city before they got on the freeway” making it almost impossible to get the children to school on time. And getting her children to school if they missed the bus was even more traumatic for Wanda since “it would put [her] two hours late getting to work because the traffic was really bad going that way.” Either way, NCLB transportation proved to be a thorn in Wanda’s side whether she had to do the driving or not.

Disruptive bus rides followed by unexpected stops also created tension for Wanda. On any given evening, she rarely knew when her children would return home from school. She described how “some of the things that happened on the bus was horrible . . . [and how] the bus would pull over and the kids would get home at 8:00 or 9:00 o’clock at night.” Bothered by these situations, Wanda talked about two incidents when her children were late due to problems on the bus. On one occasion, it was after 7:00 pm and she had not seen her children. As time passed, her daughter called from her cell phone to tell Wanda that there was a situation on the bus and they were still in route. As a result, Wanda got into her car and “picked her up out in [some neighborhood] somewhere.” To her dismay, the principal notified Wanda about her “daughter’s suspension for using her cell phone.” To which Wanda replied, “Well you know what? After 7:30 pm came and I did not know where my kids were, she was supposed to use her cell phone.” Wanda shared how her daughter, on another occasion “called [because] the police had pulled over the bus and they were sitting there for two hours off the side of the
... freeway.” Concerned about her daughter’s safety, Wanda “went and got [her] daughter off the bus because she’s a diabetic.” Having to find her children on the side of the road because of predicaments on the bus angered and scared her to the point where she was constantly contacting the receiving school about the need for adult bus monitors. Considering the regular problems that were occurring on the bus, Wanda felt this “should have been a number one priority with the kids [who] . . . are not going to act right with just one bus driver.” Unfortunately, she explained, the school never responded appropriately, always saying there was no funding available.

Wanda spoke of the difficulty she had watching her children become more and more frustrated with school, since their experiences greatly influenced her own. She described one particular conversation she had with her daughter, which worried her immensely. According to Wanda, her daughter was “just frustrated thinking [she’d] never graduate.” Hurt by her daughter’s outlook on her educational future, Wanda’s beliefs that NCLB negatively affected her children’s scholastic and personal growth overall were solidified, leaving her to feel that even her own needs as a concerned parent were never honored. As a result, the receiving school, from her experience had failed to educate her children and ended up “just passing them through,” rousing Wanda’s unhappiness and reminding her that using the choice option was not worth the trouble she and her children had experienced.

*Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option*

Wanda believed that she was doing the same level of parent involvement at the new receiving school that she had done at the neighborhood-home school. She chuckled
about how she would stop by the school at any time to check on her children. Driven by memories of her mother being active in her own educational life, Wanda reminisced:

I, from my background coming up, remember my mom coming to the school to go out on field trips with us, riding the yellow school bus through the zoo. My mom was always involved with us, and she was a classroom parent. I remember that and I wanted to give that back to my children as well.

As a result, Wanda continued that tradition, feeling it was her duty to be involved and making sure that her children and the school were very aware of her intentions.

It was also important for Wanda to let her kids know that she would be invested in their educational lives at home and school because she understood the impact it could have on their lives. She said, “If they know that I care, then that makes them try a little harder.” Wanda’s care translated into regular talks with her children about their place in the receiving school even before the school year began. From discussions about being new students and following school rules to getting along with teachers, this was Wanda’s way of preparing her children for survival at the high performing middle school. Another caring step Wanda took to prepare her children was to introduce them to the school community. She described how she “drove them around the little neighborhood . . . and took them to orientation” so they could learn more about the school.

As the school year continued, Wanda took additional steps to support her children’s educational endeavors. She described how she helped them with their homework and bought school supplies, including a computer. No matter the need, Wanda made sure “they were well supplied with . . . whatever.” Wanda even laughed about one of her late night rendezvous to the store for project supplies. “One night, around 11:00-12:00 o’clock,” she chuckled, “I was looking for poster boards at the 24-hour [store]. Oh, my God, we’re in the store fighting with another mother cause there’s only two poster
boards left and I need three, and she needs one.”

Determined to find some type of help for her children because of the receiving school’s lack of support, Wanda sought help for them beyond the school environment. She described how she solicited neighborhood churches and organizations to find individuals who could support her children academically via services like tutoring.

Wanda explained to her delight:

I met with a couple of the counselors . . . who have a No Kids Left Behind counseling service at [a neighborhood] church in the evenings where children get help with their homework and things of that nature. Teachers from [a local college] and different people that taught school would go out to the church and help the kids.

With the support of this church, Wanda’s ability to help her children dramatically increased, giving her some feeling that she was giving them what they needed to get through their eighth grade school year.

Even with all that was happening to her children academically, Wanda did not shy away from the high performing middle school. She was very serious about letting them know that she would be involved, available to not only advocate for her children, but to also serve in various roles based on what the school needed at that time. She explained how she just went up to the school and said, “If you guys need any parent volunteers . . . I will be here to help.” Having the determination and a work schedule that would allow her to be at the school on certain days, Wanda offered to help wherever they needed her. And as a result, she served in the following ways: she walked the kids to the eighth grade dance party in the park; she made copies; and she went on field trips to local theme parks.

Despite the experiences she and her children had with the NCLB transfer policy, Wanda
never faltered on her commitment to helping her children in school the best way she could.

Case Study: Cheryl

Cheryl, a Black-American woman who lives within School District B’s geographical boundaries, used the NCLB school choice policy to transfer her son with special needs from a middle school to a high performing elementary school where he would be enrolled in the sixth grade. The sister of a teacher and administrator, Cheryl was privy to some information and understanding about the policy and schools which shaped her responsibility as an NCLB parent.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

Cheryl used the policy because her son had a lot of problems at the neighborhood-home school. She felt that these problems were rooted in the school’s inability to deal with “his ethnicity and where he’s from.” According to Cheryl, the neighborhood-home school’s constant mistreatment and intolerance led her to believe that “administration, other students, and teachers antagonized him all the time and were out to get him.” Furthermore, Cheryl concluded that the neighborhood-home school did not know how to deal with different races of people, outside of the white, American culture because “they just didn’t know how to talk to or deal with people outside of the races that they are.” Although she disliked the school’s discriminatory practices toward her son, Cheryl quickly mentioned that his race should not have brought about any special treatment. But she did believe that because “we are all from different places and take things differently,” the receiving school should have learned how to interact and communicate more effectively with her son and others in its diverse student population.
Another problem Cheryl had with the neighborhood-home school was their inability to effectively communicate and respond to her son’s needs. She specifically described times when he would have altercations with other children and later approach school staff to explain what happened. However, Cheryl believed that they disregarded his voice in these matters and purposefully provided no help to her son, resulting in his “very negative behavior to the staff.” Enrollment in classes that pulled her son out of class created other problems for Cheryl’s son because it brought unwanted attention to him. Cheryl viewed this practice as insensitive and problematic because other students were “taunting him and talking bad about him.” And in her attempt to deal with her son’s problems and advocate for his needs, Cheryl felt that her efforts went unnoticed. She said:

I pushed my son from day one in school, got him all the help that we thought he needed: an IEP, going to meetings, setting different schedules, asking questions and stuff, and nothing happened. It was the same result, you know. He was let down. We were let down.

So Cheryl was compelled to find an alternative learning environment for her son, and the No Child Left Behind public school choice policy was her means of doing that.

Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support from the School District and the Receiving School

Not having received any support from School District B after the transfer, Cheryl reported limited support from the receiving school as well. Although she could not pinpoint this lack of support, she did attribute it to the fact that her son had only been enrolled for a short time. Regardless of these circumstances, Cheryl insisted, “It was mostly me! There was very little [support].” Overall, she felt that the school did very little to initiate helping her son adjust and put the responsibility solely on her.
Aside from the few phone calls from the Principal and Vice Principal regarding issues with her son, the Special Education Department’s resource specialist was the only other means of support provided to Cheryl by the receiving school. The specialist worked closely with her to monitor her son’s academic progress in school. Also with the support of the specialist, Cheryl was given specific strategies to use to directly address some of her son’s learning needs. For example, the specialist provided Cheryl with supplemental learning materials that she could use at home to enhance his understanding of content or to push his learning ahead. Despite the specialist’s help, Cheryl still felt that these services were just not enough, leaving her to question the receiving school’s responsibility to effectively educate her son.

*Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience*

Although her son was interested in the transfer, Cheryl admitted that he had no input in the decision to use the federal policy. Once enrolled in the receiving school, she explained that “he was nervous and did not do well” because he was a new student and remembered the negative experiences he had at the neighborhood-home school. Cheryl sympathized with his apprehensive feelings, understanding that as “a new student he was going to have some difficulty trying to figure out who he was going to be friends with and how the administration and teachers would take him.” At times he would get into trouble because these feelings caused him to act defensively where he “kind of felt that everyone’s against him even if he felt he did nothing wrong.” However, Cheryl mentioned, he managed to avoid any major altercations.

Cheryl later described how her son’s experience at the receiving school improved over time. As he settled into the school’s rhythms and routines, she noticed that “he was
more comfortable and did better.” She first noticed a positive change in his attitude when he established relationships with staff, teachers, administration, and students alike. The more familiar he became with these people, his negative and disrespectful attitude diminished. Cheryl witnessed another positive change in her son when he began to establish encouraging friendships with his peers by getting to know those who were “going to help and motivate him” while positively influencing him academically and socially.

Cheryl also believed that her son’s caring relationships with others and his new attitude resulted in even more positive changes in the classroom. As he became a better reader, writer, and communicator, “his grades improved a lot.” Evolving into a better student, Cheryl talked about the confidence he developed and how she was soon seeing his changes at home. Not only was he “taking more initiative to be the older brother figure, which is good for the two younger ones, he’s communicating with us, his brothers and sisters even better.”

The fact that her son began participating in school related activities was further proof of the positive change within her son and revealed his adjustment to the high performing school. At lunch, “he plays a lot of football and basketball even though they don’t really have a team.” Cheryl explained how there were some after school activities that he became interested in, but the after school busing schedule contributed to his inability to participate in those functions. Instead, she said, “he . . . gets back home about 3:30, it’s time for homework and things like that, so it kind of works out, his not being able to stay after school.” In spite of his initial struggles to adjust, Cheryl whole-heartedly
believed that her son enjoyed the new experience, exclaiming, “Oh, he loves it, he loves it!”

Parent’s Experience

Although Cheryl detested the school district and receiving school’s dismal levels of support, she described her overall experience as great. And much of her attitude was based upon her son’s positive attitude and performance at school:

I love it because he loves it and he’s doing much better than before. So I can’t really complain about it. It’s definitely worth it. And as long as my kid is happy, I’m good and that’s where I’m at right now.

Cheryl was especially encouraged and affected by her son’s budding enthusiasm for school, which caused her to be “not as stressed as before.” As a result, she became more confident in her efforts to assess her son’s academic and social needs and increased her advocacy for additional and adequate support for him.

Cheryl also commented about other aspects of the receiving school that satisfied her as well. Unlike her neighborhood-home school experiences, she appreciated the friendliness of the school’s administration, staff, and “great” teachers. She particularly valued the Special Education Department’s resource specialist because “she provided special services for kids with special needs like my son.” Cheryl was also pleased that the school’s environment and class sizes did not intimidate her son to the point where he felt “overwhelmed and could not handle it.” And most important, she was happy because the receiving school’s instructional programs did not bring attention to her son by pulling him out of class. Hence, his sense of pride was preserved because he was able to learn “among his peers . . . which has been much better” for him academically.
In the end, Cheryl was glad she had taken the chance to send her son to a better learning environment. Not sure what the rest of the school year would bring, Cheryl celebrated the positive changes she had already seen in her son’s social and academic life. She remarked, “I mean, it’s almost like a complete 180 [and though] there’s a couple months left in school, the overall experience so far has been good.” For Cheryl, the transfer left her confidently knowing that her son was “getting an education and getting it this time around.”

**Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option**

Cheryl shared that her participation was important to the educational success of her son and believed that she possessed the most influence over his educational experience. In fact, much of her current involvement was a result of prior negative experiences that he had faced at the neighborhood-home school. Identifying her role as critical to his success, Cheryl made sure that both her son and the high performing school were well aware that she would be a hands-on parent, active both at home and school. She wanted to show her son that she would be “in his space in the beginning [and] there to the end . . . through good or bad,” regardless of the educational situation. So it was her plan, she exclaimed, to overtly show him how much she cared about his education and well being:

> If I don’t care about his work and what he’s doing, then he ain’t going to care either. So I care for both of us. And he sees that I care and he’s going to try his best to do what he can, period.

Cheryl also made it a point to show the receiving school her parent involvement intentions as well. First, she visited the school to inform them of her parental rights and
that she would be “popping up at the school when necessary.” As result of her actions, the receiving school was “okay with it and they welcomed me to come in whenever.”

When asked about her level of parent involvement since making the transfer, Cheryl expressed that she was “doing about the same, but focusing a little more to keep him on track” both at school and home. One way she monitored his progress at school was by creating a progress report for teachers to give weekly feedback about her son’s academic and behavioral performance in class. Periodic communication with school administration and classroom visitations were other methods Cheryl used to check up on his progress and interaction with others as well.

Cheryl used several strategies to support her son at home. She made sure that she motivated him by acknowledging “when he’s doing good.” Completing homework and other assignments together allowed her to keep track of his progress and what he was learning. Cheryl also described the daily talks she had with her son to discuss the importance of having a positive attitude about self and school, working well with others, and getting an education. To help him cope with being the new student in school, Cheryl reminded him to be himself and not worry whether everyone likes him or not. It was also important for Cheryl to discuss the benefits of his being at the receiving school and getting along with his teachers. On one occasion, she told him the following:

The classroom size being smaller is a good thing, and the teachers aren’t the ones from the other school. So don’t judge everyone just because you got treated one way somewhere else. Just get along with all your teachers because everyone’s there to help you, and you’ll get the attention that you need.

Lastly, Cheryl emphasized that some of their discussions highlighted how the transfer was an opportunity for her son to get an education and to become a better student. During these conversations, she would tell him, “Enjoy it now. This is just a fresh start for you.”
So just take it by the horns and go with it.” Considering all the effort that Cheryl put into being a hands-on parent, active both at school and home, she worked hard to ensure that he received a quality education along with personal success.

Case Study: Renee

Renee is an African-American woman with a daughter who transferred to a high performing middle school in School District B. At the time of the interview, Renee’s daughter was in the seventh grade, her second year at the receiving school under the NCLB school transfer option.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

Renee’s decision to use the NCLB public school choice policy was based upon what she was seeing in her neighborhood’s children. She witnessed them coming home from school playing into the night and having such negative attitudes. From her point of view, there appeared to be little support for them, as well as no additional learning and studying beyond their school day, something she did not want for her daughter. So when she found out about NCLB and its provision that allowed parents to switch their children from less challenging schools to more rigorous educational environments, Renee jumped at the chance. “I want better for her,” she passionately exclaimed. Once approved to use the federal policy, Renee set out to find an appropriate school setting with a specialized curriculum geared toward her daughter’s gifts and talents. She scouted out the best placements for her daughter, and from the several options provided to her by the district, Renee decided upon a school that had a performing arts-centered curriculum.
Parent's Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School

Renee was thoroughly pleased with the support that she received from her daughter’s new school. This level of support included traditional methods of school communication such as newsletters and progress reports which kept her informed about school events and activities as well as her daughter’s academic progress. However, the support from one of the counselors was what she valued most. From their first encounter with the counselor, Renee and her daughter felt at ease, and, over time, the counselor far exceeded the other levels of support systems provided by the receiving school. More comfortable with the counselor than the teachers, she heavily relied on the counselor who was very attentive and thorough, as well as friendly and supportive when it came to meeting their needs.

Had she not established a relationship with the counselor, Renee felt that she would not have been able to help her daughter. For instance, she described a time when her daughter was failing one of her classes just before summer. A stressful time for Renee, she was worried that her daughter would have to enroll in summer school and miss the planned summer trip. Immediately, Renee worked with the counselor; they found that her daughter’s failing grades were a result of her “getting nervous on her tests.” To support Renee, the counselor gave her strategies to help her daughter with tests, and, as a result, her grades improved and they went on their family trip.

Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience

From the moment that the decision was made to use the policy, Renee included her daughter in the decision-making process. She respected her daughter’s opinion so much that she allowed her to help select from their list of potential transfer schools, and
her daughter “was happy” to make the choice. Everything seemed to be falling into place: “the bus stop was right at the corner; the drive is like 45 minutes; and she got a cell phone to keep in contact.” And Renee believed that the ease at which this was occurring caused her daughter to feel very comfortable and open to the transfer.

New student orientation was scheduled just before the school year began and Renee’s daughter was thrilled. The visit to the receiving school gave them a chance to familiarize themselves with the high performing middle school. Once they arrived, Renee described how, her daughter became even more excited when she met her counselor for the first time:

The counselor was like really helpful and pleasant, introducing herself. She even gave my daughter a gift. A student had left [a] locker shelf and the counselor offered it to her. For some reason the counselor really connected with my daughter, and I think my daughter enjoyed that because she was like, “Oh wow! I got to meet my counselor.”

From that point on, the counselor became her daughter’s “go to” person on campus, something Renee and her daughter really enjoyed about the receiving school.

Attending the receiving school was her daughter’s first experience out of her own neighborhood, and Renee commented on how quickly she socially adjusted and “made friends so easy.” She especially felt good about her daughter’s exposure to people of “other races [with whom] she made even more friends.” As her daughter adjusted, Renee explained that she began to participate in school activities and groups, such as the debate team and drama club.

However, Renee’s daughter faced some difficulty adjusting academically throughout the school year. “It’s been a little rough,” she described when talking about how her daughter struggled in some of her classes. Renee specifically talked about the
time, just before the summer of her sixth grade school year, when her daughter had failing grades because of low content area test scores. Although her daughter was able to pull up her grades and avoid summer school due to their combined efforts with the counselor, Renee spoke of how this one situation was representative of how challenging it could get during her daughter's enrollment at the receiving school. She also pointed out how her daughter's participation in extracurricular activities was limited because of her low academic grades. Again, describing her overall experience academically in these and other instances throughout the school year, Renee repeated, “It’s still a little challenging, but, she’s handling it.”

Well into the transfer, Renee reflected on the changes that she had seen in her daughter. She particularly described how her daughter had become more responsible and focused. Despite the academic challenges her daughter faced, Renee believed “she is just getting stronger.” So when asked about her daughter’s overall experience with the transfer to the high performing middle school, Renee exclaimed, “She’s had a good experience . . . doesn’t have any regrets. She’s liking the school . . . and she sees herself going through the whole thing.”

Parent's Experience

Renee buzzed with joy and laughter as she described her overall experience with the NCLB choice policy. In fact, she described her last 2 years at the high performing middle school as “a good experience that was very pleasant.” One of the reasons why she enjoyed her experience was because of the receiving school’s atmosphere. Renee spoke highly of the advantage of sending her daughter to an exceptional learning and social environment: “What I like most is just the atmosphere and that she’s in good
surroundings, around good people. There's no fights, no rowdiness. So I know she's safe and happy." Knowing that her daughter spent her school days in such a safe environment "took the pressure off Renee," reducing her stress and making her feel even better about the transfer. After all, her daughter was now in an environment where she could avoid conflicts with others and still have the opportunity to learn.

Another reason why Renee enjoyed her experience was because of the relationships she had established with some of the adults at the school site. She exclaimed, "They're professional but more like a family; there's a closeness and it's not like you're going to be ignored." Not only did she appreciate the connections she made with them, they made it easier for her to support her daughter's academic endeavors. She stated: "They're very friendly . . . informative [and] very helpful. It's not like I have to just be stressed out and worried about what to do or where to go. They just give you the information." With these available supports, Renee found it even easier to actively participate in her daughter's education. It was that consistent support and genuine communication that led her to believe that the receiving was indeed concerned about the well being of her child and would come to her aid at any given moment which, in turn, impressed Renee immensely.

Again, much of Renee's joy hinged upon the positive relationship that she had developed with the receiving school's counselor. From their first encounter, Renee felt a strong sense of satisfaction with the school because of the counselor's genuine interest in her daughter. Their positive relationship continued throughout the time that Renee's daughter attended the receiving school during which time the counselor was always accessible, friendly, and familiar with her. It felt good when the counselor "recognized
me,” and Renee appreciated the fact that she was always remembered, and never overlooked or forgotten when she went to the school. In particular, it was the counselor’s openness, positivity, and great rapport that provided Renee the freedom to focus on her daughter’s needs. Although the school district did not have any contact with her after her daughter was enrolled in a high performing middle school, Renee believed that the new school was respectfully meeting her needs as a concerned and involved NCLB parent, thus enhancing her experience.

*Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option*

When asked whether her level of parent involvement had changed since her daughter made the switch to the high performing middle school, Renee stated, “It hasn’t changed too much.” Even though this was the case, she believed that she had been very active over the course of her daughter’s tenure at the receiving school. After all, Renee believed that 100% of parent involvement was required to positively affect her child’s education.

Many situations influenced Renee’s active participation in her daughter’s education. She had already mentioned her observances of the neighborhood children and her concern that they were not being challenged academically at home and school. Once the school year began, Renee also felt the need to act because of the perceived high expectations that the receiving school had for parent involvement. She shared, “I believe it’s high and I think that’s why they make it easy, too, so the parents won’t be like so stressful.” Furthermore, Renee believed that they recognized her efforts to support her daughter’s learning.
Considering the school’s high expectations, Renee worked diligently to align the actions, activities, and other requirements assigned at the receiving school to those established routines at home. This made it easier to help her daughter remain focused and caught up with her course work. She explained their work regimen: “homework routines, 20 minutes of reading . . . tutoring, or 15 minute to 20 minutes of studying and prepping for her tests.” Renee also solicited the support of her daughter’s father; together they emphasized that education came first and all else was secondary. Renee paid careful attention to the cues her daughter was showing and often made decisions based on her actions. For instance, when she learned about her daughter’s nervousness when taking tests, she immediately talked to teachers and counselors for additional support and also offered other incentives to positively motivate her daughter as well.

Limiting her daughter’s stress levels was another step Renee took to support her daughter at home. One way she did this was to make sure her daughter had all the materials needed to have a productive and safe day at school. Because of her daughter’s long bus commute, Renee also purchased a brand new cell phone for her, a safety tool to use when she was “far out where something could happen to her.” Renee also explained how daily conversations with her daughter became another strategy she used at home to support her daughter’s educational endeavors. Just as the phone and other supplies aided in her daughter’s ability to be safe and successful in school, Renee believed that talking and listening were just as effective in keeping her daughter’s stress levels down. Whether these conversations focused on the importance of education in the real world or her daily adventures at the receiving school, Renee felt that she was still getting pertinent information about her daughter’s experiences, in a friendly, less stressful manner.
To show her support at school, Renee encouraged and supported her daughter’s learning and progress by attending all of her daughter’s drama performances. She exclaimed, “When she performed in [the play], I went and even had friends go too.” For Renee, these and her other parent involvement practices had a profound affect on her daughter, resulting in positive outcomes that made her “more responsible, strong, and focused.” Furthermore, Renee believed that engaging in her daughter’s education “made her more disciplined and open” and eager to get the best education that NCLB could give, which thoroughly enhanced Renee’s experience as well.

Case Study: Sharon

Sharon was an African-American parent who had used pre-NCLB school choice methods for her child since he had been enrolled in kindergarten. Aware of the opportunity that choice had created for him in the earlier grades, she opted to use NCLB to transfer him to a high performing middle school when the school he was scheduled to attend did not reach AYP goals.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

Sharon always thought about her child’s educational future and it was always her plan to “have him someplace where he could concentrate on learning.” So she was convinced that NCLB choice would give her child opportunities to learn, chances “to see and experience more” beyond his neighborhood, and exposure to various peoples and situations in life.

Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School

Sharon was extremely satisfied with the support the receiving school used to keep her informed. One such method, the newsletter, listed school events and activities and
also provided other general information that helped her support her child’s education.

Orientation was another method of support that Sharon appreciated because it allowed her and her child the opportunity to learn about their school choice selection. Excited to see the receiving school first hand, she described their day:

We walked the whole school to see how big it was, locating the office, nurse’s office, and the gym. Then we even got a chance to meet the staff, the principal, and all the sixth grade teachers. We even picked out [my child’s] his locker, and bought a lock for his locker and his PE clothes. And by the end of the day, we had taken in the whole school.

Being on the school campus and meeting school staff and officials left a lasting impression on Sharon who learned a lot about the school and ended up liking it.

Contact with the school was primarily conducted online, and Sharon took advantage of this level of support even though she did not have a home-based computer. She would email the receiving school and use the other online programs to check her child’s “homework assignments, current grades, and test scores.” Sharon also considered the planner to be a convenient yet valuable way to leave notes for teachers while keeping track of her child’s daily progress since “he was supposed to write . . . what was expected of him in each of classes.” With all of these means of contact and support, Sharon was able to manage and monitor her child’s learning quite thoroughly.

Lastly, Sharon spoke of programmatic/class-based supports provided by the receiving school that helped her child keep up with his studies. He attended the 6-to-6 Program before/after school to get help with assignments and complete homework in a supportive environment. Advisory, one of his scheduled classes, served as another layer of support provided to help her and her child responsibly stay on top of his school work. In addition to these programs, Sharon heavily relied on the support of a traveling
classroom aide who was assigned to help her child in each of his classes. According to Sharon, the aide always contacted her to let her know how well he performed each day in class. As a result, Sharon appreciated every support provided by the high performing middle school because they provided the assistance she needed to positively affect her child’s educational life.

Despite the excellent help Sharon obtained from the high performing middle school, she stated that there was minimal support from School District B, which included the letter stating her eligibility to use NCLB as a means to transfer her son to a better school and “a little booklet they gave me to give me some idea of the [choice] program.”

Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience

Sharon believed that her child “wanted the experience” and was looking forward to the transfer from the moment that he had been assigned a school. In fact, she explained how he showed his excitement by doing an extensive Internet search to learn more about the school choice they selected.

Once school began, Sharon described how her child showed no resistance; he was eager to go to school and “had no problem waking up in the morning, feeding himself, and getting dressed and out the door.” Even though Sharon knew he was independent, she believed that he evolved into an even stronger child, a leader not a follower, who could not be easily influenced by other people, and could handle responsibility and change in a more mature manner. For instance, Sharon felt that he handled the long bus commute “like a big boy because he was responsible for being by himself . . . from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm or a quarter to 5:00 pm.” She described how he also showed his maturity when he would tell her, “I’ll be all right so don’t you worry; everything will be fine” just before
going off to school so she would not worry. Sharon shared how he also showed the same character at school when the classroom was short on materials. For example, “he would donate things like Kleenex when the classroom supply was short.” Hence, Sharon deduced that his increasing independence and responsibility were evidence that the transfer had a positive affect on him, making his experience a success.

Interestingly, Sharon mentioned how her child did not believe his NCLB status made him any different than the students already attending the high performing middle school. As he adjusted to the new school, his interaction with others made it easier for him to join clubs and attend dances and eventually resulted in promising relationships that positively impacted his educational life. One relationship in particular, “him befriending a little guy from the bus,” grew into what Sharon called a nice and encouraging friendship where the two boys quickly became study partners. Although the school contacted her about her child’s inappropriate behavior at times, Sharon commented that “lots of the phone calls were about what a great young man he is, that I’ve done such a good job with him, and he’s just as polite as he can be.”

When asked how her child was doing academically, Sharon smiled and said, “Excellent, excellent.” Overall, she felt that he flourished in school and was successful because he took full advantage of the school’s supports, which ultimately increased his confidence and enthusiasm, and strengthened his ability and responsibility to keep up with his classes and complete the work on time. Clearly, this child’s experience revealed a more positive side of the transfer policy because the self motivation and independence helped him thrive in the receiving school’s environment and at home.
Parent’s Experience

Acknowledging the transfer as one of the best educational decisions she had made for her child, Sharon professed, “I couldn’t be any more happier with NCLB choice because it’s a good program.” Since “everything just flowed” from the moment she applied for the transfer, Sharon was convinced that the opportunity was meant to happen. Moreover, she envisioned the transfer as “opening doors giving him the option to go somewhere else to get a better education” beyond his neighborhood.

Sharon wholeheartedly believed that the high performing school that she selected for her child “was just right.” She explained further:

I just feel that it was a good choice; a good school and I love it. It’s small, personable, and similar to [his elementary school]. And he’s in a safe place . . . where he is being treated with respect and is treating other people with respect as well.

Not only did she feel it was just right for her child, she felt that it was just right for her because the school’s efforts to help her support her child enhanced her role in her child’s education. She explained how compliments from school officials about his behavior and academic accomplishments reflected their care and diligence toward educating her child and, inadvertently, made it easier for her to make specific decisions regarding his education. Unlike her feelings of disappointment regarding the school district’s lack of support, Sharon felt empowered by the receiving school’s efforts and confidently handled her child’s school-related needs with ease. Hence, Sharon had few reservations about her son’s enrollment in the school because she was “able to get up, go to work and do what was needed to hold her little household together without having to worry or stress.” She also talked about how her stress was lowered even more since she was able to implement some of the receiving school’s structures seamlessly into her household procedures,
aiding her in monitoring his progress. She added:

It helps my mind when we have structure because we know what we have to do. We’re on a schedule, and it allows me to keep that ball rolling. There’s no surprises, there’s no big ahas, and I like that. It makes a lot less stress for us and me as well.

Because of the enhanced learning she acquired to meet her child’s educational needs during the transfer process, Sharon concluded by saying, “We [the receiving school and I] are all grooming him,” in a partnership focused on his academic success, and his positive attitude and improved learning were the key aspects that made Sharon’s experience an incredible one.

Sharon’s experience was yet another clear example of how the receiving school’s practices and procedures created an easily adaptive and informative environment that helped her work with her child and the school to improve his academic achievement.

Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option

Sharon felt that she exercised her parental power when she transferred her child to the high performing middle school. Influenced by his enthusiasm for school, she emphasized the importance of knowing her child’s strengths and needs in order to make the best educational decisions for him. In order to do this, Sharon acted upon what she perceived to be the receiving school’s parent involvement expectations. Neither stated nor implied actions, she believed they were necessary to ensure her child’s academic progress. She said:

I think they have high parent expectations, just like they expect the students to learn. So I don’t think that they would accept tomfoolery, and I believe that if I wasn’t working up to their standards that they would let it be known.

Either way, Sharon felt that the receiving school recognized and respected her efforts, even when she had difficulty being fully involved. At times, her participation was limited
because of work and family situations. For example, she explained how she “hadn’t had
an opportunity to really do too much parental involvement because of her work schedule”
and how raising two other children also presented a challenge that sometimes hindered
the extent to which she could act. Furthermore, she mentioned one school related parental
involvement opportunity which she felt excluded from. The receiving school’s school-
based foundation encouraged parents to participate monetarily, something Sharon could
not do. She explained, “I don’t have the ability to donate two or three hundred or
thousands of dollars, but if they ever needed me to chaperone a dance or give of my time,
I would be more than willing.” Yet, in spite of these obstacles that interfered with her
ability to be involved, Sharon was always compelled to do her best to show the school
her commitment to her child’s education at home and at the receiving school.

At home, Sharon’s daily goal was to get her child “to believe that he could be
successful,” and she thought this mantra would encourage him to be productive, enjoy
learning, and work hard to get a good education. She described her motivational methods
as followed:

I try to stay on top of his work to encourage him to get a 3-point grade average
and to keep it there or higher. But I don’t try to make him into something that he’s
not by pushing too much.

This constant communication with her child was one of many ways she worked to
influence his thoughts about his education, especially since she used it to discuss issues
associated with the transfer, his social and academic experiences, along with her own
expectations for him while at the school. Sharon also took additional steps to show her
child that she valued his education and supported his experiences. She used routines to
keep him on track once he arrived home after school which included reviewing
homework, going out to play, and then returning for dinner followed by bath and bed.

When necessary, she visited the school to meet with teachers to discuss his academic progress. For example, he was having difficulty in math, so Sharon worked with his teacher and even bought additional learning materials designed to improve and enhance his understanding of the concepts. When her schedule did not permit her to report to the receiving school site, Sharon made sure the school and her child’s teachers had her work, home, and cell phone numbers for quick and easy access. Thus, Sharon recalled the importance of her role in her child’s education and how she participated throughout the transfer process, “When they called, [I] responded, and always acted for the well-being of [my] child.”

Case Study: Sally

Sally was the African-American mother of a son who was in his second year at a high performing middle school in School District B. She shared her experiences at the high performing middle school and how she worked to advocate for her needs as an NCLB parent and her son’s goals for academic achievement. Although Sally participated in the interview alone, she confirmed that decisions regarding her son’s education were made by both her and her husband. Therefore, when discussing their experiences with the federal transfer policy, this case was referred to as “Sally” with the understanding that her husband was also a part of the experience.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

“We just have one child and want him in a school, with great test scores, that would give him the best education.” Knowing that she wanted a quality education for her son, Sally was fairly new to the state and had limited knowledge about the programs and
schools that would best serve her son. Upon enrolling him at the school district offices, she was told about choice programs and opted to “sign up for every school transfer program available.” She also discussed how she learned about various schools “by talking to other parents who had children.” After receiving approval for using the NCLB choice option, Sally and her son vigorously searched the Internet to learn about their school enrollment options by focusing their search on “the test scores because they tell a lot about the teaching.”

*Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School*

Sally had mixed emotions about the receiving school’s support because they did not provide specific and periodic support that would have helped her as an NCLB parent. In some respects, she was appreciative of the newsletter and contact numbers available to all parents. The newsletter informed her about scheduled activities and events and clearly stated what her son needed, while the phone list allowed parents to quickly identify and call “whomever to get more information.” Sally was also thankful for the connections she made with some school staff and administration. Both the advisor and counselor were very sweet, lovable people whom Sally felt had beautiful personalities, but she valued one of the two vice principals even more. Sally said:

> I am glad she was there because I can talk with her. You have to know how to talk and listen to people. That’s an important key, and I’m so grateful for her. I don’t know who made the decision for her to get there, but thank you, Jesus. I hope she stays, too!

She was satisfied with these basic levels of support provided by the receiving school and admitted to using them on an as-needed basis.
However, Sally felt that she needed more consistent support and feedback from the receiving school to manage her son’s educational life. She mentioned how her need for more support was ignored, making her feel it was solely her responsibility to monitor her son’s academic and social progress. Although her requests for support were unanswered, she exclaimed how this did not stop the receiving school from contacting her when they needed her immediate support and action:

There was no other help for me as a parent unless my son was in trouble and they had my work and cell number and called me directly . . . for incidents where I had to come to school and talk with administration [about my son].

Therefore, Sally considered the receiving school’s commitment of support to be one-sided; they would not respond when she needed help to effectively influence her son’s academic and social progress but intervene only when her son’s troubles interfered with their day-to-day happenings. Unfortunately, this negatively affected Sally’s overall experience and that of her son as well.

**Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience**

Sally’s son had both positive and challenging experiences at the receiving school. Overall, she said, he was very excited about the transfer, helped to select the school, and initially loved that school. Many of his friends, who attended his elementary school and other schools, were going to the receiving school as well. She described how “they loved it and he was very happy.”

Although her son loved the school, Sally explained that he had difficulty adjusting. According to Sally, his first year was not easy; he “was a little bit nervous because he was new and didn’t know” how to fit in. At first, Sally figured that he was getting comfortable with the receiving school environment, but then seemed to notice that
he was still facing some adjustment challenges which she related to his adolescence. She suggested that the “teenager mood swings and back talking caused problems” eventually affecting his academic and social experiences at the receiving school. For example, Sally described how he insistently refused a math and writing tutor. She explained how she tried to convince him, and all the while he argued, “Oh Mama, I don’t need any help,” but still continued to struggle.

Sally shared how his adjustment to adolescence challenged his ideas about friendships at the receiving school as well. She explained that her son had a physical altercation with his “friend” who called him a derogatory name. As a result, her son was suspended for his actions but the friend was not. On the one hand, the receiving school’s disciplinary actions left her son bewildered and infuriated because he received punishment and the boy did not. He told Sally, “We both should have been suspended.” On the other hand, he was extremely confused because “this person who he thought was his friend called him out of his name and threw him for a loop.” Sally explained how she discussed friendships with her son and warned him to “be careful who you call your friends,” to which he vowed to have nothing more to do with that boy.

Lastly, Sally talked about her son’s further adjustment issues in regards to the difficult relationship that he had with one of his teachers because “something was said that was kind of blown out of proportion.” Sally noted his frustration with the outcome and how his teacher “made him feel like a liar, like his word don’t count.” However, she continued, he was able to find “justice” this time around after talking to the vice principal. Sally confessed:

I find that when my son was in trouble, he deal with the vice principal very well. I don’t know if it is because she’s a minority or what, but he felt a little bit more
comfortable talking with her. He felt like when he did speak his words were valid and it was taken sincerely, not like he was a liar or something.

In all, Sally described how these situations changed her son. Considering his own adolescence and adjustment issues and reaction during these situations, it also seemed that much of his difficulties had to do with how teachers and students at the receiving school treated and interacted with him as an NCLB student.

Parent’s Experience

Sally had a mixed experience with the NCLB public school choice option. On the one hand, she was thrilled about the access her son would have to a quality education. In her mind, this access would expose him to some of the best learning opportunities the federal policy could offer. Of the school choice selection she made for her son, Sally shared how she was impressed by their test scores and multiple resources. One look at the test scores and Sally was hooked because she just “knew the students were getting the best education, and that said a lot to me.” She excitedly discussed the textbook resources and how there were enough textbooks available for each student to have copies both at home and school. New to her, she responded, “I’m like wow because I never had two textbooks, and to have one at school and home is a good thing; it just floored me.”

In regards to the resources provided by the receiving school, Sally referred back to the two counselors and vice principal with whom she was able to establish relationships. They had had a profound affect on her experience at the receiving school, and she enthusiastically praised their friendliness and specifically called out their exceptional support and response times. For instance, she spoke of a time when “I felt he [our son] was still a little bit too young” to study sex education. After talking with the counselor, arrangements were made and her son was promptly removed from class during the time.
In addition, Sally viewed the vice principal as a Godsend during the challenging times that she and her son had because the vice principal seemed to genuinely care about their well being. Considering the positive affect these supports had on her experience, Sally justified sending her son to school located outside their geographical boundaries:

I just feel that... if it means I have to get up an hour early and drive up or drive an hour to get there, so be it. It’s that important because we only have one son... and we want him to have the best education possible.

Unfortunately for Sally, the receiving school’s impressive qualities were not enough to call her experience with the NCLB public school choice option a complete success.

Sally’s experience with the federal school choice policy was also plagued by many negative troubles at the receiving school. The first of several incidents, open house left an awful impression on Sally because of the mammoth crowd. With “all grades bang, clumped together, some 1,200 students... parking was ridiculous, and by the time I did, the whole thing is halfway done and I block someone in.” She remembered going to one class, struggling to focus on what her son’s teachers were sharing and worrying the entire time about her car, until she finally gave in saying, “God forbid something happened to my car, let me leave. I can’t do this.” As a result, she later contacted the office to schedule additional meeting times with each of his teachers, to get the information she missed.

Another situation that negatively influenced her experience was one of the many times she shadowed her son to his classes “to see how the teachers taught the subjects and interacted with students and how the students interacted with each other.” Sally explained how the day’s classes were unruly and even unfair to her son. During first period, Sally explained how the “substitute taught their notes... and a couple of the students were
very disruptive in the class and weren’t doing the work.” Knowing her son would be presenting the following day, she felt she had to talk to the teacher and the vice principal to assure that her son would be able to speak in a class where students were quiet and listening. Sally commented on how the vice principal listened to her concerns and later addressed the teacher. The following day, she returned to find her “son sitting in front of the class, the teacher stating the rules, and all of the other students finishing their presentations.” Sally said that even though a few of his other classes were just as chaotic, the science class bothered her the most because “her son raised his hand and the teacher didn’t call on him.” She already had concerns about this class because “there was a previous incident when the teacher sent her son to the office because . . . lately, he was getting an attitude problem.” Sally said that though she and another student’s adult aide saw her son’s hand raised, the teacher claimed “she didn’t see him.” Witnessing these classes first hand and the impact they had on her son’s education in one day’s time led Sally to wonder if the prior incidents her son had had with the teachers and/or students were fairly based on facts or a result of the chaotic nature of the classes and the teachers’ inability to control the students.

A year and a half into the transfer, Sally discussed how she had grown weary of the receiving school’s way of doing business and how she now had to carefully watch all that occurred to make sure she and her son were treated fairly while she worked to help him be successful. Sally explained, “This year I saw a lot and I’m like, wow, because what I saw left a little distaste in my mouth, and I just think that something’s got to be said and done” and these events caused her to strongly distrust the high performing middle school.
Sally was under the impression that her race and socioeconomic background contributed to the negative way in which she was treated at the receiving school. She explained, the “area where my son attends school is more affluent . . . and I kind of noticed a little bit of look-down that offended me, and I’m like I shouldn’t feel like this.” As a result, Sally saw this as evidence that the receiving school did not value her, which made her feel awkward and out of place when she visited the school. To avoid stereotyping the receiving school, its staff, and even the students, Sally reassessed previous experiences and relationships she had with similar groups and people, noting how all were quite positive. She continued:

I know we’re moving up to the higher grades and the principals and things are a bit different. I don’t feel as close as I did with the administration at [the elementary school] and I don’t know if it’s because it’s a lower level or because I was more involved.

Sally then confirmed that her feelings were warranted because of the way school officials treated her on several other occasions.

On one occasion, Sally was embarrassed by the office staff, including a member of the school administration, while trying to take care of an issue regarding her son. After finishing her business, Sally remembered walking out of the office and hearing laughter from the office staff. She recalled:

It really hurt and offended me. I walked out of the office and the receptionist and principal started laughing. I felt disrespected because I’ve never been in a school where they conduct themselves that way. This was unacceptable and I just kept myself quiet and walked out.

This harsh and disappointing experience only fueled Sally’s belief that the school officials looked down on her, lacked a certain level of professionalism, and did not know how to work and talk with different groups of people.
Sally also felt the same awkward feelings when the receiving school used its newsletters and other correspondence to congratulate certain parents for their participation in school activities and events or generous monetary gifts and other resources donated for school-initiated awards and projects. Expressing her feelings, she said: “Everyone knows we have a lot of parents who are affluent, not working, and have the resources to contribute to that community, the school, and its students. But not everybody can [participate] . . . because we all got our jobs.” And the fact they the school scheduled meetings during the day further suggested to Sally that they neither wanted nor valued her presence or input.

As stated earlier, much of Sally’s attitude regarding her experience and the NCLB public school choice option hinged upon the experiences of her son. First of all, she did not approve of the school’s communication and discipline procedures because “the only time you hear from them is when something was going wrong with my son.” Sally explained that her son was often targeted as a trouble-maker and issued excessive punishments, while other students were merely given warnings. This happened when her son was suspended for getting physical with another student who called him a derogatory name, yet the other student was not formally disciplined. Because that student provoked her son, causing the altercation, Sally felt that “there should have been some action taken because that’s teaching the other child that he can say what he wants about any person without repercussions.” As a result, she was dissatisfied with the way this situation was handled, but her son, also unhappy, walked away confused not only because of the outcome but also because he had considered that other student a friend.

Secondly, Sally felt that the receiving school disregarded her son’s point of view
when there were situations with other students and teachers. She already believed the school played favorites, but what troubled her most was that her son’s incidents would not be forgotten by teachers who would hold grudges against him instead of working the issues out with him. After all, she was convinced that “teachers can convict students by their words at the water cooler” and label them, eliminating any chance of fair treatment from future teachers who may encounter them later. For this reason, Sally “had a problem with that” and hoped that her son would get a fair shake regardless of the situation.

Despite these negative and degrading situations, the promise of an improved learning environment still convinced Sally that using the NCLB public school choice policy for her son was the best decision she could have ever made.

*Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option*

Sally believed in the importance of participating in her son’s educational life because her mother played a big role in her education. Remembering her mother’s role, she took many steps to make sure that she was knowledgeable of her son’s experience and able to act in his best interest. One way Sally kept herself informed was through an open line of communication with her son. On a daily basis, she talked to her son about everything from what he was learning in class and how he was getting along with his friends to the importance of getting the best education and how public education and tax dollars worked in a neighborhood such as that of the high performing middle school.

Regardless of the topic and/or tone of the situation, Sally prided her efforts to keep the communication flowing, because this was her way to learn about his friends, classes, teachers, and so forth.

Sally acted during the summer months and throughout the transfer year to prepare
her son for his experience at the receiving school. Prior to his first year of enrollment, Sally and her son gathered critical, yet helpful information regarding the school’s resources, test scores, and overall educational quality and even “toured the campus to see if he would like it.” She also made him read during the summer months to keep his mind active and strengthen some of his academic skills. For instance:

> It could be anything, a magazine, a book. He loves sports and dreams about it a lot, so one thing we’d do is go to Barnes & Noble or the library to pick up as much to read as possible. Then he could either talk or write about the book.

As the beginning of the school year came near, “I would try to get him back on ... a little schedule just before school starts back to get him focused.” Family game night was another way Sally acted to keep her son’s mind active throughout the year. Together, “we play games board games ... like Scrabble or Monopoly because I like to ... try to be as proactive and open his mind to see different avenues of learning.” Acts such as these served as basic ways in which Sally could stimulate and prepare her son for what she hoped would result in substantial learning and academic success at the high performing middle school.

When asked about her level of parent involvement since the transfer, a year and a half ago, Sally stated that it had decreased because of a recent change in her work schedule and responsibilities. She recalled:

> I would say I was a little more active last year than I was this year because of my place of work, and I feel guilty because I know how I was in the past. But now I just can’t. I would like to, but I can’t.

Even though her job limited her ability to act as she had in the past, Sally still found ways to actively participate in her son’s education. She perceived that the receiving school had high expectations for involvement because of their recruitment of parents each year and
joined the PTA to show the school her commitment to being a part of the school community and her child’s education. However, she recalled her frustration due to her inability to fully commit:

You can only do this [PTA] if you have the time. I went to one of their meetings last year to see what the involvement was like. And it was during the middle of the day. I think the third Tuesday or something. And I remember thinking, “I can’t make this. I have to work.”

With slight feelings of guilt, Sally insisted that she did her best to support her son’s educational endeavors even though she was unable, at times, to fully participate.

Cross Case Study Analysis

The following section includes all parent responses to each of the research questions.

Reasons for Using the No Child Left Behind Act’s School Choice Option

In response to the research questions, parents spoke of their motivations and reasons for using the federal transfer policy. Most of them emphatically believed that the provision would place their children in improved and safe learning environments. While a few envisioned that the learning at the receiving schools would be rigorous and that their children would definitely learn all they needed to know, two parents assumed that the NCLB eligible schools would have a number of additional services and programs available to extend their children’s learning experiences. A number of other parents even opted to use the choice policy because they believed it would expose their children to new environments, situations, and people beyond their residential area neighborhoods and schools.

Issues at the neighborhood home schools provided parent participants with yet an additional set of reasons for using the public school choice policy. A majority of the
parent/guardians were extremely concerned about those schools’ lack of resources, programs, and services available to their children and felt that using the policy would ensure their readiness for high school. A few of the other parent/guardians referred to the low test scores as the reason why they planned to send their children to higher achieving middle schools; they suspected that the low test scores equated to teachers with low expectations for student learning and/or the usage of less demanding curriculum. For other parent/guardians, they chose to use the policy because their children were already struggling academically at the neighborhood home schools. Furthermore, some parents felt that the neighborhood home schools’ environments distracted students from learning because they were either unsafe and/or no one, including teachers, students, or parents, seemed to support student academic achievement.

Parent’s Perceptions Regarding Support From the School District and the Receiving School

All of the parent/guardians alluded to how the school districts’ lack of support negatively affected their experiences, leaving them to figure out NCLB policy guidelines and school selections on their own. Aside from the NCLB letter informing parents of their option to transfer their children from program improvement schools to high performing middle schools and the application and other paperwork regarding the transfer, none of the parents reported any other direct contact with the districts. Statements such as “I’ve never talked to anyone from the school district” clearly express what they felt was missing from their experiences. For instance, they all worried that they did not know enough about the potential school choices to make the best decisions for their children. The following statement, “I feel like as a parent if you don’t know, then you’re kind of lost in the situation,” reflected the parent/guardians’ typical feelings of
neglect at that time. In addition, they felt they were also ill-equipped to make decisions about their children’s education throughout their usage of the NCLB policy.

In regards to the support that the receiving schools provided to the parent/guardians, at least one parent felt the receiving school was just as neglectful as the school district. All of the other parents discussed their general satisfaction with the schools’ basic usage of traditional methods used to keep them informed: newsletters, phone calls, emails, progress reports, phone banks, open house, and new school orientation. However, two parent participants reported no additional support beyond these traditional methods and explained how the receiving schools’ neglect left them discouraged and often uninformed about the specifics of their children’s progress. Each felt that they needed more support as an NCLB parent in order to work more effectively at home and with the receiving school to encourage their children’s social adjustment while enhancing their academic achievement.

The other four parent/guardians described more advanced and involved levels of support provided by the receiving schools. These parents explained how their established working relationships with at least one school official allowed them to easily gather information, learn strategies, and make effective decisions that positively influenced their children’s education. Not only did parent participants appreciate these individuals such as school counselors, resource specialists, classroom aides, teachers and principals, they felt that these valued relationships made their experiences with the transfer policy more effective and productive for their children.
Parent’s Perception of Child’s Experience

In regards to each child’s overall experience with the NCLB public school choice option, most of the parent/guardians reported that their children had wonderful experiences. In these cases, children were described as loving their schools and/or enjoying their experiences. With the exception of one parent who felt that her children had an extremely negative experience using the policy, other parents explained how their children’s experiences were merely satisfactory as a result of some troubling situations their children had to deal with while enrolled at the receiving schools.

Considering the initial reactions from children prior to enrolling in the new schools, most of the parent/guardians stated that their children were either excited or used to the idea of attending a school outside of their neighborhood boundaries. According to the remaining parents, their children were slightly unhappy with having to make the transfer, because they did not quite understand or agree with their parents’ reasoning for placing them in new schools and/or they were leaving close friends behind.

All but one of the parents talked about difficulties their children had adjusting to the receiving schools’ community and culture, which greatly affected their overall experiences. Half of the parents described how their children experienced difficulty adjusting socially at times throughout the transfer year(s). For some of these parent’s children, their social awkwardness related to how successfully they established relationships and interacted with teachers, staff, and students. Moreover, these parents noted that once their children got to know these people at the receiving schools better, they tended to adjust and do much better in school. The other half of the parent/guardians reported that their children experienced episodes of academic difficulty during the
transfer. While a few of the children eventually adjusted to the academic standards of the receiving schools, several children continuously struggled throughout the year, which threatened their summer vacations and/or hindered their chances of passing classes, participating in extra-curricular activities, or being promoted to the next grade level.

Transportation proved to be another problematic issue that most of the parents identified as having a negative impact on their children’s experiences with the NCLB school choice policy. These parent/guardians explained how the busing schedules limited their children’s opportunities to completely participate in the social culture of the receiving schools. The long bus commute coupled with the inflexible ride times based upon traffic patterns caused this group of children from the study to miss out on extra-curricular clubs, dances, and other activities sponsored by the school and/or neighboring communities. For one particular parent, transportation was a nightmare, leaving her children exhausted and unable to function effectively in school because of the early morning pick up and late evening drop off times.

A few of the parents discussed how their children’s experiences were shaped around how the receiving schools perceived and labeled them as NCLB transfer students. These parents spoke of the negative connotations school administrators, teachers, and even other students associated with their children resulting in the inappropriate treatment of their children. In some instances, this treatment was based upon the assumptions that NCLB transfer students possessed low academic aptitude and would jeopardize the high performing middle schools’ standardized testing records. Other parents described school officials’ inabilities to interact with their culturally/ethnically diverse children, which resulted in negative altercations between them.
Many of the parents gleefully discussed the positive changes in their children as a result of using the NCLB public school choice option and attending the high performing middle schools. Some explained how their children’s attitudes about education changed because the schools had fewer distractions, allowing them to focus on their learning. Other parent/guardians contributed this change to the fact their children were in environments where learning was valued. Several parents suggested that as their children became more comfortable with their new schools and their academic expectations, they became more responsible at home and school. And for these parents, their children’s changed attitudes and behaviors resulted in successes at school and home, thus positively influencing their experiences.

*Parent’s Experience*

The findings show that parent experiences with the NCLB public school choice policy varied among three degrees. Most parent participants loved their experience with the policy and explained how “it was just a good experience, happy, and enjoyable.” Other parents, whose experiences hinged upon the positive changes seen in their children, made statements such as “my overall experience is just based on what I’ve seen from my son . . . and overall the experience has been good.” However, some parents viewed the policy and their experiences as tolerable. Affected by unfortunate and sometimes shocking incidents, these parents cautiously monitored the receiving schools and their programs, still opting to use the program because they assumed that their children would receive a far superior education there than at their neighborhood home schools. One parent who was extremely dissatisfied with the incidents and outcomes that transpired as a result of using the transfer vowed to never use the program again, saying, “It really
wasn’t worth it because there was just too many issues like the transportation, trying to get help with the work, the distance; it just wasn’t worth it.”

In all, two of the parents were highly critical of NCLB’s claims of leaving no children left behind because of the experiences they each had with the policy. Both parents questioned the legitimacy as to whether the government plan really improved the educational lives of historically marginalized children who chose to attend higher achieving schools. While one parent viewed it as “just a band-aid [and] not an answer to the problem of closing the achievement gap for minority and poor children,” the other parent believed that “our good children are being left behind,” or attending these receiving schools that were not meeting student needs and were “just . . . passing the kids through.”

Parent/guardians were undeniably dissatisfied with the school districts’ lack of support. All reported how the school districts provided no additional information nor made any attempts to contact them beyond the application and school selection phases of the NCLB enrollment process. Hence, parents felt that their lack of knowledge about the policy, guidelines and school choices, along with the fact that they were left alone to make these and all other decisions throughout the transfer year, inhibited their abilities to fully support their children’s education.

Several parent/guardians shared that their positive experiences with the policy were related to the receiving schools. A few of the parents praised the receiving schools because of the influences they had on their children’s changed attitudes and behaviors toward education. Parents reported how their children were more focused on their school work, excited about school, and gained a stronger sense of confidence, maturity, and
responsibility that was also witnessed at home. As a result, these parents expressed how it was their children’s increasing academic success and personal growth that made their experiences with the federal policy positive because they felt less stressed and more empowered and confident to actively participate in their children’s education.

Most parent/guardians also noted how the relationships they established with school officials positively affected their experiences as well. They particularly described how the receiving schools had a school culture and climate where parents felt welcomed during every visit. Thankful for the good, friendly, and respectful people who not only supported them but also kept them informed, the parents felt that the receiving schools cared about their well-being, while considering them as valued members of the school communities who had the same rights and privileges of students/families that lived within the high performing schools’ neighborhood boundaries.

Some of the parent/guardians stated that the receiving schools’ efforts of communication also made their experiences at the new schools more manageable because of the frequency and quality of the contact with the schools. These parents felt that the schools kept open lines of communication to provide them with complimentary feedback about their children, report inappropriate situations involving their children, as well as notify them about their children’s needs for additional academic assistance. From these examples of communication from the receiving schools, parent participants admitted to their appreciation for the way in which the communication was efficient, timely, thorough, and even motivating for them as NCLB parents.

For a few of the other parents, the receiving schools’ climate and culture were unforgiving and left them with an unsettled feeling about the schools’ commitment to
their children. One parent discussed her concerns about the receiving school’s inexperienced staff and extremely casual educational environment, while at least three other parents described how the receiving schools were just as neglectful as the school districts in terms of support. This group of parents felt that the schools did nothing to meet their needs as NCLB parents, once again causing them to feel alone during the transfer process.

In addition, several parent/guardians also felt that their children were being singled out because of their ethnicity/race and/or NCLB status. According to these parents, their feelings were spawned by inappropriate and derogatory comments, actions, and/or behaviors of administrators, teachers, and even other students causing them to rarely feel comfortable in the receiving schools’ learning communities. Several parents reported that the receiving school’s communication efforts were either sparse or problematic because the school only contacted them when their children had gotten into trouble. They tired of the constant negative contact and reprimand that their children received from the school about their alleged inappropriate behavior, as well as the unequal discipline their children received when they had altercations with other students. This irritated these parents immensely and left them disgruntled and wondering “why is it that you only get phone calls or hear from the school when the child is doing something bad.” Because this was typically the only contact these parents had with the high performing middle schools, they felt they had a one-sided relationship with the schools that wanted them to respond to their child’s inappropriate actions and behaviors immediately, but did not want to supply the support parents needed at all. Unfortunately for these parents, they felt negatively about their experiences with the public school
choice policy and the receiving schools, which greatly influenced their feelings of being somewhat helpless in their efforts to help their children successfully adjust academically and socially.

Parents were also unhappy with the way that school officials treated them when they visited the school on behalf of their children. Either they reported being laughed at or were left feeling that the receiving schools’ teachers and staff did not know how to deal with its diverse student population.

Most of the parents were disappointed with the policy and its bus transportation assignments for their NCLB transfer children as well; the busing schedule made it impossible for their children to fully participate in a number of school activities and programs which were typically scheduled after school when they were generally loading buses for the long commute home. For these parents, their children were deleted from major segments of the social culture; hence, they were never really allowed the chance to be fully involved in the school communities. At least one of the parent participants specifically discussed the tiring effects that early wake-up times, long commutes, and late evenings had on her as well as her children. This dramatically troubled the parent who was unable to resolve the pain of busing until after her children were promoted to the ninth grade and returned to their neighborhood school minus the long bus ride.

*Parental Involvement Since Using the NCLB Public School Choice Option*

Involvement was a significant aspect of the parent and child experiences with the NCLB public school choice policy. A number of parent/guardians believed their level of participation remained static. When asked, one parent spoke of no change in her actions, but claimed to have changed her focus to monitoring her child’s progress more closely.
For other parents, they expressed feelings of guilt when discussing how their levels of participation had actually decreased. With comments similar to “I wish that I could have been a little bit more involved,” others expressed the challenges of having a career and working to improve their children’s academic achievement at the same time. For these parent/guardians, inflexible schedules and demanding bosses significantly diminished the amount of time they had to impact their children’s educational lives.

All of the parents recognized the positive impact their involvement could have on their children’s education, and some described how their involvement showed their commitment to being extremely active in their children’s educational lives. They explained how open discussions served as an effective involvement and communication tool at home and with the receiving schools. Each parent/guardian in this study mentioned how they established and/or maintained open lines of communication with their children which helped them to stay abreast of their children’s experiences at the receiving schools. Communication often consisted of daily talks that occurred before, during, and after the transfer and included discussions about the importance of education, advice for getting along with teachers and other students, and even developing a strong sense of self.

Some parent participants also talked about their experiences as they related to their perceptions of the receiving schools’ expectations for parental involvement. Although these expectations were never stated, all of the parent/guardians believed that the high performing middle schools had high expectations for parent involvement. As a result, most from this group felt it necessary to directly inform both the schools and their
children about their intentions of being actively engaged in their children’s education throughout the transfer process.

Chapter 5 includes a brief summary of the purpose of the study, methodology and research questions, and the findings. Also included in the findings are a summary of the cross case analysis, parents’ overall perceptions regarding their experiences with the NCLB public school choice option, and significant themes that emerged from the research questions. This is followed by the limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Limitations, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter consists of a brief summary of the study regarding the No Child Left Behind Act’s public school choice option, which includes the purpose of the study, methodology, the research questions, and an interpretation findings. The next section includes the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with recommended suggestions for parents, schools, and school districts associated with NCLB, school choice, and parental involvement, as well as recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document parent experiences before, during, and after their usage of the federal policy to transfer their children from failing to high performing middle schools.

Eight case studies focused on the following research questions:

1. What prompted parents to enroll their child in the No Child Left Behind Act’s school choice program?

2. What are parents’ perceptions about the support that receiving schools and the school district provided them and their child as a result of their NCLB choice transfer?

3. How are parents describing their child’s experience after enrolling in the NCLB school choice program?

4. How are parents describing their own experience with the school and school district after enrolling their child in the NCLB school choice program?
5. How has parental involvement changed since using the NCLB public school choice option?

Methodology

A qualitative research design was used to understand and interpret the experiences that parents had with the No Child Left Behind Act’s public school choice option. Through mutual decision making between the parent participants and the researcher, interviews were conducted at times and places favorable for both parties. Of the eight interviews completed, three were conducted at the library, four took place at participants’ homes, and one was held in a school classroom. With parent consent, all interviews were audio recorded, converted to MP3 audio formatting, and transcribed into verbatim records. To highlight aspects of parent accounts from interview records, the in depth and detailed understandings of their experiences as related to the research questions were captured via individual case study analysis. From there, cases were cross analyzed to find and categorize themes significant to understanding the experiences of the parents.

Findings

This section includes a summary of the cross-case analysis, the parent/guardians’ overall perceptions of the No Child Left Behind Act’s public school choice option, and a cross case study analysis of emergent themes follows the general findings.

Cross-Case Analysis Summary

Overall, most parents saw the NCLB public school choice option as the best way to provide their children with a better education. For them, the policy was just the right tool to get their children out of underperforming schools that lacked resources and had environments that seemed to inhibit their overall academic and social progress.
Support from school districts rated poorly among all the parent/guardians because they felt that there was more the school districts could have done to support them. However, receiving school support resulted in mixed reviews from the parents. While most were satisfied with the general tools used by the receiving schools to inform parents, a few parent participants compared the schools’ lack of support to that of the school districts. Other parent/guardians reported phenomenal support from various school personnel who made their experiences even better because of the plethora of support and information these individuals made available to them.

Overall, parent perceptions of their children’s experiences were positive. Parents reported that even though their children experienced a multitude of difficult situations of varying degrees, they either adjusted to and thrived within the new school environment or they struggled to survive until the end of the transfer year.

Parent perceptions of their own experiences seemed to mimic that of their children. A majority of them reported an appreciation and satisfaction for the policy despite the experiences they had with the school districts and receiving schools all because of the federal policy’s promise to give parents the choice to send their children to better learning environments.

While many parent participants believed that their levels of involvement were either stagnant or limited due to personal factors, they were still very much involved in their children’s education because they knew that they could have a profound effect on their learning and social progress. And in order to do that, all the parent/guardians felt it was their duty to let their children and the schools know that they would definitely be involved in one way or another.
Overall Parent Perceptions of the NCLB Public School Choice Option

The data revealed three important findings regarding the experiences of parent participants: (a) They loved their experience and viewed the transfer policy as a wonderful opportunity for both them and their children; (b) they considered their experiences with the policy as satisfactory in spite of the negative, unfavorable incidents that happened to them or their children; or (c) they absolutely disliked every aspect of the policy and resented its claims about leaving no children behind.

For those who absolutely loved their experience, the policy along with the receiving school exceeded their expectations to the point where they would continue to use the transfer option without question. Typical comments from the parents included: “It’s the best thing we ever did for our child”; “The experience was quick, easy, a blessing”; and “Wow!” What made some of the parents enjoy their experience even more was the positive impact the transfer had on their children’s social, personal, and/or academic improvement. Some referred in delight to their children’s successes with comments such as “I love it because he loves it and he’s doing much better than before.”

Other remaining parent participants had numerous reservations about the policy but ranked their experience as satisfactory. Each reported negative situations either they or their children experienced. From racial/ethnic insensitivity from the receiving school or district, to the way in which their children were mishandled during incidents with other children or school officials, and the inappropriate behavior of school staff toward these parents, they believed that they needed to be completely aware of the system their children were now a part of which required much observation, precaution, and advocacy on their part. However, they managed to focus on the more positive aspects of their
experience and potential impact the transfer could have on their children’s educational future. They agreed that they would continue to use the policy, but with extreme caution. The last of the parent participants disliked her experience to the point where she would no longer use nor recommend the policy to other parents. The issues she faced caused her to question the motives of the federal policy, as well as those of the school district and the receiving school. From this parent’s point of view, she offered the following warning:

Don’t think about No Child Left Behind, because, honey, it’s just not working. It’s just not fair. And as far as the No Kids Left Behind Policy and my experience with it, it’s just not a good system because our kids are being left behind.

Because this parent felt that no amount of change and opportunity could come from such a program where children, specifically hers, were not being served, she vowed to never use the policy again under any circumstances.

Cross Case Emergent Themes

Several themes emerged from the cross case analysis that provided insight into what the parents particularly believed and dealt with before, during, and/or after enrolling their children into a high performing middle schools using the NCLB transfer policy. Seven dominant themes emerged from the data: school district neglect; receiving school neglect; cultural insensitivity toward NCLB children; cultural insensitivity toward parent/guardians; culturally insensitive receiving school procedures; parent/guardian acceptance of the policy despite school district and receiving school neglect; and assumptions that high test scores make for quality schooling.

Theme 1 – School district neglect. The parent/guardians of this study did not receive any direct support from the school districts when using the NCLB public school choice option. Aside from the eligibility letter and the list of school options provided for
most of the parents, each expressed how they had limited knowledge of the federal policy and procedures associated with transferring their children to any high performing middle schools. They exclaimed how the school districts’ lack of guidance and direct and periodic communication throughout the process left them wondering if they had selected the “best” schools for their children and questioning whether they were actually making good decisions that would positively impact their children’s academic achievement. Due to the school districts’ neglectful inaction, parent/guardians were left to blindly gather whatever limited information they could find on the district and school Internet websites or from family and friends they trusted.

**Theme 2 – Receiving school neglect.** For many of the parent/guardians, the receiving schools were just as neglectful as the school districts because the level of support that parents felt they and their children needed as newly enrolled families was not available to them. Parents believed that being new to the receiving school systems meant that they lacked adequate knowledge about particular school practices, procedures, and expectations geared toward them and their children. Although some parents reported the benefits and lengths to which some receiving schools provided support, others cited the difficulties they had trying to figure out how to maneuver within an unsupportive system where their children had begun to face academic failure, social demerits and suspensions, and frustration throughout the course of their enrollment there.

**Theme 3 – Cultural insensitivity toward NCLB children.** Several parent/guardians reported that the receiving schools were quite ignorant in regards to the cultural diversity of the NCLB children. Unlike the dominant culture of the school, these parents shared how their children suffered negative and sometimes derogatory experiences with
receiving school officials and students. One parent explained how her son’s ethnic/racial identities were often ignored, leading her to believe that his cultural differences were negatively highlighted and that he felt misunderstood because of the teacher’s biased or inappropriate usage of controversial curricula. Other receiving school administrative teams also perpetuated culturally insensitive practices that negatively impacted other NCLB children in the study. These parent/guardians described how their children, when congregating with other African-American students, were closely monitored, while other groups of students gathered freely without interference or suspicion.

Negative attitudes and practices used by administration, teachers, and other resident students within the receiving schools presented another level of issues for transfer parents and children to deal with. In several cases, the children of this study were negatively labeled as “those kids” or “NCLB kids” by many school officials, and teachers were reported to have belittled them by calling them unruly and threatening to send them back to their “bad” neighborhood schools. In addition, these children where publicly blamed for jeopardizing the receiving schools’ high standardized test scores as well.

Theme 4 – Culturally insensitivity toward NCLB parents. At other times, parents were at the receiving end of the culturally insensitive actions and behaviors from school staff and administration as well. These behaviors made parents feel unwelcome and skeptical of the school’s purpose to help parents help their children. Several parents mentioned how they believed their race and ethnicity played a role in this mistreatment which resulted in their inability to work productively with some school officials to support their children’s learning.
Theme 5 - Culturally insensitive school procedures. Administrative and school procedures were other examples of the receiving schools’ disregard for the culture and needs of students who transferred using the NCLB public school choice option. Many school functions, activities, and clubs were typically scheduled after school and within the neighboring community. Because of this, NCLB transfer students were usually unable to participate in this aspect of the school community because of districted-planned bus schedules and school-organized master scheduling and extra curricular scheduling. These institutional aspects made it almost impossible for children of the study to become integrated into this part of the schools’ social culture.

Theme 6 – Parent/guardian acceptance despite neglect. A majority of the parent/guardians viewed their experiences with the NCLB public school choice policy positively regardless of the lack of support from the districts and receiving schools, cultural insensitivity, and academic and social frustration and failure felt by their children during the transfer period. For these parents, tolerating the neglect was far more accepting than sending their children to unsafe schools with low test scores, limited resources and programs, ineffective teachers, and low expectations for learning. Other parents also accepted the neglect because the transfer policy would expose their children to a world outside of their own neighborhoods where they would interact with various groups of people who the parent participants believed to value education more. Acceptance was also influenced by the potential educational success and opportunities parents imagined their children would experience during and after the transfer. In their minds, enrollment in the high performing middle schools prepared them for high school and opened the door to their future academic and social successes. Hence, regardless of
the troubles, NCLB still gave parents the power and access they needed to send their children to better schools.

Theme 7 – Assumptions that high test scores make for quality schooling. Although high test scores were an indication that receiving schools met their AYP/NCLB testing targets, all of the parents discussed how they looked for high test scores to identify the best learning environments for their children. Interestingly, most associated high test scores with quality schooling regardless of the experiences they had with the school districts and/or receiving schools. These parents still justified the quality of the education that their children were getting under the federal policy by the test scores and not by the way that they or their children were treated or progressed throughout the transfer process.

Limitations of the Study

Finding qualified parent participants for this study was a challenge because information was not readily available as to who was actually using the policy. So the number of parents in this study was greatly limited because of the difficulties associated with finding district and school personnel, colleagues, friends, and others who knew of qualified potential parent respondents. Data collection also created limitations for this study because of the one-sided, second-hand perspectives only provided by parent/guardians; children and school officials were not interviewed in this study. Dependent upon the gap between the interview and the time during which the parents used the federal transfer policy, the possibility that they may have forgotten particular details about their experiences served as another limitation of the study. Another limitation could also be linked to the fact that some parents may have been reluctant to answer some of the interview questions for fear of being judged, or they may have embellished aspects of
their experience to appear that they are much more involved in their children’s education throughout the transfer year(s). Lastly, my closeness to the subject and purpose of this study may have limited the findings of the study as I tried to monitor my subjective understanding of the issues in an attempt to not have that interfere with the collection of data as well as the analysis of the findings.

**Recommendations for Parents, Schools, and School Districts**

From the findings, numerous suggestions can be made to improve the experiences of the parents who use the policy, educators who serve them, and the policy makers who write the laws that govern the public educational system and its federal school choice option.

**Parents**

Details from the study showed how many of the NCLB children struggled to adjust socially and academically at the receiving school. Considering their difficulties, parents are recommended to actively involve themselves in their children’s educational lives to provide structure, advice, motivation, and so forth, all to help them make thoughtful and critical decisions about school and life.

The findings of this study revealed that when parents worked closely with an easily accessible and friendly adult contact person at the receiving schools, they had far more positive experiences than others. These parents described how those relationships enhanced and enriched their time at the receiving schools and left them feeling that they could effectively impact their children’s education. Therefore, it is imperative that parents seek out a designated school official or another adult with whom they can trust to
help them make sense of school policies and expectations and be adequately informed to make appropriate and thoughtful decisions regarding their children’s learning.

Several parents in this study mentioned the need to let their children and the school know that they valued education and would take an active role in their children’s education. They made it known that they would be hands-on parents to show their commitment to aiding in their children’s progress. By taking this stand, parents became more aware of how they could better assist their children at home and school. Hence, parents should be encouraged to talk to school officials to understand the school’s expectations for their involvement and talk to their children about the expectations of going to school, getting an education, and putting in their best effort. Conversely, parents should establish and share their own expectations for school involvement in their children’s education as well. It can be believed that when all parties are knowledgeable of their responsibilities, several situations may arise: parents are more knowledgeable of how to work effectively with their children and the school to improve their child’s academic achievement; schools are more apt to be productive in their roles to provide a quality education to all children; and children are held accountable for learning and growing as students as well.

Schools

Findings from this study also show that when high performing receiving schools include parents in the process of educating children, children tend to be more receptive to their learning and behavioral responsibilities as students. Therefore, the overall goal of schools should be to identify more specific ways to welcome and include parents in the school community minus the intimidation.
Details from this study also suggest that receiving schools should use deliberate strategies to get to know and meet the needs of their NCLB parent/guardian populations. By identifying their needs, parents are better informed and equipped to actively participate in their children’s education with the goal of positively affecting achievement. For example, periodic informational sessions are recommended to show parents how they can work in concert with the schools to enhance their children’s learning.

The findings from this study also suggest that receiving schools provide NCLB parents, who lived far from the school site just as the parents of this study, with alternative methods for getting involved. By acknowledging the aspects of the parents’ lives such as jobs, personal/family obligations and lifestyles, language barriers, and an aversion to school settings that may limit their abilities to frequently participate in their children’s education at school, receiving schools should provide parents with more viable opportunities for involvement beyond the traditional open house or orientation.

Many of the parents of this study believed that the high performing middle school had high expectations for parental involvement, as well as student achievement; however, none of them were sure of what these expectations entailed. Instead of assuming that NCLB parents know what to do to support their children in the new school environments, it is recommended that the receiving schools directly share their expectations for social behavior and academic achievement. The findings of this study revealed the positive outcomes this recommendation could have on NCLB parents. When given the right information, strategies, and tools, parents approached learning situations more effectively, having a positive affect on their children’s learning.
Just as schools have an obligation to parents, they also have a responsibility to teachers and other school staff. Schools should provide time and space for teachers and other staff to communicate and include parents in their agendas beyond the usual contact home about a problem with the child. A typical problem for many parent participants in this study, negative calls home upset the parents, making them feel like their children were being targeted.

Another recommendation that receiving schools should consider is to work with all school employees from the custodian to the teacher and the nurse to the administrative assistant, to provide or develop protocols for effectively interacting with the NCLB transfer families. Discussions with school staff should include appropriate ways to solicit parent involvement and response, including how to talk to parents over the phone and in person, as well as how to motivate, support, and even deal with touchy issues regarding their children. Furthermore, teachers should also be provided professional development opportunities to study, practice, and use instructional activities, strategies, and curriculum that engage different learning styles and include various cultural groups in order to avoid situations, similar to those in this study, where the diverse needs of the NCLB students were not met.

School Districts

As noted in the findings of this study, parents mentioned the lack of contact they had with the school districts and the difficulties this caused when they were making sense of the NCLB public school choice option, selecting the appropriate school for their children, and doing what was required to make their children’s experience successful. Therefore, it is recommended that school districts develop processes for parents seeking
to use the federal transfer policy. These processes should be designed to adequately inform parents about the specifications of the law, the parental responsibilities associated with using the policy, as well as the pros and cons of using it for their children. Further support from the district should then include periodic contact via letters, surveys, meetings, and so forth, to not only support parents, but to also motivate their efforts.

Several parents in this study also commented on the positive and negative rapport they had with school administrators. In either instance, parents stated how these relationships greatly impacted their experience and ability to concentrate on supporting their children. Therefore, school districts are urged to provide receiving school administrators training, support, and tools in order to become better equipped to acknowledge and support the needs of NCLB parents and children, especially when the NCLB transfer families are culturally diverse.

Federal Government

Parent accounts revealed the neglect they experienced at the hand of the school districts and receiving schools. Regardless of the situations or their severity, the findings show that NCLB parents and their children need protection and support when attending these high performing schools outside of their residential boundaries. So just as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 stipulates procedures for Program Improvement schools in regards to parental involvement, curriculum and instruction expectations, teacher quality, and so forth, the law should also delineate a set of guidelines that school districts and high performing receiving schools must follow so that they implement services and programs for NCLB parents and children that encourage their success in those new learning environments.
Recommendations for Future Study

Although this study was limited to eight individual cases, some of the findings may be referenced as a starting point to better understanding parent experiences with NCLB and public school choice in general. While much of the current research already reports parent viewpoints from the perspectives of their children and/or school officials, more qualitative and quantitative studies representing the actual voices of parents are needed.

Furthermore, more specialized studies must be conducted to specifically understand and enhance the parent/school relationship. This means that future study should be centralized around schools and districts, first allowing these educators to identify and get to know their diverse parent populations which include but are not limited to single parents, grandparents, those with multiple jobs, and even undocumented parents. Once these populations have been identified, then schools and districts can study the educational motivations of parents and begin to evaluate their own educational policies to determine which influence and support parent involvement and increase student achievement. Considering current budgetary constraints felt by most educational agencies and districts across the country, educators may need to turn to active research conducted at the classroom and school levels in order to further study parent experiences.

As parents are given more power to make decisions that benefit their children’s education, it is clear that further research is needed. And as educators and policy makers study the research and work to provide all children with a quality education, it is my hope that they “leave no parents behind” by enhancing their school choice experiences and
recognizing the beneficial impact that they could have on their children’s academic achievements in school.
References


Center on Education Policy. (2007). *Answering the question that matters most: Has student achievement increased since No Child Left Behind?* Washington, DC: Author.


Delano, J. S. (1976). When father was at Bunker Hill and mother was sewing flags, what were the children doing? *Educational Leadership, 33*(4), 261-265.


parental information and resource centers. Washington, DC: Office of Innovation and Improvement.


Appendix A

Table 1: Research Question and Data Source Triangulation
Table 1

*Research Question and Data Source Triangulation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What prompted parents to enroll their child in the No Child Left Behind Act’s school choice program?</td>
<td>Before 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6</td>
<td>Federal, state, district, and school website information/documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What are parents’ perceptions about the support that receiving schools and the school district provided them and their child as a result of their NCLB choice transfer?</td>
<td>Before 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, During 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, After 14, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
<td>Federal, state, district, and school website information/documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) How are parents describing their child’s experience after enrolling in the NCLB school choice program?</td>
<td>Before 3, 4, 6, During 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, After 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
<td>Federal, state, district, and school website information/documents Progress reports, parent/teacher letter correspondence, student work (if available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) How are parents describing their own experience with the school and school district after enrolling their child in the NCLB school choice program?</td>
<td>Before 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, During 9, 10, After 14, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
<td>Newsletters, progress reports, letters from teachers/school/district, N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) How has parental involvement changed since using the NCLB public school choice option?</td>
<td>Before All During All After All</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
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Appendix B

Email Correspondence to Various Organizations
Email Correspondence to Various Organizations

From: Roslyn Williams
To: Email address associated with parental organization
Sent: Date
Subject: Parental Involvement and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

Hello,

I am a graduate (doctoral) student at the University of San Diego. Considering PTA’s commitment toward parental involvement in a child’s education throughout the grades, I was hoping that you could help me. (Your email was listed as the PTA’s Ninth District contact.)

I am currently working on my dissertation regarding parent choice as it relates to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. I am looking to talk to parents who have transferred their middle school child/children from NCLB identified program improvement schools to receiving schools that have met the adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals and other NCLB requirements within the last few years.

With this in mind, does your organization have information that could put me in contact with local PTA middle-level teams in the San Diego, Vista, and Oceanside School Districts? Parental involvement is crucial to a child’s education, and one of the many premises behind NCLB is that parents become more empowered and better informed to make knowledgeable decisions about their child’s schooling. And what better way is there to get an understanding of the parent’s point of view than from those associated with the PTA.

Please contact me by email or phone, 760-500-2780, if you have any information whatsoever that may prove helpful to me and the progression of my study.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Roslyn Woodard
Appendix C

Flier
ATTENTION PARENTS

Are you a parent who wants the best for your child’s education?

Are you a parent who is very involved and makes choices about your child’s education?

Then you may qualify to participate in a study regarding the NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND School Choice Option.

Was your child scheduled to attend or did attend a “Program Improvement” (PI) middle school between the school years of 2003-2004 to 2006-2007?

Did you transfer your child from that PI school and enroll him/her to a non-PI “receiving” middle school outside of your home school boundaries during that time?

Did your child attend classes at the “receiving” middle school for at least 1 complete semester?

If you answered “YES” to the questions above and would like to share your experiences regarding the No Child Left Behind Act’s school choice policy as it relates to the school district, school, and your child’s experience in this voluntary study, please contact me by phone, 760-500-2780, or email, nclb_choice@yahoo.com

Compensation in the form of a gift card will be provided for those parents/guardians who participate in the study.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY
Appendix D

Formal Correspondence to Various Organizations
To Whom It May Concern:

I am a doctoral student who is prepared to collect data for my dissertation regarding the No Child Left Behind Act’s (NCLB) school choice policy. The purpose of the study is to determine how parents/guardians describe the effects that transferring their middle school child from a PI school to a high performing middle school has on their overall school experience and performance. Parents will also describe their own experiences with the NCLB school choice transferring system in relation to their child’s experience. By conducting this research with parents, I think that the findings will be beneficial for students, parents, school districts and schools that are offering and implementing the school transfer choice. Therefore, I would like to discuss and identify ways in which I could contact parents who have used the choice policy when enrolling their child into “receiving” middle school sites.

With your support, I would be able to meet with parents who have transferred their children to at least one middle school, charter school (with grades 6-8) or magnet school (with grades 6-8) that has met their AYP goals. The extent of their participation would be relatively minimal and participation and interaction are voluntary throughout the progression of this study. Face to face interactions would involve interviews with parents/guardians. The interview process would occur between May 13, 2007 and May 1, 2008.

The results of this study will be written and presented orally to my dissertation committee and others as a requirement for the completion of the doctoral program. Again, I feel that your organization would allow individuals to provide pertinent information and insight into the focus of this study, and their participation could result in valuable information that will help other parents, students, school districts, and schools their practices and procedures as well as the educational experiences of all students.

Therefore, I am asking that you help me to contact parents/guardians for this study. If you have any contact names or questions about this study, please call 760-500-2780 or email nclb_choice@yahoo.com. I will contact you within a few days to establish whether you there are additional organizations, groups, or individuals that will be willing to participate in this study. You may also use the self-addressed stamped envelope. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Roslyn Woodard
Doctoral Student
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent Form

Explanation of purposes and procedures:

- The purpose of this study is to explore the No Child Left Behind Act’s (NCLB) school transfer policy from the parent/guardian perspective.

- The researcher will schedule one interview, lasting between 30-60 minutes, with each respondent. If necessary, a second interview may be scheduled with the consent of the interviewee. The researcher and interviewee will mutually agree upon the time and place of the interview.

- The researcher will audiotape and transcribe all interviews. A copy of the transcript will be made available at the respondent’s request.

- The researcher will explain the purpose of this study and the interviewing process to ensure that the subject understands his/her rights. The subject is free to ask questions and clarify any aspects of the study both before agreeing to participate and throughout the study.

- No risks are anticipated that are greater than those encountered in daily life. All interviews will be confidential. The researcher will use pseudonyms to represent the subjects, schools, districts, and others mentioned in the interview. The data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet; the data will be destroyed after five years. In spite of these safeguards, the researcher will remind participants that confidentiality cannot be completely guaranteed.

- This study may provide useful information to parents, educators and others who must deal with the consequences of federal legislation in their schools and student performance.

- Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The interviewee has a right to withdraw at any time.

- The findings of this study will be presented in dissertation form and oral presentation, and possibly in other professional presentations or publications.

- There is no other agreement, written or verbal, beyond that expressed on this consent form.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact Roslyn Woodard, at 760-500-2780 or nclb_choice@yahoo.com, or the faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Mary Scherr, at 619-260-2274 or scherr@sandiego.edu. Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

I, the undersigned, understand the above explanations and, on that basis, I give consent to my voluntary participation in this research.

Signature of Participant __________________________ Date __________

Printed Name of Participant __________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Principle Researcher __________________________ Date __________
Appendix F

Interview Protocol/Guide
Interview Protocol/Guide

Case ______ Interview # _______

Parent-Child Names/Pseudonyms __________________________

Date ___________ Time ___________ Location ___________

School District: ___________ Grades Attended: ___________

School: ___________

Second Interview Needed Circle Yes No

Before Child Transfers

1. How did you find out about the NCLB school choice option?

2. How did you make the decision to enroll your child in the school choice program?

3. How did your child feel about having to transfer?

4. What was your thinking about sending your child to the receiving school, outside the neighborhood boundary?
   - What (additional) concerns did you have?
   - What (additional) benefits did you consider?

5. Describe the process you took to enroll your child in the school choice program.
   - What kind of input did your child have in the process?
   - What kind of input did you have in the process?

6. What preparation was taken to prepare your child for the transfer?

During Child’s Enrollment at the “Receiving School”

1. How did your child feel about being the new student in the class/school?

2. How would you describe your child’s transition to the receiving school?
-problems

-succeses

3. What did you do to help your child adjust to the new school?

4. After your child transferred to the new school, what type of contact did you have with the school district/school?

5. How would you describe the interaction your child had with others, after transferring to the new school?
   - with teachers
   - with students/other transfer students
   - counselors, nurses, librarian, coaches, etc.

6. What activities/groups did your child engage in after transferring to the new school?
   - inside class
   - outside class

**After Your Child Exited the “Receiving School”**

1. How has your input in your child’s education changed since you enrolled your child in the No Child Left Behind Act’s school choice program?

2. What is your attitude about your child’s education since you enrolled him/her in the No Child Left Behind Act’s school choice program?

3. Suppose you were asked by other parents about the policy’s affect on you, what would you say about its affect on your child?

   - Own Experience

4. Okay, you’ve been very helpful. Are there other thoughts or feelings you’d like to share to help me understand how this policy may have affected your child?
5. Are there any other thoughts or feelings that you’d like to share to help me better understand your experience in dealing with this policy?

6. Is there anything else that you’d like to add?
Appendix G

Table 2: Matrix of Findings and Sources of Data Triangulation
Table 2

Matrix of Findings and Sources of Data Triangulation

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<th>Documentation</th>
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