

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND
PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE MANDATE OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

By

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To Hampton Reynolds Duncan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress. The No Child Left Behind Act requires Adequate Yearly Progress measurements that target the performance and participation of identified student subgroups on statewide assessments in all public schools based on race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and English proficiency. (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2003).
ELL	English Language Learners. An educational term used to describe students who are in the process of learning English as a second language and often need additional services to achieve proficiency.
ESE	Exceptional Student Education. Exceptional student education refers to educating students whose physical or mental capacities fall above or below an established norm. Students may need additional services to address their individual needs.
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act. A 1965 law which authorizes federally funded state education programs. In 2002, ESEA was amended and reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act.
FCAT	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Florida's criterion-referenced tests in mathematics, reading, science, and writing, administered to students in Grades 3-11, which measure student progress toward meeting the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks (FLDOE, 2009b). It is sometimes referred to as FCAT SSS.
FTE	Full Time Equivalent Student. A funding formula for student for an 180 day term, required by Section 1011.60(2), F.S., at a rate of 5 hours per day of instructional time for Grades 4 through 12 students and at a rate of 4 hours per day of instructional time for Prekindergarten through Grade 3 students.
IDEA	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. A federal law which guarantees services to children with disabilities throughout the nation by governing how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2010).
LEA	Local Education Agency. The agency, usually a school board, designated as the public responsibility body for the disbursement of funds, educational policies, operation, maintenance, and order of the school district and the schools it manages.

NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act. Law containing changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which contains four education reform principles: holding schools accountable for results; providing states and districts flexibility in how they spend federal money; using scientific research to guide classroom practice; and involving parents by giving them information and choices about their children's education. (FLDOE, 2009b).
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress. A national assessment of what students know and can do in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b).
OSP	Opportunity Scholarship Program. Florida Statutes, Section 1002.38, requires that all students who were enrolled in a public school, or who are assigned to a public school that was designated by the Florida Department of Education with a state grade designation of "F" for the second year in a 4-year period, be given the opportunity to transfer to another school with a state grade designation of "C" or better (The Florida Senate, 2010).
SES	Socioeconomic Status. The economic and social ranking of an individual or family determined at the school level by the parents' financial qualifications for lunch services for free or at a reduced price. Supplemental Education Services is also referred to as SES in some literature, but for the purposes of this study it was not to alleviate confusion.

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STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND
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Choice is generally seen as a fundamental component of life in America. It comes as no surprise that over time many parents and politicians feel this privilege should also apply to the educational setting. Over the past 15 to 20 years, a great deal of research has been devoted to choice, focused primarily on methodology and ideology, as well as why and how parents choose their students' schools. But the research on the choice as it relates to educational outcomes has been sparse and inconclusive (Bell, 2009; Broccolichi & van Zanten, 2000; Densessen, Driessena, & Slegers, 2005; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin & Matland, 2000; Howell, 2006; Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007; Saporito, 2009; Tedin & Weiher, 2004; Theobald, 2005; Wolf, 2008). This dissertation examines the academic outcomes of students eligible for Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program under the choice provision of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The purpose of this study was to examine if differences exist between 10th grade achievement in reading and mathematics in a large urban school district for those students leaving their failing neighborhood school to attend an Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) school as compared with those who stayed at their neighborhood school. The study also attempted to identify the variation of supplemental academic

services for students enrolled in both the challenged neighborhood schools and the opportunity scholarship schools as self-reported in each school's School Improvement Plan.

The findings reveal that there was no significant difference in 10th grade reading or math FCAT gain scores between students who moved from an underperforming neighborhood school to a designated high performing OSP school and a matched control group of students who remained at the underperforming school. In addition, there was no significant difference in reading or math gain scores among students attending any of the five OSP schools. In charting the academic services of each school, it was found that, while all of the schools involved offered some of the same academic services based on self reporting through their annual School Improvement Plans, the challenged neighborhood schools offered more of the listed services.

The implication of finding no significant differences in reading and math gain scores for students participating in the choice program is in itself noteworthy because school choice is a foundational pillar of the NCLB Act. This study directs further research toward factors and interdependent relationships that may affect student achievement within various educational settings. This study adds to existing research regarding student achievement and school choice and informs federal, state and district policies for implementing school choice options. With recent remarks by both President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan (DOE, 2009; The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2010; Duncan, 2009) concerning the lack of results under the No Child Left Behind Act and the need for results-based reform, this study provides timely insight for educational reform at the state level for the Opportunity Scholarship Program and

the Florida Education Next Generation Plan and the impending reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act at the federal level.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Choice is generally seen as a fundamental component of life in America. It comes as no surprise that over time many parents and politicians feel this privilege should also apply to the educational setting. Over the past 15 to 20 years, a great deal of research has been devoted to choice focused primarily on methodology and ideology, as well as why and how parents choose an educational environment for their child. But research on the choice as it relates to educational outcomes has been sparse and inconclusive (Bell, 2009; Broccolichi & van Zanten, 2000; Densessen, Driessena, & Slegers, 2005; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin & Matland, 2000; Howell, 2006; Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007; Saporito, 2009; Tedin & Weiher, 2004; Theobald, 2005; Wolf, 2008). This dissertation examines the academic outcomes of students eligible for Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program under the choice provision of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to establish state assessments to determine if individual schools have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on the proficiency of all of their students. Individual states have the power to set the guidelines for AYP parameters, and thus, there is no national guide. However, the law impacts all schools who receive Title 1 funds. The Title 1 program allots federal dollars to Local Educational Agencies (LEA's) who fund schools with "high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards" (DOE, 2010, p.?). Those monies are allocated through a series of formulas that include the per student cost of education coupled with a state's census poverty estimates (DOE, 2010). To comply with NCLB, LEA's and schools that received Title 1 funds were required, beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, to offer a choice

option to students if their assigned school of origin failed to make AYP for two years in a four-year cycle, was included in either a first or second year school improvement plan as described by the state's corrective action, or in the planning stages for restructuring (DOE, 2010; Russo, 2005; FLDOE, 2003).

To meet this weighty challenge, school systems have created policies and procedures to match the spirit of the law with available resources. In some states, a selective choice system has evolved, while other states had already begun to implement choice options prior to the national mandate. Florida's highly-touted program, the A+ Accountability Plan, predated the NCLB Act by three years and was viewed as a forerunner for federal educational policies. "In many ways, the accountability program begun by Florida in 1999 was a precursor to the type of accountability systems that NCLB is now requiring states to implement. Thus, studying Florida's school and district responses to the provisions of the A+ Plan may yield important insights into what we should expect to see elsewhere" (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004, p. 599).

Florida initially crafted its plan to include vouchers, essentially tickets equal to the allocated cost of education, to allow students to seek educational options not offered at their home school. The vouchers, as originally envisioned, were redeemable at public or private schools, and constituted an "opportunity scholarship" scenario for students. While the voucher program was later struck down as unconstitutional and Florida amended its plan to include additional NCLB choice provisions, the plan is a forerunner for other state plans and under constant review and national scrutiny as a likely NCLB predictor of trends (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004). Specifically the plan in Florida, the Opportunity Scholarship Program, allows public school students assigned to schools

with a state designated grade of an “F,” or non-proficient, for two years out of a four year time frame to choose a public school with a state designation of proficient, a “C” school grade or better. Secondary students who evoke this right may remain at the chosen school until he or she graduates from high school even if their attendance area school does not remain low-performing (The Florida Senate, 2010c).

Statement of the Problem

While the NCLB act may be rooted in good intentions, it has been assailed by educational critics. Finn and Hess (2004) describe the No Child Left Behind Act as a “political football” that our public officials tout as “a wondrous advance or a malign mistake” (p. 34). They go further to describe the basic provisions of NCLB and all of the trappings that go with it i.e., supplemental educational services, choice option, corrective action and restructuring, as an unwieldy and complex machine yielding mixed results. The biggest sticking point with the law is not the theory that pressure on underperforming schools will cause them to improve or lose students to schools that do perform, but it is the lack of proof that such a move will work. Indeed, “the absence of empirical research that directly assesses whether schools are achieving the ultimate goal of leaving no child behind, particularly those students who have been historically underserved by the public education system,” was the basis for a special edition from the Harvard Education Review’s biopic on the law (Chrismer, Hodge & Santil, 2006, p. 459).

Similar conversations have echoed across the nation. One was led by Michael Casserly of the Council of Great City Schools, a coalition of the nation’s 66 largest urban school systems, who expressed his dissatisfaction with NCLB at the 2007 AIE/Fordham Conference by saying “NCLB’s toolkit, school choice, supplemental

education services, corrective action and restructuring,” has not shown the ability to accomplish the espoused goals and was “poorly designed to increase achievement” (p. 475), thus making NCLB a law of compliance rather than a law of results. At this same conference, Florida’s Education Commissioner, John Winn said that NCLB was flawed by design. By tying in NCLB compliance with Title 1 funding, the impetus of real change and focus took a backseat as states had no choice but to participate. (Bracey, 2007).

Sanders (2008) believes the act has potential failure points because it hinders many low-income students from receiving a higher level of education. He argues that this is due to the fact that it imposes sanctions on their home schools, creating a less than desirable situation for more qualified teachers. This deteriorates the educational environment at the neighborhood school, a school in which many of the students are unwilling to leave no matter the AYP or state-assigned grade.

However, some see NCLB’s choice provision as a solution to educational problems, including cost and efficiency, quality and effectiveness, and diversity. Outside of the education arena, the public is passive, but supportive of NCLB. This was shown in a 2007 poll of more than 1,500 Americans conducted by two research teams who were funded by Educational Testing Services (ETS). ETS found that 41% of the public felt favorable about NCLB and 43% were unfavorable, with many of the respondents indicating they had a limited knowledge about what the law was and what it was intended to do. As a comparison, 77% of teachers and 63% of administrators, who are more intimately acquainted with the law and its net effects, had a resolutely negative view of NCLB (ETS, 2007).

The foundation of choice theory rests on the thought that the ability to choose creates a market-like environment where academic competition and competency would produce benefits to all. It is seen as a mechanism for producing educational policy superior to what is seen as the current state of affairs. (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

If the goal of NCLB is to improve the outcome of disadvantaged students by improving a school's proficiency, one critical issue whether it is academically advantageous for a student to move to an opportunity-scholarship school or remain at a low-performing neighborhood school. Do opportunity schools provide students from under-achieving schools an education that results in measureable academic growth? Do low-performing schools continue to decline after students start leaving for opportunity schools?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine if differences exist between 10th grade achievement in reading and mathematics in a large urban school district for those students leaving their failing neighborhood school to attend an Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) school as compared with students who chose to stay at their neighborhood school. A secondary component of the study attempted to identify the variation of supplemental academic services for students enrolled in both the challenged neighborhood schools and the opportunity scholarship schools (OSP) for the qualifying time period. A large urban school district in Florida provided the sample schools and students for the study. This was an intentional decision, given the state's choice programs and national visibility in educational reform efforts.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

- Question 1: Are there differences in reading and math achievement for high school students who elect to transfer to an opportunity school and those who stay in a challenged neighborhood school?
- Question 2: Are there differences in reading and math achievement among high school students who transferred from a challenged neighborhood school to one of the five opportunity schools?
- Question 3: Do both opportunity scholarship schools and underachieving neighborhood schools in the same Florida urban district offer comparable supplemental academic programs?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the investigation of the first two research questions:

- Ho₁: There are no statistically significant differences in student reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SE in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.
- Ho₂: There are no statistically significant differences in student math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SE in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.
- Ho₃: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.
- Ho₄: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.
- Ho₅: There are no statistically significant differences in 10th grade student reading achievement gains of students who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in one of five opportunity scholarship schools, as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) assessment system.

- H_{06} : There are no statistically significant differences in 10th grade student mathematics achievement gains of students who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in one of five opportunity scholarship schools, as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) assessment system.

Definition of Terms

The development of No Child Left Behind choice options and school choice in general has taken a variety of forms from state to state and school system to school system. The assortment of choice initiatives has resulted in a multitude of terms associated with school choice. The following key terms are defined for common understanding in this study.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires Adequate Yearly Progress measurements that target the performance and participation of identified student subgroups on statewide assessments in all public schools based on race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and English proficiency (FLDOE, 2009b).

Attendance Area School. (Also known as a Base school or Neighborhood school) A student's school assignment, designated by the school system, based on the location of the student's home.

Charter schools. Publically funded schools autonomously run by a private entity and chartered by a governing body (Robelen, 2009).

Developmental Scale Score (DSS). "Developmental scale scores were introduced in 2002 to track student progress over time and across grade levels to indicate student "growth," or "learning gains" (FLDOE, 2003. p. 1).

English Language Learners (ELL). An educational term used to describe students who are in the process of learning English as a second language and often need additional services to achieve proficiency.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE). Exceptional student education refers to educating students whose physical or mental capacities fall above or below an established norm. Students may need additional services to address their individual needs.

Florida's A+ School Accountability System. Florida's school accountability system consisting of three major components: Yearly achievement of high standards in reading, mathematics, writing, and science; Annual learning gains in reading and mathematics; and Annual learning gains in reading and mathematics for the lowest 25% of students in each school (FLDOE, 2009b).

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Florida's criterion-referenced tests in mathematics, reading, science, and writing, administered to students in Grades 3-11, which measure student progress toward meeting the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks (FLDOE, 2009b).

Home Schooling. At home schools where students between the grades of kindergarten and 12th grade inclusive receive training and instruction for all or most of the day in their homes rather than attending school in a traditional setting (NCES, 2009a).

Magnet Schools. Schools, whose curriculum focuses on a special instructional interest, often designed to attract students to underutilized buildings or to increase ethnic diversity in a school.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Law containing changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which contains four education reform principles: accountability for districts based on student achievement; providing states and districts flexibility in how they spend federal money; using scientific research to guide classroom practice; and involving parents by giving them information and choices about their children's education (FLDOE, 2003).

Opportunity Scholarship Program School (OSP). Florida Statutes, Section 1002.38, requires that all students who were enrolled in a public school, or who are assigned to a public school that was designated by the Florida Department of Education with a state grade designation of "F" for the second year in a 4-year period, be given the opportunity to transfer to another school with a state grade designation of "C" or better (FLDOE, 2009c).

Private School. A school owned and operated by an individual or organization other than a public school system.

School Choice Parameters. The guidelines that allow students to move from school to school and defines who may move and/or where they may move.

School Grades. School grades are determined by the accumulation of percentage points for eight measures of achievement in addition to two other conditions. A school designation ranging from "A" to "F" based on the State of Florida's A+ Plan point scale (FLDOE, 2009b).

Socioeconomic Status (SES). The economic and social ranking of an individual or family determined at the school level by the parents' financial qualifications for lunch services for free or at a reduced price. Supplemental Education Services is also referred

to as SES in some literature, but for the purposes of this study it was not to alleviate confusion.

Voucher. A certificate or coupon presumably with a value equivalent to the cost of a student's education that can be used to help supplement tuition and/or placement in a private school other than one's attendance area school (Barrow & Rouse, 2008).

Year's Gain. (Also known as a Year's Growth) This measurement is defined by the State of Florida as a gain of 77 Developmental Scale Score points in reading and a gain of 48 Developmental Scale Score points in mathematics on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FLDOE, 2009b).

Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to the following conditions:

1. The data reported was delimited solely to 10th graders for the 2008-2009 school year from a single urban Florida district.
2. The study was delimited to the data offered by the research and evaluation department provided by the identified district of the participating schools.
3. The study was delimited to one standardized instrument, the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), in determining gain as defined by the state's guidelines.

Limitations of the Study

The following were limitations to the study:

1. The study was conducted in one urban school district in Florida. The results were not generalized to other districts or states in the United States.
2. The data were collected in reference to students identified as attending challenged schools and their opportunity to move to designated OSP schools. The results were not generalized in respect to other schools of choice or choice opportunities.
3. The supplemental services reported were gathered from those listed on each school's School Improvement Plan. The implementation or fidelity of these services was beyond the scope of this study.

CHAPTER 2 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP CHOICES IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Review of the Literature

The ability to choose, whatever the choice, is integral to a democratic society and to a free market economy. It conveys a fundamental sense of quality and variety, but choice also implies that there are options and that a sense of comparison exists between at least two ideas, concepts, or products (Association for Supervision and Curriculum, 1990, p. 1). Zhang and Cowen (2009) stated upfront in their research, as it related to NCLB, that expected educational outcome as it related to school choice is wanting. Dating back to the era of educational reformist Horace Mann, the alarm that students in affluent schools would receive an advantage that others were denied has been a persistent fear. Educator and legislator James G. Carver's writings in 1820 warned that the rise of private academies "would produce a dangerous social cleavage" (Messerli, 1965, p. 104).

In the arena of education, choices have been driven by popular demand and societal expectations from the very beginning. The first "public" school in America was established by Puritan settlers in 1635 in the home of a local schoolmaster in Boston, some eight years after the creation of a private school in 1628 in New York. The Boston public school was open to young men from various socio-economic backgrounds. Like schools of its time, this gender-segregated public-education platform served a perceived need and became the seed of what today has become our national education system, educating some of the country's pillars, including Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock (City of Boston, n.d.). The choice to attend school or remain homeschooled remained within a parent's purview until 1852, when Massachusetts

became the first state to pass compulsory school attendance laws. By 1918, all states had enacted laws that required children to attend a formalized school to receive an education (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2010). Choice still remained an option, but it came with a price that only the wealthy might well afford. “The dependence of private schools on tuition tends to limit private school enrollment to families who can afford it” (NCES, 2006, p. 6).

For the modern masses, school choice for the non-wealthy for the last several decades has been relegated to the post-secondary world: a student’s choice to attend a college, and beyond that, which one. Such a choice is often predicated on a number of factors, including, but not limited to price, location, and perceived value for the investment. As a point of historical irony, two pure “public” universities in America that vie for the “oldest” title, have charter dates in the late 1700s, which predate the embryonic public school system by two decades (Boney, 1984; Powell, 2010).

It is no surprise that parents are drawn to the concept of school “choice,” with its promise of power, freedom and options (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1990). But most school choice decisions today are restricted to a few choices within a parent’s purview. In fact, school choice is often a contributing factor in parents’ residential choices. A 1997 study by the National Center for Education Statistics found 39 percent of parents whose children attended assigned schools claimed their choice of residence was influenced by school-quality considerations (NCES, 1997). In a follow-up survey a decade later, based on information collected in four different studies, the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHESP), found that residential choices and other factors played into a parent’s school-choice

decisions. Of note, the NHESP's tally of 60,374 children over the decade-long survey period showed more non-white students attended their neighborhood school, even when choices were offered (NCES, 2006). Income considerations were factors in school attendance issues. As defined by adults living at 100% of the poverty level, the 2003 survey showed that of the 11,273 students identified, 78% of poor students and 77% of near-poor students attended an assigned public school and did not exercise, or have the option to exercise, a school-choice option (NCES, 2006). Where income might be a crucial factor, ethnicity did not appear to impact choice levels as much as education of the parental household. The agency's research showed that in 2003, black students were more likely to be enrolled in a "chosen" public school, than were white or Hispanic students. On a note of comparison in the 2003 data, only 14% of students whose parents both held post-secondary degrees or higher attended a public choice school, compared with 20% of students whose parents had a high-school diploma or less (NCES, 2006). At a classroom level, parents exercise their use of knowledge and social connections to secure certain teachers or programs for their children (Adnett & Davies, 2005; Cooley, 2006; Hadderman, 2002; Sugarman, 2004).

School-choice methods, such as magnet programs, voucher programs, charter schools, opt-out programs and home schooling, are all part of the national lexicon of choice as it is defined today. Coupled with government regulations to maintain a delicate equilibrium to achieve racial balance and equal opportunities, local educational agencies have a complex task before them in allocating school assets. The government's traditional ability to assign children to a particular school based on generic preset criteria, primarily by the way of traditional geography, further tips the scale of

influence in the favor of the parents. This shift in decision making is commonly accompanied by efforts to meet perceived needs to diversify the types of schools made available to children. While this promises to produce an amicable partnership, many political leaders who champion public education are worried about the inequitable effects choice could create, and continue to oppose giving parents the freedom to choose. The fear is choice reform may eventually dismantle the current educational system (Cooley, 2006; Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996).

A Historical Perspective of School Choice

School choice emerged as an educational strategy in response to the racial desegregation of public schools with the 1954 decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. Some saw an opportunity for choice applying to a select segment of the population, specifically black students, requiring little more to satisfy the ruling than a choice to decide between a two-tiered, racially separated system. Many southern segregationists touted this as a reasonable response to the court's intended freedom of choice (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996). The first magnet school created to reduce segregation was McCarver Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington founded in 1968, followed in Boston a year later. Only after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1973 that northern cities must also desegregate, did choice become a widespread alternative to mandatory desegregation (Wells, 1993).

Outside of being used as a way to avoid segregation of public schools, school choice has developed in political circles as an attempt to enable poor and working class families to challenge the regulatory nature of the educational bureaucracies. A National Center for Education Statistics survey showed that by the early 1990s private school choice was serving a narrower spectrum of income and minority groups than their public

school counterparts (1997). Over time the family-choice model has slowly and quietly become the mainstay of federal antipoverty initiatives (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996; Levin, 1991; Surgarman, 2004). A managed choice approach was used by many of the first-generation choice programs that were not under desegregation mandates. These programs envisioned proactive governance of choice, not the deliberately passive approach of allowing things to take their own course without intervention (Henig, 1996). Choice schools emerged in Cincinnati and Milwaukee later spreading to areas both in the North and South. Using strategies such as minimizing mandatory requirements and providing educational incentives, choice architects hoped to retain their rapidly fleeing middle-class white population as well as achieve desegregation outside of a court order (Wells, 1993). With attracting and retaining students in mind, a performing and visual arts school in Houston, Texas coined the term *magnet school* in the mid-1970s (Kafer, 2005).

As the interest in choice schools evolved, districts strived to become adept at identifying interest and monitoring enrollment in various programs, adding, expanding, or dropping programs as necessary to remain aligned with student and parent desires (Blank, Levine, & Steel, 1996). One might credit the utopian desire to address the social inequities of segregation coupled with an individual desire to obtain a quality education for one's child for giving rise to a number of choice programs and inventive solutions. While at one time this may have been true, in the new age of accountability, the focus has moved off of desegregation and onto academic results. Focus on educational quality, while touted in theory, plays a smaller part in the practice of choice, and therein lies the paradox. Henig (1996) suggests that in the absence of clear evidence of

academic benefit, both minority and nonminority parents used other criteria including convenience, informal communication, and concerns about social integration to determine school choice. Research indicates that in many instances the racial and ethnic composition of the student body skew parental preferences, rather than academic achievement accounting for the choice of schools as often reported (Cookson, 1994; Henig, 1996; Smith & Meier, 1995).

Although these are not necessarily racially determined, they are certainly racially influenced. A report from the Rand Institute supports this statement. “Most studies find that there is significant segregation between students, and the majority of the segregation is along race” (Mihaley, 2009, p. 7). The Rand study, which examines the theory known homophily wherein people prefer others who are similar to themselves along multiple dimensions, shows “there is significant evidence of homophily along racial, economic, and cultural lines, which lends support to the use of demographic composition as an instrument for network centrality” (p. 7). Mihaley states this bluntly: “descriptive evidence also indicates that simply redistributing students by race may not imply increased cross-racial interaction if students are choosing to self-segregate” (2009, p. 7).

The socioeconomic, or social-class, difference is another educational gap that emerges as an influencing factor in parental school choice. Much like a double-edged sword, school choice is credited to be both a viable solution to help eliminate this achievement gap and a contributing factor in maintaining and reinforcing social-class division and class inequities. It offers a student attending a school in a low socioeconomic school an opportunity to attend a more affluent school. It also allows

students to choose schools to flee a school that does not reflect their economic status (Parry, 1996; Taylor and Woollard, 2003; Tovey, 1995; Weiher & Tedin, 2006). But a more recent study by Zimmer, Gill, Booker, Lavertu, Sass, and Witte (2009) does not agree with these findings and unequivocally addresses this question by looking at seven large urban school districts that have magnet schools and eligible neighborhood school students that choose not to attend. “It does not appear that schools are systematically skimming high achieving students or dramatically affecting the racial mix of schools for transferring students. . . . nor does it create white enclaves” (Zimmer et al, 2009).

School Choice Options

Initially, choice schools were typically associated with desegregating plans, but their numbers have now expanded because of the appeal of choosing schools and the growing array of academic and arts offerings, regardless of the desegregation issue. To begin the choice process as it exists today, there must be an understanding of the types of options a district may be willing to offer and which selections, and for what reasons, parents may be willing to choose. Social policy experts Schneider, Marschall, Teske, and Roch (1998) state that parents must go into the process with open eyes and be able to articulate what they want in a school experience. They should monitor the performance of schools they consider viable choices. They should also have a realistic awareness that market-like reforms affect the school system as surely as a new retailer moving into town affects local businesses. “School choice is explicitly designed to shift power to parents, empowering them to shop around for the schools their children will attend” (Schneider et al, 1998). To do this, parents must realize that choices are prescribed by not only the demand, but by the supply of monies to meet such a need.

At a conference on choice and control in America, John Witte (1989) divided choice plans into two categories, those under parental influence and those under parental control. Parental influence is defined by interest and support of district-level choices. Magnet schools, controlled-choice schools, which have restrictions to maintain racial balance, and select private/alternative program schools receiving taxpayer funding are a few of these schools. These choice schools do not have to be stand alone entities. They can be schools that are separate schools, or units, within schools commonly known as schools-within-a-school, organized around a specialty such as the arts, the sciences, a traditional approach to the basics, or designed to meet students' special needs. Some schools, if specialized using specific vocational training or underlying educational structural support, are referred to as career academies or learning communities. This particular type of choice school, separate school identities within one school, was specifically conceptualized for urban schools to provide hope towards an educational future and a sense of belonging to at-risk students (Coffey & Pestridge, 2001). Coffey and Pestridge's description of these schools, as outlined in an Office of Juvenile Justice and Prevention bulletin, makes mention of academic benefits, but emphasizes that these sorts of schools are best at providing youth with an alternative to joining gangs, opening a pathway for students to align themselves with like-minded students seeking similar careers.

The second set of choice plans addressed by Witte (1989) was the choices made under parental control. This type of choice is defined by choices made directly under the parent's control such as vouchers and tuition tax credits when the parent is the chooser of the receiving school, rather than the district. Parents are allowed to use

public money to subsidize or supplement private school tuition. Outside of the public policy or public stimulus, parental control choice can be observed by the selection of where a parent chooses to live or by the private schools in which a parent chooses to enroll their student and is willing to pay out of their own pocket (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1990; Cooley, 2006).

Jeffery R. Henig (1996) suggests that there exist general assumptions about the reasons that families base their decisions on and about the range of incentives that public officials can devise and maintain based on their perceptions of the parents' interests. He asserts that the selection of a choice program falls under one of these three discernible perceptions. The first view is one of racial neutrality. This notion is founded on the premise that the parental choice dictates enrollment rather than by segregated patterns of where people live, thus resulting in natural integration. This view values parental preference and devalues the effect of housing patterns. Racial separation, another view, supports the idea that preference for different types of schools may vary across ethnic groups and that individuals may prefer to associate with individuals that mirror their own race or culture. This is not racial segregation which implies forced, objectionable separation by a controlling body, but rather self selection. The third is a managed choice which incorporates some of the characteristics of both racial neutrality and racial separation. In this, districts provide resources and programs based on perceived preferences, giving families the freedom of choice, and place these offerings in locations that attract students so that racial balance may be achieved. Magnet schools are one type of school that falls under this description. The more responsive families are to variations in a district's program offerings, the easier it is for

officials to channel them in the desired district directions, which are mindful of academic programming and racial balance (Henig, 1996; Mihaly, 2009).

Henig's (1996) research says that racial separation that results from free choice, based on racial neutrality, separation or managed choice, is not legally objectionable hence, it does not violate the public interest in racial equality. Simply put, a school that becomes nearly all one race because the residents within the attendance zone chose to live there or that others chose to leave that designated school area for an educational opportunity elsewhere is not against the law. Ratner (2005) points out that this concept is open to the greatest area of debate when considering school impact. In a Hooks' Institute position paper, Ratner suggests that opponents of choice assignments fear choices such as these would impact urban schools the most. Such a choice scenario would allow parents to flee struggling inner-city schools, "thus leaving the inner-city schools in the same condition with the same racial isolation for those left behind" (Ratner, 2005, p. 10). The assumption is that parents would not choose to remain in the inner-city schools. In some cases, however, this is untroubling to parents. Researchers have data that shows that in some cases parents consider the racial/ethnic composition of their student body, rather than academic performance, as a factor motivating their school choice. This implies that many would remain in a local area school rather than choose to go elsewhere (Henig, 1996).

Private Schools

Private schools are by definition schools of choice. They are created by and operated by individuals or organizational structures outside of the public school system. Parents choose private schools based on personal priorities such as religious beliefs, convenience, and academic expectations and pay tuition to attend. Types of these

schools include parochial, religious, denominational, for-profit or nonprofit (The Florida Senate, 2010b). Those with the means to select a private school setting are not limited to public school assignments. Those without the means are limited in their choice and are relegated to attend the school designated by their school board. With the advent of vouchers, this is changing.

Vouchers are the equivalent of an educational coupon, funded by the taxpayers, which is redeemable for student enrollment at the voucher school of the parents' choice. The thought is that schools, both public and private, would compete for students. Milton Friedman, an economist at the University of Chicago, was the first modern scholar to advocate a voucher program that would use public money to fund private schools. He was a strong supporter for the fair market ideology believing that competition would create variety and flexibility (Cooley, 2006). Based on microeconomic beliefs that competition will give consumers greater selection and better products, voucher supporters believe that competing for students would increase the quality of both public and private schools. Opponents believe that this type of competition further divides students by race and social class.

Wolf (2008) asserts that politicians are a little more altruistic in thought. He believes they want to know three things. Do established voucher programs serve disadvantaged students? Do parents like the voucher systems they are participating in? Finally, do the students attending voucher private schools benefit academically from these programs? The results in the literature do not give a clear answer to those questions. A report prepared by Metcalf, Boone, Stacey, and Legan (2001) concluded that students who attended private schools scored lower on all measures of

achievement than other public school students. Yet, Wolf's (2008) examination of multiple studies found that the 12 voucher programs evaluated served disadvantaged populations of students, increased parental satisfaction, and improved test scores for at least some of the voucher students. "The random assignment studies of actual school voucher programs in the United States indicate that they have consistently large positive effects on parental satisfaction with schools and smaller and less consistent effects, but always positive, on student test scores" (Wolf, 2008, p. 434). Frequently the achievement results often did not show any student gains the first year, and occasionally not even in the second or third years, of attending the vouchered school. This led Wolf to conclude that the effect of participating in a voucher program on student achievement could be potentially positive; however, achievement gains are not statistically significant for *all* students participating in *all* of the voucher studies and they tend to require several years to show measurable growth (2008). As a point of proof, in 2000 Harvard University report funded by the Program on Education Policy and Governance, said that from a racial perspective, vouchers were particularly important to African Americans who used them to transfer from public schools to private schools. Howell's research said that those students scored "moderately large test score gains after two years" (Howell, Wolf, Peterson, & Campbell, 2000, p. 2).

Home Schools

Home schooling represents a completion of the educational circle that the nation started with more than two centuries ago. In plain terms, students are educated at home by their parents. Nationally, nearly 2 million students are homeschooled annually (Bauman, 2001), with the numbers growing by a ratio of 15% to 20% yearly. Homeschooling in its current form was formally established in the 1970's based around

two basic groups of home school constituents. One group sought freedom from religiously objectionable practice in traditional secular schools, such as the teaching of evolution; the other sought academic superiority. Joined in practice, although not necessarily linked in belief, the two groups worked together to establish a political stronghold in the school choice world, overcoming the districts' propensity to label homeschoolers as truant under compulsory education laws. Supporters formed legal and lobbying networks and changed the law. As a result, by 1993, all 50 states had legalized homeschooling, a turnaround from a 30-state ban on such a practice in 1980 (Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2008). With such support, Congress exempted homeschooled students from provisions required in the NCLB Act (Isenberg, 2007). As noted by the Census Bureau researchers, "Home schooling is a more radical departure from traditional education, it affects more schools, and it forces numerous adjustments to current curricular practices" (Bauman, 2001, Organizational changes, ¶ 1). The bureau counts laws in at least seven states that permit home schooled students to participate in sports, music and other extracurricular activities at their home school. In Florida and Iowa, schools also allow home schoolers to take individual courses (Bauman, 2001).

The biggest barrier for researchers concerning home schooled students is the lack of data. Data is generally limited to the number of students enrolled in home schools, based on census data and surveys. Achievement data is scarce. Many students, from both home schools and public school, take the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) but it is a self-selected group, driven by economic considerations, which creates limited data. At least one state, New Hampshire, is questioning the achievements made by home-

school students, and one legislator citing that a lack of data creates a false sense of gain without proof. New Hampshire Education Committee chairman Emma Rous said in a statement quoted by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) who solicits support of home schooling programs as a viable choice, programs should be closely scrutinized. “We don’t have any data, and how much do superintendents have to go on to make that judgment, to determine when programs ought to be put on probation. And we have abundant anecdotal evidence of problems. I sincerely question the statement about no problems. People are using the system to drop out and to hide” (HSLDA, 2009, ¶ 7). The National Center for Education Statistics (2009a) reports that parents have different reasons for homeschooling their children, but 36% reported in a 2007 that chief among these is a desire to provide religious or moral instruction. Students that are in home schools at a younger age often return to a traditional or private school before they are ready to take the SAT, making measurement of the home-school outcomes even more difficult.

Despite the limited demographic and academic achievement data, some facts are known about homeschoolers. They frequently use public schools or other educational entities for part of their program. The households of homeschoolers seem to be better educated, more affluent, and whiter than the area in which they live. The better educated the mother; the more likely the decision to home school will be made. The mother tends to be the education caregiver (Apple, 2007; Isenberg, 2007).

Charter Schools

Charter schools are the more recent additions to the school choice arena and are the most prevalent type of school choice with a national average of 239 students on waiting lists (Center for Education Reform, 2010). The concept of charter schooling

began in 1991 under a reform umbrella approved by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) as an experiment. The idea was simple: use public funds to form an innovative learning institution without traditional layers of school bureaucracy. Mindful of being good stewards of taxpayer money, states were slow to approve charters, but the movement has taken hold with some success. As of 2009, more than 4,700 charter schools in 40 states were in operation, serving 1.2 million students (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes, 2009).

Charter schools do have to answer to some authority. To qualify for some of the \$1.8 billion in start-up money that the federal government has provided, in addition to \$320 million in facilities funding, operators must apply to a governing body, state or local, to receive a charter (FLDOE, 2009a). The objective of these schools of choice is to be able to meet students' needs by being unfettered by state educational regulations. This autonomy is believed to allow them to be more innovative in their approach to meeting the needs of their students (Cooley, 2006). Charters allow for the market-like apparatus choice advocates desire with some of the intervening accountability public school supporters felt are missing in the voucher-choice model. Simply put, their role is to provide competition against other schools, both public and privately-funded (FLDOE, 2009a). Students in charter schools are required to take state-mandated exams unlike private and home-school students. These schools may be as innovative as they would like, but must, in the end, show results. In concept, these schools are expected to create a new model of superior academic success that can be replicated for others to follow. As one might imagine, some are successful in posting academic gains, others are not (FLDOE, 2009a). To that end, the DOE is pushing charter schools to do more to

in the realm of student achievement. In their 2009 National Charter School Policy Forum report, DOE said that the failure of some charter schools and those with low performance grades should not come as a complete surprise. “We believe that charter schools can do much better, fulfilling their promise as an engine of educational innovation and quality” (DOE, 2009).

How students in these choice schools are faring academically is measured on many scales. Getzinger (2004) reported that an analysis of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed students in charter schools are not performing as well as other public schools students. The NAEP is a test that is a product of NCLB, it functions as the nation’s report card, giving legislators a snapshot of student achievement across many sectors (NCES, 2009b). In the most recent and in-depth longitudinal study, the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University published a 2009 report that backed up Getzinger’s (2004) analysis using updated NAPE data, while providing some spotlights on achievement. The study reports that 17% of charter schools produce superior education for their students, as measured in assessment gains, but nearly half of all students perform at about the same level as their peers in traditional public schools. Troubling, however, is CREDO’s findings that 37% of charter schools deliver results that are “significantly worse” than the student would have realized in public schools. Of particular note, family backgrounds seem to make a difference. African Americans and Hispanics had “significantly worse” learning gains, especially in reading. From an economic angle, the study found that students from poverty backgrounds had better gains. The best results reported in the study came from elementary charter schools, while high schools and multi-level schools

had the worst achievement rates. As a caveat, the report says that across the board, the first year in a charter school generates diminished academic returns, but over time, the results show that students do improve (CREDO, 2009).

In addition to poor academic performance, charter schools have been plagued with a reputation of having financial problems, mismanagement, and low student enrollment. Robelen (2009) reports that nearly 13% of the charter schools that opened since 1992 have closed their doors. Yet, even with those considerations, CREDO (2009) reports a national waiting list of 1.2 million children waiting to get into charter schools. The DOE policy report (2009) says that this should not be considered in the context of failure as educators traditionally define it, but rather with an eye towards a business venture that might have been a good idea, but perhaps wasn't fully supported, maintained, or market conditions unfavorably changed. The report said, "Not all new or exciting charter models will succeed in improving student performance. In the long run, not all will become replication worthy. But, some schools will succeed, and expanding the pipeline of those models is necessary to better serve America's school children" and more broadly serve public education (DOE, 2009). In short, charter schools have the room to fail without stigma because they are considered an evolutionary product; traditional public schools, and specifically opportunity schools, do not have that luxury.

Magnet Schools

Magnet schools, a version of managed school choice, are public schools that provide incentives to parents and students through curricular themes, specialized areas of interest, or focused instruction methods. They are not bound by conventional attendance areas that are developed through geographical or political conditions, such as voting zones (Lieberman, 1990; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). Magnet schools are

typically found in urban school districts with large student enrollments, but are being established in more and more school systems in an attempt to improve scholastic standards, promote diversity in race and income, and provide a range of programs to satisfy individual talents and interests.

Although not the rule, there are choice plans in which parents choose from among schools that offer essentially the same program or approach to instruction. But more often than not, as described earlier, their appeal is based on the differences they offer, programmatic or pedagogical, from other public schools. The most common type of magnet school is one that emphasizes a particular subject, such as math and science, computers and technology, the arts, or a world language. Following subject matter, in terms of popularity, are programs that offer a unique curriculum and instructional approach (Lieberman, 1990; Blank, 1989; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). Blank (1989) noted that urban magnet schools are frequently re-made schools that were once in a racially isolated area. The renovation of these schools started with a curricular overhaul tied to a theme to attract a racially and socioeconomically diverse population based on common interests instead of geography.

As previously noted, magnet schools began in the 1970s, but quickly gained popularity. By the early 1980s, one-third of the U.S.'s largest school districts reported the creation of magnet schools (Blank, 1989). Many more students are part of magnet schools today. The Common Core of Data survey, as reported by the Department of Education, shows that there are 2,716 magnet schools in the United States, serving 2,055,476 students in the 2007-2008 school year (NCES, 2009c). DOE reports in its magnet literature that the special curriculum of a magnet school attracts substantial

numbers of students from different social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds and provides greater opportunities for voluntary and court-ordered desegregation efforts to succeed (DOE, 2010). Desegregation gives way to parental choice and innovation focused on high interest, motivating instruction as well as market place competition, and school-site autonomy as primary defining characteristics of a magnet school. Districts looking to build and maintain magnets have embraced the realization that the survival of magnets depends on reaching and serving diverse populations while sustaining the satisfaction and support of their parents (Black, 1996; Blank, Levine, & Steel, 1996; Metz, 1990).

Districts that use a magnet school system often place the description of their schools in one of two categories, magnet schools or non-magnet schools. Based on traditional configurations, non-magnet schools comprise neighborhood schools, or the attendance zone schools, in which children are assigned according to a district geographically designated assignment plan (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). Magnet schools may consider geography as a priority in selection but the end result of assignments often provide for racial balance and attractive opportunities for students.

Magnet plans can further be placed in one of two sub-categories. The better known magnet configuration, the magnet-voluntary plan, is one in which selection is through voluntary transfer, by relying on parental choice motivated by incentives, such as specialized academic offerings. These plans are at times characterized racially by voluntary white transfers to magnet schools placed in minority neighborhoods and voluntary minority transfers to white schools. Some district used this form of special assignment under a majority-to-minority transfer program (Rossell, 1990). As an

example, Student A, who attends a primarily white school can transfer to a school where the student will be a minority, even if it is outside of his school boundary lines for transportation purposes. Many of these plans also include redrawing of contiguous attendance zones to maximize desegregation. There are checks and balances in the system. In the scenario listed above, negative incentives are provided in the form of racial controls on transfers. If Student A's request does not enhance desegregation at the receiving and or the sending school, it can be denied. Rossell's (1990) research also describes a magnet-mandatory plan. Although it contains the name of magnet, it is one in which desegregation is primarily accomplished through mandatory assignment of students to a school whose majority population is a race other than the students' race. In this scenario, Student B's school is his neighborhood school but he is assigned to another school in a prescriptive manner that addresses race and residence.

An unbiased selection, or lottery, as considered by popular definition, may not be a blind and random drawing for slots in magnet school cases. Enrollments often are regulated by district policy to ensure a racially balanced student population. In addition, although magnet assignments may be assigned in an unbiased selection process, some magnet schools have themes and academic requirements such that it is undesirable to apply or demands so great that the likelihood of selection is remote. The DOE has taken note and praised school districts which have adopted a weighted lottery to give minority and poorer students an edge when applying to maintain the desired racial equity (DOE, 2004a). If a student is not selected under this process or does not qualify to apply to be considered, the student is assigned to a district designated school. In this scenario, parents unhappy with that decision have little recourse. A family's only choice option if

he were dissatisfied with his assignment would be to exit the school system for private school at their own expense (Rossell, 1990; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999).

Magnet schools represent a fundamental shift in how public school districts are organized. The extent to which they offer real choice to parents and learning gains to children depends on the district's commitment to choice and an individual magnet's institutional characteristics (Blank, Levine, & Steel, 1996).

Characteristics of Choosers

In a perfect world, choice programs would emerge from school restructuring creating a system which offers a banquet of quality options from which all students could choose. In this nirvana, all families would be fully informed of their options, and every participant would have both physical and cultural access to their school of choice (Bastian, 1990). In the real world, such equity does not exist. This is perplexing, frustrating and bewildering in a system that seems to offer a plethora of choice programs. That strange imbalance has provoked many researchers to ask the hard question: If these choice programs are so attractive and structured to provide the best opportunities to those who can least afford it, why aren't more targeted families choosing the "best" education venue? The research indicates that "best" is in the eye of the beholder (Mihaley, 2009). Furthermore, those who need the information about such programs the most, are the least likely to receive it or act on it (Education Sector, 2010).

In a pointed example of how this plays out in the real-world, researchers Cuero, Rodriguez-Galindo, and Worthy (2008) gathered information on poverty-stricken Mexican descent students in a southwestern school. The study followed several students but gave particular focus to three Latina girls who were being encouraged by their mentor and teacher to attend a magnet school across town to increase their

educational experience. Two of the students were selected to attend the math-and-science magnet school based on their applications, while the third student received conditional admission. Cuero (2008) and her research team found that the girls did not openly embrace the opportunity to go to a specialized school, and neither did their parents. Their reluctance was multi-layered and stemmed from a desire to remain close to a set of peers who spoke the same language and shared the same cultural values to real parental concerns of being able to “get” to their student at a cross-town school. Cuero’s (2008) research also showed that fears and rumors that magnet schools were harder caused anxiety for the girls who had found a comfort level with their mostly bilingual teachers and friends.

Rossell (1990) notes that the families that are least likely to exercise their rights to choose are many times those families that are constrained by income or discrimination of some type. While a true litmus test of choice programs should be that they serve the instructional needs and academic interests of poor and minority children, public policy analysts challenge that the litmus test should be whether or not the program offered is one that parents of poor and minority students have sufficient access to attend and also choose to do so. To balance the perceived economic inequity, the best test of a choice proposal should be evaluated in terms of their effects on those least able to exercise educational choice (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999; Cooley, 2006; Gant, 2006; Weiher & Tedin, 2006; Sugarman, 2004). “The importance of spatial dimensions of geography should not be underestimated; they create real logistical constraints that make it impossible for parents to mediate” (Bell, 2007, p. 378).

Critics of school-choice plans often point to the issue of access to information as one of the major sources of inequity under magnet school programs. These analysts suggest that economically disadvantaged families do not have adequate access to information, may not be aware of their options for choice, and may not have the formal and informal networks to learn about alternatives (Moore & Davenport, 1989). Unfortunately, results suggest that the context of parental decision-making is more complex than a singular, individual rational act.

In order to understand some motivations of decision-making, and human behavior, social scientists have coined the term Rational Choice Theory. Under such a theory, a person balances costs against benefits of any decision before taking any action. A key component of this theory assumes that the consideration of alternatives occurs with accurate and adequate information (Green, 2002). In school choice perspective, this would mean that parents and students look at all of the pros and cons before choosing to attend a choice program, including academic outcomes. The availability of resources that lower-income parents can access to make informed decisions regarding which choice programs may be academically beneficial for their children are smaller than the ones available to middle-class parents as a consequence of the relationship between class structures defined by employment, education, income, and social networks (Smrekar, 1996). Providing information that is both accessible to and understandable by all parents is a key component of equity when we look at parental choice. While informational equity is a tricky objective to meet, it is essential that school districts act in good faith to reach the highest numbers of parents and students who could best be served by choices. This access to information would allow all parents, not just the most

sophisticated or well-educated, to make informed decisions about where their children will go to school, and can be provided by a variety of methods, not limited to letters, television and advertising, school-information campaigns and old-fashioned fliers (Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan, 2006).

Choice advocates aggressively recast the debate to focus on improving the quality of schools insisting that allowing individuals greater freedom to pursue personal values need not undermine the social commitment to racial integration (Cinchy, 1985; Glazer, 1987). But many see school choice as a not-so-new, not-so-improved method of student sorting, in which schools or districts judiciously choose programs that will ultimately attract desirable students, leaving others behind. In this sorting process, socially undesirable or historically underperforming students would have limited opportunities to participate in oversubscribed, desirable programs. Underserved at-risk students such as “black and Hispanic students, low-income students, low achieving students, students with attendance and behavior problems, handicapped students, and limited-English proficiency students” are then concentrated in schools which “characteristically exhibited low levels of expectations for their students, deplorable levels of course failure and retention, and extremely low levels of graduation and basic skill achievement” (Moore & Davenport, 1989, p. 13). But the reasons for that concentration are stratified. Bell (2007) found that even if poor and minority parents had the social networks presumably available to more affluent parents, for instance if the parent needed a ride to pick their child up due to illness, they are turned off of the school choice option that moves them out of the local neighborhoods, no matter the quality of the school. “Even if appropriate networks existed, parents uncomfortable with

asking for help, for whatever reasons, tended to prefer schools closer to home or work” (p. 358).

The desire to reducing student attrition while raising academic achievement and school satisfaction is the basis of the growing support for choice programs. But by matching students’ talents, interest, and family background, choice proponents claim that schools will raise achievement and increase parental satisfaction. An issue not raised is that there may be evidence that suggests that students disadvantaged by prejudices or economic status, may be harmed by school choice. The Carnegie Foundation’s 1992 report on school choice concluded that there exists a selection pattern bias in choice programs that favor upper socioeconomic families. Studies indicate that parents with a higher level of education are more likely to select schools based on the proposed academic quality while parents whose income falls in the lower socioeconomic levels are less likely to select schools based on academic indicators (Archbald, 1988; Moore & Davenport, 1990; Nault & Uchitelle, 1982).

Researchers have looked at the characteristics of who makes the choice and determined that the mother’s education level, coupled with high parental educational expectations and the student’s past academic performance comprise the key factors in deciding whether to enter the choice programs (Martinez, Godwin, & Kemerer, 1996). Critics of choice school programs charge that choice schools can exacerbate existing class or socioeconomic cleavages, especially when the choice schools are academically selective and few in numbers. They assert that middle-class parents are more motivated and more informed regarding the availability of educational options, while lower-income parents opt for or otherwise end-up in conventional attendance area

schools with no specialized offerings and fewer resources. Policy experts assert that choice schools tend to attract more academically motivated students with higher skill sets, more involved parents as well as more effective and innovative teachers, resulting in diminished educational opportunities, such as less rigorous curricula, lower expectations by teachers, and different school climates, for non-choice schools. This is commonly referred to as creaming off, alluding to the practice of skimming the cream off the top of a barrel (Moore & Davenport, 1989).

Social and racial makeup of a school's student body is also a determining factor. Parents often seek schools whose social class and achievement level mirrors their own so that they will be a part of the highest social class and achievement level (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). But some do seek schools outside of their neighborhoods. Ironically, white parents have proven to be more likely than ethnic minority parents to choose magnets within the framework of a mandatory desegregation plan (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996). The research suggest that when white parents opt for voluntary choice which places their children in black neighborhoods, their socioeconomic class tends to be at a higher level than those who opt not to move. Those volunteering to move appear to be attracted to student-centered, nontraditional teaching styles. They are also enticed to move if the district dedicates additional resources or offers unique curriculum. Perception of a good academic program appears to attract higher income choosers, both white and African-American. Other studies show that lower-income parents are more likely to choose schools closer to home. Several researches purport that white parents can be enticed to move to schools placed in predominately minority or urban neighborhoods given that the programs are uniquely designed or offer special

curriculum, nontraditional instructional styles are available, additional resources are dedicated towards the program, court backed admission procedures are in place, or the current system is threatened by mandatory desegregation procedures (Henig, 1996; Rossell, 1990; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999).

Alice Armstrong (2010) speaks to the difficulty created by mobility in her article concerning poverty. "They lose continuity of studies, relationships, and routines, and often fall behind in the curriculum" (p. 50). But what of students whose mobility is caused by school choice? Are there socialization issues associated with moving from a low performing school to a high performing school? In an earlier research study, Wright (1999) found this mobility to be a subordinate factor in student achievement. "When examined with multiple-regression procedures, however, the practical importance of mobility recedes. Although it appears consistently as a significant predictor, mobility is generally subordinate in magnitude to other factors such as ethnicity, family income, and (in one comparison) gender" (p. 352).

Political Outlook on School Choice

Joseph Viteritti's observation that "in the end, choice constitutes good public policy because it is fair, not because its effects are measurable by academicians" (1998, p. 427) shows that political choice is often a social remedy, not an academic one. Yet the measure of choice, discussed earlier as the litmus test of choice proposals, must be whether they serve the educational needs and interests of poor and minority children. While the reference of interests could be construed as social, the reference to educational needs cannot be. The only way to educational needs would be by academic measures. But that is easier said than done. Carl Krueger and Todd Ziebarth (2002) in their examination of the impact of No Child Left Behind and school

choice found, “Magnet schools, open enrollment programs and charter schools attract different segments of the student population, and their attempts to provide disadvantaged students with greater education options have produced mixed results” (p. 2). Echoing this, Fuller (1999) noted that choosing between schools is an imprecise decision. The picture presented is not clear due to the fact that the information provided to parents so that they may adequately assess schools is scarce; that the cost of alternative schools are variable and subsidized with unfair financing creating a false impression; that local schools seldom seek to learn from the information gathered from choice research available; and, most importantly, often evidence on student achievement is scarce and mixed. Yet, pressures for choice in American education are deeply rooted and are here to stay (University of Oregon, 2002). These vague findings may have been the very things that pressed President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan to raise the issue of student achievement back to the forefront, announcing even more teeth for NCLB, or a hybrid of it, since there is a feeling that the law is long overdue for reauthorization (Duncan, 2009). The belief that retooling NCLB will allow some of the theories that didn’t work to now hit the cutting room floor is a noble one.

The President’s message may contain more muscle as it relates to controlled choice. Political conservatives embraced a choice remedy seeking to improve the quality of local schools and advance the cultural and political homogeneity of particular communities. Advocates felt that choice schools could strengthen the educational program in those schools, contributing to overall improvements in educational quality (Blank, Levine, & Steel, 1996; Levin, 1991). Some political advocates of choice argue

that choice schools attract students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds with similar educational interest, provide unique sets of learning opportunities, and encourage innovation. In other words, choice schools are viewed as an effective way to enhance diversity and equity among schools, increase educational quality in a school district, and stabilize enrollments (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). Some use choice as a political educational platform touting educational equity. In *The Urban Review*, Houseman and Goldring (2000) noted choice school parents choose schools for a wide array of reasons and are highly satisfied with their chosen schools.

But in the midst of politics, educators must implement policies that not only benefit individual students but also ensure that our schools represent the broad, democratic interest of our society as a whole. While choice may be one factor in the achievement of these goals, it alone does not guarantee quality schools for all students. (Lieberman, 1990). A study by Judith Poppell and Sally Hague (2001) in Jacksonville, Florida on the overall effectiveness of the district's magnet schools showed the program was a positive one. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Seattle, their paper publicized the magnet program as an obvious success, yet did not address the overall effects of the magnet programs on the district as a whole, just the effects on the choosing participants. Duval County's program was also highlighted by the DOE as an example of a program that works, particularly in the realm of choices to minority and poor students, without citing specific academic gains (DOE, 2004b).

Are these portrayals only half of the story? In the race to gain the political edge by announcing educational reform are there other effects that are also overlooked? Racial

balance may be achieved but the socioeconomic equality may be deceptive. Too many times learning opportunities and innovative techniques appear to be limited to the choice programs without enriching all of the educational programs in a given district. A study of Omaha and Iowa experiences (McKinney, 1996) showed that their respective plans resulted in an increased financial inequality among schools and school districts. The Brookings Institutes' report from the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2003) advocates that school choice should be "reviewed in light of the core value of public education: that all children should be thoroughly educated so that they may pursue their own dreams and contribute to a democratic, egalitarian, and prosperous American society" (p. 20). The lenses the Brookings Institute established to measure choice outcomes are "four potential outcomes derived from that goal: benefits to children whose parents exercise choice; benefits (or at least absence of harm) to families that do not exercise choice; continued pursuit of our national commitment to equal opportunity and desegregated schools; and advancement of common democratic values and social cohesion (p. 20). They found that evidence of benefit for both the choosers and the non-choosers was mixed and further inquiry was needed to ascertain whether or not choice programs truly serve the interest and educational needs of all children especially on those that are poor and minority. Interestingly enough with all of the conflicting literature on the subject, under the prompting of Sen. John Glenn, D-Ohio, federal support for school choice in the form of magnet schools was added to Congress's desegregation assistance program (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996. p. 5).

NCLB and Florida's Choice Component

The No Child Left Behind Act requires states to establish state assessments to determine if individual schools have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on

the proficiency of all of their students. Students attending a school that has failed to make AYP for two years in a four-year cycle have the option to transfer to a higher performing public school within the school system. Students attending a school that has failed for three years are entitled to supplemental educational services (FLDOE, 2003; Howell, 2006; Russo, 2005). Such services can include free tutoring, additional classes on Saturdays, and after-school academic support (DOE, 2010).

Florida's accountability system, the A+ Plan, gives schools individual grades ranging from A to F. While not exclusively tied to just one measure, these grades are largely based on student scores on the state test, Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), in grades 3 through 11. Students are measured on reading, mathematics, writing in grades 5, 8, and 10, as well as science in grades 8 and 11. The state looks at student proficiency, as well as student gains, and subgroups the lowest 25% for gains in both reading and mathematics. Once data is collected, it is measured by the Florida Department of Education in context with other criteria, including, but not limited to graduation rates. The final measure is a point system by which schools receive their grades much like a student receives a grade in a course (FLDOE, 2009b). Schools that receive an A, or have shown a letter gain, receive bonus funding. Subsequently, schools deemed as low performing and designated as D or F schools, have increased oversight. Staying within NCLB guidelines, schools that are deemed F schools for two years within the four year period must offer students a choice option (FLDOE, 2009c).

Florida's choice option is referred to as the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). This program allows public school students assigned to schools consistently showing poor performance to move to another school. Such a non-performing school

must receive a state designated grade of F, or non-proficient, for two or more years out of four. After such a designation choices beyond the base school are available and include an inner-district transfer to a school with a grade of C or higher, if space is available. The district provides transportation for the student opting to move, but it can approve out-of-county transfers if the parent requests that option and space is available at the requested school. Transportation responsibilities for out-of-county choices remain with the parent. Under the choice provisions currently in effect, a high school student who has elected to move may remain in the chosen school until he graduates from high school, regardless of his home school's progress (FLDOE, 2009c).

Initially, the state offered vouchers to students as a choice if their school was deemed non-performing, but as previously detailed, vouchers have since been ruled unconstitutional by Florida's Supreme Court decision in 2006. Even without vouchers, Greene and Winters (2003) note that the theory behind Florida's A+ Program is that chronically failing public schools will have an incentive to improve beyond perceived altruistic motivations and public-servant responsibilities to the student. In short, if they want to keep the money that each student brings with him in the form of per-pupil funding, they must academically perform (Greene & Winters, 2003).

The studies of Barrow and Rouse (2008), Rouse, Hannaway, Goldhaber, and Figlio (2007) and Chiang (2008) looked at the increase in achievement of students within the low-performing schools. Greene and Winters (2003) found similar results while examining the achievement of students under Florida's A+ program. Overall, researchers found that the test scores of the student in the failing schools demonstrated gain. They concluded that the schools responded to receiving a failing grade in an

educationally meaningful way. They stop short at identifying the competition of school choice alone as the impetus for the gains. They did not see gains made by students choosing to move to higher performing schools.

School Supplemental Academic Services

One of the tenets of NCLB is the provision for supplemental educational services that provides additional services to students in academic trouble enrolled in low performing Title 1 schools. These supplemental services can be provided through for-profit organizations, nonprofit organizations, organizations with or without religious affiliations, and the district or other public entities (Ascher, 2006). Florida's OSP, which addresses school choice and low performing schools, without Title 1 consideration, is silent concerning supplemental educational services. The Florida Department of Education does address low performing student services through its Differentiated Accountability (DA) model, which is required for all low performing schools. Florida's Differentiated Accountability website states, "Florida's DA plan streamlines the federal and state accountability systems and directs increasing school wide interventions and school and district accountability based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and school grade. This program allows FDOE to operate a new tiered approach to working directly with schools to increase student achievement" (FLDOE, 2006).

Within the DA model, a Response to Intervention (RtI) process is used to provide evidence based instruction and intervention matched to student needs. "There are two overarching goals of RtI. The first is to deliver evidence-based interventions and the second is to use students' response to those interventions as a basis for determining instructional needs and intensity" (Florida Center for Interactive Media, n.d.). Broad-based initiative such as Florida's Continuous Improvement Model (FCIM), Differentiated

Instruction, and Reading First are incorporated within Rtl's purview. To further address student needs under Differentiated Accountability and Rtl, districts and schools have adopted a number of supplemental services such as Scholastic's READ 180, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Fast ForWord, and Compass Odyssey.

Florida's initiatives, most established before the adoption of DA and Rtl, shared common essentials but were implemented within varying offices within Florida's Department of Education. Rtl allowed them to work in concert, supporting one common goal, hence no longer working as parallel enterprises. FCIM is a quality-based approach that combines Effective Schools research with the Total Quality Management business philosophy. It advocates performance-driven intervention by tracking student performance through data, providing focused instruction, monitoring results frequently, and providing tutorial and enrichment activities (FLDOE, 2006a). Florida's Differentiated Instruction initiative reinforces the research based practice of instruction that allows students multiple opportunities to receive information, processing ideas, and producing evidence of what they have learned (FLDOE, 2006b). Reading First was a grant based initiative that "assisted Florida school districts and schools to implement proven methods of scientifically based reading instruction in classrooms in order to prevent reading difficulties" (FLDOE, 2005).

Scholastic's READ 180, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Fast ForWord, and Compass Odyssey are vendor sponsored initiatives purchased by the district. As the pressure for more accountability with limited financial resources available, the need for timely results also mounts. The majority of READ 180's success

at the secondary level has been in the middle grades. Its online site offers vignettes to showcase its successes. Tested by the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR), students considered at moderate risk, or level 2, in the treatment group outperformed the control group. Students at severe risk, level 1, showed no difference than the control group (FCRR, 2008). FCRR also researched the effects of Fast ForWord, another produced used for reading intervention. Its findings were mixed and hard to compare with other forms of reading instruction since Fast ForWord does not directly instruct reading skills. FCRR did give it favorable marks when working with beginning readers (FCRR, 2003).

A study conducted on the program effectiveness of AVID, an academic achievement initiative, found “we conclude preliminarily that within 2 years of implementation, the AVID program does appear to affect students’ achievement in language arts and writing as well as students’ self-efficacy in English and language arts, but during 1st-year implementation, positive program effects may be less evident” (Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, & Siegle, 2008). Compass Odyssey self-reports to be a research-based program that addresses initiatives Response to Intervention and differentiated instruction as well as provides formative assessments that lead to individualized instruction. Compass Odyssey’s parent company’s website, directs the reader to success stories that include several middle and high school vignettes and offers a number of research based reading links to educate the consumer.

Conclusion

The choice option, a key element in NCLB, allows parents to withdraw their children from failing public schools and enroll them in another public school of their choice. This one component has the potential of being the single most effective quality

control element inserted into the public education system (Russo, 2005). But to date, the choice option has yet to be proven effective (Bracey, 2007; Jeynes, 2000; Martinez, Godwin, Kemerer & Perna, 1995; Russo, 2005; Sanders, 2008). In the simplest of terms, mere opportunity does not necessarily equate to academic achievement. The topic of parental choice has been well represented in the literature, but the bulk of the literature has focused on why parents choose, political debating, and desegregation ramifications rather than focusing on the academic outcomes of taking advantage of the choice opportunity offered in legislation (Bell, 2009; Broccolichi & van Zanten, 2000; Densessen, Driessena, & Slegers, 2005; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin & Matland, 2000; Howell, 2006; Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007; Saporito, 2009; Tedin & Weiher, 2004; Theobald, 2005; Wolf, 2008).

The startling lack of achievement research focus during this current data-driven education reform platform was the impetus behind Zhang and Cowen's research (2009). Their study found some hard facts that will kindle the debate. "It is found that public schools with a large minority enrollment and concentrated poverty are more likely to be labeled as 'in need of improvement' regardless of urban, suburban, or rural locality" (2009, p. 24). Their research sought an answer to rural schools, like those studied in South Carolina, who have even more limitations for choices to offer students in failing schools. Their conclusions show that to keep students from being an academic victim of their geography lies in more extensive research, especially with regard to choice (Zhang & Cowen, 2009).

Chapter Three contains the research methodology used in studying the academic outcomes of choice in a Florida urban district. This district has concerns similar to those

experienced in other large cities, with pockets of students from low economic backgrounds who are not excelling at the rate needed to be successful in school. The reasons for these academic deficiencies have been well documented in research as it relates to the poverty level. The disparity is perhaps most bluntly stated in a National Governors Association (NGA) definition of what constitutes an achievement gap, which the organization cites as the most pressing concern in American education. “The ‘achievement gap’ is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts” (NGA Clearinghouse, 2010, What is the achievement gap? ¶ 1). Zhang and Cowen’s research (2009) showed that while poverty plays an important role, teacher turnover and the longevity of the poverty and the surrounding neighborhood environs also play a crucial role.

There currently exists no cogent research base that identifies the benefits that students, especially those who are disadvantaged, gain from choosing a higher achieving school under the options currently provided as a remedy. This study attempts to answer that question. This is especially compelling since Zhang and Cowen (2009) found that comparable incomes were significantly higher, by as much as \$8,774 annually, in communities where the base of the opportunity school was located, compared to the failing neighborhood schools studied. In context of that research, students who moved from their failing, economically disadvantaged school to an opportunity school could be situated to perform better.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The decision to move a student to a new environment using vouchers, magnet programs, homeschooling, or charter schools is difficult for everyone involved. Creating and implementing policies that provide effective choice options may be even harder. Sanders (2008) states, "Perhaps the most vicious problem with NCLB, as it addresses the education of those in poverty, is its inadequate school choice provision. The theory behind the provision is noble while the implementation of it is dismal" (p. 589). He notes the low percentage of participation from minority or low-income families. Given that choice is designed to offer a higher quality education to those students that are disadvantaged in some way, the primary indicator of success choice options should be student academic growth.

If the goal of Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program is to improve student academic outcomes, then research is warranted to assess the effectiveness of these programs. The problem addressed in this study is that while there is much to say about the input of choice options and of the provisions of NCLB, there is inconclusive evidence when examining student academic success. The remainder of Chapter 3 addresses the purpose of this study, the participants, the context of the study, research questions and hypothesis, and data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine if differences exist between 10th grade achievement in reading and mathematics in a large urban school district for those students leaving their failing neighborhood school to attend an Opportunity Scholarship

Program (OSP) school as compared with students who chose to stay at their neighborhood school. A secondary component of the study attempted to identify the variation of supplemental academic services for students enrolled in both the challenged neighborhood schools and the opportunity scholarship schools (OSP) for the qualifying time period.

Research Questions

This study will explore the following research questions:

- Question 1: Are there differences in reading and math achievement for high school students who elect to transfer to an opportunity school and those who stay in a challenged neighborhood school?
- Question 2: Are there differences in reading and math achievement among high school students who transferred from a challenged neighborhood school to one of the five opportunity schools?
- Question 3: Do both opportunity scholarship schools and underachieving neighborhood schools in the same Florida urban district offer comparable supplemental academic programs?

Context of the Study

This study examines Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program implemented in a large urban district. According to the Florida Department of Education), in 2009 three high schools within the selected district were identified (Table 3-1) as having a state grade designation of "F" for the second year in a 4-year period. This designation made all students who were enrolled in those schools during the 2007-2008 school year, or who were assigned to them for the 2008-2009 school year, eligible to transfer to a school having a state grade designation of "C" or better (The Florida Senate, 2010c). As part of the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), the district selected five proficient high schools to serve students as OSP schools (Table 3-2). Two of the schools chosen were neighborhood schools located within the district and three were dedicated magnet

schools within the district. Based on the School Accountability Report by the state of Florida (2009), all five of the selected OSP schools were identified as having a state grade designation of “B” or better during the same 4-year period. Other mitigating factors, such as teacher turnover rate, leadership changes, and/or age of the opportunity schools, in relation to a shift in population centers, the surrounding neighborhoods, or supporting commerce centers, were not evaluated.

Data used in this study were gathered from pre-existing student test scores examined during the summer and fall of 2009. The student achievement records were analyzed for gains from both reading and math scores from comparable FCAT scores from the previous year. The data differential was identified as the difference between the 2008 FCAT and 2009 FCAT developmental scale scores for the identified cohort of 10th grade OSP-eligible students attending either failing or OSP schools within the district and the scores they received as 9th grade students. A list of individual school supplemental academic services was obtained from their School Improvement Plans (SIP) on file at the district office and is available on the county’s website.

Participants

The procedures used for obtaining permission to conduct this study from both the University of Florida and the selected Florida district along with the process for selecting the study’s population and data collection are detailed in this section.

Institutional Review Board Procedures and Approval

Approval to collect and analyze educational assessments and documents previously collected for non-research purposes was sought prior to the study from both the University of Florida’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix A) and the selected Florida district (Appendix C). Once approval by the University of Florida (Appendix B)

was given, a letter was sent to the district's Executive Director of Instructional Improvement and Research giving a brief overview of the study, and outlining the desired data which resulted in district approval (Appendix D).

Population

This research focused on the academic achievement of OSP eligible 10th grade students in a large urban school district who chose to move to an opportunity scholarship school rather than stay at their challenged neighborhood school, later referred to as the Accepting Group. Reading and math gain scores for these students were compared to a matched set of OSP eligible 10th grade students who chose to remain at their challenged neighborhood school, later referred to as the Declining Group. To identify the potential candidates for both groups, the researcher obtained a list of all of the students who attended the three challenged schools as 9th graders during the 2007-2008 school year, a list of student that attending the challenged schools during each FTE period during the 2008-2009 school year and a list of students enrolling into the OSP.

The initial step was to identify OSP eligible students who chose to accept the OSP and leave their challenged neighborhood schools during the 2008-2009 academic school year. Students that applied for OSP but did not remain at the OSP schools the entire year, defined by attending both 2008-2009 FTE periods, were eliminated from the list. Students on the initial list that did not have ninth grade FCAT scores in reading and mathematics during both the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years were also eliminated from the list. The remaining 55 10th grade OSP eligible participants were identified as the target sample for this study. These students' were identified by

challenged neighborhood school and OSP school. A spreadsheet was created to organize student demographic characteristics.

A second group of eligible students who chose to decline the OSP and remain at their challenged neighborhood schools during the same period was selected as the control group by using matching procedures. The demographics used to match students were English Language Learners (ELL), Exceptional Student Education (ESE), gender, ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status (SES) (Table 3-3).

Academic Achievement

The Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) was used as the measure for student academic achievement in reading and mathematics. The FCAT is an annual criterion-referenced test administered to Florida students in grades three through 10 (FLDOE, 2009b). Student scores on the test are expressed as levels from one to five for general reporting as well as scale scores. Each student's scale score is translated into a Developmental Scale Score (DSS). The DSS is used to track student progress from year to year and is used to determine if students obtain a year's growth on the test. The baseline set by the Florida Department of Education for a year's growth as measured by the development scale score on the 10th grade FCAT is a minimum of 77 DSS points in reading and a minimum of 48 DSS points in mathematics. Academic achievement for the purpose of this study was evaluated by using the students' DSS on the 10th grade FCAT in both reading and mathematics as compared to the students' developmental scale scores on their ninth grade FCAT in both reading and mathematics.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the investigation of the first two research questions:

- Ho₁: There are no statistically significant differences in student reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.
- Ho₂: There are no statistically significant differences in student math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.
- Ho₃: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.
- Ho₄: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.
- Ho₅: There are no statistically significant differences in 10th grade student reading achievement gains of students who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in one of five opportunity scholarship schools, as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) assessment system.
- Ho₆: There are no statistically significant differences in 10th grade student mathematics achievement gains of students who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in one of five opportunity scholarship schools, as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) assessment system.

Treatment of Data

Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, and frequency, were obtained for all of the variables in this study. Statistical analyses were conducted for each hypothesis. An analysis of variance was used to determine statistical significance between the means of the two independent samples of the OSP eligible students; OSP eligible students that chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood

schools and those OSP eligible students that chose to move from their challenged neighborhood schools to an OSP school. Sub-group demographic scores of the OSP eligible students that chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and the OSP schools they chose to attend were analyzed using a factorial analysis of variance of the independent variables present (Ravid, 2005). The statistical analysis program used in this research was the SAS statistical software package.

The initial independent samples included two groups of OSP students; OSP eligible students that chose to stay in their neighborhood school and OSP eligible students that chose to move to an OSP school. The dependent variable was the difference between each student's 2008 DSS and their 2009 DSS in both reading and mathematics, also referred to as gain scores. To further deepen the study, the scores of the OSP students who chose to attend OSP schools were tested in reference to the OSP school they chose to attend. The independent variables were the challenged neighborhood schools the students were assigned to and the OSP school choices offered to them by the district. Once again the dependent variable was DSS score based on a comparison of each student's 2008 reading and math DSS and 2009 reading and Math DSS. The data analysis also compared simultaneously the effect of the interaction of participation and demographic variables on the students' DSS scores. This allowed the researcher to analyze the differences between an eligible OSP student's choice to participate or not, and to determine if other contributing factors had an impact on the students' DSS scores (Figure 3-1).

To inform and complement the quantitative analyses conducted in this study, the researcher also gathered information on the types of additional academic services each

identified school offered. Of interest were the similarities and dissimilarities of supplemental academic programs offered at each type of school that might impact a student's ability to achieve academic gains. The observations concerning academic offerings are reported in Chapter 5.

Summary

The methodology by which this study was conducted was presented in this chapter. The purpose of the study, the research questions, and the research hypotheses were described and the context of the study, the participants, research questions, and, treatment of data were introduced. Findings of this study are reported in Chapter 4.

Table 3-1. Demographics of challenged neighborhood “F” high schools in selected district 2009

Neighborhood School	Number of students	Free/Reduced-Priced Lunch	Minority %	School Grade 2008	School Grade 2009	% of Classes Taught by HQT
N1	1314	57.9	94.8	F	F	72.0
N2	1077	61.5	99.4	F	F	77.2
N3	1593	46.2	71.2	F	D	84.2

Table 3-2. OSP school demographics of in selected district 2009

OSP School	Number of students	Free/Reduced-Priced Lunch	Minority %	School Grade 2008	School Grade 2009	% of Classes Taught by HQT	Magnet School
OSP1	1510	14.2	54.0	A	A	97.9	Yes
OSP2	1141	9.2	31.3	A	B	99.2	Yes
OSP3	1516	10.9	45.9	A	A	94.1	Yes
OSP4	2339	18.7	27.2	A	B	96.3	No
OSP5	2939	11.8	35.4	B	A	87.8	No

Table 3-3. Student demographics of OSP participants by neighborhood challenged “F” school

Neighborhood School	N1	N2	N3
Number of OSP Participants	11	13	33
Gender			
Male	4	5	21
Female	7	8	12
Ethnicity			
American Indian / Alaskan Native	0	0	0
Asian	0	0	0
Black	9	13	29
Hispanic	1	0	1
White / Non Hispanic	1	0	3
ELL			
> 2 years	0	0	0
< 2 years	0	0	1
None	11	13	32
SES			
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch	8	9	16
Full Pay	3	4	17
ESE			
SLD	1	3	0
None	10	10	33

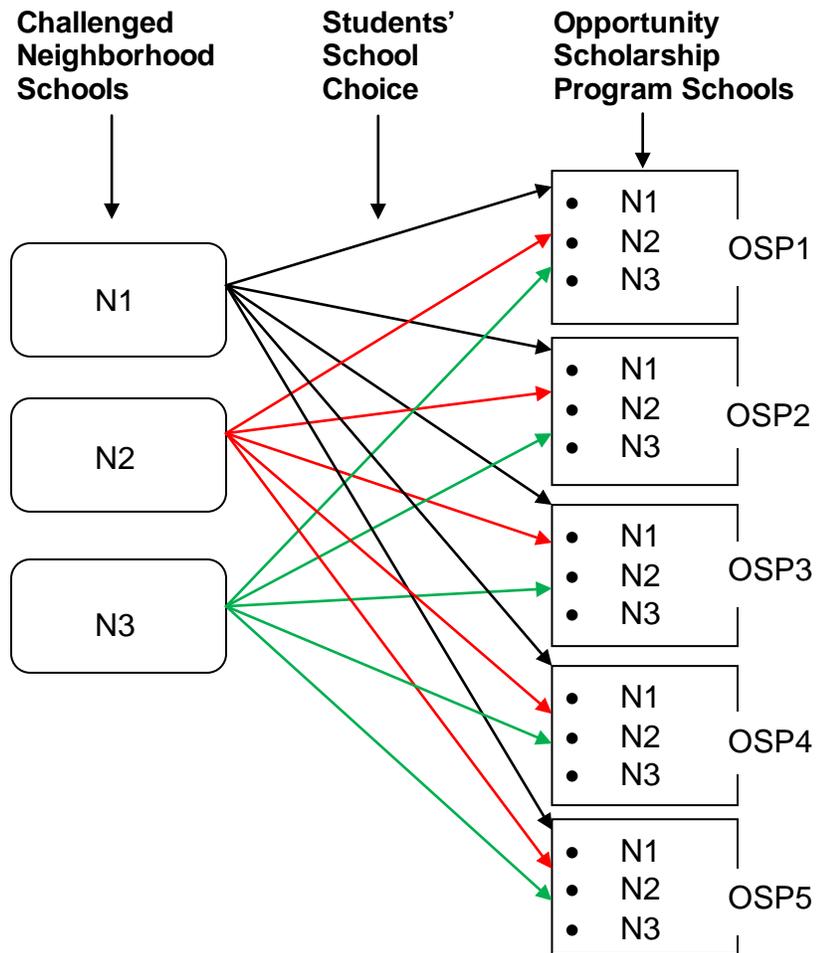


Figure 3-1. Conceptual model of choice configuration for eligible OSP participants

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the quantitative results of the research study. The purpose of this study was to examine if differences exist between 10th grade achievement in reading and mathematics in a large urban school district for those students leaving their failing neighborhood school to attend an Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) school as compared with students who chose to stay at their neighborhood school. A secondary component of the study attempted to identify the variation of supplemental academic services for students enrolled in both the challenged neighborhood schools and the opportunity scholarship schools (OSP) for the qualifying time period. The instrument used to measure achievement was the developmental scale scores from the 10th grade Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) assessment system. The data addressed the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in reading and math achievement for high school students who elect to transfer to an opportunity school and those who stay in a challenged neighborhood school?
2. Are there differences in reading and math achievement among high school students who transferred from a challenged neighborhood school to one of the five opportunity schools?
3. Do both opportunity scholarship schools and underachieving neighborhood schools in the same Florida urban district offer comparable supplemental academic programs?

The first section leads off with a descriptive analysis of the sample groups. The second section provides a brief description of how the statistical data were obtained. The third section contains the statistical results of each of the three research questions. The chapter ends with a conclusions section that summarizes the findings.

Descriptive Analysis

The student sample in this study consisted of 110 freshmen attending high school during the 2007-2008 school year at one of three challenged neighborhood schools within an urban district in Florida. The initial group of 55 students, referred to as the Accepting group, consisted of those students that chose to be part of the county's Opportunity Scholarship Program (OPS) that allows students to attend a school other than their challenged school based on the choice provision of the No Child Left Behind Act. The 55 students in the control group, referred to as the Declining group, were randomly selected based on matching demographic characteristics. The demographic characteristics for selecting matches used were gender, ethnicity, English language learners, socioeconomic level, and exceptional student education designation. Table 4-1 contains a numerical breakdown of the two groups by each demographic characteristic.

The students' neighborhood school during the 2007-2008 and their school of choice during the 2008-2009 were used as baseline data in selecting OPS students. When selecting the matching group of students that did not take advantage of the Opportunity Scholarship Program offered, a distinction based on neighborhood school was not made but was noted in Table 4-1. Academic gain was measured by the difference between the students' developmental scale scores from the 2008 test and the 2009 test. Descriptive statistics of the students' Developmental Scale Scores (DSS) for each group of students is included in Table 4-1 but was not considered when selecting matching students.

Statistical Compilation

This section contains the statistical results of each of the three research questions. Each subgroup, gender, ethnicity, English language learner, socioeconomics, and exceptional student education, were tested for group equivalency using the FREQ procedure in SAS software. Descriptive statistics for both of the student groups for developmental scale scores was obtained using the MEAN procedure using SAS software. This data is shown in Table 4-1.

After excluding ethnicity, English language learner, and exceptional student education characteristics due to insufficient numbers within the groups, the remaining classification variables were tested using the General Linear Model, known as GLM, procedure within the SAS software to establish significance. “The General Linear Model is the foundation for the t-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), regression analysis, and many of the multivariate methods including factor analysis, cluster analysis, multidimensional scaling, discriminant function analysis, canonical correlation, and others” (Trochim, 2006). The basic linear model can be written as: $y = b_0 + b_1x + e$ where y is a set of outcome variables; x is a set of covariates; b_0 is a set of intercepts; b_1 is a set of coefficients; and e is the error.

The GLM procedure was reapplied without the outlier and its matched pair after discovering an influential outlier in the DSS mathematics data that skewed the results. The outlier is shown in Figure 4-1. The focus of this study is to investigate group, Accepting or Declining, effect on student academic growth. Because group might have an effect in combination with other factors e.g. Pretest, Gender, SES, and neighborhood school, the interaction between group and each classification variable was tested. The results are shown in Table 4-2.

The final collection of data was the anecdotal collection of academic services provided by each school. Services were attributed to the school if the academic service was referenced in the school's annual School Improvement Plan which is submitted by the school to the district each year. The 2008-2009 School Improvement Plan was used. Table 4-11 notes each service referenced.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this section focuses on each of the three research questions. Included are the null hypotheses developed to test each research question and the results of the data analysis.

Research Question 1. Are there differences in reading and math achievement for high school students who elect to transfer to an opportunity school and those who stay in a challenged neighborhood school?

Two corresponding null hypotheses were developed to test the first research question. The first null hypothesis was used to test for differences in reading DSS gains for the two groups. **H₀₁**: There are no statistically significant differences in reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.

After performing a regression test in the form of the General Linear Model in SAS, the analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups and their academic achievement, shown in Table 4-2 ($p= 0.228$). Since no differences were found, the null hypothesis was retained. Table 4-3, Table 4-4, and Table 4-5 contain the

results for the relationship between the independent variables, groups, and the dependent variable, 2009 reading scores, as well as the interaction between group and the other classification variables in relationship to the dependent variable.

The second null hypothesis for this question was used to test for differences in math DSS gains for the two groups. **H₀₂**: There are no statistically significant differences in math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school. The initial analysis of data revealed that there was a significant difference in academic achievement for mathematics as measured by 2009 DSS math score gains in relationship to 2008 DSS math scores when the General Linear Model in SAS was applied. This indicated that the null hypothesis would be rejected. Upon further inspection, an influential outlier was discovered that skewed the data. Figure 4-1 displays the results in a scatter plot. The outlier and its matching data set were removed and the data were reexamined. In reexamining the data, no significant relationship between group and mathematics scores was noted ($p= 0.398$). Since no relationship was found, the second null hypothesis was retained. Table 4-6, Table 4-7, and Table 4-8 contain the results for the relationship between the independent variables, groups, and the dependent variable, 2009 math scores, as well as the interaction between group and the other classification variables in relationship to the dependent variable.

The third hypothesis addressed the interaction between control variables and reading gain scores. **Ho₃**: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship. No statistically significant relationships were found between the variables gender ($p=.663$), SES ($p=.293$) and neighborhood school ($p=.328$) in 2008 (see Table 4-2); therefore the null hypothesis was retained. The remaining variables of ethnicity, ELL, and ESE were not tested due to insufficient sample size.

The fourth hypothesis tested addressed the interaction between control variables and math gain scores. **Ho₄**: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship. A statistically significant relationship was found between the interaction of OSP group and socioeconomic status and the dependent variable. This relationship was significant both before and after the outlier was extracted ($p = 0.020$; $p=0.046$ respectively). Since a relationship was found, the null hypothesis was rejected. The p-value of the interaction of group and socioeconomic status is indicated in Table 4-2.

Research Question 2. Are there differences in reading and math achievement among high school students who transferred from a challenged neighborhood school to one of the five opportunity schools?

Two corresponding null hypotheses were developed to test the second research question. The first of these was used to test for differences in reading DSS gains for the OSP groups. **Ho₅**: There are no statistically significant differences among the five opportunity scholarship schools for 10th grade FCAT reading gain scores of students who accepted an opportunity scholarship. The General Linear Model in SAS was applied to the data concerning choice of OSP school for the 2008-2009 school year. Table 4-9 and Table 4-10 display the results. The analysis of data revealed that there was no significant relationship between which OPS school students chose to attend and their academic achievement in reading as measured by their 2009 DSS math score in relationship to their 2008 DSS math score ($p= 0.649$). Since no relationship was found, the null was retained.

The second null hypothesis for this research question was used to test for differences in math DSS gains for the OSP groups. **Ho₆**: There are no statistically significant differences among the five opportunity scholarship schools for 10th grade FCAT math gain scores of students who accepted an opportunity scholarship.

The General Linear Model in SAS was utilize to analyze the data concerning choice of OSP school for the 2008-2009 school year ($p=0.727$) with the results depicted in Table 4-9 and Table 4-10. The analysis of data revealed that there was no significant relationship between which OSP school students chose to attend and their academic achievement in reading as measured by their 2009 DSS math score in relationship to their 2008 DSS math score. Since no relationship was found, the null hypothesis was retained.

Research Question 3. Do both opportunity scholarship schools and underachieving neighborhood schools in the same Florida urban district offer comparable supplemental academic programs? Existing data were gathered so there was no corresponding null hypothesis. Reading each school's School Improvement plan, which is posted on the district's website, an inventory of the services mentioned was tabulated.

Table 4-11 lists 25 academic services identified in one or more of the schools in either the challenged neighborhood schools or in the OSP schools. The mean services listed in the neighborhood schools is 18 compared to the OSP schools mean of 12. Each neighborhood school listed at least 60% of the services where only two of the OSP schools listed 60% of the services. The rest of the OSP schools listed from 32% to 44% of the services. Nine services are listed by 75% or more of the schools in general and 56%, or 14, of the services are listed in half of the schools.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that students' school choice to either remain at their challenged neighborhood school or to accept to be part of the OSP and move to a designated high performing school has no significant relationship on their academic achievement in reading and mathematics as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) assessment system. Similarly, there was also no significant difference on their academic achievement in reading and mathematics and the OSP school enrolled as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) assessment system. In charting the academic services of each school it was found that, while all of the schools involved offered some of the same academic services

based on self reporting through their annual School Improvement Plan, the challenged neighborhood schools offered more of the listed services.

Table 4-1. Frequency of demographic characteristics and descriptive statistics of gain scores

		Accepted Opportunity Scholarship % (N) or Mean (SD)	Declined Opportunity Scholarship % (N) or Mean (SD)
Gender	Female	47% (26)	47% (26)
	Male	53% (29)	53% (29)
Ethnicity	Black	89% (49)	89% (49)
	Hispanic	4% (2)	4% (2)
	White / Non Hispanic	7% (4)	7% (4)
ELL	< 2 years	2% (1)	2% (1)
	> 2 years	0% (0)	2% (1)
SES	None	98% (52)	96% (53)
	Free/Reduced Priced Lunch	56% (31)	56% (31)
ESE	Full Pay	44% (24)	44% (24)
	SLD	7% (4)	7% (4)
Neighborhood School	None	93% (51)	93% (51)
	N1	18% (10)	20% (11)
	N2	24% (13)	22% (12)
Academic Gain	N3	58% (32)	58% (32)
	Reading	1807 (188)	1871 (211)
	Mathematics	1877 (130)	1881 (183)

Table 4-2. Significance of group interaction and descriptive characteristic tested through General Linear Model procedure

	Reading P-Value	Mathematics P-Value	Mathematics P-Value w/o influential outlier
Group (Accept/Decline)	0.2277	<0.0001	0.3967
Gender	0.6634	0.3086	0.1573
Ethnicity	*	*	*
ELL	*	*	*
SES	0.2934	0.0203	0.0461
ESE	*	*	*
Neighborhood School	0.3277	0.6061	0.3454

Table 4-2. Continued

	Reading P-Value	Mathematics P-Value	Mathematics P-Value w/o influential outlier
Group*Gender	0.6805	0.5364	0.2622
Group*SES	0.1227	0.1340	0.4135
Group*Sch08	0.3102	0.5583	0.4603

* p<.05

Table 4-3. Group comparison in Reading Gains using the NPAR1WAY Procedure – Wilcoxon Scores (Rank Sums) for Variable Reading Gains Classified by Variable group.

Group	N	Sum of Scores	Expected Under H0	Std Dev Under H0	Mean Score
Accepted	45	1968.0	2047.5	123.910646	43.733333
Declined	45	2127.0	2047.5	123.910646	47.266667

Table 4-4. Group comparison in Reading Gains using the NPAR1WAY Procedure – Wilcoxon Two-Sample Test

Statistic	1968.0000
Normal Approximation Z	-0.6376
One-Sided Pr < Z	0.2619
Two-Sided Pr > Z	0.5238
t Approximation One-Sided Pr < Z	0.2627
Two-Sided Pr > Z	0.5254

Note: Z includes a continuity correction of 0.5.

Table 4-5. Group comparison in Reading Gains using the NPAR1WAY Procedure – Kruskal-Wallis Test

Chi-Square	0.4116
DF	1
Pr > Chi-Square	0.5211

Table 4-6. Group comparison in Mathematics Gains using the NPAR1WAY Procedure – Wilcoxon Scores (Rank Sums) for Variable Mathematics Gains Classified by Variable group.

	N	Sum of Scores	Expected Under H0	Std Dev Under H0	Mean Score
Accepted	46	1996.0	2139.0	128.048712	43.391304
Declined	46	2282.0	2139.0	128.048712	49.608696

Table 4-7. Group comparison in Mathematics Gains using the NPAR1WAY Procedure – Wilcoxon Two-Sample Test

Statistic	1996.0000
Normal Approximation	
Z	-1.1129
One-Sided Pr < Z	0.1329
Two-Sided Pr > Z	0.2658
t Approximation	
One-Sided Pr < Z	0.1344
Two-Sided Pr > Z	0.2687

Note: Z includes a continuity correction of 0.5.

Table 4-8. Group comparison in Mathematics Gains using the NPAR1WAY Procedure – Kruskal-Wallis Test

Chi-Square	1.2472	1
DF	1	1
Pr > Chi-Square	0.2641	1

Table 4-9. Accepted Group to Opportunity Scholarship Program Schools

	Reading P-Value	Mathematics P-Value
School Choice	0.6493	0.7266

Table 4-10. Summary Statistics for Opportunity Scholarship Program Schools

	N	Reading Mean	Reading SD	Reading Min	Reading Max	N	Math Mean	Math SD	Math Min	Math Max
OPS1	7	-67.71	240.68	-440	248	7	39.00	71.17	-75	154
OPS2	5	69.80	142.46	-119	194	5	80.80	47.78	1	124
OPS3	5	1.40	103.74	-130	114	4	33.50	46.11	-4	98
OPS4	5	45.40	327.92	-271	420	6	46.67	61.19	-50	114
OPS5	24	-84.96	178.46	-515	328	23	29.35	66.99	-119	186

Table 4-11. Academic services identified in schools' 2008-2009 School Improvement Plans

Academic Services Offered	N1	N2	N3	OSP1	OSP2	OSP3	OSP4	OSP5
Intensive reading program	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Read 180	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Springboard ELA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Springboard math curriculum	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
CPM (College Preparatory Math Program)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Intensive mathematics program	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
After school tutoring	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Before school tutoring	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Compass Odyssey	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Content area focused reading instruction	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
FCAT tutoring FCAT Explorer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Summer reading program / school / academy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Differentiated instruction	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Advanced/Honors/College Prep program (AP, AICE, Dual Enrollment)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SAT/PSAT/ACT preparation	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
FastForWord program	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Summer Advance Placement program	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Small Learning Communities	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Double-block scheduling of remediation courses	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Florida Continuous Improvement Model (FCIM)	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Gender-based classes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Extended day classes (Sunset Academy)	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Student mentoring	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Peer tutoring	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

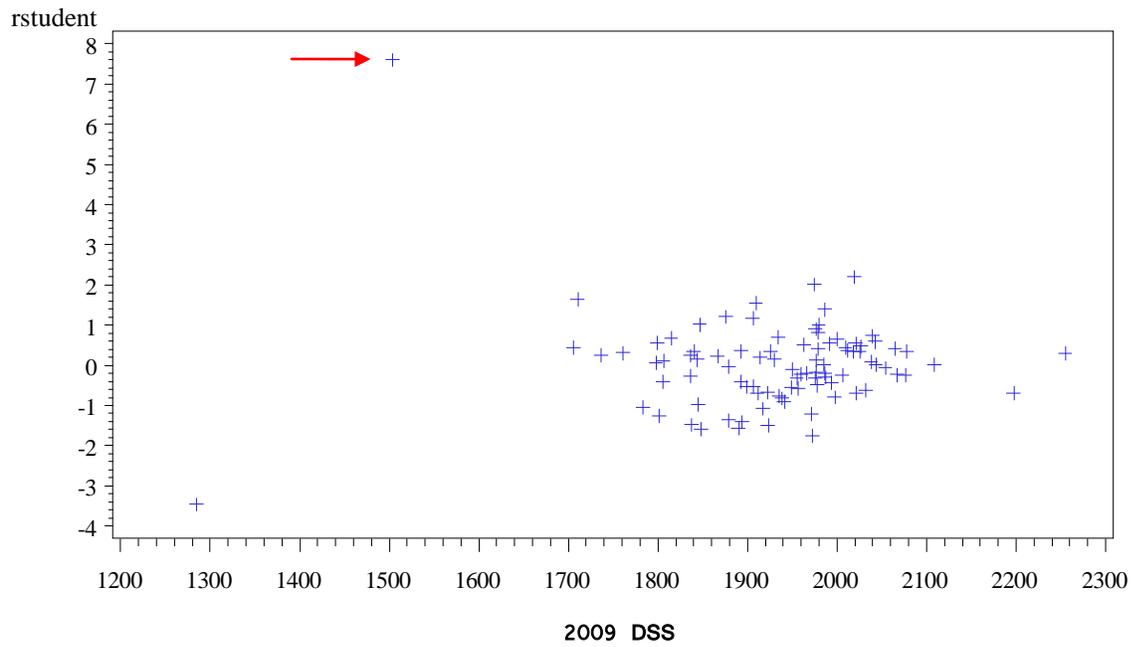


Figure 4-1. Residual plot with influential point depicting outlier in mathematics gains

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Introduction

The NCLB Act was designed to improve education by allocating choices for students who attended schools that were not meeting expectations for student academic achievement. Florida subscribed to this philosophy by offering a choice option for parents three years before it was mandated by federal law. The expected result was that students who attended better schools after attending poor-scoring schools would make measureable gains at a higher rate than previously experienced. The research on this component of the provision is wanting and inconclusive. A lack of research on the school choice and student outcomes was noted previously in this study and has been reported by national policy experts and educational pundits (Hill, 2005; Zhang & Cowen, 2009). The intention of NCLB, to ensure success for all students, is a goal the educators and reformists wish to achieve. However, there is limited evidence as to whether the separate initiatives in NCLB are leading to success.

This study was developed in an attempt to address some of the questions brought up most recently by Zhang and Cowen (2009) about the lack of research on school choice. The purpose of this study was to examine if differences exist between 10th grade achievement in reading and mathematics in a large urban school district for those students leaving their failing neighborhood school to attend an opportunity scholarship school as compared with those who stayed at their neighborhood school. The expected result was that students opting to go to a better rated school would receive higher scores on the Florida state test (FCAT). The data indicated no significant differences for those students who elected to participate in the opportunity scholarship program.

However, there are many factors which could have influenced this outcome and merit further study. With the understanding that students can only move to another school when their home school receives an F for two of the four years, restructuring guidelines dictates that measures at the home school are intensified as they relate to student achievement and that may well account for the differences in the data.

The likelihood that these schools changed their educational practices following successive failing grades adds variability, which cannot be discounted. This issue was not addressed in the current study due to the complexity in assessing all of the variables involved in the schools under pressure from state and district reform mandates. An additional issue was that student achievement in the OSP Accepting Group was influenced by more than seat time in the classroom, and in this study there was no way to control for all variables that account for acclimation within a new school prior to achieving academic success.

The following research questions guided the investigation:

- Question 1: Are there differences in reading and math achievement for high school students who elect to transfer to an opportunity school and those who stay in a challenged neighborhood school?
- Question 2: Are there differences in reading and math achievement among high school students who transferred from a challenged neighborhood school to one of the five opportunity schools?
- Question 3: Do both opportunity scholarship schools and underachieving neighborhood schools in the same Florida urban district offer comparable supplemental academic programs?

This chapter addresses the first two research questions presented above through six hypotheses, considers the implications for practice and suggests further studies that will contribute to the existing literature. In response to the third research question, the

study identifies the variation of supplemental academic services for students enrolled in both the challenged neighborhood schools and opportunity scholarship schools.

Summary of the Results

This study was guided by three research questions and six associated null hypotheses. Each null hypothesis is included with the corresponding research question and results of the data analysis.

Research Question 1. Are there differences in reading and math achievement for high school students who elect to transfer to an opportunity school and those who stay in a challenged neighborhood school? To statistically test this guiding question, two null hypotheses were developed.

Ho₁: There are no statistically significant differences in reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.

After performing a regression test using the General Linear Model in SAS, the analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in reading gain scores between the two groups of students, Accepting OSP and Declining OSP, as measured by their 2009 reading developmental scale score in relationship to their 2008 reading developmental scale score. Since no difference was found, the null hypothesis is retained. Students that chose to leave their neighborhood school displayed no significant difference in reading gain scores from those that chose to stay in their neighborhood school. With the modest sample size, it is possible that the data set was insufficient to detect a difference between the two groups.

Ho₂: There are no statistically significant differences in math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Scores for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.

The initial analysis revealed that there was a significant difference in math gain scores between Accepting OSP and Declining OSP students, as measured by their 2009 math developmental scale score in relationship to their 2008 math developmental scale score. Upon further inspection, an influential outlier was discovered that altered the findings. The outlier was a math gain score of 675 points. This student's math gain score fell so far outside the range of the other gain scores, that it distorted the probability of a significant relationship. After careful consideration, the outlier and its matching data set were removed and the data were reexamined.

In re-examining the data, no significant difference between group and mathematics scores was noted. Because no significant difference was found, the null hypothesis was retained. Students who chose to leave their neighborhood school displayed no difference in math gain scores than those that chose to stay in their neighborhood. With the modest sample size, it is possible that the data set was insufficient to detect a difference between the two groups.

Two additional null hypotheses were developed to test for differences among students' demographic variables and their gain scores in reading and mathematics.

Ho₃: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.

The initial regression test in the General Linear Model in SAS revealed that there was no significant relationship between the control variables and reading gain scores as measured by their 2009 reading developmental scale score in relationship to their 2008 reading developmental scale score. Since no relationship was found, the null hypothesis was retained. These results indicate that there is no significant relationship between the control variables (Gender, SES, and Neighborhood School) and reading gain scores for Accepting and Declining OSP student. With the limited sample size, it is possible that the data set was insufficient to detect a difference between the interactive groups.

Ho₄: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, SES and neighborhood school) and math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.

The initial analysis of data, as well as the analysis once an outlier was removed, revealed that there was a significant relationship between the socioeconomic (SES) variable and math achievement ($p = 0.020$; $p=0.046$ respectively). Since a significant relationship was found, this null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 2. Are there differences in reading and math achievement among high school students who transferred from a challenged neighborhood school to one of the five opportunity schools? To test this research question statistically, two null hypotheses were developed.

Ho₅: There are no statistically significant differences among the five opportunity scholarship schools for 10th grade FCAT reading gain scores of students who accepted an opportunity scholarship.

The General Linear Model in SAS was utilized to test for differences among the five OSP schools reading gain scores for students electing to attend an OSP school for the 2008-2009 school year. Since no difference was found, the null hypothesis was

retained. The selection of OSP schools did not result in statistically significant differences for reading gain scores. With the modest sample size, it is possible that the data set was insufficient to detect a difference between the two groups.

Ho₆: There are no statistically significant differences among the five opportunity scholarship schools for 10th grade FCAT math gain scores of students who accepted an opportunity scholarship.

The General Linear Model in SAS was utilized to test for differences among the five OSP schools math gain scores for students electing to attend an OSP school for the 2008-2009 school year. Since no difference was found, the null hypothesis was retained. The selection of OSP schools did not result in statistically significant differences for math gain scores. With the modest sample size, it is possible that the data set was insufficient to detect a difference between the two groups.

Research Question 3. Do both opportunity scholarship schools and underachieving neighborhood schools in the same Florida urban district offer comparable supplemental academic programs? Content analysis procedures were utilized to assess the existence of supplemental academic programs within each school's state-mandated improvement plan. Descriptive statistics were generated to compare data for this research question. The mean services offered in the neighborhood schools is 18 compared to 12 for the OSP schools. Each of the three neighborhood school offered at least 60% of the possible services whereas only two of the five OSP schools offered 60% of the possible services. The remaining three OSP schools ranged from 32% to 44% of services offered. Nine services are offered by 75% or more of both OSP and neighborhood schools and 56%, or 14, of the services are offered in half of the schools in the study (Table 4-11). The table displaying the services attributed to each school shows that the listing of supplemental academic assistance is

inconsistent from school to school. The inconsistent offering of programs could indicate that all of the schools are attempting to put programs into place to address the needs of low achieving students. The fact that nonproficient schools offer more supplemental academic programs than the OSP schools may indicate that nonproficient neighborhood schools are aggressively addressing the issues of low achieving students with additional district and state support.

Without further data collection and analysis, these are merely assumptions of what could be happening based on the information collected. Because the schools were self-reporting the additional academic programs offered through their School Improvement Plan, it is possible for each school to list similar services under different titles or to omit services considered integral, not supplemental, to their basic academic offerings. The analysis of services within this study did not provide data that could be used to assess the quality or fidelity of programs.

Discussion of the Results

Although choice proponents offer theoretical arguments, they have little evidence of academic success to support their beliefs. They cannot “guarantee that superior solutions will be found quickly or prevent harm for all children when it occurs” (Hill, 2005, p. 142.). It is imperative that efforts made to improve the educational achievement of disadvantaged students are based on sound practice rather than political supposition or well-meaning educational speculation. The data from this study indicate that students from underperforming schools are not achieving at expected higher levels after moving to a higher-graded Opportunity Scholars Program School.

With further research, it may be found that NCLB’s choice provision does work, but not within the limits of one year’s growth on a standardized test, juxtaposed against

other factors, including student acclimation to a new school. Would students' achievement increase if they were given an additional year in a higher performing school before their results are measured? Could better-graded schools improve the most needful students' standardized test scores in just seven short months, as compared to their home schools that have reinforced commitments and augmented resources following a failing accountability report?

In any scenario, there needs to be sound evidence to insure that the choices being made are rooted in fact. This study reinforces the need for continued research on the efficacy of choice options for student academic performance. At best, current research is inconclusive as it relates to educational outcomes (Bell, 2009; Broccolichi & van Zanten, 2000; Densessen, Driessena, & Slegers, 2005; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin & Matland, 2000; Howell, 2006; Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007; Saporito, 2009; Tedin & Weiher, 2004; Theobald, 2005; Wolf, 2008). However, research from Lee (2006) indicates that NCLB and its choice options do not provide a platform for increasing student achievement, given its limitations and other policy.

This research is troubling; however, eliminating choice as an option may be the wrong path as it relates to the greater good of providing diverse, quality learning environments for students. If the choice option is to remain, it must be seen for what the data indicate, and not as the panacea offered by some distant policy makers. To support the use of the choice option as a solution for students to do better academically, proof must exist that it will produce results. The choice option must be able to provide a school environment that is open to all who seek to maximize their learning outcomes and experience education at schools that have produced students who demonstrate

consistent gains without the presence of an achievement gap. Lee (2006) is one researcher who found there must be other reasons for the persistent achievement gap. These reasons are perhaps the most difficult to pinpoint because they relate directly to human capital. The intersection where student desire and effort join with teacher delivery appears to be the major linchpin to increasing student achievement (Wiggin, 2008). Schools that receive an A or B rating by the state standard, have evidence that their students can demonstrate proficiency on standardized tests. The reasons behind why those schools received the high marks should be studied and evaluated for modeling purposes. Can those results be replicated? What influence does parent involvement play? Is there documentation to show that those higher-performing schools have pupils who have received additional educational support prior to attending their high school that would account for their performance? More directly, do students in “A” high schools come from “A” middle schools and “A” elementary schools? What is the educational resume of students who are in failing schools compared to their peers?

The answers to these critical questions may likely loop back to building capacity in OSP and low performing neighborhood schools. “Classroom management, metacognitive processes, cognitive processes, home environment/parental support and student and teacher social interaction had the greatest influence on school learning. Program demographics, school demographics, state-level policies, school policies and organization, and district demographics has the least influence on learning” (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993, p. 74).

Marzano (2000), in a major review of literature on student learning and academic gains, computed that a student’s background accounted for 80% of his academic

success, the teacher influenced another 13.34% and the school level accounted for only 6%. Given this research, it would be expected that, all other things being equal, a change of school environs would influence student achievement for students transferring to a high-scoring OPS. The data in this study show they did not.

With these concerns about the efficacy of school choice and other NCLB mandates and provisions, researchers are waving a flag. "If the policy fails to produce real gains even on those limited outcomes, it needs to be redesigned if the laudable goals are to be attained" (Orfield, 2006, p. 5). This is not to say that students moving to OSP schools cannot do better over time. Such a predictive outcome needs further research and better tracking. Data from this study indicate that in the current time-frame, where high school students have the option to move from a failing school to a performing school, only a short seven months exists before the next standardized assessment of student achievement and determination of gain scores. In that scenario, this study indicates that no sizeable gains can be substantiated. The reasons do not matter as much as the results in this situation. The choice option to move students from one school to another in hopes of providing a greater opportunity for achievement is not based on verifiable data.

Limitations of the Study

The student sample in this study consisted of 110 freshmen attending high school during the 2007-2008 school year at one of three challenged neighborhood schools within an urban district in Florida. The initial group of 55 students, referred to as the accepted group, consisted of those students that chose to be part of the district's Opportunity Scholarship Program. This NCLB choice provision provided the opportunity to attend a school other than their underperforming neighborhood school. The number

of students in the accepted group is relatively small, even though this study examined data from one of the largest urban school districts in the country.

Academic gains were measured by the differences between the students' developmental scale scores in reading and mathematics from the 2008 FCAT test and the 2009 FCAT test. This is a limited indicator defined by a single measure in time. Additional methods of determining student achievement such as college readiness scores may have given the study additional depth.

The supplemental services reported were gathered from those listed on each school's School Improvement Plan. The number of students who took advantage of these services was not verified. The implementation or fidelity of supplemental services is beyond the scope of this study.

Finally, the research sample was limited to one urban district. A larger sample could have been drawn by combining a number of districts within the state. This would not only increase the number of students within the original sample, but would expand the variety in student demographics and introduce other variables, including curriculum focus and supplemental academic services, which is often district driven.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored the academic achievement of students that chose to participate in one urban district's Opportunity Scholarship Program by moving from their failing neighborhood schools and enrolling in one of five designated OSP schools deemed proficient by state guidelines. Additional research is needed to establish the efficacy of school choice for improving student academic achievement.

This study focused on one urban district and the academic achievement of students that chose to attend an OSP school after attending their first year of high

school at a low performing school. By studying only one district's implementation of OSP, the number of students available for the study was relatively small. Replicating this study across several districts rather than focusing on one district would provide a larger number student sample. A larger sample may reveal subtle differences in academic achievement that could not be detected with a smaller sample size. Increasing the number of districts, schools and students may also introduce greater variation of demographic factors making it possible to better investigate the interaction between student subgroups and academic achievement.

This study collected a list of educational services offered in the schools based on their published School Improvement Plans. It did not account for the fidelity of implementation or the effectiveness of the individual services. Another area for further research would be to use qualitative and quantitative research methods to investigate the implementation and the effectiveness of academic services at both neighborhood and OSP schools that may influence academic achievement. Varying educational services may account for any difference in student achievement. An extended study of this type could link its findings to related educational policy realms, such as the supplemental educational services addressed in No Child Left Behind legislation.

The research in this study was focused on choice provided by the district participation in the state's Opportunity Scholarship Program. It did not explore the other various forms of choice offered in the selected district such as magnet programs, charter schools, home schooling, and private school choice. This study could be replicated using one or more of the other forms of choice to see if there exist achievement differences when students choose to leave their neighborhood schools

and enroll in choice schools other than OSP schools. This additional research could examine if the choice to attend those schools is academically advantageous.

The time period for this study from the baseline 9th grade FCAT scores to the 10th grade FCAT scores was one academic year. It is not known if students would show greater gains after participating in a choice option over a period of several years. Additional time may allow for greater academic growth. Currently this would not be possible at the high school level in Florida because FCAT reading and mathematics testing is limited to 9th and 10th grades. Future research may explore alternative forms of testing achievement gains to include longitudinal data through the 11th and 12th grade. Tests of college readiness such as the CPT, ACT, or SAT may be used to measure achievement rather than academic growth to compare the two groups.

In an attempt to adequately support failing schools, districts may allocate additional funding to allow the schools to recover their school grade. In chapter two of this study, research indicated that districts have also been known to invest supplemental resources to promote magnet schools. Further research to compare the fiscal resources given to both challenged neighborhood schools and OSP schools may offer some insight as to the services and consideration students may receive when choosing a particular school. Exploring the funding structures of not only OSP schools but the various forms of choice schools compared to neighborhood schools may provide even more information. It may not only reveal the potential availability of services but also indicate the district's commitment to various student groups. Each of these studies may unearth a direct correlation between the effectiveness of supplemental educational programs and a school's ability to offer them appropriately.

Since a school can only be designated an OSP or a challenged school based on the state's rating scale, research is needed to examine if the methods by which schools are designated as challenged and proficient, based on the objectives of NCLB, are adequate assessments of the schools. Misdiagnosing schools as failing schools may lead to limiting student educational opportunities as well as have devastating results on communities. The labeling of failing schools can also lead to a drain of district resources to provide additional supporting services such as busing, parental communication, staff training and possible reassignment, and public relations. During a time of financial uncertainty, this could have a profound effect on the services provided to the general student population.

Transitioning between schools can have a negative effect on a choice program. Attrition and mobility can hinder a school's ability to address student needs as well as hinder a student's ability to demonstrate academic growth. Midyear enrollment growth or decline can hamper a district's ability to fund schools properly. Further study is needed to research the number of students that choose to attend an OSP school when offered the opportunity, but do not remain for an entire academic year, opting to return to their neighborhood school. An assessment of these students' academic achievement as well as the reasons why they return to their neighborhood schools would need to be investigated.

Policy Recommendations

Education Secretary Arne Duncan recently acknowledged that large parts of the NCLB Act have not produced key results. Duncan's White House blog leaves little room for misinterpretation: "The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has squelched innovation and failed to advance key education reforms" (Duncan, 2009). But this statement is not

specific. In what ways has NCLB failed? Caitlin Scott (2009) found that all six states in her study veered away from the federal restructuring strategies that could not be linked to a probability of success. Russo (2006) speaks to NCLB's accountability piece which allows parents to "withdraw their children from failing public schools and to enroll them in other public schools of their choice" (p. 37). Russo heralds this as possibly the most effective means of quality control even though he acknowledges it has not proven to be effective at this time. Yet this current study contributes further evidence that a direct correlation has not been made between moving students from low performing schools to choice schools and academic achievement. This would certainly add substance to Secretary Duncan's assertion that NCLB has not, in and of itself, produced results.

In a March 1, 2010 statement, President Obama was direct about his expectations for schools, particularly high schools, which are at the heart of the choice debate. Citing data from some of the worst schools, he stated that 12% of America's schools produce 50% of America's dropouts. Obama pledged to help school districts turn around the 5,000 lowest-performing schools in a 5-year window. How Obama plans to do this will be unveiled slowly and not without considerable debate, as the administration seeks to identify high schools with graduation rates below 60%. With \$900 million proposed to help those schools raise graduation rates, the emphasis appears to be not on providing more choices but to make the choices that are currently available more efficacious. This may be done by retooling some schools from the top-down and shutting some failing schools entirely, while dispersing students to a better school (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2010). Even these statements fall back into the same practice educators have been watching unfold since NCLB was enacted in 2001. More money

for top-down management restructuring and, if that does not work as defined by the state, moving students to identified proficient schools, which again, has not proven to be productive. With the opportunity to reauthorize NCLB, it is time to look at practices that are demonstrating identifiable success and reframe NCLB policies accordingly.

State Policy Recommendation

When examining the Opportunity Scholarship Program in the state of Florida, this would mean policy changes from the very start. OSP begins with identifying proficient and non-proficient schools. However, it is questionable whether these school identifications are reliable in light of the NCLB's overarching goal of improving academic achievement among underachieving subgroups. Does this in fact take aim at closing the academic achievement gap in America? For a school to be deemed proficient in Florida, it has to receive a grade of C or above. The school grading formula during the identification period of this study, the 2007-2008 school year, was based on the percentage of students scoring a 3 or above in reading, mathematics, and science, the percentage of students that have a score of 3.5 or above in writing, the percentage of student gains in reading and mathematics, and the percentage of student gains in the school's lowest quartile in reading and mathematics (FLDOE, 2009b).

Student gains are described as either moving one level up, remaining at their current level if the student scores in levels 3, 4, or 5, or having a positive difference of 77 DSS in reading and 48 DSS in mathematics if the student scores in levels 1 or 2. The 77 and 48 DSS gains demonstrate that a student has made one year's growth and is referred to as a true gain. While appearing balanced, upon further review, it gives an unfair advantage to schools whose average population enters with scores of level 3 or above. The identified proficient schools in this study averaged 70% and 90% of their

population who scored a 3 or above in reading and mathematics, respectively. Since students scoring at a level 3 or above only have to maintain their level to count in the gain percentage this means that a large percentage of students do not have to show a year's growth or true gain to maintain the school's grade. These students only have to maintain their scores at their previous level, even if they decline on their developmental scale score to count towards the school's gain. If both groups do this at 70% and 90% respectively, the percentages count in three categories each and the school will obtain 380 points out of the 435 points needed for the school to receive a school grade of C without a single student making a true gain. This does not take into account the remaining categories of science and writing, which could add up to 200 more points, and any true gains that could occur in the two lowest quartile categories that did not fall within the levels 3 and above previously. The possibility of 385 more points in these categories ensure that these schools will either score a B or an A.

Compare that to the non-proficient schools' average reading and mathematics scores of 3 or above which stand at 18% in reading and 47% in mathematics. These schools must show true gains of 52% in reading and 43% in mathematics to match the proficient schools' numbers. This demonstrates that under Florida's school grading policy, proficient schools do not necessarily have to demonstrate the ability to improve student achievement; they only have to maintain student achievement levels or minimize student achievement loss. In contrast, those deemed as nonproficient must establish true gains to bring their grade into an acceptable range. Only one of the 8 schools examined in this study made federal AYP. The only school making AYP did not

have sufficient numbers within the subgroups in the areas of SES, ELL or ESE which may account for the school making proficiency.

One policy change recommendation that would assist in strengthening the Opportunity Scholarship Program would be in relation to identifying proficient and non-proficient schools. The identification process, whether school grades are used or not, needs to be reformulated to reflect the goals of both Florida's OSP and the Federal NCLB choice options concerning achievement in underserved student populations. The process also needs to be reformatted so that it does not give an undo advantage to schools that receive, not produce, high performing students. This not only includes neighborhood schools, but also specialized choice schools such as magnets and charter schools. It is misleading to ask parents to choose between two schools when the labels assigned to them, proficient and non-proficient, are disingenuous as to how well they move students academically.

District Policy Recommendation

Florida Statute 1008.33 (2010a) states "The intervention and support strategies must address student performance, including, but not limited to, improvement planning, leadership quality improvement, educator quality improvement, professional development, curriculum alignment and pacing, and the use of continuous improvement and monitoring plans and processes" (Section 3, ¶ c). Implementation of this policy is most evident when looking at a district's reaction to low performing schools. Yet, this study found no significant difference between students remaining in their low performing neighborhood school and those that chose to enroll in an OSP school. This gives rise to the question of support, not only to the non-proficient schools, but also to the schools

that receive OSP students. Florida Statute 1002.38 (2010c) discusses the financial obligation to OSP schools; it does not discuss academic responsibilities.

Districts themselves point out the lack of strategic support for OSP schools. The Superintendent of the district being studied (personal communication, April 11, 2010), discussed the preparation for OSP assignment. He explained that the district tries to help make this process easier by pre-identifying potential OSP schools, assisting with budget issues for both sets of schools, and providing notification and information to parents. "But even after all of that, 90% of the preparation falls to the OSP schools." He affirms that there is no formal plan focused on academic achievement designed to support the schools receiving OSP students.

Hill (2005) discusses the need to implement research-based practices within choice programs. He stresses that "No serious business would adopt a whole new corporate strategy without understanding its customer, supply chain, technical challenges, start-up costs, and competitive environment" (p. 149). But that is what we do when we send students to a school that may not be ready to receive them. A policy recommendation that would improve the Opportunity Scholarship Program would be to require each district to not only create a plan to support nonproficient schools, but also create a plan to increase capacity and readiness for the OSP schools using the principles set forth in Florida Statute 1008.33 (2010a): improvement planning; leadership quality improvement; educator quality improvement; professional development; curriculum alignment and pacing; and the use of continuous improvement and monitoring plans and processes" (Section 3, ¶ c).

Leila Mousa (personal communication, April 11, 2010), Regional Executive Director Region II within Florida's Bureau of School Improvement, explained that each district with nonproficient schools submits a District Improvement and Assistance Plan addressing the needs of the low performing schools to the state. A similar template could be used to delineate a plan for successful induction for OSP students. The OSP schools could then address their individual school response to the needs of their OSP students within their School Improvement Plans which are submitted to the district and state each year. Leadership quality improvement could be addressed through OSP leadership cohorts that could include not only the principal, but other instructional leaders within the school such as the assistant principal, lead teachers and academic coaches. This cohort could be used as a conduit to filter ideas and concerns to the district office.

In her research, Darling-Hammond (1999) supported the findings of other researchers by stating, "the effects of well-prepared teachers on student achievement can be stronger than the influences of student background factors, such as poverty, language background, and minority status" (p. 39). NCLB and IDEA require that schools employ highly qualified teachers that use evidence-based, or research-based, practices in all schools (DOE, 2004b; DOE, 2010). This type of training goes beyond the baseline teacher qualifications of a college degree, content mastery on a subject specific test, or evidenced by a High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) plan, and state certification (FLDOE, 2007). Research-based professional development opportunities should be used to provide teachers, as well as the leadership and staff, with the strategies they need to positively affect student

achievement. Some of the learning opportunities should include the Florida initiatives discussed in chapter 2: RtI, FCIM and Differentiated Instruction. This could ensure that OSP educators have a thorough understanding of the academic foundations set forth under the Florida Department of Education's Differentiated Accountability Model.

Curriculum adopted by the district and its alignment and pacing should also be addressed so that OSP students can avoid the possible effects described by Armstrong (2010) concerning the difficulty with curriculum continuity and pacing created by mobility. Although he found that the effects were mitigated, Wright (1999) advises "Although school districts cannot directly ameliorate the effects of either mobility or poverty; curriculum, practices, and structure should reflect consideration to minimize their impact" (p. 347).

The final critical tenet listed is the use of continuous improvement and monitoring plans and processes (Florida Statute, 2010a). The previous principles advocate for the planning prior to students attending an OSP school and facilitate the preparation and ongoing professional development of educators working within an OSP school. The ability to continuously monitor OSP students and their progress, coupled with the ability to reevaluate the processes developed to support them, will create a system with built-in formative feedback loops. Hill (2005) refers to this as "ordinary R&D" (p. 149), a cycle in which: barriers are identified; current practices are reviewed; new solutions are investigated; and results are disseminated. This cycle is supported by research on information literacy for teachers, and indicates that given the current climate of accountability and the need to implement evidence-based instruction, teachers must be reflective practitioners who are knowledgeable and articulate about classroom practices

and research-based implementation (Emmons, Keefe, Moore, Sanchez, Mals, & Neely , 2009).

Funding for these initiatives is not something that can be ignored, even within the context of a policy recommendation. Capacity building will require considerable financial support from the LEAs. If educators are to be the standard-bearers for life-long learning by setting examples for their students, a better support system is needed to help them develop their professional skills to benefit the students who need it the most.

Summary

This study was conducted in a large urban district to determine if there was a difference between academic achievement for students electing to participate in Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program by leaving a low performing neighborhood school and attending an OSP school as compared to a control group that declined the OSP opportunity. FCAT data and DSS scores were analyzed to compute reading and math gain scores for the students' 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years.

The results of this study indicate that there is no evidence to support the proposition that participating in a school choice opportunity significantly impacts students' academic achievement gains. Although no significant difference was found, this study does affirm the need for further research on school choice and interdependent relationships that may affect student achievement at various educational settings. It also informs research and policy in educational reform.

Table 5-1. Summary of results

Null Hypothesis	Findings	Status of Null
<p>Ho₁: There are no statistically significant differences in reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.</p>	<p>No difference between the groups and their reading gain scores (p= 0.228)</p>	<p>Null Hypothesis Retained</p>
<p>Ho₂: There are no statistically significant differences in math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Scores for 10th grade students in an urban district in Florida who chose to leave their challenged neighborhood schools and enroll in an opportunity scholarship school compared to students matched by ELL, ESE, gender, race and SES in the same district who chose to stay in their challenged neighborhood school.</p>	<p>No difference between the groups and their math gain scores (p= 0.398)</p>	<p>Null Hypothesis Retained</p>
<p>Ho₃: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, and SES) and reading achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.</p>	<p>No relationship between the control variables and their reading gain scores Gender (p= 0.663) SES (p=.293) N. School (p=.328)</p>	<p>Null Hypothesis Retained</p>
<p>Ho₄: There are no statistically significant relationships between the control variables (ELL, ESE, gender, race, and SES) and math achievement gains as measured by the FCAT Developmental Scale Score for 10th grade students who either accepted or declined an opportunity scholarship.</p>	<p>Relationship between the control variable SES and their math gain scores Outlier (p=.020)* No outlier (p=.046)*</p>	<p>Null Hypothesis Rejected</p>
<p>Ho₅: There are no statistically significant differences among the five opportunity scholarship schools for 10th grade FCAT reading gain scores of students who accepted an opportunity scholarship.</p>	<p>No difference in reading gain scores among OSP schools. (p=.650)</p>	<p>Null Hypothesis Retained</p>
<p>Ho₆: There are no statistically significant differences among the five opportunity scholarship schools for 10th grade FCAT math gain scores of students who accepted an opportunity scholarship.</p>	<p>No difference in math gain scores among OSP schools. (p=.727)</p>	<p>Null Hypothesis Retained</p>

* p<.05

APPENDIX A
REQUEST TO UFIRB TO CONDUCT STUDY

UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research Protocol Submission	
Title of Protocol: Public School Choice Mandates of No Child Left Behind Act and Student Achievement	
Principal Investigator: Denise D. Hall	UFID #: <input style="width: 80px;" type="text"/>
Degree / Title: PH.D Department: Educational Administration and Policy	Mailing Address: <input style="width: 180px; height: 25px;" type="text"/> Email Address & Telephone Number: <input style="width: 300px; height: 35px;" type="text"/>
Co-Investigator(s):	UFID#:
Supervisor: Dr. David Quinn	UFID#:
Degree / Title: PH. D Educational Administration Department: Educational Administration and Policy	Mailing Address: PO Box 117049 Gainesville, FL 32611 Email Address & Telephone Number: dquinn@coe.ufl.edu / (352) 273-4301
Date of Proposed Research: October 2009 – May 2010	
Source of Funding <i>(A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):</i> Funding will be absorbed by the Principal Investigator.	
Scientific Purpose of the Study: This study attempts to determine if a relationship exists between 10th grade achievement in reading and mathematics for students in a large urban school district and their choice to remain in their under-achieving neighborhood school or leave to attend an opportunity scholarship school.	
Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: <i>(Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.)</i> Data will be collected in an urban Florida district from existing data concerning FCAT achievement and student demographics. Data will be presented in such a manner that it cannot be linked to individuals. Student achievement gains based on their FCAT	

data will be compared in both reading and math.

Describe Potential Benefits and Anticipated Risks: *(If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)*

No more than minimal risk The benefits of this study is to assist in making more informed decisions concerning NCLB's opportunity provision so that students will be best served.

Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited, the Number and AGE of the Participants, and Proposed Compensation:

Research involves the study of existing FCAT and demographic data.

Describe the Informed Consent Process. Include a Copy of the Informed Consent Document:

Waiver for Informed Consent - Research involves the study of existing FCAT and demographic data.

Principal Investigator(s) Signature:

Supervisor Signature:

Department Chair/Center Director Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX B
UFIRB PERMISSION GRANTED



PO Box 112250
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250
352-392-0433 (Phone)
352-392-9234 (Fax)
irb2@ufl.edu

January 14, 2010

TO: Denise D. Hall



FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair *ISF*
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: **Exemption of Protocol #2010-U-0014**
Public School Choice Mandates of No Child Left Behind Act and Student
Achievement

SPONSOR: None

Because this protocol does not involve the use of human participants in research, it is exempt from further review by this Board in accordance with 45 CFR 46. Human participants are defined by the Federal Regulations as living individual(s) about whom an investigator conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual; or (2) identifiable private information. The Board has also exempted the study based on the following category:

45 CFR 46.101(b)(4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Should the nature of your study change or if you need to revise this protocol in any manner, please contact this office before implementing the changes.

IF:dl

APPENDIX C REQUEST TO COUNTY TO CONDUCT STUDY

**Office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation
DUVAL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Jacksonville, Florida**

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

SUMMARY

Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) provides the opportunity for quality research studies to be conducted within the system by graduate students and by other professionally and technically qualified individuals and research organizations.

Factors that are considered in assessing whether the school system will cooperate in a research study:

1. The technical soundness of the proposal design
2. The appropriateness of the research topic for support in the public setting
3. The availability of appropriate research sites and subjects
4. The nature and degree of interruption within the ongoing educational program
5. The types of background data requested about the subjects of the proposed study and the nature of personal information to be collected from the subjects themselves
6. The kind and number of data-gathering procedures or instruments to be used in the study
7. The need for schools to safeguard the personal and legal rights of students, parents, and staff

The following categories of research proposals will be considered for approval:

1. Proposals for research activities originating within DCPS offices, departments, divisions, and other units, transmitted through their central office administrative channels
2. Responses to DCPS requests for proposals (RFP's) for external audits and research
3. Unsolicited research proposals from individuals or organizations independent of DCPS
4. Proposals for studies for master's theses and doctoral dissertations originating from DCPS employees
5. Proposals for studies for doctoral dissertations originating from proponents other than DCPS employees

DCPS will not accept applications to conduct research studies to meet requirements of routine undergraduate or graduate course papers from any individuals or groups.

The Office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation is responsible for evaluating each request for research support, and the researcher(s) must obtain approval as indicated by the signature of the General Director for Research, Assessment, and Evaluation before the study begins. Proposals involving sensitive issues or substantial commitment of DCPS resources may be referred to the District's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Superintendent of Schools or the Chief of Staff for approval, disapproval, or transmittal to the School Board for review.

The approval process may take as long as six weeks. Please submit your request for support in sufficient time to meet your anticipated timeline. Research activities involving students may not be conducted from April 1 through August 31, unless the project is originated by Duval County Public Schools.

The Office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation cannot assist applicants with research design, development or implementation of data collection instruments, analysis of data, or composition of the final report except as indicated in the evaluation provisions of the *Guidelines for Requesting to Conduct Research in Duval County Public Schools*.

Student and parent participation in a study is voluntary. Participation by DCPS personnel is also voluntary unless otherwise specified by the Superintendent of Schools or the Chief of Staff. Every data collection instrument must contain a clearly visible statement to that effect on its cover page. Anonymity of all participants must be preserved. The identity of schools or the school system may be disclosed only under authorization by the Superintendent of Schools or the Chief of Staff.

The applicant is responsible for submitting an acceptable health certificate for all project staff who are not DCPS employees if the research activity requires contact with students. Health certificates must be submitted to the school's principal prior to student contact.

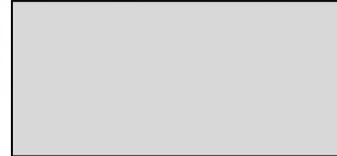
For additional details on DCPS policy and procedures on supporting and screening research proposals, refer to the *Guidelines for Requesting to Conduct Research in Duval County Public Schools*. Copies are available upon request and may be downloaded from the DCPS website.

INSTRUCTIONS: Applicants who wish to conduct research in Duval County Public Schools must complete and submit this form, <i>Request to Conduct Research</i> , and all required attachments, to the Office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation, Duval County Public Schools, 1701 Prudential Drive, Suite 651, Jacksonville, Florida 32207.			
Research Request Submission Date: _____	Applicant Name: _____		
Project Name: _____			
For RAE Office Use Only: Processing Status			
Date Request Received: _____	Date Reviewed: _____	Reviewer: _____	
Initial Reviewer Recommendation: <input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Reject <input type="checkbox"/> Refer to IRB <input type="checkbox"/> Return for Revision _____ (Date)			
IRB Recommendation: <input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Reject <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable _____ (Date)			
Supt/COS Recommendation: <input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Reject <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable _____ (Date)			
Final Decision: <input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Reject Comment: _____			

APPENDIX D
COUNTY PERMISSION GRANTED

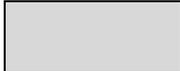


Instructional Research and Accountability



February 15, 2010

Denise Hall



Dear Mrs. Hall:

Your request to conduct research in Duval County Schools has been approved. This approval applies to your project in the form and content as supplied to this office for review. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol must be cleared with this office prior to implementing such changes.

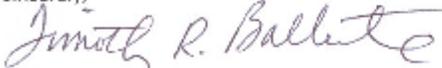
Participation in studies of this nature is voluntary on the part of principals, teachers, staff, and students. Our approval does not obligate any principal, teacher, staff member, or student to participate in your study. **A signed copy of this letter must accompany any initial contact with principals, teachers, parents, and students.**

Our approvals for research run through June 30th of each school year. If your research will extend beyond that date, you will have to resubmit an application at the appropriate time. You will be required to supply copies of signed consent and assent forms at that time. If there have been no changes to the approved protocol you may refer to the previously submitted paperwork.

Upon completion of the study, it is customary to forward a copy of the finished report to the Office of Instructional Research and Accountability,  This office also shall be notified, in advance, of the publication of any reports/articles in which Duval County is mentioned by name.

If you have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call me or Dawn Botkin at 390-2976.

Sincerely,



Timothy Ballentine

Executive Director

Instructional Research and Accountability

REFERENCE LIST

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Denise Duncan Hall attended high school at Deerfield-Windsor Academy in Albany, Georgia graduating in 1982. She graduated from Valdosta State College in 1987, receiving a Bachelor of Science in secondary mathematics education. In the fall of 1987, Denise accepted a teaching position at Paxon Senior High School in Jacksonville, Florida, where she worked for eight years. During this period she obtained her Master in Educational Leadership from the University of North Florida. Denise accepted her first administrative position as the Seventh Grade House Administrator at Highlands Middle School in Jacksonville in 1993. Since that time she has served as an Assistant Principal for Curriculum at Terry Parker High School, Vice Principal at Duncan U. Fletcher Middle School and as the principal of J.E.B Stuart Middle School, all in Jacksonville, Florida. She is currently the principal at Robert E. Lee High School in Jacksonville, Florida.

Denise is the only child of Hampton Reynolds Duncan, deceased, and Sandra Lee Duncan Price. She is married to Jimmy Carlton Hall Jr. and is the mother of two, Micah Aaron and Anna Nicole. When she has a moment of free time, Denise enjoys watching her son at swim meets and on the lacrosse field, cheering at her daughter's soccer games, going to the beach with her family, and lounging in the backyard pool reading a good book.