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Factors Affecting Private School Choice

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The University of Southern Mississippi

FACTORS AFFECTING PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

by

John Herman Hartsell Sr.

An Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor Education

December 2011

ABSTRACT

FACTORS AFFECTING PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

by John Herman Hartsell Sr.

December 2011

This study explored the underlying factors that influence parents' choices of educational institution for their children in private schools in a southern United States coastal city. It also explored why parents chose the specific private school their child is currently enrolled in and their satisfaction level with teacher, parent and student relationships. Parental satisfaction with the overall instructional program and the services provided was also explored in this study. Data was collected from parents with students currently enrolled in one of two different private schools with input from 253 parents.

A central finding in this research is that parents who make an active decision to enroll their child in a private school do so because of the perceived positive learning environment within the private school setting. As a group, the private school parents are generally satisfied with their children's current educational experiences.

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Submitted to the Graduate School
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The current arguments on the role of government and private versus public education are not new. Public versus private education has been debated for thousands of years. What is remarkable though is that through the span of history the same issues and questions seem to arise whenever public versus private education is mentioned. The importance of education is universally recognized (Randall, 1994). Any society has the right to expect positive and productive contributions from its citizens. Private schooling, when given the opportunity, plays a significant role in achieving this expectation. In addition to producing students with strong academic backgrounds, private schools focus on producing productive citizens who contribute significantly to the broader well being of their societies (Randall, 1994). Alexander and Pallas (1983) wrote that even without any controls for sector differences in student characteristics, the public-catholic differences are all very small. They account for less than one percent of the variance in both test scores and in years of school completed. When student selection and background characteristics are controlled, these small differences shrink even further. We thus cannot agree with Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore's (1982) claim that catholic schools produce better cognitive outcomes than do public schools (Alexander & Pallas, 1983). Alexander and Pallas also refuted Coleman's claims that private schools produce students with higher cognitive skills than public schools. They concluded that there is little evidence that the private sector schools outperform the public sector schools. The researchers concluded that perhaps it would be best to examine why private schools do not outperform public schools when they appear to have so many advantages (Alexander & Pallas, 1983).

Choice is a defining characteristic of private schools: families choose private education, and private schools may choose which students to accept. Public school districts, however, assign students to particular schools, and those schools usually accept all students assigned. In more recent years there has been a dramatic increase in children attending private schools (Gewertz, 2001). Gewertz (2001) reported that by 1999 an overwhelming number of students attended various types of private religious schools including 2.5 million attending Catholic schools, 210,000 attending Jewish day schools, and 773,000 attending some other type of Christian school.

Also, in recent years a great deal of research on college preparedness has been done to identify those characteristics necessary for college success. Researchers Jenkins and Lanning (2002) have found that in order for high school graduates to be prepared for college, their high school curriculum must foster certain skills and abilities. The research on college preparedness is analyzed and the characteristics to ensure success in college are discussed in detail in the literature review (Jenkins & Lanning, 2002).

Many people assume that parents chose for their students to attend private schools since they are reported to perform better academically than students who attend public schools. Although the research base has grown, when compared to the study of other educational topics and pedagogical practices, recent scholarly research by educators and authors like Marzano (2005), McNulty (2005), and Creighton (2005) on private and public school academic achievement is not plentiful. Further studies and literature on student enrichment, the learning environment, and understanding poverty by Jensen (2006) and Payne (1996) respectively are also available.

This study will compare parental choice and not institutions; therefore, this study should lead the research community to more relevant data regarding the reasons parents

choose private schools for their children. In addition, there has not been any study to examine the reasons why parents choose a private school over public school of similarly situated students. In fact, the information ascertained from this study could prove to be enlightening in terms of student preparation for higher education within a defined region in the Southeastern United States.

The theoretical framework will be based upon the Market Theory of Choice by Walberg (Walberg, 2007). Walberg (2007) asked the following:

Why does the United States, where private industries are the most productive on the planet, have such unproductive schools? Our per-student costs for K-12 schools continue to rise substantially and are third highest among two-dozen economically advanced countries. Yet, our students make the least progress in reading, science, and mathematics. (p. 1)

Market theory can explain much about the school productivity problem and could challenge and change schools radically (Walberg, 2007). It takes seriously the common-sense idea that people rationally arrange their affairs to maximize what they value while minimizing their efforts, costs and risks. Perhaps the views of values and costs of parental choice differ from public school parents. Perhaps free citizens should decide what seems best for them? They may take their children to schools that are compatible with their values and ideals (Walberg, 2007). Coleman (1990) reiterated that parental choice gives parents the opportunity to select for their children the best learning environment possible (Coleman, 1990). Furthermore, organizational choice may promote site-based management and shared decision-making. The focus of organizational choice is to empower local schools, teachers, administrators, students, parents and other community members to solve local problems and to involve themselves more fully in

their children's education (Walberg, 2007).

Even though the Social Development Theory by Vygotsky (1934) was published in the early 19th century, it is still true of the children in today's society. The Social Development Theory developed by Vygotsky in 1934 argues that social interaction precedes development--consciousness and cognition is the end product of socialization and social behavior. Vygotsky focused on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences. According to Vygotsky, humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. Initially children develop these tools to serve solely as social functions, ways to communicate needs. Vygotsky believed that the internalization of these tools led to higher thinking skills (Crawford, 1996). Vygotsky stated that the environment in which a student is placed has an impact on the students learning process Crawford (1996).

The Hierarchy of Needs theory was developed by Maslow between 1943 and 1954. According to Maslow (1943), people are motivated by needs. Our most basic needs are inborn, having evolved over tens of thousands of years. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs helps to explain how these needs motivate humans Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that we must satisfy each need in turn, starting with the first, which deals with the most obvious needs for survival. Only when the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied are we concerned with the higher order needs of influence and personal development. Conversely, if the things that satisfy our lower order needs are swept away, we are no longer concerned about the maintenance of our higher order needs. The original Hierarchy of Needs model comprised five needs. This original version remains for most people the definitive Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow,

1943).

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs include the following:

1. *Biological and Physiological needs* - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc.;
2. *Safety needs* - protection from elements, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.;
3. *Belongingness and Love needs* - work group, family, affection, relationships, etc.;
4. *Esteem needs* - self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, managerial responsibility, etc.; and
5. *Self-Actualization needs* - realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences (Maslow, 1943) .

Statement of the Problem

Education is one of the most discussed and most controversial social issues in the United States. School choice is a large part of the educational process. Why would a parent choose a private school that costs them more money over public schools or the number of other educational opportunities available? It would be beneficial for the administrators or our public school systems to study and understand why parents choose to pay for their child's education instead of sending them to the free public school. Finding the reasons why parents choose private schools could be a cause for change in the public schools to retain their students in the foreseeable future. In keeping with Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Need's Theory parents may choose a private school because they see a better education or safer environment for their child as the way for them to belong bettering themselves through education so they may have a brighter

future.

The aim of any country, its leaders, parents and educators is to produce a comprehensive and high-quality education for all its citizens. This study could provide important facts regarding school choice for parents of students in the suburbs of a small American city. Given the answer to the question as to why parents choose a private school over a public school for their children may make a case for change within the public school system to keep students from leaving and going to a private school.

The purpose of this study is to explore why parents enroll their children in private schools and to determine if parents enroll their children in private schools for purely academic or religious reasons, or if there is some other factor influencing the parental decision concerning school choice. Literature related to school choice about private and parochial schools and community-based public schools, as well as literature related to Walberg's (2007) Market Theory of school choice will provide the empirical and theoretical framework for the study (Walberg, 2007). Since this type of research calls for more casual-comparative or qualitative studies, that will be the design of choice for this study. It is from this literature and the use of a survey directed to families enrolled in a private school that the author will seek to provide data related to the following research question.

Research Question

Why do parents choose private schools?

Hypothesis

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason why white parents chose a private school for their children versus parents of children from other ethnic backgrounds.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason parents of children with family incomes over \$40,000.00 annually chose a private school for their children versus parents of children with a different annual income.

Definition of Terms

American College Testing Program ACT, a national college admission examination that consists of four standardized tests of academic abilities in English, Mathematics, Reading and Science Reasoning. The ACT assessment also includes a Student Profile Section and a Student Interest Inventory (American College Testing Program, 2011).

College Preparedness—The acquisition of the necessary information, skills, and attitudes essential for learning (Hettich, 1998).

Composite Score—The average of the four test scores (English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning) from the ACT rounded to an integer (American College Testing Program, 2011).

Family Income— The combined gross income of all the members of a household who are 15 years old and older. This figure is taken from the parents' word as they answer question four of the Private School Parental questionnaire completed by parents of private schooled students (Investopedia, 2011).

Learning Environment—A learning environment is a space where the resources, time, and reasons are available to a group of people to nurture, support, and value their learning of a limited set of information and idea (Rieber, 2001).

Race/Ethnicity— A group of people united or classified together on the basis of common history, nationality, or geographic distribution. This information is taken from the demographic section of the Private School Parental Questionnaire completed by

parents of private schooled students (The Free Dictionary, 2011).

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)—College aptitude test (Scholastic Aptitude Test, 2011).

School Choice—Known as educational choice, is defined by Good and Braden (2000) as the freedom for families to send their children to educational settings other than the one public school within their attendance zone (Good & Braden, 2000).

Subtest Score—A total score based on all questions for each separate test: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. In addition, other sub scores were examined. These include Usage Mechanics, Rhetorical Skills, Elementary Algebra, Algebra/Geometry, Geometry/Trigonometry, Social Studies and Arts Literature (American College Testing Program, 2011).

Delimitations

The study is not representative of all students in private schools in a southern state. It is delimited to private school students in the suburbs of one coastal city.

Assumptions

1. It is assumed that all participants will complete the questionnaire honestly and as accurately as possible.
2. It is assumed that the participants voluntarily completed the questionnaire.
3. It is assumed that the participants voluntarily completed the interview.
4. It is assumed that the interviewees were open and honest with the interviewer.

Justifications

The purposes of this research project are to compare parents' perspectives concerning school choice. If school choice is not made based on academic achievement, then what are the motivating factors behind the types of schools parents choose for their

children? It is imperative that educators carefully look at all of the factors that may promote achievement in the school setting in an effort to identify any factors or circumstances that may hinder, as well as promote success among students whether in a private or a public school setting.

This study could give greater credence for governmental entities to underwrite such initiatives as vouchers and charter schools if the private school system demonstrates practical significance in recruiting and retaining students based on a belief that attaining a better quality education is possible in a private school. If the study proves that there is a significant difference in school choice between white and other ethnic groups, the school system could examine the reasons for the difference and make appropriate adjustments in their academic learning environment and school policies. Every attempt should be made by the other school systems to duplicate the methods from the school system receiving the higher school satisfaction scores and responses regarding why these students are placed in a private school system for their education.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A person's education is one of the most important factors in determining whether they will become a productive member of society (Jenkins & Lanning, 2002). That is why, when considering an education, the quality of the education is almost as important as the education itself. Thus, when private schools came into the picture, the debate then began between public and private schools. A quality education is paramount in the face of the technological revolution that we are going through. Without a good quality education, a person will be left behind in today's rapidly advancing workplace (Jenkins & Lanning, 2002).

Jenkins and Lanning (2002) reported that even though public and private schools are separate institutions, they have to follow certain guidelines, so there are a lot of similarities between the two. Both school systems have the intentions of giving their students the best education within their means. Both have educated professionals that have decided to devote the rest of their careers to furthering the education of our youth. They each have set up rules hoping to maintain a positive learning environment. Both use standardized testing as a tool to evaluate the progress of their students. Also, they can access the weaknesses from these tests to improve the curriculum that they have composed. Additionally, they have clubs like volunteer groups that help out people in their surrounding community. There are also student governments where students elect students to improve upon their own learning environments. Schools also have extracurricular activities like sports where students compete against other schools and learn school spirit and how to work as a team. With all of these activities students can

hopefully find something that they enjoy in their free time. This also, hopefully, keeps children out of trouble (Jenkins & Lanning, 2002).

The emergence of school choice can be traced to more specific attempts by urban school systems, since the 1960s, to preserve the participation of the white middle class in public schools and to provide a positive vision of what public schooling can become in the face of increasingly strident criticism (Fuller & Elmore, 1996). “School choice covers a wide variety of options, including open enrollment plans, magnet schools, tuition tax credits, public vouchers for private schools and home instruction” (Fuller & Elmore, 1996, n. p.).

School choice is not new to American education. It was manifested in the residential choices made by families with school-aged children; it is capitalized in the housing prices found in neighborhoods (Fuller & Elmore, 1996). Choice also occurs when parents decide how to care for their preschool-age child and in the consequences of those choices for their youngsters’ readiness for elementary school. School choice also occurred when parents used their knowledge, skills and social connections to get their children assigned to one teacher or another, to one program or another within a given school, or to one school or another within a given district. School choice was present when families, sometimes at great financial sacrifice, decided to send their children to private schools instead of public schools. Furthermore, school choice occurred when parents jockey for places in selective public schools or when students were chosen by lottery for magnet schools with specialized academic programs. In these and many other ways, parents and students make choices that influence their educational futures. In all instances, these choices and the options from which to choose are strongly shaped by wealth, ethnicity and social status of parents and the neighborhoods in which they live

(Fuller & Elmore, 1996, n. p.).

According to Fuller and Clarke (1994) an increase in racial, ethnic and economic isolation of students has manifested in American public schools. If children's performances in school were greatly impacted by parents' social classes and educational background, then it seems conceivable, other things being equal, that increasing parental choice could accelerate the social stratification of schools (Fuller & Clarke, 1994). Advocates of school choice maintain that ultimately all students will benefit when traditional public schools are forced to compete for students with high quality magnet and charter schools. Hsieh and Shen (2001) contended that the main counter argument to school choice could be that choice programs favor parents who are better informed about the educational system and have the time and the resources to research various options.

Theoretical Framework

Maslow's (1943), Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Walberg's (2007) Market Theory of Choice and the Social Development Theory of Vygotsky (Crawford, 1996) were the theories used as the framework for this study. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory states that people need to satisfy basic physiological, safety and belonging needs before they can begin to meet the need of self esteem. Seeking the best for their children parents would seek out a school where their safety needs could be met so they could learn and develop a good self esteem.

Walberg's (2007) Theory of Market Choice is about parents deciding where their children should go to school. Parents may take their children to schools where their values and ideals are compatible. By choosing a school with compatible values and ideals parents would be assured their children are receiving a quality education and a reinforcement of the same values being taught in the home.

The Social Development Theory by Vgotsky (Crawford, 1996) says that people learn from one another through observations and modeling behaviors. Development takes place after social interaction. Consciousness and cognition are the end products of socialization and behavior (Crawford, 1996). A child will learn from those around them and the example that is being set. A child placed in a school with other students who are well behaved and desirous of learning would follow the behaviors of the group as they develop and learn.

Public and private schools work together to improve the education standards in today's society (Hsieh & Shen, 2001). Whether parents choose public or private education, they should feel confident that their children would receive the best education possible. Hsieh and Shen (2001) suggested that educators should educate each child as if he or she were training the next president. They also held that education is the key ingredient in shaping a child's future.

Although the research base for schools of choice has grown since the early 1990s, when compared to the study of other educational topics and pedagogical practices, recent scholarly research on private school academic achievement is not plentiful, with those studies on high school level achievement and college aptitude being an even less explored avenue of inquiry. Due to the lack of research in this area, and since achievement is vital to accreditation of colleges and universities and ultimate acceptance of learners to institutions of higher learning, this study is vital to understanding parental choice options (Miller & Boswell, 1979). This literature review includes recent, as well as some historical, studies devoted to school choice and academic achievement of the privately schooled, as a whole.

Coleman, Cambell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld and York (1966)

issued the report entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. This report, commissioned by congress, became one of the first studies of the nation's schools. The report, which later became known as the *Coleman Report*, concluded that student achievement, family background and socioeconomic status are independent of one another. In addition, Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that Catholic schools were more cost efficient in producing higher levels of achievement than public schools.

Many analyses and criticisms of Coleman's work questioned the philosophical and methodological grounds of the study (Sewell, Hauser & Featherman, 1976). The Coleman Report was criticized for not discussing characteristics and contributing factors of effective schools (Madaus, Airasian, & Kellaghan, 1980). Admittedly, the most influential study of student achievement ever conducted was based upon data collected at only a single point in time. Forty years ago, a team of researchers led by Coleman (1966) reported the results of a congressionally mandated, nationwide study of public school performance. In addition to reporting variation in school resources (per pupil expenditures, class size, teacher credentials, the quality of school facilities), the team identified the factors affecting student achievement. To everyone's surprise, the analysts discovered that school resources had little effect on student performance, which they found to be shaped mainly by the young person's family background. The Coleman study was flawed because it contained information from only a single battery of tests, it could not measure growth in student performance from one year to the next even though that is what schools were expected to accomplish (Madaus, Airasian & Kellaghan, 1980). Coleman's study was nonetheless well received by both academic and policy circles.

The University of Chicago professor, Coleman, was soon asked by the Department of Education to lead another large-scale research project that mounted the

High School and Beyond (HSB) survey, which gathered information on student performance and other student and school characteristics, this time in both public and private schools (United States Department of Education, 1980). Unlike the original Coleman study, the new findings generated great controversy despite the common methodology underlying the two projects. The HSB study was bitterly attacked by teacher unions and public-school interest groups, even to the point of questioning the motives of the scholars, and its methodology was subjected to increasing criticism (Catterall & Levin, 1982; Goldberger & Cain, 1982). Among the more legitimate criticisms was a crucial objection—How can one estimate school effectiveness with information at only one point in time (Catterall & Levin, 1982; Goldberger & Cain, 1982)?

In response, Coleman and Hoffer (1987), with the support of the U.S. Department of Education, gathered data from the same students two years later at the time they had become high school seniors, providing for the first time longitudinal test-score information on a national sample of high school students. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) used this information to detect which school factors affected changes in student achievement over a two-year period. Once again, they found that Catholic schools were more effective (Peterson & Llaudet, 2006).

Time magazine reported in April 2006:

The majority of analysts and lawmakers have come to this consensus: the numbers have remained unchecked and the high school dropout rate has been approximately 30% through two decades of intense educational reform, and the magnitude of the problem has been consistently, and often willfully ignored.

Dropping out of high school today is to your societal health what smoking is to

your physical health, an indicator of a host of poor outcomes to follow, from low lifetime earnings to high incarceration rates to a high likelihood that your children will drop out of high school and start the cycle anew. (Thornburg, 2006, p. 1)

No private school could sustain such a record. Thornburg (2006) also suggested that if a school failed a third of its students every four years, it would be deserted by its clientele.

Student achievement and the effectiveness of schools private or public has always been a priority in education. Today it is more important than ever with the advent of charter schools, magnet schools, and the issue of vouchers waiting anxiously in the wings. The current arguments on the role of government and private versus public education are not new. Public versus private education has been debated for thousands of years. What is remarkable though is that through the span of history the same issues and questions arise. The researcher will be discussing those issues and questions in this paper. Choice is a defining characteristic of private schools: families choose private education and private schools may choose which students to accept while Public school districts assign students to particular schools and those schools usually accept all students assigned (Naomi & Peter, 2002). Seventy-nine percent of all private schools had a religious affiliation in during the 1999-2000 school years (Naomi & Peter, 2002).

The next section of this literature review will discuss the following areas: (a) the Historical Perspectives of Private versus Public Education, (b) Private Schools, (c) Key Organizational Qualities of Public and Private Schools, (d) Characteristics of College Preparedness, (e) Academic Achievement and Predictors, (f) Consideration of Family Characteristics, (g) Perceptions of Problems in our Schools, (h) Choice/Environment/Socialization, (i) Differing Worldviews, (j) What Public Opinion Polls Say, (k) Demographics/Traits including social economic status (SES), race, gender, average

class size and the roles that they may play in a student's achievement scores for college.

History of Private and Public Education

A book entitled, *The Unknown History*, by Coulson (1999), examined 2,500 years of public and private education to find out what has worked and what has not. Coulson (1999) stated, "One needs to look no further than the Ancient Greeks to find examples of both public and private education" (p. 6). Two cities, Athens and Sparta, were little more than 100 miles apart in terms of geography, but worlds apart in everything else, especially education. Coulson (1999) noted that a fundamental difference between the two societies was how they viewed the role of parents in education. Sparta believed that the state, and not parents, was best equipped to make education decisions, so all boys attended government run schools and was fed a one size fits all curriculum or physical training, with little attention paid to arts and sciences. Athens, by contrast, put their faith in parental freedom. Anyone could open a school, and all were run as private institutions. Competition for students drove schools to offer new curricula. Secondary institutions arose out of a demand for more education. While Spartan children were confined to the physical arts and warfare, Athenian children studied mathematics, art, astronomy, philosophy and a host of other disciplines. The results are recorded in countless history books. Athens was the most literate society in the Western world. It is the birthplace of democracy, philosophy and medicine. Sparta is remembered only for its ceaseless wars against Athens (Coulson, 1999). Coulson (1999) contented that America's first schools were private schools. Its first leaders were taught in private schools, whose goal was to graduate a student capable of making a positive contribution to society.

Walsh (1996) wrote, "As ferocious as today's debate is over private school vouchers, it may be surprising that early in the history of the republic, American religious

schools periodically received generous public funding. By the mid-19th century, however, the great *Schools Question* was tearing at the national social fabric” (Walsh, 1996, p. 1). At the beginning of the 21st century, the nation was still struggling with the essence of the question: To what extent may, or should, governments provide aid to religious schools or their students? In the early years of the United States, direct government subsidies for private schools, which were virtually all religious in character, were not uncommon (Fraser, 1999). St. Peter's Roman Catholic Parish in New York City began receiving money from the state school fund in 1806, according to *Between Church and State: Religion and Education in a Multicultural America*, a book by historian Fraser (1999). However, funding for denominational schools was cut off by the 1820s as the Protestant-dominated Public School Society gained control over the city's public schools. By the 1870s, though, as their church's influence grew, Catholics were successful in removing Bible reading--usually from the King James Version--from the public schools in some cities. Moreover, according to Green (1999), the legal director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the New York Archdiocese received public funds again in the amount of \$700,000 in 1871.

The Council for American Private Education's (CAPE) motto is “Private education is good for students, good for families, and good for America” (Council for American Private Education, 2007, p. 1). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2002) found that private school students (a) scored higher on standardized tests, (b) had more demanding graduation requirements, and (c) sent more graduates to college than public schools. The report indicated that students who completed at least the eighth grade in a private school were twice as likely as other students to graduate from college as young adults. CAPE (2007) declared that nothing in a democracy is more important

than the education of the next generation of its citizens.

Before the mid-1800s, America relied on the competition between private, for-profit and non-profit, schools (Coulson, 1999). This competitive approach remained the norm until the mid-1800s when the idea of government established schools began. The common-school movement, which began in the 1830s, advocated the establishment of schools wholly supported and directed by the government. Government schools did not arise because the private, independent institutions were not serving the needs of the public. On the contrary, literacy rates in America rose steadily in the early 1800s. Rather, they surfaced due to exaggerated promises of what government-run schools could accomplish and a desire for uniformity in education to counter the influence of immigrants from Ireland, Italy and other non-Protestant nations (Coulson, 1999).

In 1925, the Supreme Court ruled, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, that states could not compel children to attend public schools and that children could attend private schools instead. At that time private school instruction was primarily for various religious denominations. Private school education could be provided exclusively for the wealthy, but was seen as an alternative for any group that found the available forms of education unsatisfactory (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 1925).

Americans' perceptions of public and private schools may be changing. Certainly public schooling has been discredited in the past generation, attacked as dominated by bureaucratic rules and rigid labor unions, blind to the interests of children and parents, and laced with violence and immorality (Benveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein, 2003). In the fall of 2003 an estimated total of 5,122,772 students were enrolled in the nation's private schools. Private school students represented approximately ten percent of the total public and private elementary and secondary enrollment in the United States. However, the

attacks on public education and the promotion of private education did not appear to reflect any discernible shift in where Americans actually send their children to school (Benveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein, 2003).

Based upon a survey of private schools conducted in 2005 in the state of Arizona, a policy report was issued by the Goldwater Institute (Goldwater Institute Policy Report, 2005). The Goldwater report stated the following:

Private schools serve a diverse student population and offer a variety of curricula at roughly half of the cost of public school expenditure per student. Thus, private schools on average charge less than public schools, and 89 percent of the private schools surveyed offer some form of financial aid. Ninety-six percent of private schools offer need based financial aid and twenty-one percent consider merit as a criterion for financial aid. Three-quarters of the private schools surveyed are sectarian, but eighty-three percent of those schools do not require religious affiliation for admission. Ninety-three percent of private schools surveyed administer standardized tests annually. (Goldwater Institute Policy Report #205, 2005, p. 10)

According to Murray and Groen (2005) private schools typically have half the student population of public schools and have smaller classes: 14 students per teacher compared to 18 students per teacher in public schools on average. Fully using Arizona's private school marketplace could reduce pressure on public schools, give parents more choices, and save hundreds of millions of dollars (Murray & Groen, 2005).

As reported in the *Digest of Education Statistics* report in 2008, the percentage of students in private elementary and secondary schools declined from 11.7 percent in 1995

to 11.0 percent in 2005. The percentage of college students who attended private colleges and universities rose from 22.2 to 25.5 percent between 1995 and 2005, and then continued to increase to 26.1 percent in 2007. In 2008, a projected 6.1 million students were enrolled in private schools at the elementary and secondary levels (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008).

The Digest of Education Statistics (2008) reported that private school enrollment officially moved out of the parlors of the East Coast upper class and into the living rooms of mainstream America. A common desire to seek the best educational environment possible led to the existence of more than 27,000 private and charter schools comprising almost 25 % of the nation's schools and educating more than 6.5 million students annually (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). Also, according to the most recent report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), private schools have enjoyed a steady increase in enrollment, climbing by 18% between 1988 and 2001 and enrollment rates are expected to continue to rise by at least another 7% by 2013! Public school enrollment rose by about the same rate (19%) but is expected to continue to rise by only 4% (National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, The Nations Report Card, 2002). The growing popularity of private schools is driven primarily by the research-backed belief that private and charter schools provide a better education, better structure and better discipline than public schools. The desire to seek the best education for our children has even sparked political movements nationwide that seek to create voucher systems enabling all families to choose the schools their children attend, regardless of their income level or location (Council for American Private Education, 2007).

Private Schools

According to the Council for American Private Education that is the primary advocate for American private K-12 education (Council for American Private Education, 2007), the following statistics prevail:

1. One in four schools is a private school;
2. One child in nine attends a private school;
3. Private schools produce an annual savings to taxpayers estimated at more than \$48,000,000,000.00;
4. Private school students perform better than their public school counterparts on standardized achievement tests;
5. Ninety percent of private high school graduates attend college, compared to 66 percent of public high school graduates;
6. Private school students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more than three times more likely than comparable public school students to attain a bachelor's degree by their mid-20s;
7. Private schools are racially, ethnically, and economically diverse. Twenty-three percent of private school students are students of color and twenty-eight percent are from families with an annual income of less than \$50,000.00;
8. Private secondary school students are nearly 50 percent more likely to take AP courses in science and math than public school students, and
9. The participation of private school students in community service projects is significantly higher than their public school counterparts (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2009).

Furthermore, Broughman, Swaim, and Keaton (2009) published a recent private school universe survey titled *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States*. According to this study, in the fall of 2007, there were 33,740 private elementary and secondary schools with 5,072,451 students and 456,266 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in the United States (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2009). The findings of this study included:

1. Sixty-eight percent of private schools, that enrolled 80.6 percent of private school students and employed 72.3 percent of private school (FTE) teachers in 2007–08;
2. Sixty-eight percent of private schools in 2007–08 emphasized a regular elementary and secondary program, while the other programs emphasizes categories Montessori, special emphasis, special education, alternative and early childhood—each containing less than 14 % of private schools;
3. The largest number of private schools in 2007–08 were in suburban locations (12,665), followed by those in cities (11,212), followed by those in rural areas (6,563), and then by those in towns (3,300); more private school students in 2007-08 were enrolled in schools located in cities (2,126,230), followed by those enrolled in suburban schools (1,987,714), followed by those in rural areas (607,095), and then by those in towns (350,602);
4. More private school students in 2007-08 were enrolled in kindergarten (515,663) than in any other grade level;
5. The average school size in 2007–08 was 150.3 students across all private schools. Private school size differed by instructional level. On average,

- elementary schools had 114.9 students, secondary schools had 282.0 students, and combined schools had 193.8 students. Forty-three percent (42.6) of all private schools in 2007-08 enrolled fewer than 50 students;
6. Three-quarters (74.5 percent) of private school students in 2007–08 were White, non-Hispanic; 9.8 percent were Black, non-Hispanic; 9.6 percent were Hispanic, regardless of race; 5.4 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander; and .6 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native;
 7. Ninety-six percent (96.0) of all private schools in 2007–08 were coeducational, while 1.8 percent enrolled all girls and 2.2 percent enrolled all boys;
 8. Seventy-nine percent (79.1) of private school teachers in 2007–08 were full-time teachers; 4.6 percent taught less than full time, but at least three-quarter time; 8.6 percent taught less than three-quarter time, but at least one-half time; 4.5 percent taught less than one-half time, but at least one-quarter time; and 3.3 percent taught less than one-quarter time; and
 9. The average pupil/teacher ratio in 2007–08 was 11.1 across all private schools. The average pupil/teacher ratio differed by instructional level at 12.1 in elementary schools, 11.9 in secondary schools, and 9.6 in combined schools (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2009).

Key Organizational Qualities of Public and Private Schools

The key differences in the organization of public and private schools have been the focus of many school reform discussions. Yet, how different or similar public and private schools really are, is not very well understood. Using data from a national sample of secondary schools in the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey, conducted by the

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (McLaughlin, O'Donnell, & Ries, 1995), a report was compiled which compared similarities and differences in the organization of secondary schools across the private and public sectors. Six key organizational domains of schools were identified and used as focal points for collecting data in this survey. Those six organizational domains included:

1. Educational Goals,
2. Professionalization of Principals,
3. Teacher compensation,
4. Size of Administrative Staff,
5. School-based Control, and
6. Curricular Emphasis (McLaughlin, O'Donnell, & Ries, 1995).

In the conclusion of their study, McLaughlin, O'Donnell, and Ries (1995) acknowledged organizational differences between private and public schools, but they maintained that the differences were not always uniform and pervasive. More similarities than differences existed between public and private schools. The main focus or most important goal among all schools in this study was improving basic academic skills. A major difference found was that the majority of religious-based private schools also listed fostering religious or spiritual development as a goal, which public schools can never hold.

Naomi and Peter (2002) explained that private schools were generally owned and governed by entities that are independent of government, typically religious bodies or independent boards of trustees. Private school teachers were to be more likely than public school teachers to report having much influence on several teaching practices and school policies. Also, a majority of private school teachers expressed positive opinions

about their principal and their school's management on the other hand, no more than 50 % of public school teachers agreed with any of the above statements (Naomi & Peter, 2002).

The National School Boards Association (Anderson & Resnick, 1997) published *Careful comparisons: Public and private schools in America*. This report contended that private schools were not superior to public schools. "All things being equal, a good school is a good school – whether it is public or private" (Anderson & Resnick, 1997, p.1). "Given the demographics of students attending public schools, our nation's public schools are doing an outstanding job educating a highly diverse population. Our public schools are graduating more students than ever before, and student achievement in many areas is rising" (Anderson & Resnick, 1997, p. 4).

The report also affirmed that of the approximate 26,000 private schools existed in the United States, about one-third were Catholic schools. Public schools served a much more diverse population than do private schools, as well as limited-English proficient students. Anderson and Resnick (1997) affirmed, "...the general public believes that public schools do a much better job of dealing with diversity" (p. 5). The study showed that students in private schools tended to come from wealthier families with approximately 49% of the secondary students in private schools coming from higher income families and 4.3% from low socioeconomic families (Anderson & Resnick, 1997).

In terms of course offerings and requirements, Anderson and Resnick (1997) reported that private schools tended to require slightly more math, science and foreign language. However, most private secondary schools were college preparatory in nature and did not offer vocational courses for students. Public high schools offered more

Advanced Placement courses, as well as more extracurricular activities than private schools. For academic achievement, the Anderson and Resnick (1997) report stated that “...private school students are more likely to select college prep courses (78%) than public school students (52%) – and it is this factor that leads to higher test scores” (Anderson & Resnick, 1997 p. 7). In comparing ACT exam scores, the NSBA report cited the 1996 dissertation by – Sunderbruch (Anderson & Resnick, 1997). As no significant differences were reported between public and private school students, the report concluded that, “...this study provides important further evidence that private schools are not necessarily ‘better’ than public schools” (Anderson & Resnick, 1997, p. 17). The report noted that this report was not generalizable to the rest of the nation because of the high average number of students in Iowa who attend college (Anderson & Resnick, 1997).

Characteristics of College Preparedness

The extent to which incoming college freshmen are prepared to meet the “challenges, demands and opportunities of the college experience” is an issue that has been explored recently by many researchers (Jenkins & Lanning, 2002, p. VI). According to Hettich (1998), many students entered college ill-prepared by their previous educational institutions for college success. They lacked the essential skills necessary for success. Researchers do not agree on a single definition of college preparedness; however, the definition used in this study was adapted from the book, *Learning Skills for College* (Hettich, 1998). College preparedness was defined as, “...the acquisition of the necessary information, skills, and attitudes essential for learning (Hettich, 1998, p. 2).

The controversy over whether private school students perform better than public

school students in college has spawned numerous discussions over the years (Horowitz & Spector, 2004). In the review conducted by Horowitz and Spector (2004), they placed the research of private and public schools into three main categories. First, there is the research that examines the experiential voucher programs that existed in such cities as Milwaukee and Cleveland. Second, many researchers have compared private schools to public schools in terms of parents' preferences, educational achievement and per student costs. Private schools were used as proxies to the voucher schools that would exist should a voucher plan be enacted (Horowitz & Spector, 2004). Finally, there has been a substantial amount of research aimed at determining whether private school competition improves public schools.

Despite the research, a consensus has yet to be reached in any of these areas (Horowitz & Spector, 2004). Peterson, P., Greene, J., and Noyes, C. (1996) found substantial benefits in student achievement from the Milwaukee voucher experiment. Likewise, while Hoffer, Greely and Coleman (1985) and Evans and Schwab (1995) found private schools outperformed public schools. Finally, Hoxby (2002) found private school competition led to better public schools, but Arum (1996) suggested that this was only due to increased funding for public schools rather than the competition itself. In order to examine the potential long-run effects of vouchers, a simple linear model was used by Horowitz and Spector (2004) to test whether there was a difference between students who attend public, private or religious high schools with respect to their performance in college. College performance was measured using the student's Grade Point Average (GPA). The results of this empirical examination was somewhat mixed. Much of the evidence seemed to support the hypothesis that those who go to religious high schools outperform their public school counterparts. However, the impact of this religious school

experience seemed to lessen as one proceeded through college. Perhaps this was due to non-religious school students learning to become better students (Horowitz & Spector, 2004).

Walberg (2007) reported that if competition and choice work well in education and if the absence of the profit motive does not excessively undermine their benefits, then students attending private schools ought to have higher achievement levels than similarly prepared students attending government schools. Achievement comparisons have been a source of controversy since the seminal and provocative 1981 study of Catholic schools by were numerous and relatively homogeneous.

The data reviewed in this section has clearly shown that students attending private schools score higher on standardized tests and graduate and enter college at higher rates than students attending public schools. For example, private schools have outstanding records for their graduates gaining admission to elite private and public universities Walberg (2007). A 2006 survey (Walberg, 2007) of elite private and public college and university offices revealed that in 2005, on average, 41% of the freshman enrollees attended private K-12 schools. Since the enrollment in private schools in the United States was only about 11% of all United States K-12 students, private school students were four times as likely as public school students to gain admission to private colleges and universities. Even if private schools did not yield superior achievement and achievement gains, it seemed likely that many parents liked to have their children exposed to peer groups bound for such prestigious institutions (Walberg, 2007).

Academic Achievement and Predictors

Marzano (2003) explained that whether a school operates effectively or not, it increases or decreases a student's chances of academic success. If we consider the

traditions and beliefs surrounding leadership, we can easily make a case that leadership is vital to the effectiveness of a school. In fact, for centuries people have assumed that leadership is critical to the success of any institution or endeavor (Marzano, 2003). Leadership has long been perceived to be important to the effective functioning of organizations in general and, more recently, of schools in particular. Leadership has long been perceived to be important to the effective functioning of organizations in general and, more recently, of schools in particular. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Hoxby (2006) contended that in the short term, an administrator who is attempting to raise his school's productivity has only certain options. He can induce his staff to work harder; he can get rid of unproductive staff and programs; and he can allocate resources away from non-achievement oriented activities and toward achievement oriented ones. In the slightly longer term, he can renegotiate the teacher contract to make the school more efficient. If an administrator pursues all of these options, he may be able to raise productivity substantially (Hoxby, 2006).

Also, according to Hoxby (2006), public schools do respond constructively to competition by raising their achievement and productivity. The best studies on this question examine the introduction of choice programs that have been sufficiently large and long-lived to produce competition. Students' achievement generally does rise when they attend voucher or charter schools. The best studies on this question use, as a control group, students who are randomized out of choice programs. Not only do currently enacted voucher and charter school programs not cream-skim or accept only the best students, they disproportionately attract students who were performing badly in their regular public schools (Hoxby, 2006).

Jensen (2006) shared that while most educators believe in having accountability

in schools, the argument is over which types of accountability. The more standardized the testing, the higher the stakes, and the more likely you'll see a narrowed down, *drill and kill* approach. This is the opposite of the enrichment process where students' lives are not enriched by the stress and focus of high-stakes testing. "It will take new varieties of assessment to help us get there" (Jensen, 2006, p. 236).

Research on Christian school academic achievement is not plentiful, with those studies on high school level achievement and college aptitude being an even less explored avenue of inquiry. Due to the lack of research in this area and since achievement is vital to accreditation of colleges and universities and ultimate acceptance of learners to institutions of higher learning (Miller & Boswell, 1979). Academic achievement matters because a country's achievement test scores in mathematics and science are strongly correlated with and predictive of a country's economic growth (Walberg, 2007). Economic growth, in turn, is linked to objective measures of a country's quality of life in such fields as health, housing and child rearing. Walberg (2007) reported that poor achievement test scores for students in the United States are not merely of academic interest, as they have real-world consequences for the welfare of millions of children and young adults. Poor schools even threaten older generations whose Social Security and pensions depend on a healthy economy and well-educated workforce (Walberg, 2007). Many people assume that students who attend private schools perform better academically than students who attend public schools (Roby, 2004). There have been many discussions over whether private schools or public schools do a better job with student academic achievement.

According to Roby (2004), "there are many different factors that play a role in student achievement, both directly and indirectly" (p. 28). Students, parents and

educators can control some of these variables to a certain degree while other factors are much more difficult to affect such as social-economic conditions. Buckley and Wilkinson (2001) noted, “Students attending school regularly were able to complete their work on time” (p. 28). The study also noted that the “strategy to increase communication with the parents did create positive interactions with the teacher and the students” (p. 29). This study identified the need for “improved teacher-student communications and improved and improved assistance to increase student achievement” (p. 29).

Bryk, Holland, Lee and Carriedo (1984) released a study entitled *Effective Catholic Schools: An Exploration*. This study examined the effectiveness of Catholic schools, primarily of secondary schools. Data was used from *High School and Beyond*, (Bryk et al., 1984) and further data was compiled from seven Catholic high schools throughout the nation. Several aspects of Catholic secondary schools were examined. The areas included in this study were (a) the Catholic character of the schools, (b) the curriculum and academic organization, (c) the character of instruction, (d) the faculty roles and concerns, (e) students life, (f) elementary schools, (g) finance of Catholic schools, and (h) the governance of Catholic schools. One significant finding from this study was the fact that the Catholic secondary schools offered fewer courses than the public secondary schools, and emphasis was placed on academic foundation courses. In addition, it was noted that students in Catholic high schools tended to take more academic courses than their public school counterparts. The study of Bryk et al. (1984) confirmed the findings of Coleman (Coleman et al, 1966) regarding the strong academic nature of Catholic high schools and the benefit Catholic schools for disadvantaged students (Bryk et al., 1984).

A study conducted by Armstrong (1984) revealed that the scores on the ACT

assessment increased as students spent a greater number of years studying the four traditional subjects: English, mathematics, social studies and natural sciences. In addition the student mean ACT scores increased as the high school graduating class size increased. Mean ACT scores were reported approximately the same for private schools and public high schools. Armstrong (1984), in studying ACT Assessment scores, determined that several factors contributed to higher scores: (a) high school grade point average, (b) years studied or planned to study science, (c) years studied or planned to study mathematics, (d) high school class rank, (e) gender, (f) size of high school, and (g) family income.

In 1966, Coleman (Coleman et al., 1966) issued the report entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. This report, commissioned by Congress, became one of the first studies of our nation's schools. Coleman's results from the 1960s were highly controversial. He presented two major findings. First, he found that social economic background differences, not school facilities and resources, explained most of the variation in pupils' academic performances. Second, he found that Black students who attended predominantly White schools did significantly better than Blacks who went to mainly Black schools. The report, which later became known as the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), concluded that student achievement, family background and socioeconomic status were independent of one another. Coleman (1966) declared, "A child's learning is a function more of the characteristics of his classmates than those of the teacher" (p. 2). Coleman et al. attributed higher levels of performance of students in Catholic (private) schools to the strong discipline, high teacher expectations and structured curriculum that characterized these schools. Coleman (1966) concluded that Catholic schools provided a safer environment with more discipline and order than the

public school system. They argued that catholic school students (a) had a better attendance rate, (b) did more homework, and (c) usually took more academic subjects than public school students. In addition, Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that Catholic (private) schools were more cost efficient in producing higher levels of achievement than public schools. Based on these results, Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore (1982) recommended that public policy should expand the role for private education in the United States. The Coleman Report was criticized for not discussing characteristics and contributing factors of effective schools (Madaus, Airasian & Kellaghan, 1980). Follow up studies and re-analysis of the data collected by Coleman (Bowles & Levin, 1968; Hanushek & Kain, 1972) showed that schools' quality and student social background were highly correlated.

Most researchers felt that the advantage of student achievement in Catholic schools was much smaller than Coleman reported (Raudenbush & Bryk, 1986). Others stated that the effects were statistically too small to be significant (Alexander & Pallas, 1985; Keith & Page, 1985). Since the release of *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, known as the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), the educational policy debate in the United States, and elsewhere, has often been reduced to a series of simplistic arguments and assertions about the role of schools in producing achievement. A study entitled, *Does Peer Ability Affect Student Achievement?* (Hanushek et al., 2001) was conducted to analyze peer effects on student achievement. Perhaps the most important finding in their study was that peer average achievement has a highly significant affect on learning across the test score distribution. A standard deviation of 0.10 increase in peer achievement lead to a roughly 0.02 increase in achievement (Hanushek et. al., 2001). Given that a one standard deviation change in peer average achievement is 0.35 of a

standard deviation of the student test score distribution and that the use of lagged test score introduces error into the measure of peer achievement, the point estimate suggested that differences in peer characteristics have a substantial effect on the distribution of achievement when cumulated over the entire school career (Hanushek et al., 2001).

A further study was completed by Rivkin et al. (2005) in a paper entitled *Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement*. In the study authors looked at student achievement, teacher quality, school selection, class size and teacher experience. They concluded that differences among teachers were not readily measured and that there was no evidence that experience or an advanced degree raises teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. However, this research did conclude that students do benefit from smaller classes, particularly in grades 4 and 5, and private schools are more likely to have smaller classes in all grades than their public counterparts (Rivkin et al., 2005).

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) published *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities*. They examined the interaction between predictors of achievement and type of high school and found that between the grades of 10 and 12, there was a greater growth in verbal and mathematical skills in Catholic (private) schools, compared to students in public schools. The study results validated Greely's (1982) conclusion that Catholic (private) schools played a more effective role in increasing the academic achievement of students who tend to achieve at lower levels, such as minorities and children from a lower social economic standing (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

Topolnicki (1994) reported the results of a national survey conducted by *Money Magazine* regarding public and private schools. The study found that students enrolled in the best public schools outperformed most students enrolled in private schools. In addition, the study found that teachers in public schools had stronger academic

qualifications than those in private schools; public schools provided a more challenging curriculum than private schools; and class sizes in private and public schools were virtually the same, with most Catholic schools having larger class sizes. Topolnicki (1994) concluded that the best value for school effective schools was found in an affluent district with a highly rated public school system.

The first national, comprehensive study of Catholic (private) schools in the United States was titled *Catholic Schools in Action* (Neuwien, 1966). The study reported that private schools were successful with regard to student achievement. The study also found evidence that the overall average of Catholic school student's ability and achievement test scores on nationally normed tests were higher than those for public schools. The study also reported a higher percentage of graduates from private schools went to college than those from public schools (Neuwien, 1966).

Staff writer Mendez for the *Christian Science Monitor* presented claims that private school achievement easily surpassed those of the public school systems. Mendez (2005) suggested this was true because private schools draw their students from wealthier and more educated families rather than because they are better at bolstering student achievement. A national, longitudinal study of secondary schools, entitled *High School and Beyond*, was designed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 1980 (NCES, 1980). The *High School and Beyond* (NCES, 1980) studies were subsequently produced in 1982, 1984 and in 1986. These studies received a great deal of attention. *Public Schools and Private Schools* (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1981) compared public and private schools based on the data from *High School and Beyond* for 1980. The authors concluded that private high schools were able to produce better cognitive outcomes than did public schools. Their analyses revealed that, after

controlling for differences in family background, students in private schools achieved higher scores in verbal skills and mathematics in both the sophomore and senior years than did their counterparts in public schools (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1981).

Coleman et al. (1981) attributed higher levels of performance of students in private schools to strong discipline, high teacher expectations, and structured curriculum that characterized these schools. They concluded that private schools provided a safer environment with more discipline and order than the public school system. They argued that private school students had better attendance rates, did more homework, and usually took more advanced academic subjects than did public school students.

Coleman (Coleman et al., 1981) discovered that expenditures were not closely related to achievement. The report found that a student's achievement appeared to be "strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of the other students in the school. Children from a given family background, when in schools of different social compositions, will achieve at quite different levels. The Coleman Report (1981) concluded, "The social composition of the student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the student's own social background, than is any school factor" (p. 62). Based on their results, Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore (1982) recommended that public policy should expand the role of private education in the United States.

Not surprisingly, much criticism ensued over the 1981 Public and Private Schools report by Coleman et al. (Alexander & Pallas, 1983; Goldberger & Cain, 1982). Many criticized the idea that Catholic (private) schools were more effective than public schools, as well as the notion that Catholic schools better reflected the "common school" ideal of American education than public schools. There was criticism surrounding the belief that

Catholic (private) schools proved to be more advantageous to students not only from advantaged backgrounds, but also to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Alexander and Pallas (1983) wrote, “Even without any controls for sector differences in student characteristics, the public Catholic differences are very small” (Alexander & Pallas, 1983, p. 171). Alexander and Pallas (1983) also refuted Coleman’s claims that private schools produce students with higher cognitive skills than those of public schools. They concluded that there is little evidence that the private sector schools outperform the public sector schools. In a further study, Alexander and Pallas (1983) stated that disadvantaged and minority students are not better served in the private school setting than in the public system. The researchers concluded that perhaps it would be best to study why private schools do not outperform public schools when they appear to have so many advantages. Critics pointed out that Coleman’s report was not longitudinal, it examined just a snapshot in time and thus its conclusions might reflect what is known as self-selection bias: Blacks and low-income student’s racially and economically integrated schools might just be more motivated than those in segregated schools. *Brown v. Board of Education* provided the legal basis for promoting integration by race, and the Constitution said nothing about integration by class (Kahlenberg, 2007).

Greeley (1982) produced a study entitled *Catholic High Schools and Minority Students*. He found that minority students in Catholic high schools demonstrated higher levels of academic achievement and effort than did their counterparts who attended public high schools. He concluded that the higher academic performance and more time spent on homework were explained by both the characteristics of the schools and the type of students who attended the schools. Greeley (1982) reasoned that the higher academic achievement levels of minority students in Catholic high schools were due to the fact that

they studied more than minority students in public schools. In addition, he argued that the quality of the academic instruction in Catholic schools was superior to the instruction in public schools (Greely, 1982). He also found that the differences in achievement for students of different social classes were less than those found in public schools. Greely ascertained that the academic and disciplinary environments in Catholic schools are superior to public schools. He felt that the primary reason that minority students achieve at a higher level in Catholic schools is that Catholic schools are far superior in quality, particularly in instruction, to public schools.

Another report by Benson, Yeager, Wood, Guerra and Manno (1986), entitled, *Catholic High Schools: Their Impact on Low Income Students*, also examined minority student gains in Catholic high schools. The report concluded that in the areas of vocabulary, reading, and mathematics, Hispanics and Whites gained more from grades 9 through 12 than Black students. Students identified as very poor, gained less in mathematics over the four years in high school than the non-poor students, but gains in vocabulary and reading were approximately the same for both groups. Finally, Benson et al. (1986) determined that family income was not a significant predictor of student growth.

To determine whether family involvement or background characteristics impacted the difference in academic performance between private schools and public schools, Wenglinsky (2007) did a special study based on analysis of the *National Educational Longitudinal Study* (1988-2000). Wenglinsky (2007) found that there is no real difference between the academic performance given by public and private school students from the same low-income bracket and background, suggesting that family involvement has more of an impact than the school setting (Wenglinsky, 2007). A *New*

York Times article by Dillon (2006) reported that science achievement test scores for twelfth graders fell substantially in 2006. The tests show that scores in science had declined for twelfth grade students over the previous five years. These results came from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a comprehensive examination administered in early 2005 by the Department of Education to more than 300,000 students in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and on military bases around the world. Winick, chairman of the bipartisan body set up by Congress to oversee the test, reported that the twelfth grade results were distressing. In the Goldwater Policy Report (2005) the administration of President Bush complained about the students' academic achievement in our nation's high schools, and these results show there is credence to these complaints. Among the high school seniors included in this report (Goldwater Institute Policy Report, #205, 2005), 54% performed at or above the basic level in 2005, compared with 57% in 1966. Additionally, 18% of all high school students performed at the proficient level in 2005, down from 21% in 1996 (Dillon, 2006).

Lubienski (2007) a professor of curriculum and instruction in the University of Illinois College of Education, reported that teacher certification and reform-oriented teaching practices correlated positively with higher achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam for public-school students (Lubienski, 2007). In a study completed in 2000 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2009) raw data for 28,000 fourth and eighth graders representing more than 1300 public and private schools was analyzed. Lubienski (2007) focused her research on the equity issues in math education, she was surprised by what she saw in the data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress study. Upon comparing the data from private and public schools she determined that there was minimal difference between the

two groups (Lubienski, 2007). “According to our results, schools that hired more certified teachers and had a curriculum that de-emphasized learning by rote tended to do better on standardized math tests, and public schools had more of both.” (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005, p. 696). To account for the difference in test scores, Lubienski et al., (2005), education professor Lubienski (her husband) and a doctoral student, looked at five critical factors: school size, class size, parental involvement, teacher certification and instructional practices (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005).

In previous research, the Lubienskis (2005) discovered that after holding demographic factors constant, public school students performed just as well if not better than private schools students on standardized math tests. “There are so many reasons why you would think that the results should be reversed – that private schools would outscore public schools in standardized math test scores. This study looks at the underlying reasons why that is not necessarily the case” (p. 696). Of the five factors, school size and parental involvement did not seem to matter all that much, Lubienski said, citing a weak correlation between the two factors as mixed or marginally significant predictors of student achievement (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005). They also discovered that smaller class sizes, which are more prevalent in private schools than in public schools, significantly correlate with achievement. “Smaller class size correlated with higher achievement and occurred more frequently in private schools,” Lubienski and Lubienski (2005) explained, but that does not help explain why private schools were being outscored by public schools (p. 696).

Lubienski (2005) reported that one reason private schools show poorly in this study could be their lack of accountability to a public body. “There has been this assumption that private schools are more effective because they are autonomous and do

not have all the bureaucracy that public schools have...But one thing this study suggests is that autonomy isn't necessarily a good thing for schools" (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005, p. 697).

Another reason could be private schools' anachronistic approach to math. Private schools are increasingly ignoring curricular trends in education, and it shows. They are not using up-to-date methods, and they are not hiring teachers who employ up-to-date lesson plans in the classroom. Lubienski thinks one of the reasons that private schools do not adopt a more reform-minded math curriculum is because some parents are more attracted to a *back-to-basics* approach to math instruction. The end result, however, was students were prepared for the tests of 40 years ago, and not the tests of today (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005, p. 697).

Mathematics standards and math instruction, have moved away from the brute-force memorization of numbers to an emphasis on *geometry, measurement and algebra* – things that private school teachers reported they spent less time teaching (Lubienski et al., 2005). "The results do seem to suggest that private schools are doing their own thing, and that they're less likely to have paid attention to curricular trends and the fact that math instruction and math tests have changed" (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005, p. 697).

Lubienski (2005) cautioned that the relationships found between the two factors and public-school performance might not be directly causal. "The correlations might be a result, for example, of having the type of administrator who makes teacher credentials and academics the priority over other things, such as religious education," is often not the case for private religious schools, where parents are obviously committed to things beside academic achievement (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005). The schools with the smallest percentage of certified teachers – conservative Christian schools, where less than half of

teachers were certified – were, not coincidentally, the schools with the lowest aggregate math test scores. Lubienski (2005) shared that schools have the prerogative to set different priorities when hiring, but it does not help them with NAEP scores.

Lubienski (2005) also noted that public schools tended to set aside money for teacher development and periodic curriculum improvements. On the other hand, private schools did not invest as much in the professional development of their teachers and did not do enough to keep their curriculum current. Additionally, Lubienski observed it appears to be less of a priority for them, and they do not have money designated for that kind of thing in the way public schools do. Lubienski suggested that politicians who favor more privatization should realize that the invisible hand of the market does not necessarily apply to education.

“You can give schools greater autonomy, but that does not mean they are going to use that autonomy to implement an innovative curriculum or improve the academics of the students,” (Lubienski, 2007, p. 54). Instead, some private schools try to attract parents by offering a basic skills curriculum, or non-academic requirements, such as students wearing uniforms. Privatization also assumes that parents can make judgments about what schools are the best for their children.

With schools, it is tough to see how much kids are actually learning. Market theory in education rests on the assumption that parents can see what they’re buying, and that they’re able to make an informed decision about their child’s education. Although parents might be able to compare schools’ SAT scores, they aren’t able to determine whether those gains are actually larger in higher scoring schools unless they know where students start when they enter school. People don’t always pick the most effective schools. (Lubienski, 2007, p. 55)

The results were published in a paper titled *Achievement Differences and School Type: The Role of School Climate, Teacher Certification, and Instruction* in the November 2008 issue of the *American Journal of Education*. The published findings were based on fourth- and eighth-grade test results from the 2003 NAEP test, including data from both student achievement and comprehensive background information drawn from a nationally representative sample of more than 270,000 students from more than 10,000 schools (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009). The Center on Education Policy (CEP, 2007), however, disagreed. According to a study by the Center on Education Policy released in October of 2007 public and private school students performed equally on achievement tests in math, reading, science and history. Wenglinsky (2007), with the Center on Education Policy, examined a nationally representative sample of low-income students attending urban high schools using federal longitudinal data from 1988 to 2000. The study compared student achievement in reading, math, science and history, and other related outcomes, and controlled for student's previous achievement, family socioeconomic status, and parental involvement factors. The study compared traditional public schools with magnet schools, public schools of choice, independent private schools, non-Catholic religious schools, Catholic parish schools, Catholic diocesan schools and Catholic holy order schools. The results of the study revealed that low-income students from urban public high schools generally did as well academically and on long-term indicators as their peers from private schools once key family background characteristics were considered (Wenglinsky, 2007). The core findings of the study follow:

1. Students attending independent private high schools, most types of parochial high schools, and public high schools of choice performed

no better on achievement tests in math, reading, science and history than their counterparts in traditional public high schools;

2. Students who had attended any type of private high school ended up no more likely to attend college than their counterparts at traditional public high schools;
3. Young adults who had attended any type of private high school ended up with no more job satisfaction at age 26 than young adults who had attended traditional public high schools; and
4. Young adults who had attended any type of private high school ended up no more engaged in civic activities at age 26 than young adults who had attended traditional public high schools. (Wenglinsky, 2007)

Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that students who attend private high schools receive neither immediate academic advantages nor longer-term advantages in attending college, finding satisfaction in the job market, or participating in civic life. The study did identify an exception to this general finding. The exception is that students who attended independent private high schools had higher SAT scores than public school students, which gave independent school students an advantage in getting into elite colleges. Wenglinsky's (2007) overall conclusion was that low-income students attending urban public high schools generally performed at the same academic level as similar private school students, and were a likely to attend college, and to be satisfied in their jobs and be as civic-minded in their mid-20s. Wenglinsky's summary stated that this is the third consecutive year in which a national study has debunked conventional wisdom regarding the superiority of private schools over public schools.

In further studies by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

reading and mathematical scores between public and private schools were examined when selected characteristics of students and /or schools were taken into account. Among these characteristics for schools were school sizes, location and composition of the student body and of the teaching staff. Student characteristics considered were gender, race/ethnicity, disability status and identification as an English language learner. This report examined results from the 2003 NAEP assessments for students in grades 4 and 8 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2003). Results from this study are as follows:

1. Results from fourth grade reading indicate that the average private school reading score was 14.7 points higher than the average public school mean reading score;
2. Results from the fourth grade math scores indicate that the average private school score was 7.8 points higher than the average public school mean;
3. Results from the eighth grade reading indicate the average private school mean reading score was 18.1 points higher than the average public school mean score; and
4. Results from the eighth grade math scores indicate that the average private school score was 12.3 points higher than the average public school mean. (NAEP, 2003)

Caution should be used in these interpretations since the data was obtained through an observational study rather than a randomized experiment. The conclusions of the study pertain to national estimates and are not based on a survey of schools in a particular jurisdiction.

McTighe (2007), executive director of the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), says that anytime studies produce *counterintuitive* results, they should be carefully examined. Without having seen Lubienski's research, McTighe pointed out that raw scores have typically shown the country's six million private school students, who make up 11.5% of the U.S. school children, outperforming their public school students. In the end, ideology often trumps research and drives the debate, with proponents on either side highlighting only data that support their case (Council for American Private Education, 2007). Further interpretation of the study was published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) by The Heritage Foundation in September 2006 in a report titled, *Are Public or Private Schools Doing Better and How the NCES Study Is Being Misinterpreted?* The article by Watkins (2007) contained some surprising results based upon a snapshot of student achievement data. According to the study, public school students are performing better than private school students in fourth, grade mathematics and at the same level as private school students in fourth grade reading and eighth, grade math. Indeed, the report says that private school students have an advantage over public school students only in eighth, grade reading. These results should be handled very carefully (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).

Policymakers and journalists need to know that the NCES findings that public schools outperform private schools employ significantly limited data. Some commentators on the NCES report appear to believe that this study described causal relationships—that public school attendance causes better student achievement and that private school attendance causes students to have lower math and reading achievement. The NCES study analyzed the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data that, due to a major limitation, were ill-suited for making any causal

inferences. The NAEP data assess achievement only at one point in time, providing a snapshot of how American students are performing in math and reading at that specific time. The NAEP data are not suitable for evaluating the effectiveness of private or public school attendance in raising academic achievement. In fact, the NCES authors explicitly warn against this in two sections of the report that are appropriately titled *Cautions in Interpretation* (NCES, 2008). Education studies that include measurement over time are much more useful for drawing conclusions about school quality. Education researchers have repeatedly pointed out that a student's low test score at a single specific time may indicate only that she is not a good student or that some external circumstance influenced her bad performance on the test that day. However, if student's test scores rise over time, it indicates that she is being well-served and well-educated by the school that she is attending (NAEP, 2003). The NAEP data do not sample the same students or schools each year. Thus, researchers cannot study how achievement has changed over time for either individual students or a cohort of students attending the same school, whether public or private. As a result, the NAEP data are not well-suited to establishing whether a specific math or reading achievement outcome is associated with attending either a private or public school.

Further studies reported in The Nation's Report Card in 2009, as a follow up to the 2003 and 2009 NAEP surveys, found there has been no significant change in the performance of the nation's fourth-graders in mathematics from 2007 to 2009. State results, however, showed increases in average scores from 2007 to 2009 for eight states and decreases for four states. Average mathematics scores for male and female students in 2009 remained unchanged from 2007. The study also showed that male students continued to score 2 points higher on average than female students in 2009. Eighth-

graders scored higher in mathematics in 2009 than in any previous assessment year. The upward trend continued with a 2-point increase since 2007. These results reflected the performance of eighth-grade students nationally (i.e., those in both public and private schools) (NAEP, 2003; NAEP, 2009).

Percentile scores were higher in 2009 than in 2007 for all but the lowest-performing students (those at the 10th percentile), where there was no significant change in the score since the last assessment. It is important to note that the same study reported that private school students in the fourth grade performed better than their public school counterparts. It is important to note there may be many reasons why private school students perform differently, on average, from public school students. Differences in demographic composition, availability of resources, admissions policies, parental involvement and other factors not measured in NAEP can influence average student achievement scores (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009).

In 2009 (NAEP, 2009), the average mathematics score for fourth-graders attending public schools was seven points lower than the overall score for students attending private schools, and six points lower than for students in Catholic schools specifically. There were no significant changes in the average scores for students attending public schools, private schools, or Catholic schools from 2007 to 2009. The seven-point score gap between private and public school students in 2009 was not significantly different from the gap in 2007 but was smaller than the gap in 1990. Ninety-one percent of fourth-graders attended public schools in 2009, and 9% attended private schools, including 4% in Catholic schools. The proportions of students attending public and private schools have not changed significantly in comparison to either 2007 or 1990 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

Another study conducted by Planty, Provasnik and Daniel, (2007) titled *High School Coursetaking*, was developed from the findings of the Condition of Education Report 2007. Their findings indicate that although the state coursework requirements and the course offerings may be the same, students in private schools tend to take more advanced classes than their counterparts in the public school system (Planty et. al. 2007).

Consideration of Family Characteristics

One final consideration to the study by the Center on Education Policy (Wenglinsky, 2007) released in October of 2007 needs to be noted. Another ongoing debate among educational researchers is whether schools *make a difference*. Until the mid-1960s, most researchers assumed that student performance depended on the quality of the school. However, Coleman and his colleagues, the Equality of Educational Opportunity Report of 1966 (Coleman et al., 1966) actually found few relationships between school characteristics and student performance. The researchers concluded that it was the family, not the school that really mattered. Various researchers, such as Hanushek, (1997) have continued making the intriguing claim that student performance is largely predetermined by student background. What happens when parental involvement is considered in comparisons of public and private schools? The Center on Education report sought to see how much the school contributed, to student outcomes and to what extent student performance was due to attentive parents. One might conjecture that parents who enroll their children in private school are by definition more involved (Wenglinsky, 2007).

Rand (2007), Dean of Education at Pensacola Christian College, in her article *Christian vs. Secular Thinking* stated that almost half of the ACT-tested graduates in 2005 were not ready for college reading. “Of the 1.2 million 2005 high school graduates

who took the ACT test, only 51% met the college readiness benchmark score of 21 on the Reading Test. The percentage of graduates meeting or exceeding the reading benchmark in 2005 was the lowest in more than a decade” (Rand, 2007, p. 1).

Perceptions of Problems in Schools

In addition to being ineffective and inefficient, schools can be dangerous places, particularly those in big cities and those serving predominantly poor and minority students. In a recent poll, (Walberg, 2007) 73% of low-income parents and 46% of higher-income parents said they worried “a lot” about their children’s exposure to drugs and alcohol at school. Similarly, 65% of low-income parents and 39% of higher-income parents worried a great deal about their children being assaulted or even kidnapped (Walberg, 2007).

The following is from a recent study reported by the *Digest of Education Statistics* in 2008. In 2005–06, about 86% of public schools had a criminal incident, which is defined as a serious violent crime or a less serious crime such as a fight without weapons, theft or vandalism. The percentage of schools having a criminal incident in 2005–06 was about the same as the percentage of schools having an incident in 1999–2000. In 2005–06, some 78% of schools reported a violent incident; forty-six percent of schools reported a theft/larceny; and 68% reported other types of incidents. Overall, there were five crime incidents reported per 100 students (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008).

The 1992 edition of this Annual Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1992) identified the following list of problems facing our public schools according to public opinion.

1. The use of drugs,

2. The lack of discipline,
3. The lack of proper financial support for education,
4. Overcrowding in schools, and
5. Poor curriculum and standards.

The same poll when taken by secondary principals lists lack of parental involvement as the number one problem facing schools at in 1994 when the survey was completed.

Student apathy and poverty were also identified frequently by public secondary school principals. This poll revealed that private school principals were less likely than their public counterparts to identify problems in their schools as serious, but they did identify many of the same problems as their public counterparts. As with the public schools, private school principals selected poverty and lack of parental involvement with the greatest frequency. Because of some of the problems identified in public schools parents may choose to send their children to private schools where they may feel there is a better overall atmosphere or environment conducive to learning.

Choice/Environment/Socialization

Because high levels of knowledge and skill increasingly determine individual and national success, Americans and others are keenly interested in changes in schools that may be effective in increasing youngsters' achievement. Walberg (2007) stated in his book, *School Choice*, that the United States of America is arguably the world leader in income, wealth, military power and cultural influence. It hovers near the top of international rankings in higher education, scientific, and medical discoveries, and productivity of many of its industries. Yet U.S. schools are behind those of most economically advanced countries in both effectiveness and efficiency (Walberg, 2007). By the end of high school, U.S. academic achievement lags behind that of most member

countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development was a group that included most of the world's economically advanced countries (Walberg, 2007).

By assigning pupils to schools based on neighborhood residency, the public school system restricted freedom of choice. *All Else Equal* (Benveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein, 2003) opened with a helpful historical review of the origins of school choice in the United States, the divergent arguments and programs associated with choice, and the often uncritical mobilization by privatizers of evidence that is weak and inconclusive. Benveniste, Carnoy and Rothstein (2003) noted, "When we take stock of the empirical results, the notion that private schools are more effective than public schools is not as clear as voucher and choice advocates would have us believe" (p. 19). Benveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein (2003) also examined the assertion that private schools are more responsive, or accountable, to parental demands than are public schools. What their investigation revealed, however, was something quite different. In lower income schools, both public and private, and parental involvement was generally low despite the efforts reported by school staff to invite participation.

McTighe (CAPE, 2007) reported when parents make decisions about schools they do not compare these constructs with statistical abstracts. They look at a particular school in a particular neighborhood and determine if the school is right for their children. Many times intangibles – a safe environment and caring staff or a culture that embraces and reflects family's values – influence the decision as much as test scores (Council for American Private Education, 2007).

Families believe that the kinds of children who attend a school affect their child's behavior and academic performance—social scientists call this the peer effect, and it is

far easier for parents to observe who attends a school than how effective teachers are in imparting academic skills (Benveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein, 2003). Goodlad (1984) examined a sampling of schools across the nation to determine what made schools effective. He identified themes for successful schools. These themes included the following: school functions, relevance, how teachers teach, circumstances surrounding teaching, the curriculum, the distribution of resources for learning, equity, the implicit (hidden) curriculum satisfaction and need for data (Goodlad, 1984).

Many students experience daily stress that is over and above the healthy limits (Jensen, 2006). It comes from bullying, rude teachers, over demanding parents and life's events. When there are unpredictable stressors, the brain's capacity to learn and remember is severely impaired. Animal studies showed that behavior stress modifies and impairs a key learning structure called the hippocampus and reduces learning capacity. In fact, the actual brain cells in the prefrontal cortex become disfigured with chronic stress. In general, students learn best in a classroom climate of moderate stress. According to Jensen (2006) that is just a generalization, there are plenty of exceptions. For example, many students with disabilities need lower stress or their learning shuts down. Examples include those with autistic spectrum disorders, reactive attachment disorders, attention deficit, oppositional disorder, dyslexia, stress disorders, or learning delays. So for a portion of the students, low stress does work better. Healthier students can thrive under much more demanding conditions (Jensen, 2006, p. 183).

Jensen (2006) contended that schools need to establish an environment that would typically inspire and challenge the learner by making it less chaotic, uncomfortable, or overwhelming, and more predictable. Additionally, ensure that the physical environment has the best possible acoustics and lighting. Provide for the possibility of movement,

right wall decorations for the class, choice open windows, and going outside. Give students the life skills to deal with stressors. Teach self-regulation strategies, such as meditation, exercise, yoga, better nutrition and reframing outcomes more positively. Students need the skills and mind-set to believe they can influence their environment (Jensen, 2006, p. 183).

Goodlad (1984) explained there are two themes were pervasive in successful schools: the school as a unit for improvement, and a caring community. Goodlad found that most schools categorized as the *most satisfying*, as identified by teachers, administrators, parents and students, were schools that reported to have a good school climate and gratifying workplaces for teachers. The more satisfying schools seemed to be at a stage of greater readiness for more fundamental improvement (Goodlad, 1984). This effective school philosophy is echoed by numerous authors, including Grant (1988). *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, by Chubb and Moe (1990) examined problems that existed in American education today and searched for solutions to help remedy the faults of the education system. The authors investigated the relationship between school organization and student achievement, conditions that promote or inhibit desirable forms of organization, and how these conditions are affected by their institutional settings (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

The key to student success is a sense of belonging, invitation and connectedness (Jensen, 2006). School leaders and staff that make schools a place for a positive social climate do things differently. They typically make sure the staff is pro-social and respects relationships. They use daily rituals and traditions, they hold assemblies and community functions on a schedule. They respect diversity and openly discuss diversity issues. They will have morning homeroom meetings with familiar agendas. Students

also have room for expression in voice, art and sports. The schools embraced the culture of the students with familiar themes that students, staff and community can align with (Jensen, 2006, p. 204).

Jensen (2006) also suggested that people need social connectedness, the store of social capital that gives them access to a network of caring human services. Connectedness is an important enrichment factor because it can regulate stress levels up or down. If our relationships are positive, they tend to have buffering effects against stress. If they are negative, it increases our stress response (Jensen, 2006). Jensen also recommended that schools should foster positive social connectedness for many reasons. But the main reason is that it may keep students in school. Of those in school, it increases their likelihood of having better friends, fewer illnesses, less absenteeism and a more positive attitude. Jensen (2006) expressed that, for many kids, the main reason they are in school is because it is the law and their friends are there. Social contact can influence gene expression; improve student health; and reduce discipline, bullying, and violence. “How many more reasons do school policy makers need to mandate positive social structures?” (Jensen, 2006, p. 204)

Marzano (2007) said, “Arguably the quality of the relationships teachers have with students is the keystone of effective management and perhaps even the entirety of teaching” (p. 144). There are two complementary dynamics that constitute an effective teacher-student relationship. The first is the extent to which the teacher gives students the sense that he is providing guidance and controls both behaviorally and academically. In effect, the teacher must somehow communicate the message, “You can count on me to provide clear direction in terms of your learning and in terms of behavior. I take responsibility for these issues” (Marzano, 2007, p. 149). The second dynamic was the

extent to which the teacher provides a sense that teacher and students are a team devoted to the well-being of all participants. In effect, Marzano (2007) suggested that the teacher should somehow communicate the message, “We are a team here and succeed or fail as a team. Additionally, I have a stake personally in the success of each of you” (p. 149).

Jensen (2006) explained that students’ brains never mature in a vacuum. They become human-friendly in the context of a social environment. School stress that is associated with bullying and violence hurts achievement. The stress also impairs test scores and attention span and increases absenteeism and tardiness. Community violence exposure, an unsafe neighborhood or a dangerous path to school, also contributes to lower academic performance. It is discouraging, but many high school students either stay home or skip classes for fear of violence. Students who have to worry too much, especially over safety concerns, will underperform academically. And plenty of recent evidence shows that stereotype threat reduces working memory capacity in students (Jensen, 2006).

A teacher’s beliefs about students’ chances of success in school influence the teacher’s actions with students, which in turn influence students’ achievements. If the teacher believes students can succeed, she tends to behave in ways that help them succeed. If the teacher believes that students cannot succeed, she unwittingly tends to behave in ways that subvert student success or at least do not facilitate student success. “This is perhaps one of the most powerful hidden dynamics of teaching because it is typically an unconscious activity” (Marzano, 2007 p. 162).

Prior research suggested that the sense of community may be higher in private schools than in public schools. Job satisfaction levels among staff members in private schools are higher than in the public sector in spite of the lower salaries they receive

(McLaughlin, O'Donnell, & Ries, 1995). Further evidence suggests that larger schools in general are less likely to have a strong sense of community (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Since public schools are larger on the average than private schools (Choy et al., 1993), the differences in public and private school sense of community noted above might be due to differences in school size between the two sectors.

In an article written by Scoville, (2007) she listed a number of things parents take into consideration when choosing between private and public education. The following list provides a summary of the areas she considered important to parents in choosing between schools (Scoville, 2007).

1. *Size*: Private schools are generally smaller and have a more favorable student-to-teacher ratio. Smaller does not necessarily mean better, either. Size of the student population might limit resources, variety of classes offered and extracurricular activities offered.
2. *Quality of Instruction*: It may seem counterintuitive, but most private schools do not pay their teachers as well as public schools. While salaries are generally competitive, private schools attract teachers by offering smaller classes and “better behaved” students.
3. *Cost*: The obvious difference between private and public schools is cost. By law, every child is entitled to a free and equal public education. Parents must examine the cost of private education and ask, “Is it worth it (Scoville, 2007)?”
4. *The future*: A parent must consider the future education goals of their child. Most private schools are geared toward college bound students with a rigorous curriculum. Public schools sometimes have two

different tracks to satisfy all students regardless of their plans after graduation (Scoville, 2007).

Differing Worldviews

For those holding to a Christian worldview, and perhaps others whose position is more in keeping with a purist autonomous child-rearing philosophy, private Christian education seems to provide a worthy alternative. It is profoundly appreciated and sought after as those parents would seek to shield their children from a worldview not in concert with their own and interpreted by some as having saturated the country's educational system and societal mores (Carper, 2000). It is an opportunity for children being raised in a Christian home to be mentored by more mature Christians with the same belief system as their parents. Christian education aligns the values of education with those of Christian homes and prevents schooling from alienating children from their parents. Moreover, as in all things, God has provided us with the means to do this (Shortt, 2004). "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers" (Malachi 4:6). "Christian school advocates and evangelical homeschoolers have much in common. Both are profoundly dissatisfied with what they perceive to be the secularist world view, embodied in the public school curriculum" (Carper, 2000 p.16).

The earliest American colonists knew that when they passed the Old Deluder Satan Law (Rand, 2007). They were saying that we are morally responsible to provide an education for our children, or they will not be able to read God's Word and will be susceptible to Satan's delusions. Rand (2007) exclaimed that God's view in education is to teach students Godly thinking, to teach them to use their abilities for the glory of God, to conform their character to the standards of God's word, and educationally, to pass on

to students the accumulated knowledge of past generations that equips them with tools they need for future studies. God makes it clear what He thinks about educating children. In the Old Testament, He says we are to teach His words/commandments to our children- and not just causally or in church. In the New Testament, fathers are told to bring up their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians, 6:4; Rand, 2007).

According to Williamson (2007), Bradford, governor of Plymouth colony, in his story of Plymouth Plantation, gave the following reason why the Pilgrim fathers left England and Holland to come to the new world, “Lastly and which not least, a great hope and inward zeal we had of laying some good foundation or at least to make some way thereunto for the propagating and advancing of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world” (Williamson, 2007). One of their purposes was to establish Christian schools in order to train their children to evangelize people in the new land. Life’s important questions are answered according to what we believe about truth and reality and goodness. What we believe is true and real and good becomes our religion. God’s Word gives us our view of the world that differs from the worldview of our day (Rand, 2007).

What Public Opinion Polls Say About School Choice

The origin of the schools choice movement can trace its roots to the work of Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman and to the momentous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Fuller & Elmore, 1996). The emergence of school choice can also be traced to more specific attempts by urban school systems, since the 1960s, to preserve the participation of the white middle class in public schools and to provide a positive vision of what public schooling can become in the face of increasingly strident criticism (Fuller & Elmore, 1996). Choice has emerged in the minds of many as a tool for

transforming schools that are seen as failing. Some educational advocates see school choice as the panacea of school reform (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

There are two major options in schools choice—the public sector and the private sector. Corwin and Schnieder (2005) suggested that more options have become available to parents and students within the public sector. Additional public school options included magnet schools, specialized alternative schools, vocational schools and minischools (Corwin & Schnieder, 2005). Private schools were generally broken down into three main groups: Catholic, other religious and non-sectarian (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004).

According to a 1999 Public Agenda Poll, 52% of parents said private schools generally provide a better education. Only 19% thought a public education was better. A similar survey conducted by Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice for the Montana Family Foundation found that 38% of those surveyed preferred Private Schools, 28% Charter Schools, 18% Home School, 10% Public Schools, and 5% Virtual Schooling. Further studies conducted in 2007 by the National Association of Independent Schools found that independent (private) schools did a better job than the public schools in all 10 of their stated characteristics of a quality education. (National Association of Independent Schools Survey, 2007).

The 10 characteristics of a quality education according to National Association of Independent Schools Poll (2007) are as follows:

1. Providing a safe environment,
2. Employing high-quality teachers,
3. Maintaining discipline,
4. Supporting a climate that says it's okay to study and excel,

5. Keeping students motivated and enthusiastic about learning,
6. Preparing students academically for college,
7. Encouraging parents to participate in their child's education,
8. Preventing drug and alcohol use,
9. Preparing students for life and a career in a global economy, and
10. Using computers and other technology to enhance learning.

Demographics/Traits

Payne (1996) described generational poverty as having been in poverty for at least two generations; however, the patterns begin to surface much sooner than two generations if the family lives with others who are from generational poverty. Situational poverty is defined as a lack of resources due to a particular event (ie., a death , chronic illness, divorce, etc.). Generational poverty has its own culture, hidden rules and belief systems. One of the key indicators of whether it is generational or situational poverty is the prevailing attitude. Often the attitude in generational poverty is that society owes one a living. In situational poverty the attitude is often one of pride and a refusal to accept charity. Individuals in situational poverty often bring more resources with them to the situation than those in generational poverty. Of particular importance is the use of formal register (Payne, 1996, p. 47).

There are differences in the racial and ethnic diversity in public and private schools. Public schools were more likely than private schools to have any minority students in 1999-2000, as well as to have high concentrations of minority students (more than 30%). (Naomi, & Peter, 2002) Although many private schools had a racially diverse student body, about 14% had no minority students, compared with only 4% of the public schools (Naomi & Peter, 2002). Research suggested that diversity in a school's

enrollment can help low-income and minority students increase their achievement and attainment, reduce dropout rates and improve critical thinking skills and the ability to understand opposing viewpoints (Naomi & Peter, 2002).

The key to achievement for students from poverty is in creating relationships with them (Payne, 1996). Because poverty is about relationships as well as entertainment, the most significant motivator for these students is relationships. Teachers and administrators have always known that relationships, often referred to as *politics*, make a great deal of difference, sometimes all of the difference, in what could or could not happen in a building. But since 1980 we have concentrated our energies in schools on *achievement and effective teaching strategies*. When students who have been in poverty (and have successfully made it into middle class) are asked how they made the journey, the answer nine out of ten times has to do with relationship, a teacher, counselor or coach who made a suggestion or took an interest in them as individuals (Payne, 1996, pp. 110-111).

One of the reasons it is getting more and more difficult to conduct school as we have in the past is that the students who bring the middle-class culture with them are decreasing in numbers, and the students who bring the poverty culture with them are increasing in numbers. As in any demographic switch, the prevailing rules and policies eventually give way to the group with the largest numbers. An education is the key to getting out of, and staying out of, generational poverty. Individuals leave poverty for one of four reasons: a goal or a vision of something they want to be or have; a situation that is so painful that anything would be better; someone who *sponsors* them (i.e., an educator or spouse or mentor or role model who shows them a different way or convinces them

that they could live differently); or a specific talent or ability that provides an opportunity for them (Payne, 1996, p. 61).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the reasons for parental choice and explore why parents enroll their children in private schools. The researcher determined if parents enroll their children in private schools for purely academic reasons or if there was some other factor influencing the parental decision concerning their school choice. A survey with follow up interviews was conducted using input from parents of children in private schools to determine their reasons for their choices of schools for their children.

To best answer the research questions and the hypotheses, a mixed methods research medium was used. Viadero (2005, n.p.) described mixed methods as a study that blends different research strategies. Mixed methods research includes collecting information from a variety of sources like survey's and interviews. This mixed methods framework is deemed the most appropriate approach towards answering the questions regarding parental choice of private schooling. While the questionnaire may provide good direction and responses to the questions, the questionnaire alone cannot answer the essential question "Why?" Viadero (2005, n.p.). Subsequently, there was a need to conduct semi-structured interviews to delve more into the reasons why parents opt for private schools. The purpose of using the mixed methods is to amalgamate survey results and interviews into a unified whole. The goal was not to corroborate the questionnaire but to expand the researchers understanding. The goal of this research was to expand knowledge of the inherent complexities regarding parents' decisions to choose private schooling alternatives when there exists many other viable, successful school options.

Research Question

1. Why do parents choose private schools?

Hypothesis

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason why white parents chose a private school for their children versus parents of children from other ethnic backgrounds.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason parents of children with family incomes over \$40,000.00 annually chose a private school for their children versus parents of children with a different annual income.

Instrumentation

Prior to gathering data for this study the researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Southern Mississippi (see Appendix A) and the principals of the selected schools (see Appendix B). The primary data-gathering instrument employed in the research design was a self-administered mail questionnaire. The design structure of the questionnaire was developed by the researcher; its general format was designed for ease of reading and understanding (see Appendix C). The final version of the mail questionnaire consisted of three major data gathering sections: (a) Demographics information section, (b) School environment choice section, and (c) School learning environment section. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions and took approximately five minutes to complete.

Interviews

The interview component of the survey, as previously indicated, was employed as a secondary generative of exploratory step in the research design. The interview schedule was designed to fulfill a key purpose was to help confirm the variables perceived by

parents of private schooled students towards private education.

Following the questionnaire a semi-structured interview was conducted with parents who were purposefully chosen. One parent from each of the demographic groups was chosen to participate in an interview. Parental verbal consent to participate in the interview process was considered consent for the data to be utilized in this project. The researcher asked parents as they arrived at school in the morning if they filled out the questionnaire, and if they did, would they participate in a short interview? Those parents willing to participate were asked three questions to supplement the closed ended questions of the questionnaire with more open ended questions for in-depth analysis. The parental responses to the questions were recorded in writing by the researcher. The recordings were later transcribed and used as a part of the data analysis. The parents interviewed were asked to comment in the following three ways:

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

Six interviews were conducted as a follow up to the questionnaire. Parents from each school participating in the questionnaire were selected at random for participation in the interviewing process.

Validity

The survey was given by the researcher to fifteen sets of parents to take as a pilot group for validation purposes. The parents described the questionnaire as easy to read and understand. The test or reliability and validity were conducted with the data from the sample of fifteen parents having children enrolled in a private school. Item clarity was assessed by soliciting comments from the respondents. In addition, and an overall

measure of internal consistency, i.e., coefficient alpha Cronbach, was calculated. The overall scale reliability was high ($\alpha = 0.723$), combined with an analysis of the respondents' comments indicated that the questionnaire was reliable and easy to read and understand.

Participants

The target populations were randomly selected privately schooled students and their parents located in the same local region enrolled in private schools for the 2010 – 2011 academic years. Most participants were either White or Black since those are the prevailing ethnicities in our local society. The socioeconomic status of the participants ranged across the spectrum from less than \$25,000.00 annually to over \$60,000.00 a year, with an average family income of \$35,000.00, which was the average annual salary for employees in the selected region.

Procedures

The Private School Parental Choice Questionnaire was the primary instrument used in gathering the data for the research (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was developed by the researcher containing thirteen questions for parents concerning school choice. The questionnaire was given to parents who placed their children in a private school to determine their motivation for choosing one a private system. The private schools used were chosen at random. All parents in each school chosen were requested to complete the questionnaire. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

The names of local private schools used in the research were chosen by the researcher. The questionnaire was mailed to the home of the students for their parents to fill out and return to the researcher. The surveys were sent with an enclosed self addressed stamped envelope for the parents to return them to the researcher. The parents

were also able to return their questionnaires in the envelope to the school for the researcher. The return of the questionnaire by the parents served as their consent to participate. The survey was random because not all parents returned the survey. A total of 274 of 740 questionnaires were completed and returned. There was no place on the questionnaire for information identifying the school, the parent or the student participating in the survey. Statistical analyses was conducted on the data from the returned questionnaires to discern why parents chose the learning environment of a private school over all other educational options available to them for their children and whether significant differences exist between the school learning environment and Social Economic Status (SES), race and gender of the student.

The independent variable in this study was the students enrolled in a private school. The continuous dependent variable was the learning environment of the private school.

Analysis

This was a non-experimental design that involved a comparison of pre-existing groups. SPSS version 19.0 for Windows with a 0.05 level of significance was used to analyze the data collected. A one-way Chi Square test was conducted to measure the differences in parental choice. In addition to the Chi Square test analysis, the responses to the open ended interview questions were assessed to determine if they support the findings from the questionnaire.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

This study sought to better understand the reasons for parental choice of a private school over all of the other educational opportunities available for their children. Chapter IV presents the descriptive statistics for the samples taken from the private schools taking part in the research. Also included are the results of the statistical analyses of the sample. The data from this study are presented in relationship to the research question and two hypothesis presented in Chapter I. This chapter contains an analysis of why parents choose private schooling and if their educational choices correspond with their values for choosing private schooling. Further analysis describes variables of family income and ethnicity and their impact on parental choice. A mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques was deemed the most suitable research design for obtaining and illuminating the intended information. Self-report questionnaire data was supplemented with semi-structured interviews for in-depth analysis. For the purpose of qualitative analysis, a sample of six parents of students enrolled in a private school was presented with the following open-ended questions.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

Instrument

To examine the reasons for parental choice of educational institution for their children, the writer developed a questionnaire containing 13 questions entitled the Private

School Parental Survey focusing on reasons for private school choice (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was comprised of demographic questions (1-4), questions about private education (5-7), and the learning environment within the private school questions (8-13).

Sample

The principals from three private schools in the local area were contacted to determine if they would be willing to participate in the research study. One of the schools declined to participate indicating they did not participate in any research or solicitations from outside their school. Two of the principals indicated they would be willing to permit their schools to participate in the research study. Letters were drafted and permission was given in writing by the individual principals of the schools for the researcher to conduct his research and hand out the private school parental survey questionnaire within their individual schools. A total of 740 Private School Parental Survey's were handed out. Of the 740 questionnaires sent out 274 were returned which equals a response rate of 37%. Of the 274 questionnaires received by the researcher, 21 were unusable because they were either incorrectly filled out or incomplete. Of the 274 questionnaires 253 were complete and useable by the researcher. There were a total of 113 males and 140 females represented in the sample. (see Table 1)

Table 1

Frequency of gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	113	44.7
Female	140	55.3
Total	253	

Of the 253 questionnaires there was 29.6 percent in grades 9-12, 23.7 percent in grades 6-8, 37.2 percent in grades 1-5 and 9.5 percent in Pre-K through Kindergarten represented in the sample. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Frequency of grade

	Frequency	Percent
PreK- Kindergarten	24	9.5
Grade 1-5	94	37.2
Grade 6-8	60	23.7
Grade 9-12	75	29.6
Total	253	100.0

Of the 253 responses to the questionnaires question about race 85% were white, 5.1% were Hispanic, 5.1% were black, 1.6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and .4% Native American represented in the sample. (see Table 3)

Table 3

Frequency of Race

	Frequency	Percent
Native American/Alaskan Native	1	.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	1.6
Black/African-American	13	5.1
Hispanic/Latino	13	5.1
White	215	85.0
Other	7	2.8
Total	253	100.0

Of the 253 responses to the questionnaires question about income 60.9% had an income over \$60,000, 11.5% had an income between \$51,000 and \$60,000, with 27.7% having an income of \$50,000 or less represented in the sample. (see Table 4)

Table 4

Frequency of Social Economic Status

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 25,000	9	3.6
25,000 – 30,000	15	5.9
31,000 – 40,000	24	9.5
41,000 – 50,000	22	8.7
51,000 – 60,000	29	11.5
Over 60,000	154	60.9
Total	253	100.0

Research Question

1. Why do parents choose private schools?

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 5 was analyzed to determine the reasons parents choose private education over all of the other educational options available. Responses to question 5 of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question of what attracted parents to a private school for their children. Of the choices presented response 2, the positive school climate, was the most popular receiving 37.2 % of the responses. The second most selected reason for choosing a private school was response 1 preparing students academically for college. Of the 12 responses of other to the question of what attracted parents to a private school, 11 wrote that they wanted a religious environment for their child, and one wrote that they chose the private school because of

the poor public school system. (see Table 5)

Table 5

Frequency of Reason for Attraction to Private School

	Frequency	Percent
1 Preparing students academically for college	80	31.6
2 The positive school climate	94	37.2
3 The maintenance of discipline	9	3.6
4 Providing a safe environment.	43	17.0
5 Employing highly qualified teachers	15	5.9
6 Preventing alcohol and drug abuse	1	.4
7 Other	12	4.7
Total	253	100.0

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 6 was analyzed to determine the role of private education as perceived by the parents of students enrolled in a private school. Responses to question 6 of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question of what they see as the role of private education. Of the choices presented response 3 to provide children with moral and/or religious values to build moral character was the most popular receiving 49.8% of the responses. The second most selected reason for the role of private education was response 4 to provide children with educational opportunities to prepare them for college (see Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency of the Role of Private Education

	Frequency	Percent
1 To prepare children to become well-rounded individuals	24	9.5
2 To help children become productive members of society	24	9.5
3 To provide children with moral and/or religious values	126	49.8
4 To provide children with educational opportunities to prepare them for college	78	30.8
5 Other	1	.4
Total	253	100

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 8 was analyzed to determine if the parents perceived that the private school environment had better prepared students for entrance into college. Responses to question 8 of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question, Did the private school environment better prepare your child for entrance into college? The overwhelming majority of responses 99.2% indicated good to excellent as a response to the question. Table 7 contains the mean and the standard deviation for the question (see Table 7).

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 9 was analyzed to determine if the parents perceived that their child was made to feel welcome in the private school environment. Responses to question 9 of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question, Students are made to feel welcome at the school my child attends? The overwhelming

majority of responses 97.3% indicated good to excellent as a response to the question. Table 7 contains the mean and the standard deviation for the question. (see Table 7)

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 10 was analyzed to determine if the parents perceived that the teachers had a good relationship with their students. Responses to question number ten of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question “student teacher relationships.” The overwhelming majority of responses 96% indicated good to excellent as a response to the question. Table 7 contains the mean and the standard deviation for the question (see Table 7).

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 11 was analyzed to determine if the parents perceived that the teachers had a good relationship with them as parents. Responses to question 11 of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question “parent teacher relationships.” The overwhelming majority of responses 90.1% indicated good to excellent as a response to the question. Table 7 contains the mean and the standard deviation for the question (see Table 7).

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 12 was analyzed to determine if the parents perceived that the students had a good relationship with each other. Responses to question 12 of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question “student teacher relationships.” The overwhelming majority of responses 96% indicated good to excellent as a response to the question. Table 7 contains the mean and the standard deviation for the question (see Table 7).

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 13 was analyzed to determine if the parents were overall satisfied with the instructional program and services. Responses to question 13 of the Private School Parental Survey answer the question “your overall satisfaction with the school’s instructional program and services.” The overwhelming

majority of responses 94.9 % indicated Good to Excellent as a response to the question.

Table 7 contains the mean and the standard deviation for the question (see Table 7).

Table 7

Frequency of Responses to Questions about School Environment (N=253)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
1 Students academically ready for college	2	4	3.70	.475
2 Students feel welcome	1	4	3.74	.513
3 Student teacher relationships	2	4	3.61	.564
4 Parent teacher relationships	1	4	3.48	.705
5 Student to student relationships	1	4	3.39	.591
6 Overall satisfaction with school	2	4	3.53	.595

Note: 1= poor 2 = fair 3 = good 4 = excellent

Hypothesis

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason why white parents chose a private school for their children versus parents of children from other ethnic backgrounds.

Using the statistical tool SPSS question 5 responses were found not to be statistically significant when compared between ethnic groups. The relationship between race and school choice is not significant, $X^2(N=253,df=5)=.582,p=.989$ (see Table 8).

Table 8

Attracted to Private School

			.00	1.00	Total
Attracted to private school	1 Preparing students academically for college	Count	12	68	80
		% within	31.6%	31.6%	31.6%
	2 The positive school climate	Count	13	81	94
		% within	34.2%	37.7%	37.2%
	3 The maintenance of discipline	Count	2	7	9
		% within	5.3%	3.3%	3.6%
	4 Providing a safe environment.	Count	7	36	43
		% within	18.4%	16.7%	17.0%
	5 Employing highly qualified teachers.	Count	2	13	15
		% within	5.3%	6.0%	5.9%
	7 other	Count	2	10	12
		% within	5.3%	4.7%	4.7%
Total		Count	38	215	253
		% within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: White Crosstabulation .00=non-white, 1.00=white

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason parents of children with family incomes over \$40,000.00 annually chose a private school for their children versus parents of children with a different annual income.

Using the statistical tool SPSS question number seven responses were found not to be statistically significant when compared between ethnic groups. The relationship

between social economic status and school choice is not significant,

$X^2(N=253,df=5)=4.82,p=.441$ (see Table 9).

Table 9

Attract to Private School

			.00	1.00	Total
Attracted to private school	1 Preparing students academically for college	Count	14	66	80
		% within over 40,000	29.2%	32.2%	31.6%
	2 The positive school climate	Count	21	73	94
		% within over 40,000	43.8%	35.6%	37.2%
	3 The maintenance of discipline	Count	1	8	9
		% within over 40,000	2.1%	3.9%	3.6%
	4 Providing a safe environment.	Count	10	33	43
		% within over 40,000	20.8%	16.1%	17.0%
	5 Employing highly qualified teachers.	Count	2	13	15
		% within over 40,000	4.2%	6.3%	5.9%
	6 other	Count	0	12	12
		% within over 40,000	.0%	5.9%	4.7%
Total		Count	48	205	253
		% within over 40,000	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: over \$40,000 Crosstabulation 00=less than 40,000, 1.00=over 40,000

Ancillary Findings

It was surprising to see a non significant result to the chi-square test for both hypotheses. A one-sample t-Test was conducted on the responses between ethnic groups

to evaluate whether the mean was significantly different between Whites and other ethnic groups in response to the questions about the school environment.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason why white parents chose a private school for their children versus parents of children from other ethnic backgrounds.

A one-sample t-Test was conducted on the responses between ethnic groups and social economic status to evaluate whether the mean was significantly different between whites and other ethnic groups.

The one-sample t-Test between ethnic groups proved to be non significant (see Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10

Learning Environment Group Statistics by Race

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prepare for college	.00	38	3.82	.393	.064
	1.00	215	3.68	.486	.033
Students feel welcome	.00	38	3.82	.457	.074
	1.00	215	3.73	.522	.036
Student teacher relationships	.00	38	3.66	.582	.094
	1.00	215	3.60	.561	.038
Parent teacher relationships	.00	38	3.45	.760	.123
	1.00	215	3.48	.696	.047
Student relationships	.00	38	3.39	.679	.110
	1.00	215	3.39	.576	.039
Overall sat	.00	38	3.55	.555	.090
	1.00	215	3.52	.602	.041

Note: .00 = non-white 1.00 = white

Table 11

Independent Samples Test by Race

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Preparation for college	1.586	251	.114
Students feel welcome	.948	251	.344
Student teacher relationships	.536	251	.592
Parent teacher relationships	-.293	251	.770
Student to student relationships	.083	251	.934
Overall satisfaction	.302	251	.763

A one-sample t-Test was conducted on the responses between social economic groups to evaluate whether the mean was significantly different between those who earned over \$40,000.00 annually and those who earned less than \$40,000.00 annually in response to the questions about the school environment.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in the reason parents of children with family incomes over \$40,000.00 annually chose a private school for their children versus parents of children with a different annual income.

The one-sample t-Test conducted between social economic groups proved to be significant in the areas of *do the students feel welcome* (Question 9), and *overall satisfaction with the instructional program* (Question 13). Those parents earning less

than \$40,000 annually responded more positively about their student feeling welcome than did those earning over \$60,000.00 annually. Those earning over \$40,000.00 represented by the 1 had a mean of 3.71 while those earning less than \$40,000.00 had a mean of 3.9 (see Tables 12 and 13).

Table 12

Independent Samples Test by SES

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prepare for college	.00	48	3.77	.425	.061
	1.00	205	3.69	.485	.034
Students feel welcome	.00	48	3.90	.309	.045
	1.00	205	3.71	.544	.038
Student teacher relationships	.00	48	3.58	.539	.078
	1.00	205	3.62	.570	.040
Parent teacher relationships	.00	48	3.46	.743	.107
	1.00	205	3.48	.697	.049
Student relationships	.00	48	3.35	.483	.070
	1.00	205	3.40	.614	.043
Overall sat	.00	48	3.67	.519	.075
	1.00	205	3.49	.607	.042

Note: .00 = less than 40,000 1.00 = over 40,000

Table 13

Learning Environment Group Statistics by SES

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Preparation for college	1.091	251	.276
Students feel welcome	2.312	251	.022
Student teacher relationship	-.400	251	.690
Parent teacher relationship	-.217	251	.828
Student to student relationship	-.431	251	.667
Overall satisfaction	1.833	251	.068

Interview Questions

Six parents representing a cross section of the demographics information gathered on the Private School Parental Survey were interviewed using the following three questions.

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

Parent number 1 is White, earns more than \$40,000.00 annually and has a male child enrolled in grade 1-5.

1. My son has had an excellent experience in his school. He gets along with the

other children and he enjoys going to school.

2. I want my son to be well equipped for high school and later on for college. I believe this school is providing him with that opportunity.
3. I selected this school because it strives for academic excellence and its Christian leadership.

Parent number 2 is White, earns less than \$40,000.00 annually and has a male child enrolled in grade 9-12.

1. My son is enjoying his experience in his school. He is getting good grades and doing well.
2. My son needs to have all of the tools necessary for college and I believe this school will give them to him.
3. I selected this school because of its good reputation and their Christian values.

Parent number three is White, earns less than \$40,000.00 annually and has a female child enrolled in grade 1-5.

1. My daughters experience in this school has been great so far. She actually enjoys going to school.
2. I want my daughter to be a well-rounded, Christian young lady.
3. I selected this school because it fit within my budget and it had a good reputation in the community.

Parent number 4 is Black, earns more than \$40,000.00 annually and has a female child enrolled in grade 6-8.

1. My daughter has had nothing but great experiences in her school. She gets to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities that she might not be able to participate in if she went to a large public school.

2. I want my daughter to have every opportunity to learn and enjoy school and this school provides that for her.
3. I selected this school because it is multi-cultural and teaches/trains the whole child not just their brain.

Parent number 5 is Black, earns more than \$40,000.00 annually and has a female child enrolled in grade 9-12.

1. My daughter gets along with all of her teachers and the other students in her school. All of her experiences have been good at this school.
2. I want my daughter to be well prepared for college and I know this school will prepare her for the future.
3. I selected this school because I believed it would be a good fit for my daughter and they have a daily bible class.

Parent number 6 is White, earns more than \$40,000.00 annually and has a male child enrolled in grade PreK-Kindergarten.

1. My son has had an excellent experience in his school. This is his first experience in school and he seems to like being there with the other children and his teacher.
2. I want my son to be safe in school and to have a positive experience that will prepare him for elementary and high school later on.
3. I selected this school because when I toured the school it was clean, neat and all of the staff were very friendly and helpful.

Summary

Chapter IV presented a description of the sample, reporting statistical results of a chi-square, cross tabulation and a one-sample t-Test. In answering Research Questions 1

and 2, a chi-square was conducted to measure whether there was a correlation between race, income and reason for entering in a private school. A one-sample t-Test was used to measure the mean score of the sample between races and learning environment questions 8 – 13 of the questionnaire. A one-sample t-Test was used to measure the mean score of the sample between social economic status and learning environment questions 8 – 13 of the questionnaire. There were significant differences in the following questions a) Do students feel welcome in their school and b) Your overall satisfaction with the school's instructional program and services. The parents earning less than \$40,000.00 annually mean sample was higher for both feeling welcome and overall satisfaction with the school.

The interviews conducted support the findings in the data gathered from the Private School Parental Survey Questionnaire. The parents interviewed support the finding that race or social economic status does not significantly affect the reasons parents choose private education for their children.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Chapter V provides a brief summary of the present study. Identifying factors that may promote creating a positive learning environment for students is one aspect of many issues involved with parental school choice for their children. It discusses conclusions based on the statistical analyses of the research question and hypotheses. Finally, suggestions for further research are made.

A further benefit from choice is increased parental involvement and a strengthened role for families. Education is a partnership between family and school. Like any partnership, it works better if the parties choose each other. Parents of children in school choice programs are more involved with their children's academic programs, participate more in school activities, volunteer more in their children's schools, communicate more with teachers, and help more with homework (Vassallo 2000). When it comes to educational choice for children, parents are ultimately the major decision maker in determining which school system is best for their children. Recognizing that parents are an influential part of the educational system is important as their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and influences become increasingly important to the educational community (Lane et. al. 2006).

Prior research has revealed differences between parents who exercise choice in determining their children's schools (Bomotti,1996; Goldring & Hausman, 1999) and parents who send their children to the local assigned school. Building on this foundation, I sought to investigate if there were intra-differences based on ethnicity and income between parents who opt for school choice and private schooling. The quantitative

component compared parents of different ethnicities and income levels who exercised choice in their school selection. The qualitative medium consisted of interviews with a small sample of private school parents (two African American and four White, four with an annual income over \$40,000.00 and two with an annual income of less than \$40,000.00) to explore a little more in depth their reasons for selecting the private school and the qualities of the child's learning experience. The quantitative component survey sample was composed of 253 parents whose children attended private School.

Finally, conclusions related to the sources and types of information and the implications for policy, practice and further study are developed. This study sought to better understand the reasons for parental choice of private schools program over the educational choices available to them. It is from this literature and the use of surveys directed to families enrolled in a private school that the author sought to provide data related to the research question and hypothesis.

Study Summary

This study sought to better understand the reasons for parental choice of a private school for their children over all of the educational choices available to them. Secondary purposes of this study were to measure whether school choice was affected by the parent's ethnic background or social economic status.

Question 5 was used from the Private School Parental Questionnaire to respond to the research question, and the demographic section Questions 1 through 5 were used to obtain the variables for this study pertaining to parental choice for type of education for their children based on ethnic background or social economic status.

A chi-square test was used to measure the sample for both Hypotheses 1 and 2. There were no significant differences between the response of White and Non-white

parents' to the question of why their choice for the education of their students was a private school. A positive school climate was the response chosen most often by Whites and Non-whites. There was no significant difference between the responses of those parents earning over \$40,000.00 annually and those earning less than \$40,000.00 annually when choosing a private school for their child's education. A positive school climate was the response chosen most often by all of the parents surveyed regardless of annual income.

Discussion

In the current study, a one-sample t-Test was conducted in Hypotheses 1 and 2 to further measure parents' perspectives of school choice and their child's education and their learning environment. Statistical differences were non-significant in the sample between Whites and other ethnic groups, but statistical differences were noted between groups by social economic status. The families of students with an annual income of less than \$40,000.00 felt more welcome in their school than those from families with a greater than \$40,000.00 annual income. The sample was also significant in the area of overall satisfaction. Those parents with an annual income of less than \$40,000.00 were more satisfied with the overall program of instruction and services provided by their school.

Responses to the Private School Parental Questionnaire provided the following results.

Parents chose a private school for their students because of the positive school climate and the academic preparation of their child for college. They responded that the role of private education was to provide children with moral and/or religious values to build their moral character. They also responded that the purpose of a private school

was to provide children educational opportunities to prepare them for college.

According to the parents taking the questionnaire, the primary issue facing private education today is a lack of funding and other resources, and a lack of parental and community involvement and support.

The overwhelming majority of parents responding to the questionnaire stated that the private school environment prepared their child for entrance into college. The stated that students are made to feel welcome in their school. The respondents stated that relationships between parents and teachers were good as were the relationships between teachers and students and amongst the students. Overall parental satisfaction with the private schools instructional program and services was very high.

Results

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Parents of students enrolled in private schools, placed the most importance on the learning environment, academics, socialization, interaction with peers and the classroom teacher.
2. The learning environment of the private school and the instructional program is meeting their child's educational needs based on parental response to the Private School Parental Questionnaire.
3. No significant differences were found when comparing the importance that parents placed on learning environment, academics, socialization and interaction with peers and the classroom teacher between Whites and Non-whites or social economic status.

According to NCES (2003) data, parents who choose the child's school tend to be more satisfied with the school than those who enroll their children in the assigned

public school. This study's report of high satisfaction with the school among parents who exercise choice is also aligned with previous studies (Bomotti, 1996, 2004; Hausman & Goldring, 2000). The qualitative responses of the parents of private schooled students showed very high satisfaction and enthusiasm for the school, teachers and curriculum. Given the persistent influence of certain demographic characteristics in educational research, this study sought to explore the effects of race and income on the school choice process. Effects of race were not as palpable. The high income parents and the low income parents have a slightly different level of satisfaction with the overall instructional program and services offered by their schools.

The results are in line with the contemporary education philosophy and thought in terms of how teaching, learning and the classroom environment are structured. The parents were not asked whether they were aware of their child's school possessing any specific factors or characteristics, only the importance of each to them. According to the results of the Private School Parental Survey Questionnaire, those parents responding do not enroll their children purely for academic reasons. Despite demographic differences, the majority of parents agreed on what was important for their children. As a group, the parents gave high priority to their child's inclusion in a positive environment for learning.

The parents of private school students chose a private school more often because of the positive learning environment they find in the private school. Researchers Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1994) found in their meta-analyses of student learning that constructive student and teacher social interactions also have a documented effect on school learning. The frequency and quality of these interactions contribute to students' senses of self-esteem and foster a sense of membership in the class and school. The extensive research on quantity of instruction indicates that students need to be fully

engaged in their academic pursuits and teachers need to make wise use of instructional time (Wang, Haertel & Walberg 1994). A positive school culture contains elements that foster student achievement (Gruenert, 1998).

Limitations

The following conditions may limit the validity of the study:

1. The study sample was taken from students enrolled in two private schools of the many private schools in the area.
2. It is assumed parents responding to the questionnaire did so truthfully.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Limited empirical research has resulted in differences of opinion on the topic of school choice for the education of students and their achievement, as perceived by parent, teachers and administrators (Lane, Wehby & Cooley, 2006). Despite the differences that encompass public and private schools across the United States in respect to accountability and achievement for regular and special education students, the underlying goal of the current educational system is successful achievement for all students. Educational leaders in seeking to improve their schools as a whole should consider incorporating those strategies which have been proven successful in improving the learning environment within their schools (Lane, Wehby, & Cooley, 2006).

Recommendations for Future Research

A particularly important area for further research is exploring strategies for gaining greater participation of low-income and Non-white parents in school choice. A key application of qualitative research is soliciting input from individuals and groups that have historically been marginalized. The most powerful strategy for enlisting the active involvement of low wealth parents and parents of color in school choice is gaining their

perspectives on barriers to participation and ways that we can all work towards overcoming them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Further research could be conducted in this area receiving input from all private schools in Mississippi.

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 I
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 I Fax:
601.266.43771
www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11110901

PROJECT TITLE: Factors Affecting Private School
Choice

PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation

RESEARCHER/S: John Hartsell, Sr.
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education &
Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational leadership
FUNDING AGENCY: NIA
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review
Approval
PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: *11/09/2011 to
11/08/2012*

Lawrence A. Hosman,
Ph.D.
Institutional Review
Board Chair

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION LETTER 1

To: [REDACTED]
From: John H. Hartsell, Doctor of Education Degree Candidate
Re. Consent to Conduct Research

In partial fulfillment of the doctor of education degree in educational administration, I will be conducting a study of parents who have enrolled their child in a private school for their education. The purpose of this study is to analyze factors associated with the perspectives of parents regarding school choice. Data will be gathered from a questionnaire created by John Hartsell, and information received during subsequent interviews. This letter will serve as verification that the administration will allow me to retrieve data regarding parents of students and their associated opinions regarding school choice. Participation in this study is voluntary and results are confidential. Parents are assured anonymity by not placing their names or identifying numbers on questionnaires.

Data gathered will be used inclusively for the completion of my research project. This letter will be sent to the Human Subjects Protection committee for review to ensure this project follows all guidelines and federal regulations.

Questions regarding the rights of research should be directed to the following:

"This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001,

(601) 266-6820."

Please feel free to contact me at 228-596-1377 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

John Hartsell
Practice Manager
Garden Park Physician Services

My signature below authorizes John H. Hartsell to gather the necessary information specific to the research discussed above from [REDACTED]

Administrative Signature:  Date: 3/18/11

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION LETTER 2

To: [REDACTED]
From: John H. Hartsell, Doctor of Education Degree Candidate
Re. Consent to Conduct Research

In partial fulfillment of the doctor of education degree in educational administration, I will be conducting a study of parents who have enrolled their child in a private school for their education. The purpose of this study is to analyze factors associated with the perspectives of parents regarding school choice. Data will be gathered from a questionnaire created by John Hartsell, and information received during subsequent interviews. This letter will serve as verification that the administration will allow me to retrieve data regarding parents of students and their associated opinions regarding school choice. Participation in this study is voluntary and results are confidential. Parents are assured anonymity by not placing their names or identifying numbers on questionnaires.

Data gathered will be used inclusively for the completion of my research project. This letter will be sent to the Human Subjects Protection committee for review to ensure this project follows all guidelines and federal regulations.

"This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820."

Please feel free to contact me at 228-596-1377 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

John Hartsell
Practice Manager
Garden Park Physician Services

My signature below authorizes John H. Hartsell to gather the necessary information specific to the research discussed above from [REDACTED].

Administrative Signature:  Date: 3/23/11

APPENDIX C

PRIVATE SCHOOL PARENTAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

Please complete the following demographic information:

1. Is your child male or female?
 - Male Female

2. In what grade is your child enrolled this year?
 - PreK- Kindergarten Grade 6 - 8
 - Grade 1 - 5 Grade 9 - 12

3. What is your family's racial/ethnic background? *(Mark only one.)*
 - Native American/Alaskan Native Hispanic/Latino
 - Asian/Pacific Islander White
 - Black/African-American Other

4. What is the average annual income in the home?
 - Less than 25,000 25,000 – 30,000 31,000 - 40,000
 - 41,000 - 50,000 51,000 - 60,000 over 60,000

For questions 5 - 7 select the three responses you agree with the most, and rank them 1-3, with 1 being the one you most agree with.

5. What attracted you most about choosing a private school for your child to attend this year?
 - ___ Preparing students academically for college
 - ___ The positive school climate
 - ___ The maintenance of discipline
 - ___ Providing a safe environment
 - ___ Employing highly qualified teachers
 - ___ Preventing alcohol and drug abuse
 - ___ Other _____

6. In your opinion what is the role of private education?
 - ___ To prepare children to become well-rounded individuals.
 - ___ To help children become productive members of society.
 - ___ To provide children with moral and/or religious values to build moral character.
 - ___ To provide children with educational opportunities to prepare them for college.
 - ___ Other _____

7. In your opinion what are the primary issues facing private education today?
 - ___ Substance abuse.
 - ___ Ineffective disciplinary policies.
 - ___ Poor environment for academic achievement.
 - ___ Poorly prepared teaching staff.

- ___ Lack of funding and other resources.
- ___ Lack of extracurricular activities (e.g. clubs, sports, band etc.)
- ___ Unsafe schools.
- ___ Poor parental and community involvement and support.
- ___ Other _____

Please turn the page over and answer the questions on the back

Please rate the learning environment at your child's school using the assigned scale:

8. The private school environment has better prepared my child for entrance into college.

1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

9. Students are made to feel welcome at the school my child attends.

1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

10. Student-teacher relationships

1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

11. Parent-teacher relationships

1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

12. Relationships among children attending the school

1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

13. Your overall satisfaction with the school's instructional program and services

1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

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